

1.

Thesaurus Rex

(Of Master Mouse who asks that a book be written for him)

And Master Mouse had this word play dating back to his childhood and he christened the play Thesaurus Rex and the name itself was a pun though different in essence than the actual play which revolved around the meaning of words and relied the differences that could be found even between words of a similar sense and accordingly hallucination would immediately spring to his mind when he'd have a dream which was not unlike delusion or mirage or oasis or camel and yet it never occurred to him that dream and camel shared such a similar connotation and this word play that largely consisted of the endeavor that lumps together words that bear no apparent interrelation like butterfly and buttresses finally led him to infer that by harnessing his mind and imagination he could lump together virtually any two words of remote meaning and that struck him as a discovery almost as hopeful as that of Cape of Good Hope which had allowed to link continents and countries hitherto un-linkable and he suspected that the speed of imagination far transcended the speed of light and engaged as he was in imagining similarities between words his mind bustled with thoughts and images and so busy was he tasking himself with questions to address or nay with the act of thinking itself that he had never read a book from cover to cover and despaired of reading altogether and went for years with no books and so decided to ask for a single first book to be written for him so that he might read it with the author adhering to some basic guidelines and the first of which was that no previous knowledge might be required to make it through the text and better still that a disclaimer might be printed in bold on the cover to the effect of: The Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education approve that current medical research in world-leading research institutes found this book to require no previous knowledge determining such knowledge to compromise one's health or worse still one's fertility and whoever reads the book will be well-advised to get rid of any knowledge at their disposal before embarking on it while those of previous knowledge may enjoy no guarantee with said disclaimer applying for men and women alongside another guideline stating that the book must be accommodating whether the reader skipped a letter or a line or a page or even the entire book and if that wasn't enough he wanted the book to be readable from any point and in any direction i.e. from its beginning or middle or even its even end and his audacity culminated with the idea that even reading the chapters in reverse order would do as any two words could tie in with each other and any chapter might tie in with another and any two matters could be wedded together even when no apparent conjunction could be found to begin with and Master Mouse did go on to note that he required a book that he might read willingly rather than reluctantly as had often been his experience back in school and that the moral i.e. the book's would keep it really really really simple and straightforward as in everything is everything or there's a bit of everything in anything or dropping a soured milk jar down the stairs is not tantamount to saying back in 1927 that GM's stock could drop or even crash because anyone bearing bad omens for GM's stock would most likely be locked away at a lunatic asylum and kept there at least until the stock bounced back and could they please make it a friendly kind of book like the fridges they had back in the day with this big handle where stored goods inside the fridge would ring into action with a chorale of colors rather than just freeze and fret on about their sell-by date and could this book be made somewhat useful as well that is making him better-clued about certain stuff with whatever they wanted him to understand stated clearly rather than enigmatically and making sure that he

understood the important points even if it meant making them time and again while Master Mouse would say that he'd have written this book if only he could and had the book not been written – he would have written it itself to which Coda would add that once there was this power cut with darkness all around and she stood by the fridge waiting for someone to open the door thinking there might be some light left to it and Master Mouse further noted that the book he required should feature no long words like emancipation nor should it encourage one to listen to Brahms or Chopin with the same rule applying for questions like why on earth had Bach introduced a prelude for every fugue or why had Rosalyn Tureck fallen of her seat at 14 or how much had Alter the grocer charged for a cucumber bun back in Master Mouse's childhood and what's with those people who preferred vinegar-pickled cucumbers to their salt-pickled counterparts because again no previous knowledge was required and he named this game a cross between Thesaurus and the Tyrannosaurus Rex dinosaur or Thesaurus Rex and Master Mouse's son was a dinosaur enthusiast while Master Mouse's father or the Man in the Suit had more than an eye for cyclopedias but about which later and it was Master Mouse's last wish that sparse use be made of punctuation marks and that the text be written large as possible and thus making spectacles redundant.

2. The Postman

(Where Master Mouse Awaits a Letter)

And Master Mouse kept himself occupied with the question of whether the word Postman otherwise known as the man carrying the mail should be made definite or otherwise and there he was pacing the dark corridor of his 5th floor apartment awaiting the Postman also known as the mail carrier and knowing deep down that he stood no chance of successfully passing the entrance auditions and yet as Coda would say a dog that barks and never bites is still a dog and Master Mouse would gaze out the window which was relatively large for the narrow room and overlooking the great valley out there with its vineyards and fields and he agonized over the issue of whether a window hanging on the wall early in the play was like a rifle hanging on the wall and if Master Mouse could remember forward surely he would have known that a day would come when he'd walk through this relatively large window hanging on the narrow wall but his forward memory betrayed him and he knew not which way he was going to walk through whether to the room or oh perish the thought out of it and down to the valley and the window at the top of the tower did a needle's eye make with Master Mouse as a yarn threaded through and knowing neither which way it's been threaded nor dwelling over it as one whose fate was in hands other than its own and yet all the while and beyond the matter of the post's caption and the issue of the window he was engaged in a search for the Postman's figure i.e. the mail carrier who was supposed to make it over to the isolated five-story house on his bike down the path to the valley and accustomed to people's expectations and the respect they held him though the Postman was and albeit never in his whole life stopping for as much as a single moment to ponder if his title should or shouldn't be made definite he nevertheless knew that Master Mouse had been waiting a reply due from overseas and more specifically from Lutetia and the letter had to be handed to none but Master Mouse himself and should preferably be held with its stamp and blue seal facing down and with the hand overlaying the sender's name all so that Master Mouse's secret be kept from the neighbors and particularly from the third floor lot and surely he i.e. the Postman wouldn't stand even for a moment in the letter's way

given the epic occasion and a letter should no more be delayed than should a delivering midwife cause delay to the delivering mother as a verdict stayed is a verdict miscarried and Coda would say of which that people came to resemble their lawyers to the point where you couldn't tell them apart and the Postman again knew that anticipation made Master Mouse's life a living hell and so much so that on some days he would walk up to the Postman and meet him on the white trail that bridged the great valley and the high-pitched Kibbutz because anticipation indoors and awaiting the letter were detrimental for his health and eating way at his body like rust in the hot water tap and Master Mouse did know that the Postman was skillful on his bike even with just one hand as they had talked about cycling trips on more than one occasion because Master Mouse would often ride with his son until they rode no more oh but I digress while this may be the right moment to clarify which entrance audition it was that Master Mouse signed up to and what it was that he had to get in place for said audition and how he came upon the whole thing in the first place because above all Master Mouse well knew that he stood no chance of passing the audition even had he been blind as that Helmut guy who had played Bach's full catalogue from memory without ever seeing a scorebook in his life and learning it all by hearing only and yet inertia hinders the relevant clarification at this point and even if nigh dead and deaf and blind and maimed Master Mouse still stood no chance of making the grade and before anyone addresses these questions we must nevertheless make it clear that where Master Mouse's cycling trips are recounted is unlike where explanation into the audition is due and many have been the occasias - yes-the-occasias where Master Mouse tasked himself with vain questions all too well knowing that most questions with which he was tasking himself were trifle and if only he could get up on his feet and shout deep inside himself Stop unlike the window and the needle's eye and the most pressing question preoccupying him of all those presented so far was why-oh-why he kept playing over and over in his head the 44 duets i.e. the 44 duos by Bartók composed for two violins and a pretty and sound piece to be either played or listened to and yet he couldn't quite figure why it was at this stage of his life that it got stuck in his head just as he was awaiting a reply delayed for quite some time and he had been listening to the 44 duos from dawn to dusk and even bought the scores yet gathered that for some reason the instrumental parts had been recorded on CD in an order other than the one informing the scorebook which meant that the first recorded piece was not necessarily the first one on the book ditto the second and third and so forth and up to the piece 44 with all of which encumbering his listening experience and prompting him to turn the scorebook's pages back and forth skipping no page oh but I digress and the anticipation for reply was well-nigh driving him off the rails with thoughts running to and fro in his head all to the background of the strident and occasionally rough sounds of Bartók's 44 duos and if that wasn't enough – he found it strange that he had been preoccupied with this piece rather than practicing for the audition or at least settling on the piece he would perform back then because unlike the yarn threaded through the needle's eye here he was taking his fate into his own hands and as he walked down the somber corridor staring at the window and pondering the Postman's due or otherwise definite article and the window itself and Bartók and Helmut and several others things that dared not speak their name and watching the jay as it flew he knew that just as this bird heralded no spring it might well herald the impending Postman and his drowsing heart was resurrected with joy and he mused that for him the blue fleck gracing the end of the jay's tail with a beauty insurmountable marked the blue seal on the envelop from Lutetia which was surely to arrive any time now and moreover did he muse at how his thoughts were diving down and leaping back and flying up birds' singing in the valley and while running all those things

through his head he could spy at the end of the white path winding down into the valley the Postman on his bike with his flabby belly and as anticipation had more than once left him disenchanted he drummed it into himself that while the Mezuzah letters that grew wary and dropped as they did over the years and required the occasional check and reinstatement the letter from Lutetia had probably been electric type-written thus leaving the caption put for better or worse even if the paper got crumpled or the Postman fell off his bike which was unlikely to begin with and as for the duos he assumed the piece might have stuck with him due to the number 44 which equals half the number of piano keys or was it Bartók's nature who had been as strict as to sit with a scorebook and metronome while listening to those performing his pieces as if they had been sitting an exam they were never going to pass.

3. Les Trois Mains

The Three Hands

(Where Master Mouse walks down the stairs to meet the Postman)

And it came to pass after these things that Master Mouse commenced descending from his apartment and out to the Postman in his green captain-like cap and stepping down the spiraling flight he could feel his feet tapping the stairs step after step step-pit step-pit stepity-step just like the tapping of the metronome by the piano side but the stairs being spiral his steps were unevenly measured like jennets' load come threshing season and Master Mouse did take step after step down like the baby-occupied pram freshly unclutched by the mother and bumping and hurtling down the stairway and facing row after row of postmen and mail carriers with charged smoking letters in hand and piercing cum decisive replies and staring at each as at every person going down the stairs as if they must be stopped at any cost with him i.e. Master Mouse telling them *oh bother* while proceeding down step by step and skipping over stairs and hurtling down step by stepity step as the postmen struck some of those who are dealt negative replies right between their ears and over the left hand eyebrow right of the lashes while some and notably those sporting a Spitz moustache turned their backs and went *hey petal* with a candor that suggested an *I don't give a damn* and others fell and Coda would say of which that *if you have to fall – fall and don't talk* and all Master Mouse could think of as he headed downstairs step after step was whether he had actually seen the Postman mounted on his bike with his hand clutching a letter signed with blue seals and waving it or was the whole letter-in-hand thing a figment of his imagination like the tortured metronome-ticked imagination or that time when he had gone out to the desert with his son looking for yolk-colored bulbous flowers oh but I digress and he could only physically feel the thump of his feet against the stairs and the rhythm that was very much like that of the metronome by the piano and concern nevertheless arose for what he was to do in the first five minutes after receiving rejection and worse still – what was he to do should it be a positive reply for he was yet to even chose the right audition piece and had quite the agonizing choice between Rameau's *Les Trois Main* i.e. *The Three Hands* and Couperin's *The Mysterious Barricades* and Scarlatti's K.208 and the pram hurtling down the stairway letting off a baby's voice and him rushing down step after step Tara Tara Butler Butler and hurtling like the roller coaster in Rameau's piece about the mysterious barricades with the feet tapping step after step like the metronome by the piano side and the pram did keep on rolling and there holding onto the handrail and letting go of his feet as they rolled down the slopping flight he recalled how as a child and wherever the Man in the

Suit had been he would have the snow sled tied with a rope to the back of the vehicle which had a trunk so huge that Master Mouse would sleep inside on a blanket and so in the sled along with his brothers the car would drive through the streets with them in tow and people would gesture to the Man in the Suit with all manner of finger twirling into the head to signal he had a screw loose and not knowing them passersby that in fact by twirling in that screw they were only making matters worse and if Master Mouse could only have one detail as trifle as step-by-step and as the tick-tock of the metronome or as Tara Tara changed in history he would go back to that sled who had slid over the snow neither tapping nor skipping nor thumping nor agonizing nor humming but merely pulling behind the large vehicle of the Man in the Suit who sat at the driver's seat in a suit and it was for a reason that he had earned that moniker but of this later lest we disrupt the murmur of the sled and Master Mouse's tapping down the stairs and the tunes shuffling through Master Mouse's mind in the run-up for the audition which would or would not be and at moments he wanted to audition with *Les Trois Mains* which was so tricky as if three hands should be performing it or should it be *Les Barricades Mystérieuses* or the one titled Mysterious Barricades which nobody could really fathom not even Master Mouse's brother who had gone to the Sorbonne and was proficient in French or maybe it should be Scarlatti's 208 after all which really did accelerate and decelerate like the sled that resounded with the chortles of Master Mouse's and his brother's childhood days and was forever held dear for him engraved though it was not with a rosebud or maybe like the pram hurtling down the stairway and letting off a baby's voice or the roller coaster's cars running through the public beaches and resounding with the screams of children and suit-less accompanying adults by their dozens all while Master Mouse's steps were leading him further down the stairs step after step Tara after Tara and the by-now-renowned Coda would say of which one day that when practicing Rameau Master Mouse was much calmer and much easier on his Heel! command and kept the screws on her collar much looser and that she was actually into composers and authors who had double initials like Benjamin Britten or James Joyce and just as Master Mouse was walking down the stairs step after step heading towards the Postman in his captain cap with a fateful long-since-written letter in hand so did the sled latched to the vehicle of the Man in the Suit stop under orders from a kepi-donning policeman with a ticket book in hand and Master Mouse stopped eye to eye nose to nose with the Postman just at the house's lintel and here too he knew not which way he should go past or whether a letter he had so anticipated arrived or what it said and what was he to do in the next five minutes after reading it.

4.

The Laser Beam

(Where Master Mouse meets the Postman)

And the eyes of Master Mouse and the kepi-wearing Postman met and the laser beam shot out from each eye fixated on the eye that faced it and unable were the twine to move as feasting were their gazes on each other like a person with his cornea glued to another's with electric current running through them and sulphur sparks and fire and smoke rolling from their ears and the first voice in Master Mouse's head said *here comes the reply regarding the audition* and *here comes the reply regarding the audition* said the second voice and the first voice further added *and it must be positive* and the third voice said *here comes the reply regarding the audition and it must be negative* retorted the second voice and the third one added that *one way*

or another he won't make it and the first voice repeated itself making it clear that it must be a positive reply while the second found quite the opposite to be the case and repeated that it must be negative and the third voice did repeat that it must be either positive or negative and the two pairs of eyes remained fixed on each other as the beam shooting from Master Mouse's eye and swirling around the Postman's head retracted through his other eye and thus did doubt travel round and round with its gematria hitting 2372 while the first voice had by now ditched its original line in favor of plain *positive positive positive for sure* as the second voice did dog the first to speak backwards *evitagen evitagen* cue the amplified-by-laser and doubt third voice which accelerated from side to side like the particles in the particle accelerator for a moment positive and the next all *evitisop dna rof tnemom evitagen evitagen* and enter the second theme of the first voice saying *I have yet to pick up a piece* only to be echoed to the letter by the second voice saying *I have yet to pick up a piece* while the third voice too repeated the second theme going *I have yet to pick up a piece* to the tune of the first voice repeating the first theme *it must be positive* cue the third voice reiterating too the second theme *I have yet to pick up a piece* while the other voices proceeded in the background as the laser shifted from one eye to the next and on to space and onto the eye and was spinning around it all when suddenly an orderly cacophony sounded to whomever could tell the different voices apart *I evah tey ot dinffff* accelerating further and further with the letters riding the crest of the laser and running in circles and away from each other like a circular fugue of three themes at which point the moment arrived and the universe did stop and silence fell and birds their flight did pause and even the spring in the wolf trap had its high places all slain and the sun up there in the sky did slowly break into two like a cell dividing or the yolk of a soft-boiled egg that the boy and girl let slide down to the floor from its silver tray and the third voice echoed the second only in reverse and then oh then all three headlights went alight and the traffic came to a halt and a child dropped his red mobile phone only to realize that the gravitational force became the force of repulsion and the mobile lifted without falling and the son of Master Mouse grabbed the Postman's picture painted by Van Gogh and took it off the wall at the museum and the alarm sounded and caught a debt-shackled man at the window seal and then oh then as words finally ran out and letters span into a total jumble of this one big counterpoint and Master Mouse knew not whether the Postman should be made definite or otherwise and the Postman called Master Mouse and said as he had hundreds of times before to people awaiting letters and as he was to say yet thousands of times more until such day as he would be run over by a vehicle that always rang twice *that which you have awaited has arrived* and he pulled the letter out of his diagonal striped rucksack as he didn't hold the letter in his hand as Master Mouse had imagined and he muttered *Good Luck* and carried on as he would any day and it was only at diner that it occurred to him that he'd never asked Master Mouse to *please sign here and down here and there and write down your ID number*.

5. The Annunciation

(Recounting the moment Master Mouse opened the letter)

After these things came to pass as the things that had come to pass before them Master Mouse was left alone on the path holding a letter sealed with a French stamp and blue inscription and Master Mouse did realize that whatever had been before was not going to be after and he started tearing the envelope tearing it gently so as not to upset the written content lest haste result in

waste and there inside the envelope he found a single-page letter folded in three and so badly were his hands shaking that he failed to straighten the letter and he sat down on the white path but that was no good too and he lay supine and felt as if at any moment blood should start boiling inside his veins and his leg strained in pain and he still couldn't focus his eyes on the paper and he stared and started reading and the letters were jumbling before him when suddenly the air was gaining color and no longer was it clear and each molecule was colored a different hue and electrons there circled the atom nucleus singing *ring around the bozo* and everything became one and it all came together as if a clear plastic bag was slipped over his head while his body no longer had limits and like there was no beginning or end to him as if the world and colors were going right through him as they would through a fishnet afloat in the ocean and pleasantness and silence engulfed him with the sand and sky and the clouds all merging into a reality that could be blended in bright technicolor colors and the flap of the butterfly's wings had a sharp dull sound to it rather than mere color and every eyelash and fingernail did like rams skip and there he was lying on the ground feeling not the pebbles and he soared to drift up the path and through the five-story tower without breaking the wall or jumbling the colors that had become one with silence and the clock halted and silence and majesty melted into color like up there on Mount Avnon oh but I digress and the light was no longer clear and it trickled from the sun like water from a fireman's hose and there he saw himself from the back and from below and stared into the cavity of his mouth and throat and saw the world through his belly while looking from inside his stomach through his skin and into the horizon and colors were everywhere and it seemed that for the first time Newton's apple was going to fall upward not before another apple was born out of Master Mouse's hand and he wanted to share all this beauty comprising as it did even colors he wouldn't normally see and beyond the visible scope and only seen in the glow of darkness and with eyes shut he read from the page the official announcement saying he must report at Lutetia for an instrumental audition in a few days' time and when he unclenched the hand that held the apple he found himself lying on the path with the letter by his side and an elderly man stood by asking *hey Master Mouse what are you doing with the letter in your hand* and so delighted was he at the reply he received and so sad for the air that had by now recovered its clarity that he started laughing and explaining to the person standing beside him that something had happened and he couldn't explain anything but giggle awkwardly and before he could get up the apple he'd just left bumped his head and from then on the question haunted him of how and what he was going to play and yet he never again returned home but went his way on foot as if having no clear idea when and wherefore and with nothing to his name but a wallet and a credit card and an empty packet of Cheetos folded in his back pocket.

6. Fettuccine Napolitana

(Where Master Mouse decides on a piece for his audition)

And by midnight Master Mouse was overcome with this sudden anxiety as not only was he on his way to Lutetia and had taken nothing along and not only had he yet to make up his mind on the piece to play and not only had he taken no scores and not only had he neither air ticket nor credit card or a garment to wear but he moreover realized he must do whatever it took to conclude this chapter as quick as possible as he had to devise a speedy dignified way to plug an invalid passport issue gap in the plot and yet a thriller it was not and with the clock ticking

forth rather than back as it did like in this police crime scene where every detail belied a secret as might be recounted elsewhere and Master Mouse therefore assumed he was to find a solution for this issue for here moreover was the rub i.e. that he had yet to work out what he was to do with Coda who had stayed back home behind a closed door she knew not how to open of which Coda would say that *a dog could only contain its volume's worth which has been a well-known fact for years even before Louis Pasteur who'd been based in Lutetia where he successfully fought rabies* and so was Master Mouse walking with a letter in hand and the now empty Cheetos bag in his back pocket and the idea had yet to spark in his mind of what he was to play and he wondered whether it should be a Couperin that he could not play at all or a Rameau which he could play even less and he knew not which of the two was nicer and he stretched his hands up high and felt incorrigible and he cried out loud *say ye Postmen this or the other?* as one was swift and complex and requiring three hands on the keys while the other was incomprehensibly named and long and hard did he agonize over the Rameau or Couperin issue who had been of the same generation yet could not be more different with one being grand while the other mellow to his note-perfect counterpart who was unlike his colorful-like-firework display to the very trill equal and Rameau observed to leave no openings in the wall while Couperin would spin chords around from the left end corner of the keyboard and it had once happened to Master Mouse that he'd been so overwhelmed by Rameau's transposition that the neighbors had fancied Rameau as this kind of ringleader from an outlying town and Master Mouse spent no little time trying to figure out which of the two was easier to play and to whom the reviewer was going to be more partial and whom he might perform unshackled by the original pieces 'ensuing periods and he came to the conclusion that the most pretentious thing by far nowadays would be to say that one could play like back in the day i.e. two hundred and fifty years ago and that authentic was as innovative and pretentious as it got and anyway what cembalo sessions at the Qumran Caves had to do with playing at the Palace of Versailles other than perhaps the fact of the waitresses serving drinks during intermissions becoming ever younger by the year and that given how difficult and costly printing had used to be they'd refrain from noting down in the scores that which had been obvious to the respective generation and the scores in turn probably hadn't reflected that which had been played anyway and who knew how closely they kept to the rhythm and generally speaking he couldn't see why they had written down so much given that in the absence of radios they'd have heard pieces once or twice a lifetime and who could even remember what they'd heard a couple of years earlier and the more we beleaguered the score – for the score too was not without its limits and even if the score had come complete with all that one had to hear in a given song playing on the radio it would nevertheless sound nothing like it i.e. the original song and anyway playing means performance rather than precision and who's to say whether they'd used to go by the score and even if scores came with instructions and arrows and highlights it would still be no more than a sorry stab at recreating what cannot nor should not be recreated and maybe playing for ten people was unlike playing to a packed house and practicing to the candle light with some wig on one's head was different let alone when one donned a corset and how could one even begin to compare pieces heard once in one's lifetime at best to pieces familiar to and whistled by the audience in their all-inclusive resort up north which wouldn't necessarily include all playing instructions and Master Mouse realized that the more he was trying to make up his mind the less able was he to make it up and the very indecision rendered him paralyzed and exasperated and he stared at the mirror only to be stared back at by an invertebrate freshwater mollusk that shoots purple ink when threatened and his vacillation wouldn't leave him alone and fearful was

he lest he fell ill for that was no time for such excesses and he felt he must find a way out because when trying to decide for one kind of good over another it could be hard to compare just as one wouldn't compare a short word to a long one and weren't all words born equal and some might declare both as good and some would declare both pieces tedious while some would call it a case of both were the fairest of them all and the more he grappled the more he scratched his leg raw and bleeding and he recalled how he once sought to buy a chewing gum at the gas station only to find more than one hundred different varieties on offer and he realized that choosing one kind of good over another was not about preferring one over the other and the point was what he was going to do with that decision and how he was going to impress the reviewer and the more peace he found in this approach the more resolved he became to do that which he'd used to do quite often and cast a die i.e. go by the direction taken by Coda's tail but as Coda had stayed home he had no choice but to decide that should the clock's seconds pendulum swing right then Rameau it should be and if left it would be Couperin with which he also grappled considerably trying to decide which side better suited Rameau and inconsolably mad was he with himself as he cast a die and failed to make up his mind about the coin's value and decided it should rate higher than two mils as was the custom with wedding rings and like the sum his father would issue from his ear and beyond that he wondered whether it was appropriate for the fate of the world of sound to be determined by a currency that might also have been held and by a Sabbath desecrating gentile at that or a by left-handed man considering that this was a piece for three hands and the pendulum swung right and over to Rameau but before a second could go by where thousands of children might be created the minority thereof using their left hand to write and 13 thousand cars might crash sending no less than forty two adults who had quit smoking over the last year flying through their front window with three children caught shoplifting apricot yogurt from the supermarket before such second went by he had resolved to play neither that or the other but a piece by Scarlatti who had composed 555 sonnets which worked out the Hebrew gematria value equivalent of Remedy and of all those he took shine to one particular sonnet which he loved and knew to be loved by the audience too at times and it had this fine balance between the torrent of sounds and the overflowing details and ornaments and the wonderfully attuned concision and that beyond the torrent of notes and frills that Scarlatti had loved so much and beyond the stellar career with the Spanish royal family and the piano four-hands playing with the queen and beyond the career which had started in Napoli Italy there hid an Italian boy who had refused to finish his Fettuccine Napolitana and had his mom telling him to finish it or else his father Alessandro Scarlatti would come from the opera house and be very angry with his son and little had they known that one day Ferrari and Maserati and Lamborghini cars were to leave from the port of Napoli and rundown ships would sail to the Atlit Beach and vessels might well leave for Cherbourg and so the die did fall although his heart was still consumed with vacillations as corrosive as the rust in the Fettuccine Napolitana cutter but let us remember that Master Mouse was very anxious knowing not what or how he should tell Coda about the trip or what he was to do with her for canny though evolution might have been it had equipped dogs with no cutoff switch or bear-like hibernation mode and despite being far away in heart and mind by then and over in Lutetia with preparations underway for the audition he nevertheless turned back and started heading to his home at the pretty valley where the five-story tower with the window hanging on the leaving room wall and all because his moral fiber which wouldn't let him leave Coda and as he walked in he saw that she i.e. Coda had dragged the bin from the kitchen and through the gloomy corridor and spilled its contents on the living room floor.

7. Coda

(Where we learn of Master Mouse's plans for Coda for when he is away in Lutetia)

And Master Mouse knew not what he was to do with Coda nor how he was to break it to her that he was to spend a considerable period away from home and nevertheless knew one thing for sure i.e. that she could not come along to Lutetia and not only because he could not afford to pay her airfare or bring her along to the audition but also and crucially because no dog should be taken out of context and Coda's context was well within his home at the fifth floor of the tower overlooking the valley and as far as he knew she had no manners whatsoever even by his country's standards let alone by its overseas counterparts where they'd bow as they opened the door and licked their paws before mounting the sofa and I don't mean just the front ones and put a paw over the mouth when yawning particularly if they were four-legged and he could send Coda to the kennel only she wouldn't find her place and attack fellow dogs which in turn could attack her and she'd leap as high as to jump over fences as tall as the Postman which was why they would keep her in a roofed cage but inside there she would sustain blows from the ceiling which Master Mouse was well aware of for Coda had been taken as a rescue dog to his home and he further knew that Coda's memories of the kennel were unpleasant which sent her immediately to think of a different home and a different name to say nothing of cruelty and he was at a loss and long and hard did he muse that had it not been for his youngest daughter he'd have given Coda to another family long ago or just set her free out in the desert only he didn't know how to tell her i.e. his daughter about it or how she was to take the announcement for beside all the troubles she had caused and the damages she had wrought on Master Mouse and beyond the conflicts with neighbors and passersby and law enforcement and every dog around the neighborhood etc. etc. Coda had this rather plain pair of eyes that were moreover a tad red like the Edom Mountains mid heat wave and yet they resembled this five-story deep empty well with water pure and cool at its bottom of the kind one wouldn't find even in Norway inside the glaciers and she was kind of heart but alas her behavior cast a heavy shadow over her glowing heart like a whipping willow at her own back and image and Coda was nevertheless beautiful of heart and her musings might be recounted elsewhere perhaps even as early as the next chapter and when she would run away Master Mouse used to pray that she didn't come back and once she was back he would thank the Lord for Israel was not widowed just yet and he'd be the happiest man on earth and there was this one time when Coda fled Master Mouse's home and he was very mad at her and his anger was corrosive like rust in a pulley lowering a bucket down the well of Coda's eyes and his voice went *come back come back Sweet Codi Coda* exuding the scent of anger over her flight for on the one hand she'd been taken out of the kennels and into a happy home complete with meals on her plate and cuddles while on the other she was running away and he'd be happy for her to run for good but knew not what he'd say to his daughter or how she would take it and he'd call out for her *Codi Cod come back sweetie* and the scent of his wrath pervaded the neighborhood and deterred her from coming back and Master Mouse did leave home and searched for her over long hours and even as he saw her she ignored him as one who had left her bubble of consciousness and been at least a three day run away from her and he ran over to her proffering a fragrant sausage meat as delicious as to make Pavlov himself drool so badly as to require IV infusion and thus he drew her i.e. Coda step by

step and bit by bit to the tower's foot only she wouldn't come upstairs with him as he was calling her who was downstairs and reveling in his scent and trying to make up her mind too as she wanted to come home yet feared Master Mouse's anger and the scent of the sausage curled into her nose and stuck to her tongue alongside the scent of his anger for Master was like the antiseptic ointment applied on Pavlov's arm before the IV and Master Mouse was up in the fifth floor looking at Coda down there and Coda was downstairs looking up at Master Mouse at his window in the fifth floor and the twine knew not what to do wanting though they both did for Coda to come home i.e. to Master Mouse's flat and she would take a couple of stairs up then startled by the pungent scent of wrath would retrace her steps and there was Master Mouse walking over to the fridge and getting some more chunks of sausage and tossing them down to the dog and so it went on for the better part of that night until Master Mouse decided that the only thing that could get Coda up and back home was to change the trend of the acrid scent of his wrath and he sat down on the floor and thought of every good thing coming to his mind and was even thinking of how Coda used to sit on the trailer pulled by the Man in the Suit's car or of how she'd pull the bike as would be told elsewhere and he made a promise to himself that once she was back he'd do nothing but cuddle her and tell her *how great to have you back* resorting to no such statements as *dog brain* or *damn bitch* or *why can't they stuff you once and for all* or *cursed be the day* etc. and so he mused for quite a while over the deep well of her eyes and was even moderately proud of her for managing to extract good thoughts out of him and he further promised himself that once she finally walked in he wouldn't rush to close the door behind her but let her decide whether she stayed or not and he thought long and recalled all those moments when they had been out walking and all the damage she had caused and wondered whether it was her or him or both and couldn't make up his mind and he thought he might let the clock's pendulum decide for him as recounted elsewhere and he had still to decide whether the Postman should be made definite or otherwise and nevertheless felt calmer and mellower and thought of Coda who'd stand at the top of cliffs as might be told elsewhere and he also recalled the good stuff like when she'd come up to him and lick his leg when he'd suffer with toothache and how she divined that missing his elder daughter had tormented him and his heartrate would slowly pace down like a viper into its hibernation and his scent became a tad lighter than air and wafted in all directions rather than down and made the scent of wrath that much more bearable and down at the foot of the tower Coda could tell and stench made way for a more ordinary kind of air and she took step by step up as jauntily as back then when she had chased a rock hyrax up a cliff only this time she wasn't chasing anything and she went up thinking all the while what she was to do when she found out that he intended to forgive or be angry perish the thought for she wasn't sure whether he'd made up his mind himself and she walked in and looked straight at him as if to say *take it or leave it* and he had yet to decide what he was to do with Coda while away and he decided that maybe just this time he would start from the end saying it'd be fine for the paper never refused ink and the more the better but less was better still of which Coda would say that *let's not forget that Niels Bohr's atom model mainly applies for the carbon atom* and Master Mouse did give her a small fitting into the pants' pocket book to browse about shells and oysters for the selected French cuisine like the hearty carditidae or the dentalium shell which called to mind Coda's canines and the book was replete with pictures allowing for intermittent reading i.e. easily skippable and having packed a couple of items in the suitcase which was as small as to allow him to take it on board and a Scarlatti scorebook and a picture by Rembrandt which he had mistaken for a Rubens he looked at Coda and the well water in her eyes and he undid the leash

and the collar and all she wanted was a lead to her case and the certainty of having him back and he put the collar back on and took the watch he had been given by his father the Man in the Suit and he attached the watch to her collar muttering that he'd be back by November as the song went so that they might look for the bulbous yellow autumn flowers out in the desert on a bluff known to none but them as would be recounted elsewhere and he left home leaving everyone none the wiser as to when and for how long and crucially why and wherefore and he nevertheless felt ashamed of himself for closing the door as soon as Coda had walked in.

8. Me Home

(Where Coda has her say)

Me food Me reassurance Me go downstairs Me food Me go downstairs Me Pine Me search Me freedom Me run Me reassurance Me bite Me hunt mongoose Me kill for We Me Wee-Wee Me Woo-woo Me Pee-pee Me sniff Me down Me sniff Me parents miss Me all smelly back from field Me down Me freedom Me wish Me had frozen river Me could skate away on Me pining Me run Me freedom bound Me miss Friday delicious food Me no obey Me freedom Me no know whether vet or walk Me no know is it hunting or infertility Me no freedom Me miss siblings Me storytell Me getting down and doggy Me freedom bound Me pining Me search Me pining Me run Me search Me slosh Me scratch Me pining Me sniff Me no know if out for a walk or out for shot Me away run Me run Me eat Me no know if injection or sterilization Me sit Me obey Me bite Me claw Me way Clown Me canining in Canaan Me work the wielder of the leash the wielder of the leash pull Me groom Me bark Me search family Me miss mama dog papa dog Me miss uterus mine Me run Me no sell Me sold Me yesterday news Me anxious if out to desert or to week in lockup Me freedom Me Coda Me tag Master Mouse Me run Me search family Me sniff Me no obey Me run away Me storytell somewhere else Me no Know if back from desert trip or deserted Me Heel Me want Guarantee Me down and dirty with scent of field Me welter in two goat carrion Me want blessing Me no die Me no shampoo Me search Me no "dog brain" Me search Me sniff Me down and doggy Me Wee-Message Me miss slave siblings Me smell Me find smell Me bark the bark but the pup never pops Me in heel vet holds Me walk Me huff Me no want Master Mouse stuff Me pining Me TAIL Master Mouse no TAIL Me paw hairy Master Mouse paw snary Me sniff miss family Me down and doggy Me bless Me with freedom Master Mouse Me give reassurance Me no obey Me heel Me up Me sit Me obey Me want welcome Me want reassurance Me miss Me doggy and dirty Me cry Me no know if vet give sweet or fasten wounds with a staple gun Me what's with them checks Me what's with them cheques Me what's with them sheikhs Me what's with them shakes Me what's with that leash Me help Me yelp Me want to mock the hawk Me rattle mongoose Me search for down and doggy siblings Me search Me food Me obey Me Bark Me tag on leash Me smell of puppy siblings Me obey Me sit Me Heel Me up Me siblings down and doggy obey puppies Me wander Me bite Me up Me obey Me hate vet Me hate vet for bought he my birthrighter Me hate for bought my youngest Me hate vet for sold my body for the pottage of my sterility Me bite vet for being no quiet Jacob man and meddling in pants Me fear Me bark big bark Me ask Master Mouse for reassurance Me want blessing like kids of Master Mouse Me no want shot Me want warm like children of Master Mouse Me no want exclusion Me want freedom Me no want collar Me no want ride in car to get shot Me want shash to my shlik Me want welcome Me bite watch me blight yet another Me blight another fox in flight Me no obey

Me no bark Me cow poo smell Me search siblings Me down and doggy Me wee myself scared
Me miss parents Me bark she-dog on street Me wet bed Me no obey Me search smell Me home
Me chase hyena Me forth into the field Me forth to hunt hyena Me freedom Me pine Me stare
out car window Me fear dew from heaven Me fit in Me stirred He Master Mouse get rear
windshield wiper going Me startled Me bite Me want family Me want PTA Me barren like
Matriarch Rebecca Me want welcome Me want two pups Me want two peeps in belly Me want
no intestinal abruption at spaying Me want inheritance Me want welcome Me want down and
doggy Me want after my own heart Me no want on a plate down on floor Want run Want collar
colored red Want never vaccinated again never serve any man Want reassurance Want
welcome Want labor pains Want skin fore skin Want umbilical cord no collar Want cut loose
Want cut noose Want bris the ket Want brie on plate.

9. Papa is Dead Papa is Dead

(Where Master Mouse heads to the airport by train)

And Master Mouse sat on the train listening to the rumbling of car num. CD 318 going pa-pam
ta-tam ta-tam pa-pam and right next to him sat a passenger browsing an auto catalogue from
Sweden and sitting in front of him was a young woman of about twenty who wouldn't stop
rattling her leg to a beat altogether different than the train's and very much like shlik-shlak drr-
drr shlik-shlak and the convergence of beats was driving Master Mouse out of his mind for as
if the pa-pam ta-tam pa-pam ta-tam of Car CD 318 on the tracks was not enough there came
along the shlik-shlak drr-drr to create something very indistinct like pa-pam drr ta-drr-drr-tam
shla-pa-p-am-k shla-drr-drr-pa-p-ak-lik and if that wasn't enough it seemed the girl was dying
for a smoke and kept putting the packet in and taking it out and lighting and stubbing out all to
a different beat than the pa-pam ta-tam pa-pam ta-tam which didn't quite fit anyway with the
shlik-shlak drr-drr which she rattled to a beat that was annoying to the eye as well and next to
him sat an older man sporting the beard of an orthodox Jew and he wouldn't stop rocking back
and forth like the frond on a date palm tree to the beat of the to-frond all of which converging
to disrupt Master Mouse's peace that is the convergence of the pa-pam ta-tam with the shlik-
shlak drr-drr and the box going check-in and check-out from the bag and the to-frond to the
shlik-shlak to the drr-drr all blending into pa-pam-shlak-ta-tam-drr-check-in-pa-pam ta-tam-
frond-pa-pam ta-tam and if that wasn't enough the power and telegraph poles outside the car
and by the tracks were like the bonga-bonga drums of some savage tribe at the foothill of Lake
Aftergroove and the telegraph wires that heaved down and up down and up between the poles
outside the car wouldn't relent and heaved back and forth back and forth so much so that the
wipers in the picture of the Swedish car started swinging right and left with this slow repetitive
daubing right and left and Master Mouse was ill at ease with all that check-in check-out pa-
pam ta-tam bonga-bonga taking a different mode each time around and Master Mouse realized
that no way could he open the scorebook to revise and mark the specific finger to hit the specific
note and interpret ornaments and much to his luck his was a forward-facing seat else he'd have
to contend with seasickness on top of it all and he found some comfort in the lake and field
landscape outside and the mossy smell and it wasn't long before the conductor approached
them with a little tag reading "Krieger" and the man rocking like a date palm frond took them
all for Kriegers and the girl incessantly rattling her leg to the shlik-shlak beat muttered Papa is
Dead Papa is Dead then took out a cigarette and put it back in check-in check-out and Master

Mouse mused at the girl who was reiterating out loud Papa is Dead Papa is Dead and his own dad too i.e. Master Mouse's AKA the Man in the Suit had indeed been dead for a while and had the Man in the Suit known that he i.e. Master Mouse was traveling to audition in Lutetia he'd tell him that he i.e. Master Mouse was traveling in vain for when in a favorable mood he'd refer to his playing as no more than practice and no way would he pass muster and it was then that Master Mouse was reminded how the Man in the Suit would drive back and forth outside the synagogue as recounted elsewhere and with the racket all around him he attempted to think of something that would set the Man in the suit apart from other fathers and make him proud to tell about to his own children which was no easy task what with his head rocking between the train's pa-pam ta-tam and the shlik-shlak drr-drr of the orphaned girl's foot and the power pole and heaving power lines and the wipers in the car's picture and the man rocking to-and-fro and he mused that his father's real feat had been his managing to drive everyone around him so out of their mind that when the time had come to say mourner Kaddish over his grave no ten-strong quorum could be put together and despite working hard and priding himself on his work he had managed to leave a mark on nothing and no one but his children and wife who had passed away herself during the Tour de France on the day when the champions in the boulevard of Lutetia had ridden to the Arc de Triomphe with a glass of champagne in hand as recounted elsewhere and the Man in the Suit would say that one must be prudent with money and that academics belonged in academia and one should implement their ideas at one's own peril and that anyone saying back in 1927 that GM's stock could drop would have been committed right there and then.

10. The Masseuse

(Where Master Mouse is aboard the flight)

And Master Mouse sat in his cramped seat and made sure the pocket of the seat ahead contained the mandatory earphones and a brochure with pictures showing the exit points and that the seat was indeed well fastened to the airplane's body and that no fault lines formed in said body and that a parachute was duly placed under the seat and with these ascertained he put his mind to ease and scrupulously considered risks such as blazes and crashes and disintegrations and took comfort in the fact that if he was to suffer it would be very briefly if at all and preoccupied was he nonetheless with the question of who was to seat next to him as he had been pulling tricks on the bus for years to deter the unwelcome and lure in the welcome and felt the ridicule of his capers to the point of shame for it was neither a bus nor a train but an aircraft with seating arrangements pre-determined i.e. even prior to their boarding the flight of which point exactly Coda would quip that *the rain is drawn to the lampposts* and several times had she requested that he look into it for her once in Lutetia i.e. see whether it rained harder by the lampposts outside the old Metro stations which had once been lit with gas rather than electric power which made him think of his aunt Polly whom he had found walking the rainy street all soaking wet and she could not tell where she'd been headed and had been confused and he had taken her to her home and thought it awfully kind of himself and recalled it for years and nigh failed to board the flight and got himself into a right mess as he'd walked up to the border policewoman who sported a French beret cap with a visor and quipped *I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship* only to be nearly arrested by her and taken out of the queue for about half an hour by the same policewoman and all the while he was fretting lest he miss the security

video with its explanation about the exit points and it was only after he had sworn by all that he'd held dear that it's nothing but a bad joke and certainly no harassment and by no means condescension of her country of origin that she had finally let him aboard the flight and he naively believed that *no harm could befall bearers of good deeds* and yet who was to say that travelling for a playing audition constituted a bearing of good deeds and could it be that someone's good deed was the punishment of another and that he was the bearer of the reviewer's good deed what with the latter being a gentile and being engaged by no other thoughts Master Mouse resolved to read in his own book which he had prepared in advance once the plane took off and as he was making sure the little cage stopped the tray in the seat in front of him from slipping a female passenger took the window seat next to him and he was preoccupied observing her and thinking how they were to strike a conversation and he squinted only to have his eye thereupon popping into the cavity of his ear and he could see her through the hairs and wax in his ear and it was nothing short of a miracle that he managed to restore his eye to its natural position and it was not long before another passenger took the other seat next to him and there was Master Mouse feeling clamped between clamps that clamped ever tighter as the aircraft's air pressure rose and it was indeed a good thing that he had checked the bolting on the seat and aircraft in advance and baffled at what he was to do with his hands or where he was to look straight he stared at the little tray in the seat ahead whereupon he saw a chimney sweeper drawing on the floor and a carousel with self-rotating horses requiring neither magic word nor secret code and felt his face drawn inside the screen but due to its relatively small size his head was half way in half way out i.e. the tip of the nose and mouth inside the screen with the rest of the face outside thereof just like it had been at the spa when he had first laid on the only massage bed in his life flat on his stomach and wearing nothing but his underwear with his face squeezed into a round hole in the bed and Japanese mall soundtrack at the background and all through the massage which he'd estimated as a whole day-long but in fact stood at 45 minutes sharp he could feel the masseuse hurting him and pinching him all the while knowing not how to feel or how he should feel and at that moment she'd hurt him really bad and he could not tell if it's the norm to scream when massaged and had considered asking her to top up his anesthetic only to recall that this is not the dentist's for even at the dentist's the procedure is painful but the ensuing eating is cool and the more the masseuse would work through his body the less empathy he could feel in her hands as they'd touched him as if he were a meatloaf or a raw slice of meat in the refrigerated room and he'd try to tell what she'd thought of him by her touch and couldn't feel her thinking about him at all and he'd put her to test thinking about the seaside or the tam-tam drums or banners in Nepal and the massage had remained unfazed and he'd had yet to figure out what he'd felt or whether it'd been pleasant to start with and the tune making way for sounds of flowing water and whale calls had only made it worse for him and he'd felt like a whale washed ashore and beached face down in the warm sand with the shells from the book he'd left Coda chafing his flesh and for a fleeting moment his elbow had touched the masseuse's knee or was it the leg of his neighboring female passenger and he knew not whether that had been intended as part of the treatment or not and despite her touching him incessantly he could in fact feel nothing just as Mary whom the wind whispers to had told him that her boyfriend would touch her as one instructed by a manual and couldn't really feel anything for her and having finished massaging his back she'd moved to the arms and fingers and bent them while he hadn't screamed for he had not even screamed as the dentist had turned his head only to have the dental high speed drill drilling into his tongue and it had only been the splashes of blood that had brought the dentist's attention back to him

so that he could duly stitch his tongue and she'd work finger after finger while Master Mouse would fear for the finger that for a while and under permission had been inside one of the world's most prominent female mathematicians and the beat-less tune had upset him and he could hear the whales call each other *hey there get us a krill will you them tiny marine creatures while you're riding the Gulf Stream and don't make a stop at the shore near Africa what with that virus and don't forget you promised to exercise some tail strokes and for Christ's sake don't run into another brawl with a giant squid* and once the tune had ended the masseuse had said something unintelligible in a foreign accent and walked out of the room signaling the session is over whereupon he'd heard a whale scream to report a blue she-whale and a child fleeing a couple of black and white orcas with the child equated by the Equator with all blue whales in the vicinity called to lend a hand for the mother and child are exhausted and the orcas i.e. killer whales would plain drown the whale with the Equator and the Earth would crack open like an egg on the breakfast that is yet to be served aboard the flight and it was with some difficulty that he managed to extricate his head out of the screen but not before inquiring how long must he fast whereupon he recalled again that he was not at the dentist's and he really couldn't work out if that treatment was meditation of sorts or whether it was in real time or only later that it was meant to be pleasant and he could not make up his mind and consulted his watch only to find that the aircraft had been up there for some time and breakfast now over Master Mouse did take out his book printed with "no previous knowledge required" and opened it randomly on page eighteen for order was immaterial and started reading *only to return confused as the birds' singing in the valley and while running all those things through his head he could spy at the end of the white path winding down into the valley the Postman on his bike with his flabby belly and as anticipation had more than once left him disenchanted he drummed it into himself that while the Mezuzah letters that grew wary and dropped as they did over the years and required the occasional check and telling off and reinstatement the letter from Lutetia had probably been electric type-written thus leaving the caption put for better or worse even if* and couldn't make head or tails of the lot or particularly of what were those things that returned confused and why the birds' singing i.e. the fairest thing in the whole country was confused and found it inconceivable that birds would chirp irrespective of each other and couldn't work out the bike that the Postman was riding for Master Mouse had no bike nor was the Postman's bike the property of the post but of the postal service and he couldn't understand how anticipation could let one down for the wait and hope and disappointment were after all anticipation's own building blocks and so on and so forth and on he read understanding not that which he was reading and he seriously considered leaving the book in the pocket of the seat ahead alongside the earphones and safety appendix and all he could say was that *the life of this fictional Master Mouse was rife with sadness* and that he was probably on the brink of despair and wondered if he should propose that he look at the bright sides of his life and wallow in pleasant memories and try and recreate the stuff he liked and felt timid about talking to the character at the book for he was sandwiched between two passengers and he mused long and hard about how he could save the character in that book and thought those birds singing in the valley might be singing on the banks of the river in Lutetia and if he could get his message across they could convey it to Master Mouse there inside the story after their migration back to the valley and he wished to know where the birds flew when the baguette dried whereupon he fell asleep with his head inadvertently reclined on the next seat female passenger's shoulder who never even attempted to nudge it off and his one ear heard Coda inquiring whether *one sided croissant* was even possible while the other heard the electric typewriter tapping the next

chapter with an immaculate 104 per minute beat and he prayed for Master Mouse there inside the story that the ink had a firm enough grip on the paper lest Master Mouse slip of the page come the next air pocket and fall out of the book onto the aircraft's carpet only to be eventually vacuumed into a French vacuum cleaner over at Lutetia's airport and he realized it was his call to free the whales of the soundtrack at the masseuse's room and no harm should befall the bearers of good deeds and at that moment Master Mouse freed himself for the first time of the seat's safety belt.

12.

Upon Listening to Kreutzer Sonata

(Where Master Mouse listens to Kreutzer Sonata and yearns for a story to be written for him titled Upon Listening to Kreutzer Sonata)

Intermission now over the crowd was filling the hall bustling and anticipating the highlight piece for that night - Kreutzer Sonata and Master Mouse sat at the fourth row awaiting this long-anticipated moment and eager and down with a cold with his nose a tad red and a pack of Kleenex resting on his knees and they i.e. the musicians resumed their positions on stage and their steps were rather resolute and the pianist was donning a dark suit and his violinist wife in a light gown and violin in hand and he felt that in a way he had a much simpler task dressing up than her as the suit code all but relieved him of selecting-and-matching duty to say nothing of the jacket's disguising the weight issue that by then had been quite a lingering concern for him and that night the pair were requested to perform Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata which was a piece that had gained them renown with considerable tickets and CDs sales and how many times had Beethoven himself heard this piece mused the pianist and struggled to guess and to the best of his knowledge Kreutzer the violinist to whom the piece was dedicated had probably never played it himself nor had he held Beethoven in particular respect and he i.e. the pianist definitely had his reservations – nay repulsions about Beethoven who squeezed the piece's culmination further and further as if to wring water out of a wet cloth and he banged the piano to the point of crushing its tusks with this piece which held a special place for the husband and wife duo paving their road to success as it had and albeit only scoring them the second place in the competition it had also paved their way to their wedding as they had been married at the same hour by the same rabbi in the same synagogue as two hopeful Conservatorium students with hours of joint practice to their name and who would probably have won first place had the pianist not inadvertently turned two pages rather than one during the trials and got startled and plunged her into a muddle that could be felt by the entire audience whereupon he vowed never to skip a word or a note or a letter no matter the text but on second thoughts he kept telling himself that even David Oistrakh had finished second at a violin competition after the by-now-all-but-forgotten Ginette Neveu and Master Mouse beheld the program thinking it would be terribly amusing to have someone writing a story one day titled Upon Listening to Kreutzer Sonata based on goings-on inside the hall with Kreutzer Sonata as the plot's setting and let him

note for the sake of those unfamiliar with musical tittle-tattle that even Tolstoy had written a similarly-titled story about a husband catching his violinist wife red-handed playing Beethoven's sonata with a strange man oh the horror and if that's not enlightening enough he should note as an aside that even Janáček had written a piece titled Kreutzer Sonata which endeavored to render Tolstoy's story in sounds only Janáček had taken the extra step of making the couple's intimate story into a... quartet and Master Mouse further mused that the author of this story would be well-advised to suggest that on their wedding night the rabbi had requested they play Van Gogh's Moonlight Sonata at which point the crowd had fallen silent and the two started playing and occupied as he was with Kleenex and surreptitious achoos and earnest efforts to let his present company know he was doing his best to be civil Master Mouse struggled to keep his focus on the tune from his seat in the fourth row and the best he could do was to follow the hand gestures and spy how the pianist's eyes virtually close with his body shifting from side to side as if he were giving in to the tune and turning into Beethoven himself or into the man from Tolstoy's sonata story and yet drippy-nosed Master Mouse scrutinized the pianist's face and saw one of his eyes which was shut but only just whereupon he glimpsed the pianist's white space and pupil and thereby probed into the artist's mind which grappled with the question of how many more times would he and his wife have to play this vulgar piece which hadn't really been made to clock the annual equivalent of 613 Jewish *mitzvot* before a packed tribune and was yet more concerned by the question of whether he had put out his parking permit as the fine was much higher than his pianist fees but the thing that really got him down was the girl sitting pretty near the stage so much so that as he was playing to a full house with eyes just open and fit to burst out of their sockets he muttered way-way under his breath "I would have done her right here on the piano before this whole crowd and my violinist wife ripping and tearing her clothes apart and giving it to her not only *alla strett*o and *rubato* but also *alla allegro* and *agitato* and *appassionato* and *crescendo* with *alla zucchini* and *Pomodoro* and *Alfredo* and *Marconi* like *Enzo Ferrari* to her *Lamborghini* and *Maserati* and *Caravaggio* and *peperoni* and *Sicilia* and *Napoli* to say nothing of *autostrada* and *veranda* and *Rimini* and *Padua* and *Toscana* and *Lombardia* and particularly *Umbria* *Genova* over to *Portofino* and *espresso* and *Lavazza* and *Segafredo* and *Medici* and *Berlusconi* and *Fellini* and *Accattone* and *Cabiria* and *Da Vinci* and *Galileo Galilei* complete with the *Sea of Galilee* and *De Amicis* featuring *Lella Lombardi* and *Francesco Camagni* and *Emilio Carducci* and *alla Stradivarius* while at it even and *Nautilus* and *Corriere della Sera* and *Cremona* and *Perugia* and *Madonna* with no other than *Maria Callas* herself and *Giulietta* herself and *Mito* herself and *Amanda Knox* herself and *Giuseppe Di Stefano* and *Tullio Serafin* themselves and solo at *La Scalla Milano* and *La Scala-upon-Bograshov* and *La Scala* at *Great Abasan* and *La Scala di-Muck* and *La Scala di-Époque* and *La Scala Siciliana* and *Marcello Mastroianni* and by quarter past eight and 3:10 to *Yuma* in the *Thurman of the Uma* and by two-ish to *Capri* and *Adastra* and *Sinistra* and *Sinatra* and *Toscanini* and *Panini* and *Paganini* and *Kreutzernini* *alla sonatini* and *Verdi* and *Verda* and *Tricolora* and *rapido* and *Mercato* and *mezzo* and *forte* and *Coda* and *Di Capo* and *di appassionato* and *veranda* and *Sparafucile* and *Berrera* too and *Moto Guzzi* itself and *Dolce* and *Gabbana* with *cappuccino* and *espresso* and *Chianti* wine and *vermouth martini* and *Armani* up the *Pirelli* tires and *Campari* and *Luigi Nono* meet *spaghetti* westerns and *soap operas* and *Opéra bouffe* and *lasagna* and *Tosca* and *Turan-dot-com* and *Turan-Dot-Como* and *Lago di Como* and *fusilli* and *tortellini* and *cannelloni* *alla Scarlatti* *alla moda* *Pasolini* and *Carabinieri* and *crab-in-ieri* and *whose-in-ieri* and *Man-in-ieri* and *AK-ieri* and *macaroni* and *Stromboli* and *Lago di Maggiore* and *Sacco* and *Vanzetti* and *Geppetto* and

Pinocchio and La Gioconda and Via Apia and Agip and pizza and Pizzicato with Robert De Niro and Piazza della Repubblica and Piazza dell'Opera and Piazza della Libertà and Piazza de-la vea fanculo and Piazza Napolitana and Piazza conculo and Enrico Caruso and Piero de Palma and Galliano Masini and Kuame and Love-Me and Hate-Me and Bite-Me and Scratch-Me and Pull-Me and Spank-Me and Impale-Me-Burn-Me-Push-Me down the Puccini and Max Biaggi and Finzi Contini and Vittorio De Sica and Pasolini yet again with another Vittorio De Sica alla Olivetti and Donizetti and Vivaldi and Puccini and Fausto Coppi and Max Biaggi again oh well it's not like he's not worth it is it? And Valentino Rossi and Rossini and the Barber of Seville and the Raven of Venice but not Barbara Strozzi whichever the closet she was dragged out of might be and arrabbiata and La Traviata and Don Pasquale and Rigoletto and Nabucco and Nabokov and Lolita and Gilda and Golda and that war in October and Bertone and Pininfarina and Monza and Rome and Pseudo and Alpha Sud and Alpha Sod-It and Alpha Soda and Diadora and Pronto and ciao and meow and bahau and crow and naau and aaaaaaaaaaaaaa- aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaau and Ai Gondolieri and gondola and may we bang on the piano's sides like the mariners at the Kursk submarine who banged on the vessel's sides at the Black Sea off Odessa which is the birthplace of that son-of-a-gun Oistrakh and all of you at the audience watching me as if I were this gladiator inside a Rome arena awaiting my every blunder so you can devour me oh may you beg for an encore and oh mama I'd sooner play outside the mall on a Casio portable keyboard than here with my wife and all that so-called romantic drag is making my back hurt and for every moment there's a member of the crowd dropping dead which reminds me of this joke: why does the music play backward by Beethoven's grave? And that bore with the Kleenex sitting out there in the fourth row coughing as if to state I don't mind him at all and looking at me with his laser cross-eyes as if he can see through me assuming that just because he's bought a ticket for a dime oh-but-with-a-twenty-percent-discount-for-club-members he's got some claim on me or that knowing whether Kreutzer played for Juventus or deciphered the enigma or the chain of events behind the anecdote that gave the sonata its name necessarily means he has a clue about how it's performed oh what with him staring at me the way Bartók would listen to his pieces with the scores on his knees and metronome in hand and an open notebook in pocket oh by all means come over and take my seat at the piano and do take a swagger out of your own eye and play and see what they say then oh don't go all sanctimonious with your old "I'm-just-the-audience-slash-patron" as we all know that you've travelled all the way to Lutetia to learn how to play oh but I digress for you're boasting of your reading into me and it's plain to see that your mind is going drop this shifting from side to side *s'il vous Plath* and you're actually no better than me sitting there in the fourth row with your Kleenex and wondering whether you left the toaster-oven on as it takes a cross-eye to know another so let me tell you I've probably forgotten to put out a parking permit just between you and me and even if you play the piece backwards as in back to front with or without modulation or with Negro Caballo's decapitated head perched on the strings still this philistine audience shall applaud on as if they'd just received the Tables of the Covenant at Mount Sinai and a friend stationed at the back of the orchestra once told me that he only played intermittently as the audience couldn't tell anyway and once he'd even played the Jig during Christmas Mass just because he'd felt like Jigging it so now for instance I'm keeping my foot on the pedal and see what you have to say about that oh there you go not a comment nor even a brow raised and your remonstrance that you realize I'm testing you doesn't wash with me because as far as I'm concerned you get a global reverberating F for microgravity and neither the Kleenex nor any other excuse will do...

Drippy-nosed Master Mouse had no choice and suddenly on top of his cold he started to come down with this jamming and cramming of his head as if a submarine with its propeller broken were drifting in there with its sailors banging on his temples and he just softly got up and left the hall with a sense of relief not before his gaze made sure that Dulcinea-by-stage still had her clothes intact and not before the pianist opened his eyes to look straight at him as if to say “just you wait you and I are an unfinished symphony and every scale has its dominant and every coda has its tail and there are two sides to any note and every dog gets his day... and let me tell you that one can get a toaster-oven to whip up anything but love... oh and the piece is played backwards by Beethoven’s grave because he’s decomposing.”

20.

As We Ride beyond the Blue Line

Aria

This apology - you heard me right - an apology it is and let me begin it with this little confession - that moment when the door clicks shut with you my son sat inside sat in the car all safe sound and happy - this moment must be the stuff that fuels my life as we’ve yet again managed to complete a bilking trip without falling or getting snake-bitten or diving off a cliff or getting lost and once again we’ve made it back to the car which we left unguarded somewhere and were spared burglary or theft or fire all of which and many others being non-incidentals close calls and we’ve already experienced getting lost at Wadi Peres and finding ourselves in a goat trail on a bluff hundred meters above ground out of water and with the nearest car broken into - all in the same trip’s work.

We cycle two a tandem bike largely because you can’t bike on your own and it was when you were really small aged just five that we set out on our rides leaving in the early hours in what we’d refer to in our own private language as “night-morning” way ahead of sunrise and I would pluck you up sleeping from your bed and carry you off to the pre-heated car and would later “one-on-one” or piggyback you and now that you’re fourteen I only have to walk into your room saying “come on let’s go it’s night-morning time” for you to jolt like a rocket and get down to the car unprompted.

At first I wasn’t sure we could cycle to begin with and you could say the bike I got us was a gamble of sorts but you liked it and devised your own way of cycling by turning the pedals back rather than forward to counter my pull or mounting the handlebars then onto my back all while riding and yet all these culminated with the game you invented which involved planting your leg in the wheels as they turned or trying to work out what would happen when the shoe got caught between the chain and sprocket which once ended up with you catapulted off – and being too small for me to notice back when we’d been cycling with the group on a Saturday morning I suddenly had people calling me “stop! Stop! Go right back!” Turning back I ran over only to find you crying and me once reassured these were no more than minor scrapes I started leaping for joy and crying for happiness with everyone staring at me as if I were an alien but they had no idea it was the first time I saw you dear son of mine crying with

pain oh yes you hadn't cried even when circumcised and when asking the wielder of the knife if it hadn't struck him as odd he said that with a thousand acts to his name he was more than capable of pulling off a painless procedure.

Our trips would unfold at leisure.

In fact we set out on them because I wanted to make sure your older sister and the newly-born one got one quiet day a week that's all and plus I believe nature to possess some supernatural powers but mainly because mounted on a bike we escaped your otherness escaping up north and down south and wherever one could ride and we escaped gravity too because sat on the bike you're just like me and so did we escape with a mental drawstring pulling us down to diagnoses and treatments and on we ventured to that place where about two years ago a family were to step a landmine but most of all we escaped our looming fate and the sentence delivered by a clever judge making it impossible to overturn and I wasn't one for making do with living under the gloom of your disability.

As early as your infancy I recoiled from - nay - resented parents sitting in parents groups and bemoaning the child born to them and I thought even back then they should be put up against the wall and burnt alive and couldn't understand how a parent could cry over a child born to them or how anyone could look their child in the eye and say "that's not what I bargained for" while I had already been a hardliner catholic believing our life to begin with the blue line the moment you spring into our consciousness as parents and I thank science three times a day for devising no relevant prenatal test because then I might have accidentally succumbed to a friendly counsel or heeded some learned advice and pulled the plug on you and it was a great privilege that the stork carrying you had decided to bring you into my home and it made it very easy for me to decide to bring into your world another brother or sister despite statistics being 20 times as harsh as your run-of-the-mill amniotic fluid test and because I knew I could look your big sister in the eye when she'd ask "alright you didn't know about one brother but why setting me up with two of these?" replying that "just like that because I am a devotee of the blue line and besides it couldn't be any worse than being a Jew."

Variatio 1

We met scores of people along our trips like that time at the Sea of Galilee Round Tour when a man with a shiny metal prosthesis was riding by and you asked him with that famous lopsided smile of yours "say are you a robot?" and the man smiled affectionately understanding you and teaching me - your father - who sees the world through viewfinders with patience thinner than hairbreadth - a lesson in kindness.

We also met a female rider past her youth and you grabbed a crease in her neck asking "are you alive?" which made her so nervous that at first she had to sit down and then went supine and we met many people along the roadside and on the brighter side of the scale like Hilwe in the village of Shibli at the footsteps of Mount Tabor who smiled upon seeing you pull your pants off to take a number two smack in the middle of her shop and said "we are all born with our own fortune" which struck me as one of the most beautifully appeasing expressions I had ever heard and we met this guy who dug you so much that he got a cycling group together from his hi-tech company especially for you with thirty cyclists showing up

every Saturday to hi-five you and hear your take on dinosaurs and we met Lior who had another biking group set up especially for you and the folks we met at the multi-participant Wheels of Hope tour and at the famous annual Sea of Galilee circular tour and the Dead Sea Gyro or along the trail marked in blue at the 3rd avenue of the Negev desert.

Absolutely nothing to be ashamed of and people did stuff for you that I found embarrassing like when that couple took us all the way from the Dead Sea to the car park because we had gotten kind of sidetracked then couldn't make our way back up the desert or the Druze man who towed us when we had two flat tires and another one blown to boot up there along the Golan Heights's Petroleum Road or the four young men who adjusted their ATV trip route when we got stranded around the desert trail of MaAle Avraham with no water or energy left and took us along with the bike and dog all the way to Sde Boker and the man in the blue SUV who loaded us on board hoisting the tandem onto the vehicle's roof scratching and twisting as would a Jew twisting a coin over the mezuzah and vowing to give it to charity upon returning from his journey all reassured that no harm should befall bearers of good deeds and would therefore take neither my details nor money for the damage incurred or Ben-Gal who's been taking care of our bike all those years and won't hear about money and we came across so much fellowship and warmth that we had to amp up our Smile Protective Factor lest the Walkman melt.

There were also for sure those of a less obvious kind of charm - like that British tourist who tried to arm-twist you into silence whereupon I cordially but firmly let him know where the cranes flew when the pond froze and that mom who solemnly and unequivocally informed me that she was going to kill you while I wished her good luck telling her I totally heard her and was all for reciprocation and we met people who gave us so much that it brought tears to my eyes to thank them too humbled to come up with nothing more.

Variatio 2

Oh and just so you know I forgive you for spilling our entire water supply down south near Mount Arqoub - what a masterstroke to spill it then play with the ensuing mud of two cycling water bottles and two 1.5-liter bottles to boot or an estimated total of four liters of water and I managed fine actually and maybe you did too but the dog ended up belly-crawling by her two front legs as we had no water to cool her down while I was already on the lookout for a priest and a coffin maker and I forgive you for plunging into that freezing puddle up north near Mount Bental where I had to dress you up in my own clothes and needless to say I forgive you for all those times we cycled round a circular track by the end of which you wanted or rather insisted that we got back to the car the same way we had come and no amount of explaining that it's better and shorter to carry on this way would do and I forgive you for the fire we nearly wreaked on Beit Keshet Forest and for chucking your helmet while cycling and for outright refusing to leave the car when we arrived at Mitzpe Ramon having driven for almost 3.5 hours and I naturally forgive you for that time when we arrived at the Tour De Arad's starting line half an hour early but you just had to swing away on the swing and wouldn't get off even when we could hear the race caller rounding bikers at the starting line with the ensuing takeoff clatter while we stayed for roughly another half an hour and long after the dust had settled and for being bafflingly partial to rock the bike from side to side even as we hurtle down the road.

I on my part owe that I've gone too far at times like on that trip around the Sea of Galilee during the 2006 Lebanon War with desolation all around us and beaches all closed down and not a soul or vehicle in sight and we rode down the middle of the road zigzagging the white lines and marveling at missiles dropping on Tiberias from across the lake because you see for me a trip with you overrides any Jewish preservation-of-life concerns and I admit that my curiosity drove us into a flood at the Ardon Canyon maybe or a little further down in mud so deep we couldn't walk let alone cycle and all in all we notched up quite a documentation of our excursions with tens of thousands of photographs and lots of pictures but most of all we captured my thrill at the whole thing at how a nondescript canyon like Wadi Hatzatz could be made into a photography book or at how a flower as humble as the Wild Pink could yield a photographic collection and how the desert came alive once you got to know it by arriving way ahead of sunrise because usually by 9:00 the show was over and yet no one was around when that hawk or a buzzard flew up there and while this pair too might not get along and albeit dogfights were not that rare a sight we actually got on pretty well with everyone and we learnt that they liked gliding between the sun and us so that we couldn't see them and that the falcon could betray the position of snakes or hyraxes while the jay we saw in town was but a scale model of its wild counterpart and the dove was no pacifist at all and might well be nature's most superfluous bird and that there were at least 20 creatures more deserving than the hoopoe of the title of Israel's own national bird and we also learnt that when there was no more water for the dog she might also drink the milk of a nursing mare and that it's best to give the female camel - also referred to as cow - a wide berth particularly when she was having a baby camel in an oasis and we further learnt that even cattle could be pretty feisty on their way to the kebab shop well at least those at the mountainous part of River Jordan and that when charged by a cow there's not much point counting on your dog's barking and it's better to just make a dash for it but on the other hand one stone striking a single cow's head did not a spring make but might easily scare the entire herd away and that deer were frightened by pedestrian humans and cars but couldn't hear the bike and with a little bit of luck you might approach within ten steps of them provided that zero warning didn't induce a panic episode over on our side and we learnt that Jewish people's dogs barked at Bedouins while Bedouins' dogs in turn barked at Jews.

We learnt moreover that in this our country it didn't rain everywhere at once or in other words you could always go out on a trip even on a doomed winter day and you could always make it somewhere where it wasn't raining or had just rained while rain always fell ahead or to the sides of the bike itself and summer and heat were actually worse than winter and cold as winter posed far less dangers with most animals in hiding and we learnt that one might walk into the wheat barefoot when it's green but it's better avoided when yellow and most importantly we learnt to ride with our eyes shut oh yes the real and quintessential ride is that where your hands see their surroundings through the handlebars as you simply close your eyes and prick up your ears and count to ten while hardliners may even let go of the breaks as well.

Variatio 3 – canon a lunisano

And if you ask me to name our better trips I shall cite those where you surprised me like on that rainy Saturday when we drove souther than south hoping to cross the rain line and eventually once we got to Mount Negev it was dry enough to load off our bike and assemble the wheels then change from pajamas into cycling gear and set off only you weren't that eager to venture out into the cold and we cycled reluctantly until we made it to the so-called "cropped" mountain or this high hill that looks like an Asian hat and all of a sudden you took off with this magnificent bee line sprint all the way to the top and I even managed to capture you at it in one of my favorite photos and it suddenly hit me that whatever I'd learnt or done or thought before had been but a preparation for that moment and that rarely could one say in real time "this is one of the most beautiful moments of life" and I said it with this conviction and this resignation just as it's clear to me that the hardest part of my life will be when I'm no longer around but you are and that we are a bit like the Wild Pink – a sorry bush but a pink flower and we stood at the top of the cropped mountain in the ghostly winter wind of Mount Negev eating out of your pretzel bag and feeling that though we cycled through the valley of the shadow of death we would fear no evil for thou were with me and we felt like the dwelling-of-brethren-together incarnate and the oil upon the chain and the dew of Hermon.

Or that trip to the Hula Valley where I turned my head for a second only to turn it back and find you'd just disappeared or rather fallen into one of those ditches then got tangled up in the tangle of a brake and when I pulled you out you looked like this Vietcong fighter at the Mekong Delta and the first thing I did was take your picture with your hair and eyes and ears and mouth and clothes and socks all soaking with mud and organic gunk and the next thing was wondering how I was going to get you a change of clothes because no way were we going turned out like that and I kept the photo deep inside a drawer finding it as I had unbearable to look at because that's probably how you'd have looked like dredged up out of that ditch in a black plastic bag

And how about that time at the Judean Desert when we arrived at a pole meant to be signposted with further directions only it was just a pole with no signpost to it and I really had no idea where next because alas the map had dropped off my handlebars and the trail was ravaged by the flood and directions were unclear and you insisted that we rode down the track and I had no choice knowing that if we had to turn around I'd have no energy to ride back while an impending Lost Riders of Judea was wafting through the wind and it was only after about 300 meters that we looked up and saw a green milestone and I couldn't tell where exactly it was pointing at but I knew it was getting somewhere or the other time when we took on the big ascent from behind Kibbutz Dvira and pepped ourselves up by calling out loud "I want I can" which you rendered into "I want can" and when we got up there we cried together at the top of our lungs "We maaaade it!"

Coda

But the thing is that even with no clouds the scorched desert earth may host more fetes than the sirens at sea.

We've been going out on the road for nearly a decade now with nature out there awaiting us quietly and meekly and never tooting its own horn feet firmly on the ground as if to say "Feel like coming? Great we're here with the thorns and birds and tracks and the morning mist and the dew an'all" every Tuesday and every Saturday up north or down south which south begins at the Pura nature reserve outside Beer Sheva and ends at Mitzpe Ramon while North begins with Mount Tabor and ends with "Trees McDonalds" upon River Banias and sorry but we must quit and it's not because it's almost too much even for me getting up "morning-night" come Saturday come winter or summer and almost fifty times a year and driving every Tuesday to the Latrun area nor is it on account of our bike - falling apart though it may - sorry son but we must quit and it's not that I feel like Don Quixote by now or that I'm worn out - and I won't deny that my body has become sore - it's just that you can only have luck on your side for so long and what are we to do if a snake bites you or if you need stitches or if I fitted as I am with heart stent have an MI and what if we end up writhing on the sand like a Snow White besieged by evil beasts and who knows how they're to give you a tetanus shot given that you must be anaesthetized to have your blood taken and must fast if they're to anaesthetize you.

That's it time to let the air out the tires and it's back to the shelf for the pump and let it be known that the desert thorns filled my life with joy passing the love of women and it was hard parting from the trails we rode and the flat wheels and the hyena we came across with its body at once repulsive and striking and its laughter evil and the countless foxes we startled or the falcons and hawks and eagles and snake eagles or the flowers we gave names to and the snakes who are ever-present yet cannot be spied by most people and our skinny-dipping at the water pits knowing there's not a soul to be found from one horizon to the next and the snow-cycling up north near the Oz 77 war monument with your sister's green rucksack and whistle which saw us everywhere or the thorns and scratches and sweat and yet dear son of mine there's no way around it there just isn't and it's as simple as that - or is it?

Elizabeta

1.

And having washed just one of her hands with soap just like her mom had taught her and having perfunctorily put on her glove with its glittery mesh for her entire crowd to see unlike the magician slowly wearing a black glove for his own entire crowd to see Elizabeta found quite a few customers standing across the counter with quite a few supermarket carts to boot and considering the order of 42 thinner-than-thin-schnitzel-fillets which had been placed by phone for the kindergarten near the supermarket and considering the shopping list they'd always hand her ever so politely and with no pushing and shoving and in clear and legible letters so that she didn't have to strain her eyes and considering the two cardboard boxes packed with red meat and the packed antibiotic-free poultry that had to be stacked on the shelves having arrived just minutes earlier because all slaughtering operations were reserved for Monday and all things considered it was as early as that and while grappling with the mesh glove that Elizabeta realized there'd be not a single moment for her to breathe and that the customers were actually got in the way of her work and it'd be a lot easier if this were a customer-free kind of supermarket or could the customers come in an orthopedist kind of queue whereupon she could get the newly arrived meat and stack the shelves and tell the rump parts from their topside counterparts and cut the fillets just right leaving no kid with less than his or her due and even pound them i.e. the schnitzels and not the kids perish the thought with the designated white tenderizer and on a day like that there was no choice but to work quickly between the chicken for the shawarma and the meat for the fillets and the pullet for the chucks and gullets and she kept wondering why is it that people buy such small portions of meat being that grinding half a kilo is just the same as grinding two i.e. you get the meat together then wash it in a strainer and put through the grinder and grind again and arrange nicely in the trays then shrink and stick the code and place gently for customers who could barely be asked to blurt thank you and ask *anything else please* and inform them of the discount on whole poultry and just like at the local clinic some customers have just this one thing to ask about the meat and should they go for sirloin or fillet and if goulash was better cut with or against the grain and was a cow's tongue better to bite on than a bull's with everyone around on edge and following her every move as if she were performing CPR on the meat and they all whispered a prayer *oh but that we don't lose the veal and that she cut it gently* because there was no anesthesia and other than a glimpse of Argentina and Ben Gurion Airport the meat had very little taste of the world out there and that some calves had been commemorated crossing the Rio Grande alongside John Wayne and there's also those who'd go *get us some veal foreshank mixed with pullet will you love* and others complained there was too much fat in their meat last time now try to explain to them that a bit of fat can actually add some flavor particularly if you're slow cooking and now this man comes up asking why there's no antibiotic-free meat on the shelves but how could she possibly stack the meat with so many customers waiting and getting in the way and as she cut the frozen chicken's drumsticks the hungry little ones from the kindergarten could be heard crying awaiting as they already were their lunch with them thin schnitzel and breadcrumbs and the bow-tie pasta with tomato paste and it was then that her fingers started aching with the frost and there she was peeling back the chicken's skin with one hand as she filleted with the other and arranged in yet another while explaining about the time it took the goulash to cook which

she reckoned was better prepared in an iron saucepan with a thick bottom even if it came with a little rust which was not that bad and you might want to add a little red wine but even plonk would do and grandma would fry stuff on the blazing hot steel of the German maybe Panzers about an hour after they'd been hit and there she was sweating under the heavy jumper she wore against the refrigeration and all those well-timed actions reminded her of the crane operator who'd fiddle with the hydraulic handles on board the ship at the North Sea where she had served as a drilling engineer certified by the Moscow Polytech way back in her previous incarnation and specializing in drilling holes in the ice with the purpose of measuring its thickness and on more than one occasion her measurements had spared the ship some excessively thick ice and everyone would therefore show her respect and let her go first in the shower when water had been relatively tepid rather than cold because it had only been the Capitan and the command floor lieutenant that enjoyed actual hot water and Elizabeta would move about like a player in the area stretching between the grinder and the cutting board and recalled her mom i.e. the most decorated she-sniper at the Battle of Stalingrad who'd managed to take down the German Fox himself and had been so famous that even the Germans had shown her respect and the pamphlets they'd dropped on Stalingrad had alerted that if they i.e. the Germans were to lay their hands on her they'd kill her with dignity and spare her torture and they say that Stalin shook her hand after the war and for years later she wouldn't wash that hand though switching hands for convenience's sake even while at the gulag with her family out there in Siberia and it was there that Elizabeta had been born and she'd be later told that even the amniotic fluid that had broken with her mom listening to Shostakovich playing the piano had frozen which was why Elizabeta wouldn't complain about her hands freezing and all the more so with her mesh glove and her mom had told her that sniping at the Germans had been a mental cause or *cosa mentale* and Elizabeta who was also an engineer by occupation would make such calculations as how many customers it took to buy a whole cow or whether it mattered which direction the meat grinder axis took in the northern hemisphere and could a bovine foursome heading into the slaughterhouse be made into a Fourier series with all them sines and cosines and Pi and at times and with pressure becoming intolerable she would go to the phone and ask for help on the PA just as she would with the radio on board the ship at the polar circle when the drill would break or when they'd had to stop and turn back or when the hydraulic line would come out and splash oil all over the white snow just as the meat grinder would sometime squirt veal spray all over the floor and the thing that engaged her most as she was wearing the glove was the question of whether her favorite customer whom she referred to as 400-GGV just like back in the gulag when everyone had had their own number and letters and what was 400-GGV to wear on such a hot day and was 400-GGV going to ask her to get him 400 gram ground veal אוילי in two trays as always or was it going to be cut skinless chicken legs for his soup or thin schnitzel as a cheaper option or maybe even shanks or maybe the whole lot and she muttered to herself in Cyrillic script that there she was falling in love with a dead man and they once asked Elizabeta (as she was preparing two kilos thinly-filleted schnitzels which equated four kilos as this way she doubled the number of servable schnitzels and she worked out that it could be mathematically established that there was always an epsilon of error as little as we wished it to be that excused filleting an n number of schnitzels provided there were no customers around and she christened this law *The Reversed Schnitzel Law* or *Leztinhcs*) whether it was going to take much longer to which she didn't reply because as a matter of fact she couldn't stand the customers who were in the way and particularly those that sent

their foreign worker with a list ready which had an Hebrew schnitzel written down in Latin letters with highlights in Filipino or those who'd call expecting service and she reckoned people had no patience and that they all pushed politely i.e. go about their pushing saying sorry like that time when she'd been boarding a flight and at times she slowed it all down on purpose and it's not just the meat cutting for she'd hit the scales at about the right amount then add some to adjust and took some off so that it's spot on the gram as if it mattered at all and unlike the resetting of the sniper gun of her mom the Sniper of Stalingrad where every gram could decide the precision of the hit for precision is a matter of *cosa mentale* and whoever got on her nerves or talked down to her would get lots of fat with little meat which she referred to as white meat as you couldn't see the red for the fat and she had also learnt that the nicer their *good mornings* and *how are yous* when they called her the harder the blow and the longer the list and the more complex the phone instructions and she recalled how one day they called her from the bank asking *how are you Elizabeta* And she didn't even understand how they knew her name and her phone number and she knew that if they called from the bank it meant a disaster must have struck and that the way she was feeling now was nothing compared to how she was going to feel in a minute and that her ship diesel-fumed lungs were failing to provide her with enough oxygen and in no time she would fall down on the knife right there between the chicken legs and all she could tell the bank clerk was *that's how I am ... let me see how it is what do you want* at which point he noted his name was Nissim as if she could care less and added that he was head of her team at the bank as if she could care about that too and that her bank account had been frozen which wasn't that bad because that was often down to an error and could actually work out for the best because a frozen bank account saved you heaps on shopping and the diesel fumes singed her throat as she felt her sweat running down the space in her cleavage all the way down to her belly button and the edge of her bra was propped with prime Ukrainian metal which the Wehrmacht had once tried to rob and in no time she'd leap out of her heavy jumper and she i.e. Elizabeta was going to look like a woolly mammoth with huge tusks like the ones they would find up there in the cold north in her voyages with the ship's drill dead frozen in the ice and who knows what else lay in store and there she stood receiver in hand and the clerk went *Mrs. Elizabeta are you OK* and she didn't get his humor at all and the customers went *is it going to take much longer and what about the schnitzels* and the pressure at the supermarket offset the pressure in the lungs and it took as little as a spark of power for the diesel fumes to go alight sending Elizabeta flying like a rocket through the supermarket's ceiling just as the ice drills breaking on the ship would do back at the pole circle and there had been this one time when the drill had shot up with such force that it had flown a hundred meters in the air spiraling down into and through the deck only to finally stop miraculously two centimeters into the rucksack of one of the sailors who'd sported a beard and hidden a Torah book inside his rucksack and the drill had stopped outside Mount Gilboa i.e. on the verse *Therefore Saul took his sword, and fell upon it* and needless to say the guy had stood trial on board the ship for the Torah book thing and spent his shift working in the oil filters and then done a month of cold water dishwashing in the kitchen as punishment and they'd been angry with Elizabeta because the steel would grow hotter on the outside due to its friction with the ice while on the inside it'd become more brittle what with the freeze up north as if she hadn't already known that and she'd been offended at how little they thought of her and they might as well have told her that she had broken the drill on purpose so as to be back inside the ship and away from the ice and freezing white air surrounding the ship and

that one i.e. the Jew with the Torah book had sworn to her that anyone messing with Jews would end up like them Wehrmacht soldiers who had put the bulletins with the inscription of her mom the Sniper inside their trousers so as to keep warm before they had frozen at which point she asked the clerk what did he mean by frozen account and the calmer he spoke the more fretful she became and realized the knife was twisting further in and she asked what could one do about it and he told her she should talk to her lawyer and have them send someone to the tax bureau and sort it on the spot but she had no lawyer and by now no money to pay for one and she asked whether they were going to shut off the cable service for her daughter who was attending the academic high school and finally went *oh well you asked how I am so it's things as usual what with my troubles and blessings being a single package I've never actually ordered so let's wait and see what's next and have a fabulous day* blurted the clerk and she went *oh well* and went back to the schnitzels and glove and the people looking at her and one of them even said that they might want to put the phone on silent during work because it's poor service and in America they'd have her sacked right there and then because talking on the phone in front of the customers was rude and she recalled how back in school they had taught her that there's no playing around with American and a nigger would always get up for a white man on the bus and the Indians had skinned the white men's legs with them still alive and with no glove which was collegially interesting that they'd managed to pull it off and that the Americans had castrated the mentally ill even before the Germans and the Germans had even travelled there to train in the practice because theoretically speaking the Germans had needed not learn from no one and she'd love to go to America and work in a supermarket because over there they bought steaks by the pound which required conversion from kilos and she wondered how long it was going to take her to hit just the right weight and she really couldn't understand why people in America bought such large quantities for you would think they had rationing like back in the gulag and by tomorrow there'd be no more meat and maybe the whole frozen account thing wasn't that bad when it was your neighbor's account but it's a hell of a trouble when it's yours as they said about medicine and health and she wondered whether the chicken legs placed in the tray could tell whether the next leg belonged to the same chicken and her mom could take down her customers one by one even from a distance of 200 meters or more at night while lying in the ice like the pullet with the cold steel of the sniper rifle in her hand and her thoughts then took her back to the ship and how at one point and due to misnavigating they'd thought they might have to spend the entire winter in the Northern Sea engulfed by ice until succumbing to the cold and subsequently feeding on one another until the springtime snowmelt and had it not been for her special formulas Elizabeta couldn't have contended that they could press ahead and that the ice would not break the ship and be right and the entire ship staff had given her a round of applause with the Capitan shaking her hand which she had never washed since and they'd let her take a real hot shower and people had called *miraculo* as if a miracle had indeed taken place or a magic at the very least even though she had been wearing woolly gloves with holes and the funny thing for her was that it'd all been down to her mental calculations and rather than dividing by Pi which was roughly 3.14 she had divided by 31.4 and the ship had therefore been meant to be shattered whereupon a customer suddenly proclaimed *say lady how much longer is it going to take with them schnitzels* and she really couldn't see how this day of hers was so fabulous that it must be continued and she kept the Torah book from the ship to herself and read it occasionally and particularly the story about Saul and the Witch of Endor.

2.

And Elizabeta turned in and as she lay on her bed she thought of the supermarket she would invent if she could which was first and foremost a dimmer supermarket with incense burning and no customers for customers got in the way of work coming as they did only when they needed something or could it be a supermarket with no customers but her kind of customers like 10-**DFD** or 10 doctor's favorite drumsticks and 400-**GGV** and One-and-Calf-Kilo and that Chukchik who wouldn't stop asking about the antibiotic-free chicken and Elizabeta recalled how they would sometimes take chickens on board the ship so they could enjoy fresh eggs or even chicks and would let them drink the hydraulic oil running from the winch so that they wouldn't freeze and albeit used the oil had been hundred percent organic and as it had turned out fowl who'd drunk that oil could not be frozen in the vessel's big refrigerator as it had also contained anti-freeze agents and they had had this slightly funny soy-like taste to them and the eggs had turned out slightly more oval than usual and Elizabeta mused that people were naïve because whatever the meat lacked in antibiotics it probably made up for with stuff far worse who knows even a bit of *cepa* which is what they called spelter or sulphur over here which she didn't know for sure and when her mom had arrived at the hospital to have her the doorman had cited three other hospitals in town saying she should turn to one of them instead as they'd have room which had been actually to insinuate that unless she'd had something to show for no way he i.e. the doorman would let her in and her dad i.e. the head mechanic on the *Potemkin* had tried to reason with the guard saying that's a labor they're talking and that's Liza a woman with more confirmed hits under her belt than any other she-sniper in Sevastopol and then her father had resorted to begging as the price had been going up with each and every cramp and he'd finally left him the gold watch he'd once taken off the hand of an SS officer tossed by the side of the road i.e. taken from the officer himself and so freezing had it been that he could not unbuckle the watch without taking off his gloves and he had even asked the SS officer to take the watch off himself but the man had been more frozen than Lot's wife of which Elizabeta had read in the Torah book she'd found on board the ship and racking his brain as her father had been he could not find a way to take the watch off the SS officer's wrist without taking off his own gloves which was out of the question and his fellows at the patrol had been on their feet some time trying to work out a way to take off the watch without taking the gloves off and after a while had started a little fire and held a discussion over a cup of tea and went over the different options to take the watch off the SS officer's wrist without removing their gloves and looking up option by option without noticing that to strike the match for the fire they had removed the gloves for a moment and yet removing the gloves to take a watch off the wrist would be no gloving matter and Elizabeta's father had finally had no choice but to take the hand off with the axe so as to ease out the watch which had still been working and showing the correct date and many a time had her parents told her that tale and neglected to tell that the recipient of the watch had been decided on in a draw held by the mates and that her father had been fit to faint when the axe had been brought down which was not unlike the incident on the day when Elizabeta's ship had returned to the shipyard with the drill a tad rusty and yet folks

on board had preferred to spend a whole day keeping the rust secret just so they don't have to assemble and then disassemble the drill in what would take an hour at most and when Elizabetha herself arrived at the Wolfson Medical Center to have her girl she brought along quite a few watches including no less than an electronic Seiko watch made in Japan and an original Swiss cuckoo clock and once at the entrance during security check she was stopped by the guard who thought she'd come to pinch watches from internal medicine ward patients and took her to a back room and called in a female cop and would only leave her when she started writhing from side to side with cramps well-timed to deliver just like them old reliable clocks and just before it was the cuckoo's time to come she'd been taken to the delivery room with its crowd of people in blue gloves and her beautiful and healthy baby girl would dismiss her stories about life in the gulag and thought her mom was making things up like there's no tomorrow and that it couldn't be that the whole gulag had had no epidural anesthesia birth to show for and she doubted whether anyone had ever heard of such a thing and in Africa they delivered babies with a shaman dancing by the flame and fighting off demons and dispelling pain while over at the gulag they calmed the mother-to-be by reading out Stalin speeches and she might have read about it all in Solzhenitsyn's novels but it couldn't be that her mom had actually been there and 400-GGV had once wanted her advice on what he should prepare for his children whereupon she'd learnt he might have children and might not be married and the guy had seemed so polite and patient and she had started talking him through goulash casserole and realized he could not follow and suggested he made a pot of potatoes and chicken with onion which was tasty and moreover never went off and the next day he had come back to tell her it had been a success and she couldn't even bring herself to look up and smile what with the kindergarten on her case to get the thinner-than-thin filleted schnitzels over and he had seen her putting away ten drumsticks nicely wrapped in two shrink packages and known not what for but dared not ask and she treated whomever got on her nerves or looked down on her to plenty of fat thus leaving some nice meat for the goodies which was also her way of killing the baddies and not-nicies slowly and painfully clogging their arteries and there were those she wanted to treat to maggoty meat like they'd given to the sailors in that movie she'd watched back in the gulag on her father's ship where the maggots would go out on a Sunday promenade across the meat and as she couldn't put away maggots she would put away fat skimmed from the goodies' meat and leave it inside the right hand meat grinder and the prodders and urgers did get ground veal mixed with drumstick fat and leftover chicken gullets that won't go down and she'd cross herself after the Provoslavic custom for after all better a Pro-voslavlic than an Anti-biotic and both were heathens anyway and she knew there was such thing as probiotic yogurt but resolved to find out the next day whether there was an anti-voslavlic yogurt as well and wasted no time picking up a pencil and scribbled on the wall-to-wall wallpaper by her bed lest she forgot and over her bed there hanged a little black cross with a picture of the people of Israel crossing the Danube with walls of water to their left and right and she too wished she could cross the supermarket alley to her department between two walls of water to her left and right just like she'd read in the Torah book back on the ship and to have no meat lists stuck to her the way they would stick dollars to her neighbor who worked at a pub as well as from home and yet was always clean and to face no questions like *have you got new beef in today because if it's old forget it* and without the security man at the supermarket entrance stopping her asking if her daughter could help him fix his MP3 player and without ever intending to and against her will told her how he had received said player as a Passover gift from the security services company and how it nevertheless hadn't worked from day one or had been but with a buzzing

noise in one of the ears and how it wasn't the earphones and he took the day off to have it fixed only to be told that the company had bought old players from returned goods with no warranty and he had no way of uploading tracks to that player and maybe she knew someone who could help and he went on to tell her that over here it was a well-to-do neighborhood with many jeeps owned by the customers which was why people couldn't be bothered taking back their carts even if they left a coin inside and he wouldn't stop until he told her on another day of the watch he had received for his fine service while still at detection where he had gotten a call on the radio to rush to this domestic violence or DV scene and once at the household in question he'd seen the woman with a cut across her brow and the officers at detection had wanted to take the battering husband who'd pretty much threatened suicide into custody only to have the security man and former investigator detective find a cut-high mirror in the bathroom complete with blood and he'd threatened the complainant i.e. that wounded-browed woman that unless she admitted to fabrication of evidence he'd have her taken into custody on the spot before she got medical care and the woman had buckled admitting to willfully butting her head bloody at the mirror whereupon he'd taken her to be stitched first and only then had he taken her to custody while the husband had committed suicide anyway and it wasn't just any watch it had the Israeli Police logo and the security man wouldn't leave her alone whenever she'd walk into him on her way in and even when she took the stocks' back entrance and he wouldn't leave her until he told her he had this hobby doing stained glass as in paintings from painted shards of glass which was a bit of decoration for the window and one day there was this fracas at the supermarket and an ambulance arrived because the guard chased two boys pinching carts and due to the MP3's being lobbed into both his ears but only working on one while buzzing on the other he couldn't hear the jeep that ran him over driven by the customer who'd always pack her cart full with ready foods and frozen pizzas and it knocked him like a sling shot onto the sidewalk with a blow so strong as to break a leg and worse still had made a bullet discharge and it was only the next day that the antibiotic-free meat customer found the pellet lodged into his work bag and as it took place at the bank he'd immediately concluded it had been a warning message from the mafia concerning frozen accounts and over time Elizabeta learnt that there was this women with seven daughters who you should start talking to at your own peril because the supermarket manager would then tell her a supermarket was no sanatorium adding that if she felt like talking to customers she could punch a card for all he cared and never come to work and just spend the day basking by the seaside with tequila a-la mode as long as all customers got their meat and so long as deliveries were on time as the delivery man was a criminal on parole and was actually doing a favor for a friend who was the delivery man's probation officer and the two had been on tour together back at the Beqaa Valley fighting the Syrians and the guy had taken down six Syrian tanks single-handedly and the six had gone up in flames on the spot because they didn't have that non-inflammable organic oil that we had and you could fry some ace eggs with that oil and he had seen the Syrians bind their soldiers to their posts so that they didn't flee and there'd been this one Syrian troop who'd taken his own arm off leaving behind an original Omega watch just like in a fox trap and without him noticing there she was standing and listening afraid to remind him there were many orders to get through and finally he hand gestured her to get the hell out of there and she still had no idea what she was going to do about the frozen account and truth be told didn't really understand because how could anyone take money of her account if the money was at the bank and if it was possible to just take her money under the banker's nose what was the point of this all bank thing anyway and if that was the case she might as well roll her salary and leave it next to her

Ukrainian steel under the blouse and she dared anyone to try and grab the money from under there and she realized she was gonna have to go to the bank the next day knowing not what she should say exactly all so that they don't touch her allowance because in this country unlike what they'd have you believe it was never just a matter of talking to the clerk because the immigration absorption guy would always send her over to housing and the housing guy to eligibility and the eligibility guy to the Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Interior guy sent her in turn to Jahannam and she had yet to find Jahannam and indeed thought it might be best to ask one of the suit-donning customers what to do about the frozen account but she had no time to take her eyes off the meat board and sometimes they had Mrs. Camombert from Cheeses over to help her and she added the frozen account business to her list on the wall so she didn't forget and before closing her eyes she said her *Shema Israel* and crossed herself because it's always best to grind the meat twice over and at night she had a dream where the customers were lined up tight inside the glass door fridge on the tray with this little sign saying it had antibiotics and across the counter there stood a chicken and a bull and a calf staring at the customers with considerable compassion and exchanging looks while trying to read the customers' body language through the tray and they turned as one to the exit door and punched no card on their way out to the street with only the calf lagging slightly behind because he had the little price card lodged in his back and they all hopped inside the cart which the bull wheeled forth with his horns and the cart hurled down the street with no one to stop it and it was at that moment that Nissim from the bank called to say it was the whole of Elizabeta and not just her account that they were freezing and if that wasn't enough them adds that peddled square Kinder Surprise and a Jewelry company offering a golden calf pendant had to come on just at that moment in the dream and Elizabeta broke out in sweat for a golden calf would break the blades on both meat grinders not least the right hand one crammed with leftover fat and she almost fell asleep from within the dream but then her leg cramped and she woke up calling her daughter from the other room and standing by the bedside not actually knowing what she should do the daughter started putting together the famous Kinder Surprise egg which was no mean feat because rather than assembly instructions a disassembly notice there materialized with the mother screaming in anguish at the background and little could the daughter understand why they had flat spoons with no depth to them inside the eggs and it seemed the pain was relenting some and Elizabeta resumed autonomous respiration but in the midst of the silence that took over you could hear Nissim's fretful remonstrations regarding the frozen account and startled as she was about her own self's freezing on top Elizabeta ran over to the bathroom mirror and realized her face had turned inside out just like a sock and she thought it might be time to go the sanatorium if only they revoke her freezing and over there they would have her drink mineral water three times a day as the stories went about pre-revolutionary Odessa and the supermarket's guard returned after a while looking very different and all weak and pale without the MP player and even the sapphire glass of the watch had cracks to it and its hands were no longer rotating just like that Hiroshima watch showing the exact time it had ceased to work.

3.

And Elizabeta knew her daughter was with a daughter before her daughter knew she was pregnant in the first place and without ever knowing how she knew but as time went by she felt she had this sense for internal organs and Elizabeta immediately started noticing pregnant

women at every turn and the night before she'd read in her Torah book and pondered the story of the Pharaoh and the Plagues of Egypt and the death-of-firstborns plague and thought it was too cruel what had happened to the Egyptians what with Pharaoh made coldblooded and obstinate on the one hand and dealt a blow after blow on the other like the ones she would deal her schnitzels until they came out all thin and she'd pound the schnitzels unsparingly whether orphans or second-born and so hard did she pound on the schnitzels with flat blows that her joints started to ache and after a while her watch too started to come apart with its hands dropping but it kept going tick-tock and the ornaments too fell off the rings and they warned her that she might want to tone down and just make believe i.e. deal the schnitzels weak blows and give her customers the *service-oriented feel* which always worked out easier and cheaper than providing the actual service and never more so than in the supermarket because customers were only in the way and were never happy which was why she was waiting for 400-GGV who would ask her how she was and how was her daughter and consult with her and deemed her as real a figure as the Statue of Liberty who stood at the entrance to the port in New York wielding an ice drill in one hand rather than that torch that looked like a toilet plunger and in the other hand Popov's book of formulas which is actually half plagiarized from an American book by Young and they said that just outside the academy of technology in Odessa which Elizabeta attended there was a statue of Popov and Lopov and Popov needless to say had invented an airplane twenty years before the Wright Brothers and today of all days One-and-a-Calf-Kilo had to come in with that smirk he'd have on and once again asking for shawarma with absolutely no respect as if she were trading in slaughtered second-hand stolen auto parts and given how disrespectfully he treated her she in turn tossed in into his ground meat not only the fat but also parts of white trays and parts of used rubber gloves and even the tail of a mouse and some parmesan cheese to boot and she kept some of the cat food that people left on the pavement outside the supermarket as a special treat for him and back in the gulag they'd taught her the saying *hungry beggars cannot be choosers* and there was also that pregnant lady coming in occasionally who actually struck her as a nice person although she did find it a bit odd how she used to come in with this fancy camera slung across her shoulder and that pregnant lady had once asked her permission to take her picture i.e. Elizabeta's who had refused in turn because first they took your picture and then they had you wiretapped and then they'd end up knocking on your door at 3:00 at night but she nevertheless remembered the pregnant lady favorably despite the latter constantly correcting her language and talking her through the difference between saucepan and pot but she felt the pregnant lady had been offended by her and had even come to tell her she could have featured in an exhibition at the dining room of a kibbutz up north and Elizabeta couldn't quite understand what the pregnant lady had been on about and she'd once asked One-and-a-Calf-Kilo in a gesture of courtesy if he could recommend a shawarma recipe and he'd giggled as it turned out he would feed the shawarma to his she-dog who deserved the best as she'd had all those ghastly bowel obstructions and a surgery in her tummy and he wanted to sue the vet because he'd left glove parts inside the dog's tummy which had been expelled with much anguish and not for the first time and the vet had once lifted the dog's tail determining summarily that she must be spayed and it had come out like *what would you have done if someone went about checking your wife like that* and they i.e. One-and-a-Calf-Kilo and the vet had been left speechless and it'd been a respect but suspect him with the vet ever since and Elizabeta had this all chat with One-and-a-Calf-Kilo while working his shawarma with him looking at her rather than at the meat and she felt self-conscious and couldn't really tell the last time she'd had someone looking at her that way and

she wanted 400-GGV to look at her and ask her out on a romantic promenade through the woods perhaps in the Hadera forest and oh that he take out a handkerchief all ironed and washed with a softener to boot and with folds so that she could wipe her face for people here would often litter the place leaving their mess behind and at times there was a strong smell coming from the smokestacks of the power plant and it was actually this smell that reminded her of her trips through Odessa with her mom the Sniper of Stalingrad where they'd take the stairs down to the beach and smell the smoke coming from the nearby plant and one day the smoke had been so stifling that her little sister had coughed so bad thus causing her mom to let go of the pram which had started in turn to hurtle down the steps whereupon this young guy had jumped the pram and hurtled along some steps down thus cracking his head open as it had hit the angle of the step and it was cries all around for he had screamed at the mom who'd been holding the sister in her arms for failing to shout at him that the pram had been empty and the mom had in turn yelled at him for wrecking the pram and they'd ended up calling in the gendarmerie and with one thing following another the young man had been arrested for there would be no messing around with someone who had shaken hands with Stalin and had their picture hung in every school and the mother had nevertheless ended up in the gulag for one night Stalin had been whistling and humming away this fragment by Mozart and with Radio Moscow failing to find a vinyl record with the full piece they'd had to wake up the entire Leningrad orchestra in the middle of the night so as to record the piece for Stalin so that he might listen first thing in the morning and as it turned out they'd knocked on the contrabassist's door only to find him in bed with the Sniper of Leningrad with both of them married though not to each other which was a matter for the Ten Commandments themselves and the contrabassist had known that no one could really tell whether he played or not and often he would make believe and even conductor Yevgeny Mravinsky wouldn't notice and thanks to his playing this special instrument and given the shortage of playing members he'd been sought after by many orchestras and gone on a tour from the Ural Mountains and all the way to Vladivostok through all manner of kolkhozes you wouldn't find on the map and he'd even performed for Elizabeta's workers at the dockyard and had his picture taken with her ship at the background minus the drill which had been in repair and he'd got around to play a fragment by Galina Ivanova Ustvolskaya otherwise known as The Lady with the Hammer and not for ever wielding a hammer or a schnitzel tenderizer but because her tune banged the piano and the instruments like a reflex hammer and never more so than in her piece n. 2 which featured seven contrabasses which he i.e. the Sniper's lover had pretended to play at times and once at the gulag he had been warmly welcomed because at the very same day they'd burnt the giant contrabass to keep warm and there came again the guy proclaiming out loud what's with this long wait for antibiotic-free chicken and it would never happen in America and she wanted to tell him to go to America and be quarantined in Cuba and end up like Sacco and Vanzetti on the grill and leave her alone with her leg veins and elbows aching and her frozen bank account and the three chickens with the schnitzels she'd prepared but couldn't remember whom for and it was only years later that she found out that the contrabassist's wife worked a night shift in a top-secret plant making special propellers for the Russian nuclear submarines due to the Americans and their success in pinpointing the submarines' exact location by the whirlpools generated on their propellers and the whirlpools in turn had generated infrasonic waves which the Americans had in turn tracked with a sonar and it had only been a small group of engineers working on the project and they had numbered the wife and when the secret service people had come to announce that her husband had been arrested with the Sniper it had turned out that rather than

working by the lathe she'd put a mattress on a table at the storeroom and gone to sleep whereupon she'd been sent to the gulag too and Elizabeta's daughter believed none of these stories and by grade seven when it was time for the mandatory family roots project the daughter and Elizabeta decided to make up a family story so that it's found credible and it was all a figment of their imagination and they even made up some nonexistent countries and nonexistent cities and nonexistent customs and whoever thoroughly studied the project would notice that the daughter had three grandfathers of whom one had died in Tel Hai and another fallen in the great battle of Murmansk while another had been parachuted with Hannah Szenes and there were also four mothers to boot but all this did not stop the school and city council from lavishing a price on the project which was put on display at the school's lobby and given the manifold roots Elizabeta knew that her gentile-looking daughter was going to travel and visit the house in Odessa one day and even before the daughter had her ultrasound scan at the airport Elizabeta already knew that the daughter was back with additional cargo even though she took the track of those who had nothing to declare and the pregnant photographer ditched photography after a comment in the guestbook of the exhibition held in a dining of a kibbutz by the Banias Stream advised that she might want to trade her camera for a copy machine.

4.

And that night when back home from a visit at the ER after cutting off part of her finger on account of forgetting to wear her mesh glove Elizabeta found the Israel Electric Company man by her door informing her that he had come to shut off her power due to her power arrears and with her supplications to no avail she had to make up a daughter with stalagmitis and therefore on keep-in-the-fridge non-subsidized medications which she would personally import for her via seamen in downtown Haifa who'd bring back counterfeit drugs from Singapore which actually impressed the technician who therefore refrained from shutting off her power though taking along all fuses other than the fridge's and telling her that he'd end up getting the boot because of her and don't even think about fiddling with the meter and if she broke that tin thing i.e. the seal to prove the integrity of the fuse box she'd become liable and he too had a boy with eucalyptical urticaria which was this chronic disease and she couldn't tell whether it was an eyes-wide-open wink or whether there was actually such thing and so she remained in the darkness of her home and realized the only lightbulb actually working in the house was the fridge's and she got together a table by the fridge and opened the door wide open to bask in the whiteout of the virtually-empty fridge and recalled how an investigator with the marine gendarmerie had once come aboard because there'd been suspicions that the vessel had been somewhat oblivious to the law what with diesel and fish smuggling to Finland and the guy had investigated them all and sealed his reports in a small hand suitcase and had the suitcase locked with a real steel padlock and been invited by the captain to dine at his cabin and the suitcase in the meantime had its hinges taken apart and been emptied of its reports and even yielded a vial of prime vodka which had been taken too and a Ronson lighter and the padlocks had been left locked and a headless carp had been placed inside the suitcase so the investigator didn't suspect it had been empty and the carp's head had been cut as the guy had been said to make snitches even out of fish and she recalled what she'd learnt back in Odessa i.e. that fridges kept the room warm due to the energy entering through the plug hole and energy couldn't care less if it was driving an iron or a fridge and energy was actually anything that could eventually end up as heat and it all came down to the fact that processes in nature had a trajectory to them just

like in the creation narrative and she opened the Torah book which she kept and she wanted to read of Moses and Aharon and the magicians who could turn a stick into crocodile which would have been a common trick back in the day or the equivalent of today's pulling a rabbit out of a hat or turning bread into rusk and it had only been later that Aaron's rod swallowed the magicians' rod which Elizabeta could understand because turning a stick into a crocodile beat swallowing a stick hands down and the rabbit had several advantages over the crocodile for he didn't bite and he was a lot yummier to start with and could be made into a scarf and a hat come winter which was the last thing she needed in her department i.e. rabbits and all the more so top hats and overcome by her troubles Elizabeta crossed herself saying *Shema Israel* holding the cross with both hands and she stared at the pale white light emanating from the fridge only to be reminded of the doctor who had her hand stitched with sky blue rubber gloves under the powerful lamp a-la interrogation rooms at the gulag and with this round-shape needle and back at the gulag they would stitch with a normal needle and a thread they'd pull out from garments with no anesthesia and she really wanted to go to America because they had a hospital named after Elvis Presley rather than Stalin or Lenin and over there they'd surely stitch with a Cadillac logoed needle that hadn't been used before and she was happy to have three sick days but knew not what she was going to do once she was back and they might say that this all work accident had been down to negligence on her part and sack her and she had a little piece of meat in the fridge from returned goods for it had lots of fat and she used it plus a little potato and half a beetroot and a dab of margarine to make soup on the gas stove and thankfully there was no Styrofoam from the tray in her meat and she ate her dinner quietly and felt quite a few ripples of pain pulsing from her hand and she wanted to set aside some time to reading the Torah book and she closed the book then opened it and she wanted to read of Job and the leviathan but couldn't find it and looked and finally ended up in chapter 21 i.e. the year when Stalin invaded his homeland of Georgia and where it was written *their cow calveth* and she understood right there and then that it was a runaway cow she was looking at i.e. calving away from the glacier that was the left-hand meat grinder i.e. the one where she didn't shove fat into for trouble customers and she read on *and peacefully they go down to the grave* which was not unlike how meat took to its gravy or how her own flesh had taken to the knife earlier today and it was all down to her own Job and she finally got the point of *they spend their days in prosperity* and resolved to make tomorrow her recreational day and she got off her table by the fridge and took the plate back to the kitchen sink only to prove unable to do the dishes due to her stitches and dressing and only checked to make sure there were no dishes in the sink and mused that customer 400-**GGV** struck her as pretty nice and perfectly able to provide for her and her girl and could even sort her teeth for her with some new crowns so that she might smile too and get her two leather gloves to replace the single mesh one and he might also take her out on a concert and she'd come up to the manager saying *it's either cheeses or the bakery otherwise I'm out of here* and maybe they'd adopt a parentless kid if she could be bothered to start with because pacts between adults were always struck with kids and they'd serve drumsticks at the wedding comprising a whole leg which she didn't have to cut herself and she would be able to tell whether it was a fresh clean bird and she really wanted to sleep but her hand was aching and she knew that at this time of night she had to keep it down because the building committee would make a round among the neighbors and knock on the door if they heard any noise and she'd been two months behind and she went to the kitchen and shut the windows and she took out the marmalade jar and found about half-a-kilo-goulash-meet-worth note and put it under her blouse next to the Ukrainian steel bones and resolved that the next day she was going to

the big mall and then the cinema like her daughter and girlfriends would do and only later would she go to the bank to find out what's frozen and how to break it and at night she put the Torah book by the drawer where she had those things that looked like tea bags in shiny aluminum wraps with rubber inside which must have been past its sell-by date for several years now and finally she fell asleep.

5.

And the next morning Elizabeta woke up to her daughter's screaming having failed to turn the light on and make the coffee and operate her BabyLiss and the screams grew all the more louder when the daughter realized that her mobile phone too had not been charged at night and there was no cables and Elizabeta tried to explain to her that when her age i.e. the daughter's she'd had none of those things and she wasn't talking the odd day but a lifetime and they hadn't even known they could turn on the tap at home and even if there had been one it'd only be at springtime as water would freeze at winter and her daughter told her to go carry an Independence Day torch with them stories and one day and with power still running Elizabeta had heard a young American female violinist on the radio playing Prokofiev's violin concerto composed for David Oistrakh who'd had Kabalevsky and Shostakovich and Khachaturian too composing pieces for him as if there were only a single violinist for whole of Russia and a Jewish one at that and she'd heard it from beginning to end and sat at her table right there and then to write a letter to the Israeli Minister of Culture noting that the violinist whose name she hadn't known had sounded like her daughter who'd grown up in the mall with burger lunch ketchup still wet behind her ears and the woman had no idea what she'd been playing nor would she understand it if broken down to her in a language she could understand or if shown wartime movies because some things you just couldn't explain and she'd noted on the envelope that this was for the ministra of cultural affairs and put no stamp as she hadn't had one and thought that the letter to the ministra would make it to her on account of being important and no one would hold back a letter to a ministra and she had awaited a reply knowing that it'd take as long to come as back in the gulag where mail would arrive once a year in the spring provided the tracks had not been ravaged by winter and when Elizabeta finally sat down in the cinema up at the top floor of the station's mall she felt like Jonah inside the whale for it was all so different with a headrest to boot and a round niche to put a flowerpot in each seat and as it was a matinee kind of film there were very little people and she placed her handbag on the seat to her left and the coat in the seat to her right and her hands on the arms and so close was she to the screen that she could feel the basses at the tip of her nose and she decided to follow the pre-screening commercials' advice and go to MacDonal'd's right after the film and even though her hand was still aching she felt as if she was in Yuri Gagarin's spacecraft and at any moment now she'd be out of the atmosphere drifting around the theater like gravity had never existed and she wondered which movie she should see but at the box office booth there stood a boy with an earring and tattoo and a nice girl and she queued for the girl and asked her what she recommended and as the girl started telling her about the movies she said she wanted a movie that was dreamlike like back in the old days with a handsome boy loving a handsome girl but not at the very beginning because the beginning had a baddy messing with her head and the girl at the booth said that there were such films *but not over here* but there was that film when

they're making plenty of love with many handsome boys and girls and she had really enjoyed it and even seen it twice and Elizabeta looked the young girl in the eye and could sense a whiff of mischief on her part and went *oh well* and bought the tickets because the last time she'd seen a nice movie had been on board the ship with the screening of *Gone with the Wind* but they'd screened it the wrong way around and with one roll missing so she couldn't get the story but remembered the bloke with the trim moustache and this sort of movie could only be screened on board a ship on the Northern Sea because it had been banned on the motherland's soil showing as it had there were some good Americans after all and the rolls had been kept by mister Capitan at his cabin while over at the gulag they'd have the same movie every week about a tractor factory where workers were enlisted to the war and converting tractors into tanks and improvising just about anything to have a real tank coming out of the factory and the cannon they would make of the power pole pipe at which point Elizabeta had known it for a fake and even checked with her formulas and naturally told no one and the tractors-turned-tanks had stopped a whole Wehrmacht army and wanting to fasten the red flag to the tank's turret one worker had thought nothing of using his teeth for lack of any other work tools and subsequently gotten all his front teeth broken like the blades on the drill which wouldn't stop him waving to the tanks as they'd set out to battle and singing the *Battle on Ice* from Prokofiev's Alexander Nevsky with Stalin's image at the background watching from the factory's wall and having seen this movie so many times Elizabeta had spied many errors like how the clock up on the wall had stood still all through the movie or even turned back and the workers assembling the cannon though actually turning its bolts the wrong way around or that soldier with a scar who had died several times in the course of the movie with some real death wounds and in places far apart and the heroin making a little basket for her beau as he went out to battle with strawberries that you could only find in the winter in spite of the blatantly summer-like scenery what with all the trees in bloom and the beau had nevertheless returned home from the battlefield minus one eye and a leg but with his chest decorated and both him and the girl were happy only the guy hadn't lost his eye in battle but in a Russian roulette game over a cigarette pack which he had lost and eventually got into a fight and been punched in the eye by a diamond ring-wearing hand but the girl had been none the wiser because it hadn't been in her script and the movie then started and it transpired that while back in the gulag movies would uphold the importance of production as in that movie on the tractor factory over here in Israel it was important to have many children because as early as the first minute the actors never bothered with clothes and love indeed abounded and trains set out on their way and there was even one who nearly broke her teeth but that wouldn't stop her and at some point there were a host of unclothed legs on screen which was not unlike what you'd find on the tray and at this point Elizabeta could pair the legs and was suddenly startled as she'd forgotten about 10-DFD i.e. the doctor's wife and she bolted out of her seat and ran out only to run back in to pick up her coat and handbag and some people in the audience were laughing at the sight of the woman going out calling *don't you panic lady you might as well be watching a nature doc* and Elizabeta ran so fast that she knocked off one of her shoes and yet she wouldn't stop or turn back and looking at her watch she panicked for in no time the lady was coming in to get the poultry for her doctor husband and time was short and the poultry a long distance away and the thought of 10-DFD made her heart race and she feared lest she turn the doctor's wife into a pumpkin in her husband's eyes and the gas from the ship's diesel inside her lungs started burning and her hand was aching with the stitches and so were her arms and even her teeth and having no other choice she struck a match and taking it to her mouth she blew and the diesel vapors all came

alight and just like the Sputnik in the movies she'd seen at the gulag Elizabeta went up flying like the drill only this time it was a downward other than upward trajectory along the streets and all the way to the supermarket and the wind hauled her back and the stitches stretched as if pulled apart by two claimant mothers and she thankfully landed outside another supermarket which was different than the one she worked in but not too far away as she couldn't have walked into hers without provoking the wrath of her manager whom none but his son could appease and she walked straight into the meat department and queued like everybody else and checked to see whether there was someone who knew her standing next to her lest she was taken for a Freudian horse who'd come in to sniff around or intersperse the meat with viruses and she followed the worker cutting the schnitzels thinner-than-thin and muttered *oh well* and she noticed the worker was expanding many excessive actions and leaving the slag of fat around it and muttered *oh well* yet again but also half-crossed herself so that no one see and she wanted to cross over to his side and talk him through and she held back from saying *is it gonna take much longer* and as he cut the shoulder in four for the goulash she felt fit to pass out what with all the diesel and squandered meat and mused that back in the gulag they could sustain a whole restaurant on his leftovers and she also noticed that over there too people were leaving notes and talking down to the man at the counter and she spied on the wall at his back a picture of a cow eating grass in the countryside with red thick lines marking her different parts with a name for each part like sirloin and filet and she asked herself whether they marked out the red lines and the names on the cow while she had still been alive and whether they'd asked her permission and how they made her stand still because marking a cow without her moving was a bit like drilling the ice without the ship heaving and when it was her turn she pointed at the drumsticks and chosen the best looking ones and returned two because they had a bit of a brown to them and she tried her hand at matchmaking instructing the man at the counter to proper skim off all strips of fat and peel off the skin with a glove rather than this paper because it worked better and people around did not butt in as they realized she knew her stuff and when he asked her *anything else ma'am* she went *oh well* for the third time and muttered *Shema Israel* and picking the tray she rushed to the cashier all the while taking care not to have her foot trampled by carts because she had forgotten her shoe at the cinema's stairs and she proceeded fairly slowly to stand outside her supermarket where she then waited for Mrs. 10-DFD who was due to arrive in the next half hour.

6.

And by the time Elizabeta arrived at the entrance to her supermarket her back was soaking wet with sweat and she positioned herself in such a way that the security man wouldn't see her and go off with his never-ending conversations about the rehabilitation he'd been undergoing since his running over and how they wouldn't recognize his diabetes and how the jeep owner was now suing him for mangling her vehicle's body and how his MP3 player sounded better on both ears but the radio was no longer working and nor did she want the customers to see her and ask when she was back and offer her their million unhelpful advices and then some or express their hope that she was soon be back to work or that perish the thought the manager see her and inquire about the mesh glove she had not been wearing or worse still that 400-GGV who bought from her in the manner of one walking into the gas station asking to fill his Ronson lighter would see her with her sore hand all dressed and a drumstick tray in the other but beyond all those whom she wanted to avoid she really did want to meet 10-DFD who was her favorite

customer never asking for anything as she did and yet because she'd always come in at the same time and ask for the same thing while patiently waiting with eyes cast down and standing on the same particular floor tile Elizabeta realized it was an important order and she really wanted to ask her whom it was for and what was hiding there behind her sealed expression and knowing though she did nothing of the woman she'd already guessed a lot and fancied her the wife of Abraham bringing fresh water from the well every day and waiting at the tent's doorstep for guests dressed in her coat of many colors and Elizabeta found standing on one shoe immensely uncomfortable reminding her of that winter when she'd been on board the ship and had her foot caught up between the ice and the ship's side as early as the third day and more by good luck than good sense she had managed to extricate the leg from the shoe leaving it in the Bering Strait and wanting to kill time she tried to work out all the possible drumstick tray arrangements and the odds of ending up with at least two drumsticks from the same bird given that there were a hundred birds in the supermarket or how to fit eight queens in a shrink package arrangement and she hadn't been standing there long before a customer who must have failed to recognize her put a dollar coin with eagle and talons on the chicken tray before Elizabeta could respond and she felt humiliated and the memory came vivid of the day on board the ship when they'd met an Eskimo tribe who'd never seen normal people before hunting seals through cracks in the ice and wanting as they had been for the Eskimos to give them fresh meat they'd given them hot beverage in return which had been no more than the hydraulic oil whereupon 10-DFD arrived spot on her usual time and finally stood about a step away from her without the cold counter to tower between them and arching her eyebrows as if to say *Elizabeta you haven't been waiting here for me have you* and noticing that they were of about the same stature Elizabeta half sighed as if to say *what can I say 10-DFD for this is exactly what I'm doing* and she held on tight to the tray lest the spread out drumsticks extended their hand to reach for the coin or give a leg up for the tray to run for they'd had enough and 10-DFD looked straight at Elizabeta as if wishing to say *you shouldn't have* and Elizabeta took a moment to ponder and making a quarter sigh she muttered something to the tune of *I know but I wanted to* and 10-DFD could hear Elizabeta's panting and breathed in as if to say *but why are you panting like that when my husband the doctor is a leading expert on respiratory diseases* and Elizabeta smiled emitting two seventh parts of a sigh as if to say *you really don't want me to tell you about the diesel on the ship* or how back at the gulag she'd had to play chess with a stock keeper over clothes and a jumper or of all that had happened the day when mayday signals had been received from an American vessel sending her to spend all night at the ship's bow in the freezing wind hugging the crane's operator and once arriving near the American vessel they could see DiCaprio and Kate Winslet with arms spread wide honeymoon-fashion and tremendously annoyed at the false signal the Capitan had decided to ram into the vessel as if it were an iceberg and one sailor had threatened the Capitan that if he didn't calm down he'd reveal at the port that he'd had *Gone with the Wind* in his cabin and the next day they had asked Elizabeta to make a really deep and wide hole in the ice and tossed in the threatening sailor with a rock tied to his hand whereupon they'd discovered a wooly mammoth that had frozen intact at the late Ice Age and the sailors had spent three days and three nights working as never before to extricate the frozen tusks worth as they had been more than two years' worth of contraband diesel and nor was she going to tell that she had a daughter who was now pregnant but she had yet to tell her i.e. the daughter about the all thing and that she thought Elizabeta was making up her whole childhood and that her power was frozen and her bank account de-fused and Mrs. 10-DFD mused and wanted to tell her *I can't believe it* as in *I do*

believe it and don't go anywhere I'm just getting a couple of things then I'm taking you home to have the doctor look at your lungs but it came out as *come along* and once on their way in 10-DFD's car which Elizabeta found to be as spacious as the Tsar's carriage they exchanged no words but Elizabeta was really impressed with 10-DFD for managing to shift gears with neither a gear stick nor double clutch and the car stopped at a large parking lot with plenty of cars and 10-DFD told Elizabeta *come with me* and Elizabeta didn't really understand why they were stopping and uttered a sixth-part sigh saying *oh well* to signify *you wouldn't find so many cars in the whole of the gulag and if I made it so far we're probably not in for that many icebergs* and she walked out into this place with lots of shops and stairs escalating down as well and a marble floor and cinemas with nice posters of actors in clothes and when they got back in the car Elizabeta sat in that big seat feeling like a girl in an oyster and was really conscious about soiling the pumpkin-orange upholstery with the crumbs left over from the restaurant and she looked at her shiny new pumps and couldn't recall when she'd gotten a new pair of shoes and knew well that she never had and asked herself whether 400-GGV too was going to take her to buy a gown and a ring or whether she too could one day send in the Filipino woman and whether 400-GGV too had one of those party member card that you punch in the shops for the party to pay with rendering cash unnecessary and she let out a three-quarter sigh and wanted to say *you shouldn't have* but preferred to say nothing and nevertheless let out a full sigh this time and knew that even stillness couldn't convey the turmoil she was feeling and the diesel vapors started bubbling like the carbonated froth and she considered telling 10-DFD that what she'd done for her was like bringing back her dad and sniper mom on the day she'd slipped and fallen in the orphanage yard and had a nail tearing into her knee and her father had taken her in his arms to the clinic with the force of the worker in the gulag movie who could single-handedly connect caterpillar tracks of tractors-turned-tanks and like those life boats connected to her ship at the northern circle were her new pumps and the life boats had had neither food nor water and not as much as a flare or a blanket as night shift sailors had stolen and sold it all in exchange for shifts or cigarettes or a place in the hot water shower queue and left not as much as the oars and the engine's propeller and had it all sold with everyone on board the ship knowing that them life boats had been but a halfway stop on the road to hunger and freezing or first freezing and then some as it was the custom in the Northern Sea not to interfere with lost vessels and from her station by the drill and the crane's operator Elizabeta would often hear the Capitan overlooking other vessels who had sent out mayday signals and he would always say that the maydaying side had not been clear enough and 10-DFD wiped her forehead as if to say she knew she didn't have to but she really wanted to and she opted to say nothing herself and Elizabeta did want to ask *but why and how did you know* and at certain moments the two women's silences interrupted each other's while at others one woman's silence joined the other's thus creating a turbulence that sucked in the diesel vapors from Elizabeta's lungs through 10-DFD's respiratory system and their mutual waves of silences rattled their mutual sabers at each other and produced a spark that nearly set fire to the diesel in the car's space and 10-DFD blinkered as if to say that she too could leave but said nothing and Elizabeta thought of the workers in the engine room and mused that *it's better now* and this one was thinking that she knew those years would be in vain but kept quiet and that one wanted to say that happiness in life meant taking a hot shower with a dry towel and another one yet thought the cage was gilded but said *help me* and you could hear the leather in the brand new shoes starting to frazzled and Elizabeta mused that an order of trays should be placed for

next week and uttered the third part of a sigh whispering *oh well* which meant the phrase *oh well* had 18 different senses like the Eskimo using 18 different names for snow.

7.

And it came to pass after these things i.e. after she'd laid down in bed and thought about how there was an issue with the single hand washing as the hand she would normally wash was all wrapped up and she wished to consult about the matter with her daughter to whom she really wanted to break the news of her pregnancy i.e. the daughter's and wanted to break it in no two terms lest the daughter think Elizabetha was pregnant but her experience had shown that there was no point really engaging in dialogue with her daughter because all questions big or small would invariably be met with terse and hollow replies and Elizabetha decided to try and talk to her daughter in her sleep and she walked over to the other side of the room which she shared with her and where the daughter slept to the humming of the fridge which was the only humming to be had in the house functioning as it had been since the day before like a night light with its door open and looking very much like Elizabetha's sniper mom and a typical product of a pogrom the daughter was fast asleep in her clothes and Elizabetha sat by her side at the edge of the bed and laid her dressed hand on the daughter's shoulder and ran it over her hair which was shining in the fridge's light like the radiance of the moon as reflected from the ship enshrouded in ice and she laid her hand on the daughter's head and wanted to inquire about the partner's identity and who and how he was and whether she'd met his family but she knew there was no point asking for the answer would come in the form of *he's this guy* or *he's OK* or *what do you want me to say* and she realized she had no choice but to wait for the day when it came from her daughter herself and she hoped she live to see the day yet on the other hand wanted to tell the daughter much about the father she didn't know and the grandfather of whom she didn't know much other than that he had been a sailor in black and white on board the *Potemkin* for that's how it was in their family and that she was in fact about to become a mom which was both good and confusing news and maybe she didn't know just who exactly the father was which was not that bad and that she was really blessed to become a mom and that on the very moment when the daughter who was probably going to be named Michal was born she i.e. Elizabetha would become a grandma and all those changes would take place in a split second and sometimes it took a lot of work for it to happen and there was much more she wanted to tell but even before she started to whisper one thing she could feel her stitches in motion like the strings on an instrument and at first she couldn't tell they were making a sound but after a while she could once again hear the strings or the stitches in the hand that was placed on her daughter's shoulder making a faint and intermittent sound and the sound she fancied to hear coming from her hand was starting to hum and Elizabetha asked *is that you Michal* and the inarticulate wordless reply soon followed and Elizabetha got it right there and then as if it were a coded reply that only the holders of a particular genetic key could decode and she thought she heard granddaughter Michal in her daughter's belly humming *don't shut me off because although I have neither fingernails nor eyelashes and teeth and even though my words have yet to come and I have no memories and no preferences and no eggs or regrets and a mouth full of water I do have life yes life and moreover I have a family line and tradition and it's like LOL big time and I'm really thankful for what I've got but worrying about my future and I'll do anything to guarantee that my mother i.e. you daughter doesn't shut me off and I know that they've worked hard in our family to make me that kind of character and I realized that I too*

*must be stubborn and in-your-face and even a survivalist and I'm gonna make this family's life miserable and let everyone know they can forget about sleeping because I've got life and see how I can clap my hands even in utero and I know who it is out there that I'm communicating with and I've got a memory etched in my mind from you Elizabeta the little girl holding your father's hand and carefully placing his hand over your eyes until you've seen all those amorphous shapes that change and shift and at times it seems like yellow while at others it's the opposite and at others still it's the shapes of doubts or actual spheres and I Michal kill time placing my hands on my eyes and I really want to see you first grandma Elizabeta for imprinting's sake and the volume of family baggage running through my umbilical cord blood is just huge and it takes ages for the software updates to download which is fine as it keeps me amused and Elizabeta breath was taken she and was moved as she'd never been before and forgot about the pain in her hand and her loneliness and the rigidity of her face melted like margarine in the blistering sun with cheeks all trembling and she asked *oh well how is it in there* only to immediately add *I'm waiting for you* to which the answer wasn't that clear-cut because on the one hand it's pretty comfortable in there with meals always served on time and you could eat with your mouth open or shut and even whistle as you did and yet with every heartbeat of her mother she'd been loading up with the family character and with the knowledge of the mother and the grandma and the grandma's mother and she'd really like to meet them and she too kept one hand unwashed and she had a lot to be proud of and the challenge for her was great and all fathers had a really warm hand and a very reassuring gaze and her grandfather knew how to do a handstand and put his leg behind his neck and she'd really like to ask that they allow her to mature in peace and let her come into this world unplanned though she might be and she could hear her mother's heart murmuring loud and clear particularly now when she was very close to her and from the inside at that and the mother's pulse stirred some bubbles in her fluid which was really reassuring for her in the dark but she was worried lest doubt sneak into the mother's heart when she found out about her very existence and she could hear it all including the food slowly passing down inside the belly or the gasses going glugluglu and even her mom's rising pulse when she was excited and she could feel the change and with every atchoo she was dealt a bang on the head and she knew very little about the fathers of the family and there had been this shocking rumor going about Elizabeta's father and Elizabeta had to hear that and she'd only tell once outside and provided that they don't terminate her and Elizabeta really didn't want to miss that story and as of this point Elizabeta better be on her side and do whatever in her power to have her born and it was really hard holding on to all this info as gaps still stretched between her skull bones which made Elizabeta smile and she was still unsure whether she'd actually heard it all or whether it was just her imagination and she was surprised to find Michal's language to be her own and wanted to ask her when she was planning to make it out and she took pains to concentrate and pose her question to which the answer was somewhat slow to arrive to the point where the stitches in her hand were starting to move and slowly release the coded waves and maybe even a mute singing and fetus Michal was singing that in many ways it was up to her twin brother who was there with her inside the mother and Elizabeta bounced back with her hand withdrawn from the daughter's shoulder and she thought this prospect of twins had never occurred to her and a girl and a boy at that and in a way she felt as if her unborn granddaughter Michal was a sniper herself who could play her cards even in the dark with eyes shut and though really wishing she could keep talking she nevertheless knew she had to keep something for the next day and moreover knew that her daughter was not going to believe her and would think she was once again going on and on*

with her gulag Arabian Nights tales and she'd want her committed and so she went back to her bed at the other end of the room and lying on her back she stared at the ceiling thinking how it would be when 10-GGV was her partner and how granddaughter Michal and grandson anon would allow them to relieve childhood and give them something to live for and maybe they would buy themselves a white rather than red Ferrari so as not provoke the neighbors' jealousy and by that time she was already a little upset with her little granddaughter fetus Michal for manipulating her so easily despite all her life experience and yet she was also happy to see her sporting such a survival instinct in the true spirit of her family's females and the very same night before falling asleep with a smile on her face as she hadn't done in years Elizabeta crossed herself and kissed the Torah book from the ship and gently did she place the good hand which would normally hold chicken gullets on her eyes and there she was too seeing shapes of no shape and colors and confusion and darkness and dark clouds propping up the ceiling *chuppah*-fashion and light and shimmers and cells a-dividing and she really hoped that Michal too could see the very same thing at that moment as if they were out on a movie date with Michal on a baby high chair so she could see and munching on popcorn or herring with Michal talking her through the imaginative bits and Elizabeta was struck by how she had forgotten about the fingers over the eyes thing for at least 50 years and then she dreamt of future adult Michal sitting by her side while she i.e. Elizabeta was asleep and snoring and telling her of a little secret in her belly which even her mother i.e. Elizabeta's daughter had not the slightest idea of and she was well aware of the secret Michal had threatened to keep and relived it each and every day of her life.

8.

And as early as the next day when she got up Elizabeta realized that 400-GGV had a heavy genetic baggage and the wellbeing of offspring on his shoulders and knowing very little about him she had very little to note in his favor other than his manners and patience and his respect for her work and she didn't even know his name but realized that like other men in her family he was going to pitch in which was insignificant on the one hand yet irreplaceable on the other and she resolved to confess of her love to him and the special treatment she reserved for him and despite the pains she still had in her hand and her stitches not withstanding and albeit having her bank account frozen and although she had yet to talk to her daughter and despite being left with no power at home and having virtually no shoes she knew that sometimes you had to start from the end and certain that all was going to end well she put on her most casual clothes for her work behind the supermarket counter and slapped some lipstick on and adjusted her hair and walked straight to the supermarket and had yet to know if he was to arrive at all and knew not how she would talk to him or announce her love and the role she had carved up for him and Elizabeta knew that God was on her side and she observed to cross the road strictly on red light and closed her eyes knowing that Michal was waiting for her inside her daughter's belly and all the sailors from the supermarket were expecting her to blaze the right trail so that they didn't get stuck out there on the ice and as she wore the mesh glove she could already feel the pain in her hand and her strings screaming with pain and she looked straight into it and said *oh well you wanted me to look after you didn't you Michal so let me do my work* and upon seeing her the supermarket manager swirled around and turned into the woolly mammoth who had frozen in Siberia and two giant tusks popped from his head and as she walked up the stairs from the staff entrance to the sales hall the PA called *dear customers Elizabeta is back and*

coming aboard and we all wish her health and success and the carts from all corners of the supermarket screeched to a halt and turned so as to be the first at Elizabetha's counter and even the one who always asked for antibiotic-free meat was waiting for her and as she approached the counter she too became a vulture with a shopping list stuck to her for wings and rushing as they did the shopping carts were clashing into each other and failing as they had to fasten their seatbelts the shoppers fell to the floor and slid over each other and were nearly sucked in by the floor cleaning machine while jars of pasta sauce smashed alongside their peanut butter counterparts and the cashiers started emitting empty papers by their masses like a tribute march through the Fifth Avenue and the conveyor belts started to turn forth and back with speed and Elizabetha took out a knife and cut gullets and wings and chopped and grinded unsparingly and the animals who had been long dead by then proved insufficiently dead and felt the pain and the scales nearly gave in under the pressure and then oh then 400-GGV arrived and stood in his place waiting and so high was the pressure that Elizabetha took whole carts and tossed them into the grinder and mounts of customers stood between him and the counter and asking who was last on the queue he got no reply and with pressure peaking they started loading whole animals onto the carts without quoting their price and had the heifers calved before the cows and they tied the poultry with a rope and lying on the floor one customer sobbed crying that this would never have happened in America and Elizabetha cut and cut as if working her way on a voyage to the Arctic Circle via Anersham Straits and she pulled apart and wrapped and put together and the shrink machine was exhaling smoke and the masses of customers started rubbing against the sides of the fridge just like the masses of ice screeching against the ship's sides and only 400-GGV stood along waiting and the meat department ice started to inundate the floor thus damaging the goods that had fallen off the carts and the frozen fish came alive and snapped forth from their package to leap into the inexorably rising water and Elizabetha saw 440-GGV almost knee-deep in water and signaled to him with the razor *wait wait I'll get to you* and he took it the positive way and waited and the path between the twine was obstructed with all them masses of customers and the mounts of shopping lists and Elizabetha was waiting for the right clear shot to squeeze the trigger and the diesel vapors in her lungs posed a fire hazard and she paused for a moment making sure he was looking and she picked up a piece of meat and signaled that it was his and placing it on the slab she picked the meat clean as if everything around stood still and she polished it i.e. the slice and removed any leftover fat and maybe even fondled it and only then did she weigh the meat and knowing well what it meant 400-GGV did blush and knowing that she always kept the cleaning until after the weighing he grasped the magnitude of the hour and as he looked at his watch he saw it said Omega in Latin letters and the message lodged right between his eyes and he saw the locks in her hair dazzled by the light of the cold counter and Elizabetha disassembled the drill from the meat machine and used it to clear her path and she brought 400-GGV his meat package which comprised two trays in a double shrink packaging and went *oh well have you heard about that ice-freezing snow up in the Hermon Mountain* and 400-GGV asked her *will you join me* to which she replied *I'd love to but my place is at the supermarket* and 400-GGV said he understood and that he'd get her some ice in a flask and Elizabetha turned back whereupon 400-GGV saw how her plastic apron fluttered like the gowns in the harvesters' dance at spring when the wheat had already turned yellow and as early as this moment he knew he was going to drive up there to get her some of the Hermon ice for if she could she would come along and he felt he was travelling for two and the crowd stood around with clothes soaking wet and kept demanding their meat and schnitzels and gullets and by the end of the day it turned out the worker pushing the

cleaning cart disappeared and missed his ride and it later transpired that he too had been put through the grinder only to be packed in a pair of trays which had come to light when his Seiko watch which he had bought from a new immigrant and a former worker at a hospital in Odessa started playing *Jordanian Rhapsody* from the refrigerator of a banker specializing in account freezing of which 400-**GGV** heard the next day on the news as he drove back from up north and he stopped by the side of the road and crossed the fence unaware of the yellow signs with the red triangle warning against mines and puking wholeheartedly he suddenly felt this metallic click under his shoe and was mostly concerned about the ice in the flask for Elizabeta and he tried to work out whether it'd melt before Elizabeta found out about his fate and before he could make up his mind 400-**GGV** was blown the Golan Heights over and his watch landed spot on the Gilboa and rested on the tail of a non-venomous freshly-molten whip snake and Elizabeta never saw 400-**GGV** again and even tried to find out where he had disappeared and yet knew not his name and even turned to 10-**DFD**'s help who consulted her husband on the matter while Michal's first out twin brother was named Victor.