

## **Rubber Merchants**

By Hanoch Levin

Translated from the Hebrew by Naaman Tammuz

## **Dramatis Personæ**

**Shmuel Sproll**

**Yohanan Tsingerbai**

**Bella Berlow**

## Act 1

[Our protagonists are a little over 40]

### Scene 1

[Evening. Bella Berlow's pharmacy. Berlow]

**Berlow:** It's evening, early spring, the pharmacy, I'm waiting.

[Yohanan Tsingerbai enters]

Hello, sir, how can I help you?!

**Tsingerbai:** I'd like to see the pharmacist.

**Berlow:** The pharmacist is dead.

**Tsingerbai:** In that case I'd like some APC tablets.

**Berlow:** I'll give you APC but I suspect you're after something else.

[Pause]

With your permission, I'll give you a hint.

[She sings]

[*The hinting song*]

It starts out like a baby  
Wrapped up and out of view,  
And ends up like a cockroach  
Flushed right down the loo.

And it's as soft as silken thread  
And as elastic as a lawyer's head,  
And if you are not watching, it spills out onto the bed.

[Pause]

Another hint?

[Sings]

It's a bit like a glove  
For a one-fingered hand  
It's dry to begin with  
Then suddenly gets wet and expands.

It's as soft as...

Basically, which condom do you want?

**Tsingerbai:** Pack of three, unlubricated.

**Berlow:** Do you also still want the APC ?

**Tsingerbai:** Yes, because completely separately I suffer from frequent headaches.

**Berlow:** That's typical for a sensitive man.

**Tsingerbai:** Many thanks.

**Berlow:** You'll get APC and also condoms and warm wishes of good health.

**Tsingerbai:** Many many thanks, and thanks again.

**Berlow:** A pleasure. My name's Bella Berlow.

**Tsingerbai:** And I'm Yohanan Tsingerbai.

**Berlow:** Tsingerbai, I once knew a Tsingerbai.

**Tsingerbai:** Perhaps a relative of mine?

**Berlow:** What an interesting person you are. We just met – and we already have a topic for conversation.

[Shmuel Sproll enters]

**Sproll:** My name is Shmuel Sproll, I'll get straight to the point: my father, may he rest in peace, who died a week ago, was a god-fearing man but with a frenzied sausage, and while he was alive he bought condoms, a lot of condoms, which he very sadly wasn't able to make use of, and so therefore I, his only son Shmuel, have been left with an inheritance of ten thousand brand new packs of condoms of excellent Australian origin, for which I have no use – I myself am a sick man – and which I would be happy to sell to you at a knock-down price, literally pennies, I live two doors down from here, you can come by at any hour, even now, the name's Shmuel Sproll.

**Tsingerbai:** The offer's appealing. On the other hand, the lady pharmacist's friendliness here is also appealing...

**Berlow:** Call me Bella.

**Tsingerbai:** ...the lady Bella's, a friendliness beyond the usual casual exchange, so it's not a simple dilemma at all. What's the discount?

**Sproll:** A pack here costs you eight lira! From me, man to man, six.

**Berlow:** Mr Tsingerbai's deliberation...

**Tsingerbai:** Please, call me Yohanan.

**Berlow:** Yohanan's deliberation is understandable. Yohanan buys condoms from you for two lira less a pack. What happens next? Yohanan leaves with a pack of condoms in one pocket and a pack of APC tablets in the other. Yohanan walks around in the street. Yohanan's head hurts. Yohanan goes to a kiosk, asks for a glass of soda and takes an APC. But what about the pack of condoms? Condoms aren't APC. You can't open a pack of condoms in the kiosk, the owner won't allow it. Yohanan gets on the bus with the pack of condoms. Yohanan gets off the bus with the pack of condoms. Yohanan sits with the pack of condoms in a café. Yohanan listens to the news with the pack of condoms. Yohanan's head hurts again. Yohanan takes another APC. Yohanan leaves the café with the pack of condoms. Yohanan strolls with the pack of condoms on the beach. Yohanan gets on the bus with the pack of condoms, Yohanan gets off the bus with the pack of condoms. And what then? Another APC? Yohanan's not made of steel after all. In whose toilet, Yohanan asks himself, in whose toilet will I be opening the pack and unfurling the rubber cylinder at its intended location? And in whose kitchen, Yohanan then proceeds to ask himself, in whose kitchen do I take a fourth APC tablet with a cold glass of water after the condom's already stretched and fastened tightly in its place? And on whose bedsheets, asks Yohanan, on whose sheets and under whose blanket or in simpler words, where, where exactly will the stretched condom on Yohanan's, pardon me, Yohanan, enter. That's the final, simple, profound question Yohanan's asking himself. I'm done.

**Sproll:** A long speech which raises only a short question from me: What happens if he buys from you? Does he, when he pays - please remember, two liras more per pack - does Yohanan then know where he's putting the stretched condom?

**Berlow:** Absolutely. 36 Washington Street, second floor, flat eight.

**Tsingerbai:** May I ask what's written under the doorbell of that flat eight?

**Berlow:** Of course. It says: Bella Berlow.

**Tsingerbai:** Bella Berlow or The Berlow Family?

**Berlow:** No family. Bella.

**Tsingerbai:** That's far more than I expected. I'll take the original offer.

**Sproll:** Which is?

**Tsingerbai:** 36 Washington Street, second floor, flat eight.

**Sproll:** In that case I step aside with a bow. Goodbye, and I'd like to remind Mr Tsingerbai that I live two doors down, number 10, Shmuel Sproll.

[Exits]

**Berlow:** I don't like people who are pretty like singers.

**Tsingerbai:** They're not quite my taste either.

**Berlow:** Look at that, there's already even a shared taste. And why have I gotten cold all of a sudden? Maybe because I'm not wearing anything under my gown?

**Tsingerbai:** And a little dream's just formed in my mind.

**Berlow:** Tell me.

**Tsingerbai:** To open a pack of condoms here, now.

**Berlow:** Nice dream, but we'll have to postpone it to the evening. This is a pharmacy after all and not some back alley.

**Tsingerbai:** Of course, my pure one.

**Berlow:** The condoms and the APC. Twelve lira together. Maybe take two packs of condoms?

**Tsingerbai:** Of course.

**Berlow:** Steel, a man of steel. Twenty lira in total.

[He pays and gets the merchandise]

So at nine?

**Tsingerbai:** At eight thirty you'll already see me walking around downstairs.

[Turns to leave]

**Berlow:** [Sings]

It's as soft as silken thread, and as elastic as a lawyer's head...

[Tsingerbai exits]

## Scene 2

[Evening. A synagogue. Sproll's finishing an evening prayer]

**Sproll:** Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom, and the situation's not good, father, not good, no pharmacy's willing to give more than three lira for a pack that's worth eight, they're taking advantage of the fact that I'm not a well known manufacturer and that I'm keen to get rid of the entire stock, and that means throwing fifty thousand into the sea, while at the same a private client immediately suspects that I'm trying to sell him patched up condoms and would rather pay two lira more a pack and bang away with peace of mind, and who's even interested in such a large stock which only has a four year warrantee/guarantee on it and which you also need to be careful with and store in the fridge, and that's in a warm country like ours, and the four years pass, the time flies and the condom cracks and life, as though there weren't enough mysteries in the world, you've also added another one with the condoms, because what was going through your head, if you were thinking about an investment, dad, what kind investment is this, you can see for yourself, why not a flat or a share in a business, and if it was for going to prostitutes, well it's well known that the prostitute brings her own condom, otherwise what, for women who aren't prostitutes? - Just how much would you have been able to, dad, how much, and why buy a hundred years' worth in advance, what's the matter, why the panic, and why specifically condoms, were you scared that the world's rubber manufacturing was on the brink of a crisis, or that there'd be a siege in a war and that imports would stop? - And who's screwing like crazy during a siege, dad, and how long does a siege last anyway, and if there's a siege, then why not tins of sardines, dad? - What have you bequeathed me and what have you left me and what have you stuck me with in this world where I don't know what I'm doing even without the condoms, He who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace, upon us and upon all Israel and say Amen.

### Scene 3

[Evening. Berlow's flat. Tsingerbai enters]

**Berlow:** Mr Yohanan, you said you'd be half an hour early, not an hour and a half.

**Tsingerbai:** Forgive me, I couldn't wait at home anymore. It seemed to me that every moment I wasn't seeing you was a moment in which I was losing you.

[Kneels and kisses her hand]

**Berlow:** Of course that's not the only thing that matters in life.

**Tsingerbai:** If everything works out, a wedding would be nothing but an honour.

**Berlow:** Do I hear a proposal? Sit. Let's go over it together.

**Tsingerbai:** It's just that the condom's been unrolled and stretched out in its intended place for the last hour and a half.

**Berlow:** You must be tired, sit.

**Tsingerbai:** Thanks, it's just...

**Berlow:** I told you to sit – sit down.

**Tsingerbai:** Thanks.

[They sit]

As much as I'd like to have some light conversation, it's a bit difficult right now.

[Stands up]

It's difficult for me to sit down. It's pressing, if you know what I mean. Unrolled and stretched out.

[Tries to chuckle]

With us, once it's stretched - it's tight. Like a cord.

[Kneels]

Try and understand the agony I'm in. Why do I always have to ask? Why doesn't it ever just happen for me like it does for others? And why do I always find myself on my knees, always waiting for an answer, waiting for someone to show up, to knock on the door, always in suspense, always in anticipation, always having to wait for someone's answer? Maybe one day I'll get to say "we'll see" or "maybe" or "perhaps at some point" or "please wait" or "please sit down" or "I'm a bit busy" or "I'm a bit tired" or "I'm a bit confused" or "please call again in a week" or "please try again in the autumn"?! Or maybe for once just "No"?! Or maybe even without a word, to maybe once just get up, take my hat and leave?!

[Almost crying]

Forgive me. Not manly. I got myself excited by your hinting at the pharmacy...forgive me for pushing you. I'm urgently trying to be happy. Every day from morning to evening I'm searching! Searching and searching and searching! I'll go crazy! How long can you keep searching for?!

[Sings]

*[How long can I go on searching]*

How long can I go on in the moon's sweet light  
My tail between my legs and a prayer on my lips?  
How many passing backsides must I sniff every single night?  
How long can I go on searching like this?



Because how long does a man actually have to live on this earth?  
And of that time how long is he actually hard?  
And how much of the time he's actually hard, does he have someone?  
And how much of the time he has someone, does it not suddenly droop?  
And how much of the time it doesn't droop, does the phone not ring?

And, if a miracle happens and there's no ring and it doesn't droop,  
And he's hard and there's someone and he's still alive and he's able,  
And he jumps up quickly in the dark and with two strokes he cums –  
How much of all that time is actually left for having fun?

How long can I go on in the moon's sweet...

**Berlow:** Yes. But the question is how much a person is willing not just to receive, but also to give.

**Tsingerbai:** Everything! Everything!

**Berlow:** I've heard that word too many times in my life, "everything".

**Tsingerbai:** [Again almost crying] But why is it my fault that you've already heard it?! Other people are always going to talk rubbish – and am I supposed to pay the price?!

**Berlow:** I don't know! And don't ask me deep questions about your life, which I'm not even responsible for, and don't push me into corners on the very first evening! All I know is that I've heard "everything" too many times in my life! They come, they leave mud and crumbs on the carpet, a mess on the rim of the toilet seat, they say "everything" and disappear! And I'm telling you I've had enough of you lot! And I'm telling you that I won't believe it, no, I won't believe anyone unless it's in the presence of a lawyer, and not easily, and not cheaply, I've been robbed enough, I've been trampled enough, I've been swallowed up, I've had every last drop of moisture sucked out of me, not me, not me, enough!

**Tsingerbai:** Madam Bella...

**Berlow:** Sit down! Sit down! How many times do I have to tell you to sit down!

[Tsingerbai comes back and sits in his chair. Pause]

**Tsingerbai:** I've got sixty thousand in the bank. An index-linked savings account locked for five years with a seventeen percent interest rate. I live in a rented two-bed flat, albeit as a sitting tenant. I have a steady job, I'm a municipal clerk. The money in the bank is money I've saved from the time my mother was still alive, savings for a flat, I'm saving the money in her memory, I probably won't make it to a flat of my own. That's it. That's what I have, maybe now you know me better.

**Berlow:** [To herself] A clerk with sixty thousand in his mother's memory, how low have I gone.

**Tsingerbai:** If my job and my savings offend you personally, then maybe it's best if I leave.

**Berlow:** [Jumps up towards him]

No, stay! You have a good personality. You're a gentle man. A good soul. That's worth a bit more than sixty thousand. And don't be too dismissive about the sixty thousand either.

**Tsingerbai:** You're not a simple woman, you can tell, many distinguished men must have, and who am I...

**Berlow:** No, no...

[Strokes his cheek]

There's a bird for the spring, and there's a bird for the autumn.

**Tsingerbai:** And I'm for the autumn...

**Berlow:** What's wrong with that, autumn's a season too isn't it? The bird of life's autumn. And I can see that down there you're still fluttering.

[The tip of her shoe touches the front of his trousers]

Have mercy on the man. Sixty thousand.

[Slowly and as though without noticing she begins to rub the tip of her shoe against his trousers. Pause]

**Tsingerbai:** Would you mind if in the meantime I ran my hand along your leg? Gently...

[Tsingerbai strokes her thigh]

That's more or less what I have. Along with the movements. Obviously I'm not as energetic as a sixteen-year-old black man.

[Pause. They continue, she rubbing with her shoe, him stroking. He suddenly stops]

**Berlow:** You can keep going.

**Tsingerbai:** I came, I think. Like I told you, not as energetic as a sixteen-year-old black man...

[Pause]

But total joy, no question. At least on my part. The leg, the toes, the sole of your foot – a burning flame. And you're also very experienced, you can tell.

[To himself]

All in all there's enough here to grow something nice. The flat's excellent, the leg's firm, and there's a kind of sharp shiver of freshness which stirs in you the feeling that it was worth being born. It's worth being born, it's good being born, and whoever isn't born is missing out in a big way.

[To Berlow]

Should I stay the night?

**Berlow:** Not convenient. I'm not set up very well for overnight guests.

**Tsingerbai:** Should I go and bring a blanket and pyjamas from home?

**Berlow:** Not convenient. In general, I'm not comfortable with overnight guests. And now you should go and throw the condom into the toilet before it spills onto the carpet.

**Tsingerbai:** [To himself] Being born isn't good. Not good and not worth it, and whoever isn't born wins.

[Has a change of heart, pleads again]

Listen, I know you haven't prepared and that you stick to your habits...

**Berlow:** No, Mr Tsingerbai, not like this! This isn't a party or some motel! No one springs romantic confessions on me before midnight, and no one suddenly decides to stay over just like that and dirty the sheets! Not like this! Slowly, slowly! We meet properly, normally, we come with a detailed proposal and sit down to negotiate like human beings, then we can start thinking about sleeping arrangements! Go home! Study! Think! When you have a proposal - show up with a proposal.

[Tsingerbai turns to leave, comes back and sits next to her]

I see you have a proposal. What's the proposal?

**Tsingerbai:** I propose...just...myself...

**Berlow:** Excuse me?

**Tsingerbai:** Myself. Myself. I'm offering you myself.

**Berlow:** Yourself and...?

**Tsingerbai:** And...?

**Berlow:** How much?

**Tsingerbai:** Lots. Lots and lots of love.

**Berlow:** And apart from love?

**Tsingerbai:** Admiration.

**Berlow:** Are kidding me, or what?

**Tsingerbai:** Kidding? I'm falling to my knees, burning in agony, giving you everything, is that kidding?!

**Berlow:** Everything? You're giving me everything?

**Tsingerbai:** Everything.

**Berlow:** Everything everything?

**Tsingerbai:** Everything everything everything. All of me.

**Berlow:** All of you and everything you have?

**Tsingerbai:** What exactly do I have?

**Berlow:** Don't you have anything?

**Tsingerbai:** Love. I have a lot of love.

**Berlow:** And...?

**Tsingerbai:** Admiration.

**Berlow:** Goodbye and good night.

**Tsingerbai:** No, not yet! Listen...I know I don't have anything to offer except myself, and that myself isn't actually a serious proposal.

**Berlow:** Not a proposal at all.

**Tsingerbai:** I know. But still, in the evening at the pharmacy, I thought you'd shown some interest...

**Berlow:** You seemed like a decent person.

**Tsingerbai:** I really am decent.

**Berlow:** That's why I'm saying, for a decent proposal, which would include you and your decency, I'd come to the table. If it's a proposal which just includes you - with love or without love - then there's nothing to discuss.

**Tsingerbai:** I understand.

**Berlow:** And excuse me for pointing it out again, but you really should go and throw the condom into the toilet before it spills onto my carpet.

**Tsingerbai:** I shouldn't have put it on. I wasted one for no reason.

**Berlow:** Buy a new one tomorrow.

**Tsingerbai:** There are two left in the pack.

**Berlow:** Those won't last until tomorrow.

**Tsingerbai:** Won't last? Two? For one evening?

**Berlow:** [With a promising smile] A man like him - and he even has to ask!

**Tsingerbai:** [Pleased] Maybe you're right. For an especially passionate evening...

**Berlow:** Passionate doesn't even begin to describe it.

**Tsingerbai:** [Jumping with happiness] Maybe it's actually good to be born, it's worth being born...

**Berlow:** And now it's spilled onto the carpet! I warned you in advance!

**Tsingerbai:** [Picks the condom up from the carpet] Sorry.

**Berlow:** Sorry! They make my carpet filthy and say sorry.

**Tsingerbai:** [To himself] She's just wonderful. Holds your hand wonderfully, looks after her furniture wonderfully, and such warmth...

**Berlow:** And what are you doing holding it by the tail like some salt herring! To the toilet, mess-maker!

**Tsingerbai:** Tomorrow at nine?

**Berlow:** At nine, and not a minute sooner.

**Tsingerbai:** Yes, my accurate one.

**Berlow:** And with a proposal in your hand.

[Tsingerbai exits]

[To herself] That's how it is. Love - admiration, admiration - love, and not a word about the sixty thousand.

#### **Scene 4**

[Night. A promenade along the beach. Sproll. Tsingerbai enters]

**Sproll:** Shmuel Sproll, as you recall. Has a condom been utilised?

**Tsingerbai:** Properly utilised, discarded in the toilet, now it's in the sewer.

**Sproll:** A wild time, eh? I'm standing here on the promenade, staring at the water like an idiot, while you, all quietly, don't waste a second, use up a condom...

**Tsingerbai:** A pack.

**Sproll:** A whole pack! Three! I mean, you...! Scary! Scandalising the town!

[Tsingerbai keeps walking]

Where to?

**Tsingerbai:** [Yawns] I've screwed. I feel good. Want to sleep.

**Sproll:** One second, there's a proposal coming together here in light of your throughput, I mean you're really wolfing down condoms like...the offer of a lifetime, believe me, basically: I want to do you a deal for the entire stock. Ten thousand packs at six lira instead of eight a pack, an instant saving of twenty thousand, no pharmacist will make you an offer like that. Not to mention, Mr Tsingerbai, that I'm saving you the hassle, which involves no small amount of awkwardness, going into the pharmacy every time and starting out in a low voice with your eyes averted asking for some APC. Basically: I'm also saving you the APC.

**Tsingerbai:** I'd have bought the APC anyway.

**Sproll:** That's just a minor detail. What about the main discount?

**Tsingerbai:** Paying sixty thousand today instead of eighty thousand, means making twenty five percent on long term inventory, while the interest that you get today on a regular bank deposit is seventeen percent a year, which means that the discount you're giving me is only eight percent, that's sixty four pennies off on eight lira, what's the big discount here?

**Sproll:** Just that if you factor in the expected price increase over the years...

**Tsingerbai:** With inflation-linked bonds I link the value of my money to the price increases, and that includes amongst other things the price of rubber.

**Sproll:** You don't get more than four percent interest on inflation-linked bonds.

**Tsingerbai:** For four percent annual interest on the sixty thousand, which is two thousand four hundred lira, I can buy a whole year's worth supply of condoms, and I've got enough left for APC, toothpaste, shaving foam, cotton wool and talcum powder, and I've got the inflation-linked fund left.

**Sproll:** They say that the government's going to gradually phase out the inflation-linking.

**Tsingerbai:** Only over a hundred thousand, I've got sixty.

**Sproll:** What about the hassle of going to the pharmacy every time...

**Tsingerbai:** I'm not the kind of guy who has a problem with that. You saw didn't you? How many people have you seen go in to buy a condom and leave with the pharmacist's home address?

**Sproll:** That's the thing, that you seem to be quite the rooster, slipping it to women left right and centre...

**Tsingerbai:** That's pretty much correct.

**Sproll:** Which is why I was surprised to hear that four percent of the sixty thousand, which is...

**Tsingerbai:** Two thousand four hundred a year.

**Sproll:** ...would be enough for your annual condom usage.

**Tsingerbai:** Based on a calculation of two packs a week - which isn't a small amount by any means, I'm forty five years old - that will definitely be enough, whereas by the same calculation, buying ten thousand packs from you now means preparing a stock of condoms for the next hundred years, while with today's technology the condom might become obsolete next week, how would I know what they're going to invent tomorrow?

**Sproll:** The condom is eternal.

**Tsingerbai:** They used to say the same thing about the button. And then they invented the zip. But let's assume so. The condom's eternal, and mankind? Today I'm forty five years old, and the condoms are for a hundred years, who lives to be a hundred and forty five?

**Sproll:** There are some Chechens, you know. Up in the Caucasus mountains.

**Tsingerbai:** You're ready to throw me all the way to the Caucasus mountains!

**Sproll:** And why spread it over a hundred years! Why only two packs a week? Why not four? Or eight?

**Tsingerbai:** What eight?! Twenty fours goes a week?

**Sproll:** What's wrong, you not able to?

**Tsingerbai:** I'm able, I'm able, even more, it's just...

**Sproll:** And when you get to Texas even more, with all your successes...

**Tsingerbai:** What Texas? First it's Chechnya, now Texas?!

**Sproll:** Because otherwise why does your Yohanan, pardon me, point towards the horizon?

**Tsingerbai:** [Looks at the opening in his trousers] I can't see it pointing at all...

**Sproll:** What, aren't you hard?! You impotent?!

**Tsingerbai:** Hard, of course I'm hard!

**Sproll:** Obviously! You not hard?! Straight at the horizon. There's Napoli. Further away is Texas. Further still is Tokyo. And further still, because the world is round, you again with your Yohanan pointing at the horizon, always pointing at the horizon. Take Texas for example. Land of the most beautiful women in the world, and the richest in the world, what a combination, what heartache! The women in Texas have golden skin, blonde hair and long legs. You look at the leg of a woman from Texas, there's no mercy in that leg, it stands on your throat and strangles you, they just strangle us one after the other, female executioners with transparent underwear from Texas. We're stuck like skewers on their long legs, turning round and round, turning and burning. And I haven't even started talking about their backsides. Every bottom smells like a magical world. By the way, I've heard that the women in Texas also tan their bottoms, have you ever had a tanned bottom in your hands? - God, I'm getting weak at the knees - what's there to discuss here, you get up, take a stock of condoms and follow your Yohanan towards the horizon, he'll lead you, he's your compass, he's pointing towards Texas, go to Texas, goodbye, farewell, good luck.

**Tsingerbai:** Texas, yes. Texas isn't the Caucasus mountains. But what have I got to do in Texas? Even though there are plenty of women there. Corn fields, swimming pools, ladies with tanned long legs. You think I don't know? You think I don't sneak a peak at an American magazine when I'm buying my evening paper? I'm not that big a fool and I'm also not blind. There's lots of beauty in the world, lots of beauty, lots of good, possibilities upon possibilities. And maybe I would try to take a bit of it for myself were it not for the fact that I'm not...you see, in terms of travel...I'm just not adventurous...in terms of women I am, but in terms of travel...



**Sproll:** You're just not adventurous.

**Tsingerbai:** Only in terms of travel.

**Sproll:** OK, don't go. The Texan ladies come to you. Look at the hotels to your left and to your right, look at the windows, every window's dark - a Texan tourist fornicating. What's there to discuss here, you get up, take a stock of condoms and walk into the lobby of a big hotel, they're sitting and waiting for you, goodbye, farewell, good luck.

**Tsingerbai:** I don't doubt that they're waiting, the problem's just that, how to say it, I'm a slightly...romantic person. That's what it is, romantic. With me, when my love for a specific woman gets kindled, everything else is burnt to a crisp.

**Sproll:** Nonsense, a ladykiller such as yourself, as we know, hops over here today, hops over there tomorrow, as they say, here today - tomorrow far away, and how could you stop at the height of your success...

**Tsingerbai:** It's true I used to be like that, but it's time to settle down isn't it? You don't go past forty...

**Sproll:** Don't talk to me about age again! Don't tell me you're one of those people who counts the days and the hours like some clerk at the council.

**Tsingerbai:** I don't, I definitely don't count, I'm just...actually...basically, I suddenly just want, you know how it is, just on a whim, want some slippers instead of boots, pyjamas instead of a raincoat. Understand?

**Sproll:** A wedding?

**Tsingerbai:** Why not? Why not try a steady relationship, a wife, tea, a child. I've always dreamed of having an heir, one woman who I love and who loves me, and for my sperm, without any rubber barriers, to sail around freely inside her. Children will be born. I'll feel good. And I'll be happy.

**Sproll:** After all your lustful successes...

**Tsingerbai:** I haven't had that many.

**Sproll:** You've still had something.

**Tsingerbai:** I haven't had anything. I don't have anything. Maybe you do. You're a great, classy man. Me, the time it took for someone to become fond of me - I thought I'd die. You're not angry, I hope.

[Pause]

You're not angry, I hope.

**Sproll:** Not angry. Just a shame. Ten thousand packs. An opportunity. Anyway.

[Pause]

Look at the sea. Used condoms floating on the water, yours amongst them no doubt.

**Tsingerbai:** Big consolation. A condom in the corner of the Mediterranean. I wanted one in the ocean.

[They sing]

*[Condom floating on the water]*

**Both:** A used condom at night floating on the tide,  
An empty rubber corpse, tossed by the waves at sea,  
Just an hour earlier it was going in and out between some thighs;  
That's the fate of a condom, like the fate of you and me.

**Sproll:** A man sleeps with a woman on the beach on a summer's night,  
On the sand they're all alone, above them sky and moon,  
The whole world suddenly feels like it was created for their delight  
When their bodies unite in a sublime climax of pleasure.

A little while passes, on the water near the shore  
Floats a wrinkled condom, still a little warm from the rubbing.  
Swaying on the water's surface, taking on and losing shape,  
Soaring on the crest of foam as though it still contained some life.

A few moments earlier it was still in the eye of the storm,  
If life has an essence, it was right there, in their hearts;  
Oh, pale rubber balloon, the world is his from sea to sea,  
The life which was inside them - we never meant for it to be.

**Both:** A used condom at night floating on the tide,  
An empty rubber corpse, tossed by the waves at sea,  
Just an hour earlier it was going in and out between some thighs;  
That's the fate of a condom, like the fate of you and me.

**Tsingerbai:** Don't take her away from me.

**Sproll:** Who?

**Tsingerbai:** The pharmacist, I know that if you just lifted a finger - she'd be yours.

**Sproll:** I'm not interested in the pharmacist.

**Tsingerbai:** Are you not interested in the pharmacist because she's a piece of junk?

**Sproll:** No, she's not a total piece of junk.

**Tsingerbai:** That's the thing, she's totally not a piece of junk, she's relatively...yes, and I also got laid tonight, there was fun with a woman, and maybe you're even a bit jealous of me, jealous, just jealous, of course!

**Sproll:** [To himself] No, he wouldn't buy at any price, and now it's becoming really clear, no one's going to buy. In which case, what? Should I just sit there with this stock until the day I die? And what about after the day I die? Someone'll obviously come along and take all the stock for themselves, just come and take it. The heart aches. Now I suddenly see how necessary a child is. A child of my own, who would inherit the condoms, that's something else. A child is you, it's your flesh, a continuation of yourself, just fresher, stronger, as though you yourself had come back with renewed force and dressed a bit differently for another round on the market, and here you are carrying on, carrying on with two suitcases of condoms passed like an eternal torch from one generation to the next, carrying on and on, and you're lying in the ground and disintegrating with your heart at peace because you know that up above, up there, you're being continued on and on, up above, in the blue summer sky, like a kite in the blinding sun, you're being continued, Shmuel Sproll, with two suitcases of condoms, onwards, onwards...

[Exits]

## Scene 5

Night. Berlow's flat. Berlow. Sproll enters.

**Berlow:** I hope you've got a good reason for showing up at a lady's house uninvited at twelve o'clock at night.

**Sproll:** Ten thousand reasons made of excellent Australian rubber, and one flesh and blood reason, yours.

**Berlow:** Meaning?

**Sproll:** You're a woman, I'm a man; you have a period every month, I need to shave every morning; you have a pharmacy, I have ten thousand packs of condoms; what better fit to be found in nature?

**Berlow:** Get to the point. No midnight poetry.

**Sproll:** Let's say I put into the "Berlow and Berlow" pharmacy ten thousand packs of condoms which are worth sixty thousand to you today in wholesale prices.

**Berlow:** Let's say. Next.

**Sproll:** And let's say that in exchange for that investment the sign is changed from "Berlow and Berlow" to "Berlow and Sproll".

**Berlow:** Let's say. Next.

**Sproll:** And let's say that once the deal is done then a modest wedding ceremony takes place between the two sides.

**Berlow:** Which would turn "Berlow and Sproll" into "Sproll and Sproll".

**Sproll:** The name "Berlow" doesn't bother me.

**Berlow:** Let's say. Next.

**Sproll:** There is no next. That's it.

**Berlow:** Have you come over tonight to make me laugh?! In exchange for ten thousand packs of condoms which are worth four, not five, lira at wholesale prices, in exchange for that stock you want fifty percent of a business whose equipment alone is worth a quarter of a million, not including the license, building and reputation, which together come to half a million! And to celebrate this commercial nonsense you're also throwing in a gift for the holidays, stinking next to each other in one double bed?!

**Sproll:** Your business is in bad shape. The location isn't good, not central, there aren't any clients, there's no momentum.

**Berlow:** I spit on momentum. Business is excellent.

**Sproll:** Business, like you personally, is at a low point. And you need me, Bella.

**Berlow:** I swear he's trying to charm me, the owner of the rubber assets! He's already calling me Bella, with honey on his tongue! There are other candidates, as you obviously know.

**Sproll:** I've met him, the other candidates.

[Embraces her]

But you've got to admit that with me it's a bit different. With me you don't stink at home in your pyjamas, with me it's the air of the theatre, cafés, playing cards.

[Dances with her]

And there's one more reason, Mrs Sperlow...

**Berlow:** Berlow. Still Berlow.

**Sproll:** Excuse me, Berlow, one more reason why you should go with me. You're striking a deal with a man who loves sugar. I've got one heart attack behind me. My blood pressure's not good. I also don't maintain a lifestyle which will keep me going for very long. I smoke, drink, gobble up fat and fried food, play poker, go to sleep late at night, and usually not alone. A year or two of living with me, and then - goodbye, and I leave you everything wrapped in a nice memory.

**Berlow:** The man I'll want to marry, Mr Sproll, I'll want to grow old with.

**Sproll:** I could die young, I could die old, I can do a lot of things, it also depends on you.

[Presses her to him, romantically]

Since I was a child I've dreamed about charitable and charitably-proportioned women.

**Berlow:** Go find charitable women up above! Charitably-proportioned - be my guest.

[Presses herself to him]

**Sproll:** Think about what I said. Think very very deeply.

[Detaches from her and turns to leave. She stands surprised for a moment, breathless]

**Berlow:** You know very well that it's you I want. Very much. You've known all along.

**Sproll:** Which didn't stop Tsingerflai using up a pack of condoms at your place tonight.

**Berlow:** It was one condom, not a pack, which the Tsingerflotz put on at my place, he didn't finish counting to two - and came in his trousers. Down there, believe me, I didn't even get wet.

**Sproll:** Now, for a change, it's wet.

**Berlow:** I don't deny it.

**Sproll:** Me too. A sticky transparent droplet, the saliva of hungry love, stretching like a thin thread in my underwear.

**Berlow:** Isn't it wonderful, that dampness down there, in the darkness?

**Sproll:** Wonder of the universe, crowning glory of science. Above physics, astronomy, para-para-psychology and the pyra-pyra-pyramids stands the eighth

wonder: a man gazes out of his window in the evening, sees a woman passing by in the street below, moving her hips, hop and hop, and there's already a transparent droplet in his underwear, and some hidden pump there already working full-throttle and inflating him right up. Go figure.

**Berlow:** God knows. But what do I care about the mechanism, I care about the results.

[They have intercourse and sing]

[*The Tunnel to Happiness*]

**Both:** Hit, hit, hit,  
Drilling a tunnel to happiness,  
Hit, hit, hit,  
In a small and dirty pit,

Striking like blind people in the dark,  
With a soft and small drill bit,  
Forty years without any rest -  
Hit, hit, hit.

And as though deep in silent prayer  
Arse bouncing like a rubber band  
Waiting for Moses to lead us  
To the Promised Land

Hit, hit, hit,  
No strength left in the hips,  
Hit, hit, hit,  
And nothing opens even a bit

But when night falls again  
And the moon is so softly lit,  
You'll find us digging together again -  
Hit, hit, hit.

And as though deep in silent prayer...

[They finish having intercourse]

**Berlow:** Shmuel, my love, my man with a moustache, let's not talk about business any more, let's stop all the haggling, you're sickly, leave all the stress to me! Give me the rubber! Just give it to me! And you'll get me! And marry me! I'll be a faithful and worthy wife! I'll be good to you! I'll take care of you with caring and devotion! New and surprising aspects of life will reveal themselves to you with me! Shmuel, my love, my man with a moustache, there are emotional treasures waiting for you with me, believe me! Emotional treasures!

**Sproll:** From the emotions - treasures. From the pharmacy - not a penny. Emotions are cheap with you, Bella.

**Berlow:** And why all the bookkeeping again?! Life's just passing by, passing by, and instead of taking part in them we're busy with bookkeeping!

[Cries]

For once, Shmuel, let's rise above all the bookkeeping, for once let's show some altruism, for once just agree to something I've suggested!

**Sproll:** Which is to altruistically give you ten thousand packs of excellent condoms for free.

**Berlow:** Have you thought about the risks I'm personally taking on here? Just like you might die in a year or two, you might also live and live and live, might bury me too, and in the end you'll have both the rubber and the pharmacy, and I'll lie there naked and filthy in the ground. That's one point. A second point: What do you even have to offer a woman? You used to be a man with some charm, granted, but not a professor, not an academic, no emotional layers, just a lazy bum, and now because of the sugar almost blind and on the verge of impotence, as we witnessed just a few minutes ago. Third: what if the situation gets worse, what if you get a stroke, paralysis, and then live for another twenty years? The hassle of caring for a disabled husband is the wife's obligation, that's included in the marriage and I'm not disputing it, but the costs are another matter. Do you know how much a room in a care home costs per day nowadays? Within a few months your hospitalisation costs could swallow up sums of money which would make your entire rubber investment look like dust in the wind. Of course, if you agree to take on any financial expense related to your illness, then that changes the picture.

**Sproll:** What do you mean? Getting sick, dying, and all the costs are on me?

**Berlow:** What do you mean? Getting married, getting widowed, and all the costs are on me?

**Sproll:** There's nothing to talk about costs, who can calculate costs in advance? Today I'm sick, you pay, tomorrow you're sick, I pay.

**Berlow:** That's in a normal situation. Here the situation is that you're sick, I'm healthy, we're not getting married from an equal starting point, get it?

**Sproll:** In the name of, as you said, altruism for once - I agree. We'll sign a clause with the lawyer: medical expenses aren't included in the marriage.

**Berlow:** Medical expenses which include hospitalisation, medication and financial support during the illness.

**Sproll:** Financial support's already included in hospitalisation.

**Berlow:** This refers also to when you're home.

**Sproll:** What, if I'm lying in bed at home you won't give me soup?

**Berlow:** I'll give soup and I'll give meat. The costs are on you.

**Sproll:** What's meat got to do with medical expenses?! Does a healthy person not eat meat?!

**Berlow:** They eat, but by themselves. They don't get it served in bed, they don't get fed. The cost here is for the serving and the hassle.

**Sproll:** All right, we'll calculate the hassle.

**Berlow:** There's no way to calculate the hassle. Let's just decide the financial support's on you.

**Sproll:** All right, agreed.

**Berlow:** And of course, the burial costs.

**Sproll:** Burial?! What have medical expenses got to do with burial costs?!

**Berlow:** One leads to the other.

**Sproll:** I'm sorry, medical expenses are up to the point of death. Everything from death onwards is included with the marriage.

**Berlow:** When you get married from an equal starting point.

**Sproll:** Enough with the equal starting point! Tomorrow you get hit by a car...

**Berlow:** A car doesn't hit me so fast! He's found just the person to get hit by a car!

**Sproll:** Run over or not run over, burial expenses are included with the marriage.

**Berlow:** It's not fair, but I'll try to compromise with you on something: the cost of the funeral is on me. Not going to pay for the plot or the headstone.

**Sproll:** I'll skip the headstone. Definitely need a plot.

**Berlow:** On you.

**Sproll:** Included with the marriage.

**Berlow:** On you.

**Sproll:** Included with the marriage.



**Berlow:** On you.

**Sproll:** Included with the marriage.

**Berlow:** Shmuel, I want you very much, but I've really reached the very upper limits of my concessions, understand me, I've compromised with you on everything, everything, except a plot, I just can't any more, I'd be lying to myself if I told you I could, I just can't. Want to, but can't.

**Sproll:** Included with the marriage.

**Berlow:** [In a sudden outburst] Shmuel, my love, my man with a moustache, why all the bookkeeping?! Life's passing by...

**Sproll:** You already said that. If you don't have anything new...

[Stands up]

**Berlow:** He's serious, the Tsingerbai, he's in love, tomorrow he'll submit a proposal which I'll accept, you'll lose me forever!

**Sproll:** In that case, go to Tsingerbai, what are you waiting for? He doesn't get you wet, but he pays.

**Berlow:** Gets me just as wet as you do, don't fool yourself. You, him and all the rest - same lover with a different rubber.

**Sproll:** Good night.

**Berlow:** [Clings to him] No, Shmuel! Wait! Forgive me!

**Sproll:** I'm not going to throw good money into the sea, Bella, I'm not going to do something which neither I nor my father, may he rest in peace, would forgive ourselves for. You understand me, don't you?

[Berlow cries]

**Berlow:** How come it never...ever turns out...never works out...nothing...how two...grown...people...can't...in this world...close...a deal...

[Sproll leaves the house. To himself]

**Sproll:** Oh, if only it was possible to live life as though you were at the cinema, sitting a little to the side, seeing life moving back and forth in front of you on an illuminated cloth, all the storms, the loves, the disasters, all this mess, everything running by and passing in front of you without touching you, while you, for just a few lira, get to sit on a chair in the dark, with chocolate in your mouth, watching, just watching.

## Scene 6

[Evening, a theatre hall before the show. Sproll is sitting in the auditorium. Berlow and Tsingerbai enter]

**Berlow:** Suddenly inviting me to the theatre, and even a comedy. Such a surprise. How much did the tickets cost you?

**Tsingerbai:** Why?

**Berlow:** No reason. How much did they cost you? Because I usually like sitting closer.

**Tsingerbai:** [Offended] These tickets are worth twenty two lira.

**Berlow:** Twenty two? But you didn't pay twenty two, did you? You probably bought them with a discount from your work at the council. So what was it, seven lira a ticket? Just curious. Seven lira?

**Tsingerbai:** Something like that.

**Berlow:** Not more than five, I'm sure. I hope this comedy's worth more than that. I'll be really angry with you if this comedy doesn't make me laugh.

**Tsingerbai:** In the programme it says that the comedy's funny.

**Berlow:** How much did the programme cost you? Ah, that's not even a programme. That's a piece of paper with information on it which you get for free. Everything's cheap here.

[They sit down]

I hope I'm not wasting my time. I'd eat something instead of laughing. At least something goes inside. Laughter comes out and fades. After this comedy we'll go to a restaurant.

[Tsingerbai's face falls]

Why have you gone so serious all of a sudden?

**Tsingerbai:** Let's make this clear before the comedy starts: I didn't bring enough money with me for a restaurant after the comedy because I just ate before I left.

**Berlow:** Not even for coffee and a cake?

**Tsingerbai:** I've got just enough for the bus. So if you're going to be hungry...

[Pause]

And maybe I'll also be a bit hungry...

[Pause]

I'd be happy if we could go up to your place afterwards and you can make an omelette or something...

**Berlow:** There's no eggs. There's nothing. The house is empty.

**Tsingerbai:** We'll drink coffee.

**Berlow:** The house is empty I said.

**Tsingerbai:** Yes. Empty. Shame.

[Pause]

These moments before a comedy are always the saddest.

**Berlow:** If we're being so serious, maybe we can talk about a serious topic.

**Tsingerbai:** Such as?

**Berlow:** Your proposal. I told you yesterday to come with a proposal.

**Tsingerbai:** But I already came with a proposal.

**Berlow:** What proposal?

**Tsingerbai:** That we go to the theatre. And here we are at the theatre.

**Berlow:** Your sense of humour's a little heavy for me, Mr Yohanan. Let's cut to the chase: what have you thought about doing with the hundred and sixty thousand that you've got in the bank?

**Tsingerbai:** Sixty. Sixty.

**Berlow:** Sixty. Yes. What have you thought about doing with them?

**Tsingerbai:** Do? Nothing.

**Berlow:** Still, so much money. What are your plans for it?

**Tsingerbai:** The money's sitting there.

**Berlow:** Have you ever considered an investment?

**Tsingerbai:** No.

**Berlow:** There are investments which would grow your profits more than just the interest.

**Tsingerbai:** Maybe. But I wouldn't touch the money.

**Berlow:** Why?

**Tsingerbai:** I wouldn't touch the money.

**Berlow:** And if you got married?

**Tsingerbai:** If I got married, I'd get married.

**Berlow:** What would you do with the money then?

**Tsingerbai:** I wouldn't touch the money.

**Berlow:** And if your wife had a business which needed the investment very much?

**Tsingerbai:** People come together and part ways, tie knots and undo them; with all due respect, what's left of the knots? And if the moment comes and the paths diverge, and the man goes back to his corner to sit there by himself, what does he do there in the corner by himself? He licks a little bone. The sixty thousand - that's my little bone. I wouldn't touch the money.

[Pause]

**Berlow:** Shame.

**Tsingerbai:** What's a shame?

**Berlow:** Nothing. Shame.

[The light in the theatre dims slowly. To herself]

Ah, that moment in the theatre, when the lights in the room have already dimmed but the light on the curtain hasn't come on yet, and the audience is sitting in the dark, waiting in silence, all the expectations, all the dreams of a thousand people focussed on a single point in the darkness ahead: I feel like I've lived my whole life in that moment, waiting in the dark, and any second now the curtain will rise, the stage will be flooded with blinding light and a vibrant life will start flowing in front of my eyes. Yes, any second now a vibrant life will start shining here, a wonderful breathtaking life, the likes of which we've never seen before.

**End of Act 1**

## Act 2

[Our protagonists are already over 60]

### Scene 7

[Evening. A dark cinema auditorium. Sproll, blind, a walking stick beside him, sits and sings]

[*The ballad about Jane*]

**Sproll:** Get up, go to Texas, dusty man,  
And in Texas meet a girl named Jane,  
And in her villa, in the sweet sweet dusk,  
In an Australian condom you'll screw out her brain.

And Jane will sigh, "my love, how did you appear?"  
"I came to you from beyond the horizon, Jane,  
I saw you on the movie screen,  
And in my bed I saw you again."

"Stay here with me, my man!"  
After our session she'll tell me, Jane,  
"You're so beautiful and I'm so smelly,  
How will I know that you want me, Jane?  
My entire life's passed on the screen,  
And I have no faith in myself, it's in vain."

"I love you and I want you,  
And I'm yours like my name is Jane.  
Here are my nice full thighs before you,  
And stretching to the horizon is my field of grain."

"Even if you're in my lap for a thousand years,  
I'll watch you as though from a darkened room, Jane,  
My entire life's been invested in the cinema,  
I have no other life, it's in vain."

"I love you, and don't ask why,  
And want to attach your name to the name Jane,  
An infinite honeymoon awaits us like a dream  
And the yacht's in the bay ready to sail again."

Get up, go to Texas, dusty man,  
And in Texas meet a girl named Jane,  
She'll take you out of the darkened room  
And put a glowing bright screen in your brain.

## Scene 8

[Early evening. Berlow's pharmacy. Berlow]

**Berlow:** And again it's evening, and again it's the start of spring, the pharmacy, and I'm still waiting.

[Tsingerbai enters]

I remember sixty thousand. Remind me what your name was.

**Tsingerbai:** Yohanan Tsingerbai.

**Berlow:** That's it, And the sixty thousand?

**Tsingerbai:** Sitting. Today it's already a hundred and fifty. It's been twenty years.

**Berlow:** Twenty years! And the money's still sitting there! There must be a good reason, probably a perfect marriage with a well-off woman and two teenage kids.

**Tsingerbai:** Children - no. Marriage - there almost was. Twice even.

**Berlow:** And twice it didn't work out.

**Tsingerbai:** Twice it almost worked out. There were serious discussions. At the final stages of the negotiations - it failed. And you, if I may ask?

**Berlow:** There have been proposals. Definitely. One of them even from over in France. All rejected. The Frenchy was actually charming and wealthy.

**Tsingerbai:** Why didn't you take it?

**Berlow:** I didn't take it. I don't owe anything to anyone. And you, you haven't changed at all.

**Tsingerbai:** Thank you.

**Berlow:** You always did look old and tattered. Time can do you no harm. But what about me? What's happened to me? Probably look like a roast chicken, eh? And you're not even denying it! What can I get you?

**Tsingerbai:** APC and a pack of three unlubricated.

**Berlow:** And even that sentence "APC and a pack of three unlubricated." Twenty years have passed, the world's completely changed, man has landed on the moon, five presidents have come and gone in the United States, and here in some far-flung corner of the globe, some nonsense, a dull and unimportant sentence with the persistence of a cockroach is still scratching and scratching the air, burying the US presidents and moving on.

[Sproll enters, sick, blind, leaning on a cane]

**Sproll:** My father may he rest in peace who was a god-fearing man and also a frenzied sausage, left me in addition to the ten thousand packs of condoms, also the diabetes from which I've suffered my whole life, and which has gotten much worse, as you can see, in recent years, I'm a broken man, can't see, dragging my legs, fading, what's there to talk about, I'm ready for an amazing discount, a discount which only someone who knows that you don't take anything, or almost anything, with you to the grave can give, that is, I'm selling at twelve and half lira a pack, a price that's equivalent to five twenty years ago, and if you remember, the previous price was six, so I'm taking off another lira, an amazing and final discount, I'm doing this because it's important to me to die with my head clear of rubber, the money's not important here at all, second house down, the name's the same as it was, Shmuel Sproll.

**Berlow:** Aside from all the other reasons which are still very much valid; who'd risk using a condom that's over twenty years old?

**Sproll:** Who'd be tempted to squeeze flesh that's over sixty years old?

[Berlow slaps him across the cheek. Sproll bows and leaves]

**Berlow:** Look at him, the singer, what used to be there and what's left. While you, on the other hand, the health of a one-year-old. Ah, I can already see that you're going to give someone a lot of pleasure tonight, there are also packs of a dozen, will you buy a dozen?

**Tsingerbai:** [To himself] A dozen? Together with five that I've got left from twenty years ago that leaves me with seventeen condoms. Even with the most intense love and desire, I still can't see how at my age I can get a real and stiff erection without some really long foreplay, and when I say really long, I'm not talking about hours but about days. If I want to reach the final full on Saturday night, I need to start the warm-up on Friday evening at the latest with some magazines or fantasizing. With two and a bit days of warm-up for one final plus four days of recovery after the final, it's not even worth thinking about more than once a week, preferably once a month, and I can't see myself being stuck in advance now with seventeen condoms which'll last me for a year and half.

[To Berlow]

Thank you, I'll stick with a pack of three.

**Berlow:** [Disappointed] And that's after you did your bookkeeping as though you had all of eternity ahead of you. Three lira for the rubber and the APC.

[Tsingerbai pays, takes the goods and turns to leave. Berlow sings]

It's as soft as silken thread

And as elastic as a lawyer's head...

[Tsingerbai stops. Turns to her]

**Tsingerbai:** 36 Washington Street, flat eight, at nine?

**Berlow:** [Sighs, to herself] An incurable romantic, that's my problem.

## Scene 9

[Evening. Synagogue. Sproll finishes an evening prayer]

**Sproll:** Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom, and the situation's not good, father, not good, and here I am standing before you like I stood twenty years ago, all the condoms still with me, and nothing's changed in the world in the last twenty years, everything's stayed the way it was, apart from one thing, which is that they invented the contraceptive pill which has made the condom almost obsolete, and it happened specifically in my generation, just when I have a bit of rubber to sell, a very strange coincidence father, and that's how the wheels of progress and technology roll over someone, over the small investor, and the small investor who's put his whole life into excellent Australian rubber in the belief that the condom is eternal, now intimately feels how nothing is eternal, that even the best quality rubber is temporary, everything's temporary, and man's always cheated, but now it's too late, I'm holding worthless merchandise, and deals I haven't done yet probably won't ever get done, He who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace, upon us and upon all Israel and say Amen.

[Exits]

## Scene 10

[Evening. Berlow's flat. Berlow, Tsingerbai]

**Tsingerbai:** And nothing's changed here in the flat. And the atmosphere's also still the same atmosphere. A kind of warmth...

**Berlow:** A warmth that's been waiting for you for twenty years.

[Pause]

I made a big mistake by not marrying you, Yohanan.

**Tsingerbai:** Do you really think that?



**Berlow:** Yes. And over the years I've thought about it a lot.

**Tsingerbai:** Why didn't you try to call me?

[Pause]

Because I was living back then with the feeling that you weren't that interested in me, that you were interested in Mr Sproll. Now you're making me agonise over the missed opportunity.

**Berlow:** There's definitely been a big and fateful missed opportunity here, no doubt.

**Tsingerbai:** That's terrible to hear now, after life has almost passed. Maybe you actually did have some doubts?

**Berlow:** I didn't have any doubts.

**Tsingerbai:** No doubts: God! Someone definitively wanted me! But you must have found some flaws in me?

**Berlow:** No flaws.

**Tsingerbai:** But I would have needed to make a huge effort in order to get you? Right? An effort way beyond my abilities?!

**Berlow:** No effort. One word.

**Tsingerbai:** One word! God, one word! But you would have been likely to regret it after a short time! You would have gotten fed up with me! Say you would have gotten fed up with me!

**Berlow:** You're a rare man, Yohanan, and I would have loved you more and more every day.

**Tsingerbai:** She doesn't just love me, but more and more! Oh no!

**Berlow:** To the day you die!

**Tsingerbai:** To the day I die! God, I had it in my hands! I had it in my hands and it slipped away! Slipped away!

**Berlow:** Yes, Yohanan, you had it in your hands. Never before has such a small step come between a man and his happiness.

**Tsingerbai:** Wasted! Wasted! Life's been wasted!

[Cries. Berlow hugs him]

**Berlow:** My Yohanan, my man.

**Tsingerbai:** I'm standing at the edge of a sixty-five year abyss and getting scared. From the moment of my birth until the day I die - a gaping and dark abyss. What have I done with my best time!

**Berlow:** If we just wanted it, everything would still be ahead of us. We haven't lost anything. We'll realise every gram of our flesh. Every drop of blood will boil. All the marrow will get sucked from our bones. We'll be utilised. We will be fully taken advantage of. Life will be taken advantage of, every unit of energy in our bodies and our souls will be used and burnt up. We will be used to our core. Not guests at other peoples' weddings any more, no other sun in our sky besides a wedding. From the moment we were born a wedding's been waiting for us, like destiny, like a life raft, like an exotic island of desire, and from the moment we were born we've been rowing towards that island, we're rowing with all our strength, an island full of waiters and musicians and impatient guests sticking their fingers into the cake to taste it, a small magical island with a wedding waiting for us, a wedding, a wedding, a wedding, great happiness, blinding happiness, all the tenderness and warmth, an answer to every question, every expectation fulfilled, a release for every tension, an end to the wanderings, a return from exile, complete redemption, a wedding.

[Sobs. Pause]

**Tsingerbai:** How can we start from the beginning now?

**Berlow:** [While crying] We can.

**Tsingerbai:** How.

**Berlow:** We can.

**Tsingerbai:** I also wanted a child.

**Berlow:** There will also be a child.

**Tsingerbai:** How? We're not in the Spring of our lives.

**Berlow:** Spring, Spring, believe me we're in Spring.

**Tsingerbai:** How in the Spring? We're both over sixty.

**Berlow:** [Shouts] Believe me we're in Spring!

**Tsingerbai:** [Dejected] All right. If you say so - we're in Spring.

**Berlow:** What are you waiting for? Hold me. Hold me already!

[Tsingerbai hugs her]

Tight.

[He hugs her more tightly]

Shall we go to the bedroom?

[Tsingerbai doesn't move, Berlow tries to joke]

Remember how last time you put on the condom even before you arrived? And how afterwards it spilled out onto the carpet?

[Tsingerbai nods]

Did you put it on before you arrived now as well?

[Tsingerbai shakes his head]

Why not?

[Pause]

You can go and put it on now, if you want.

[Pause]

Don't you want to?

[Pause]

Don't you want me?

**Tsingerbai:** What day is it today?

**Berlow:** Thursday. Why?

**Tsingerbai:** Would you mind if we did it on Saturday evening?

**Berlow:** Why Saturday evening?

**Tsingerbai:** Saturday evening is Saturday evening.

**Berlow:** Fine, let it be Saturday evening.

**Tsingerbai:** Good night.

**Berlow:** Good night.

[Tsingerbai turns to leave]

Yohanan.

[He stops]

You'll notice Yohanan, I'm not saying anything about the money. I'm sure we'll work it out. I just trust that you've grown up, sobered up. You'll give, you're a knight, you've got the character of someone who gives.

**Tsingerbai:** Good night.

**Berlow:** Good night, my love. And notice that I'm not saying a word about the fruits that this will yield for you, which are large and significant. But we'll work it out, when there's love - there's trust, and you have a trustworthy character.

**Tsingerbai:** Good night.

**Berlow:** Good night, my love, my sweet, darling, and remember, Yohanan, and don't forget, I'm also not telling you to bring a cheque for a hundred and fifty thousand lira with you on Saturday evening so that we can cash it first thing on Sunday morning and start renovating the pharmacy and renovating our lives as soon as the new week starts. I'm not saying a word to you about that. I just know that you'll bring the cheque on Saturday evening - and it should be a banker's cheque - by yourself. You're an intelligent, generous man, you know not just what to bring, but also when to bring, you've got excellent timing...excellent...

[He turns to her impatiently]

There, that's it, I didn't say anything, and I won't add anything, nothing nothing, nothing nothing nothing nothing, nada nada nada nada, tring tring tring tring trang.

[Tsingerbai leaves. Berlow sings]

*[Life only starts at sixty two]*

**Berlow:** Life only starts at sixty two,  
It's all nonsense until sixty two;  
You search around to find your path,  
You live your life without a clue,  
You're in love, you jump,  
A man there and a man here,  
One shows up, and disappears,  
Another takes his place,  
The heart is woken, the heart is broken,  
But everything, everything's so serious somehow,  
Life only starts at sixty two,  
And that's exactly my age now.

Life only starts at sixty two,  
From sixty two it's called living at last!  
You've left a lot behind, most of the problems have already passed,  
You're sorted, established,  
A deal here, some money there,  
The next man who comes in through the door,  
Won't turn his back on you any more,  
And if he's dragging his feet,  
No worries, you've still got time, you'll wait, you know how;  
Because life only starts at sixty two,  
And that's exactly my age now.

### **Scene 11**

[Evening. Promenade by the beach. Sproll. Tsingerbai enters]

**Tsingerbai:** Mr Sproll?

**Sproll:** Who's that?

**Tsingerbai:** Yohanan Tsingerbai.

**Sproll:** I'll take off another lira. Have them for eleven fifty a pack. What? I can't see you. I've gone blind. From the sugar. My eyes, the teeth of sight, have gone. The only teeth with which I gobbled up some of the world have been pulled out. You know what, to keep things simple I'll take it down to eleven a pack.

**Tsingerbai:** I'm going to marry the pharmacist. This time it's done.

**Sproll:** What are the terms? Are you giving her the money? Eh? He's giving her the money!

**Tsingerbai:** She's a good woman, for a wife.

[Pause]

She also doesn't look bad for her age.

[Pause]

The money will be invested into the business, I'll have decent fruits.

[Pause]

What can I do?! If I'd been handed something for free in this world wouldn't I have taken it?! I don't have anything for free! I don't have any gifts! I don't have any discounts! I'm one of those people who pays full price!

[Pause]

Anyway, my wedding to the pharmacist - that's final.

**Sproll:** What's left for you to do here on the promenade?

**Tsingerbai:** Nothing. To breathe some air. Remember you told me twenty years ago about Texas?

**Sproll:** Sit next to me.

[Tsingerbai sits next to him]

Look over there.

[Points in a specific direction. Tsingerbai looks in that direction]

Do you see what I see?

**Tsingerbai:** What do you see?

[Pause]

**Sproll:** Texas.

**Tsingerbai:** Yes, I can see Texas. Which part are you referring to?

**Sproll:** The middle.

**Tsingerbai:** The exact middle?

**Sproll:** The exact exact middle. There's a big farm there surrounded by corn fields.

**Tsingerbai:** I see.

**Sproll:** Forget the corn fields for now and concentrate on the farm. In the middle of the farm there's a huge villa and behind it a garden, and in the garden a swimming pool with a lawn around it. On the lawn there are a few deck chairs and a table with cold drinks on it...

**Tsingerbai:** Is it summer?

**Sproll:** Texas summer? Eleven in the morning. And if you can see what I'm seeing, there's this woman swimming there in the pool, all alone in the big pool. Her name's Jane.

**Tsingerbai:** Jane or Jin?

**Sproll:** What do you care?

**Tsingerbai:** It's important to me for the scene. Jin is slim, Jane's fuller.

**Sproll:** It's Jane.

**Tsingerbai:** I do prefer fuller.

**Sproll:** And she's full in exactly the right places. But exactly. Should I describe her to you?

**Tsingerbai:** Please. Because my eyes are a little blurry from the excitement.

**Sproll:** Black hair, short, but flowing. Full lips, a solid chin, high cheekbones. Brown eyes. Tall, full body. A chest with large touching breasts. Not apart, touching.

**Tsingerbai:** That's good, touching.

**Sproll:** I know. A wide pelvis.

**Tsingerbai:** How wide?

**Sproll:** Very wide. Your head with all the passions inside it would fit in there four times over.

**Tsingerbai:** I wish it were even six.

**Sproll:** The legs are toned and long. A little thick at the ankles...

**Tsingerbai:** That's good, I like that so much.

**Sproll:** I know. And the thighs aren't fat at all, I mean, ok, full of gentle flesh, but not very fat, not wobbling, in any case not to a degree which would prepare you for what comes next.

**Tsingerbai:** What comes next?

**Sproll:** You know those thighs which go up-up-up, getting thicker and thicker, until suddenly, at their peak, without any warning, like the dome of a plump mushroom, an overflowing bottom reveals itself?

**Tsingerbai:** Listen, that's my oldest dream.

**Sproll:** I know. A large, round bottom, something that spreads out above you like the sky itself, slopes to the sides, slopes backwards, and makes those two deep

folds which mark the border between the kingdom of the bottom, and the principality of the thighs, you know those folds...

**Tsingerbai:** Better than I know my parents...

**Sproll:** White bottom, mighty and pure, a heavenly choir of angels, a Swiss lake full of swans, the pinnacle of happiness, something which promises you all the intense excitement together with all the serenity of home - that's Jane.

**Tsingerbai:** My Jane.

**Sproll:** She's currently an unmarried woman, twenty-two years old. She climbs out of the pool in a two-piece swimming costume.

**Tsingerbai:** With an upper part too?

**Sproll:** Upper part too.

**Tsingerbai:** Why? It's her private pool, isn't it?

**Sproll:** Yes, but what you can't see is that next to the drinks table there's a young dark-skinned man with a moustache standing and pouring her a gin and tonic.

**Tsingerbai:** Isn't that her intimate friend?

**Sproll:** No, it's the butler, you can see he's wearing a uniform with the letter 'J' embroidered on his chest.

**Tsingerbai:** What about her boyfriend?

**Sproll:** She doesn't currently have one. She's free this weekend. She dumped her previous boyfriend yesterday, and this evening she's going to a party, where she'll probably meet someone else.

**Tsingerbai:** Which means there are now basically eight-nine hours where she's without a man.

**Sproll:** Yes, and now she gets out, dripping, approaches the table. The butler, his name's Manuel...

**Tsingerbai:** Let's call him Gonzales, the idiot.

**Sproll:** ...serves her a gin and tonic with ice. She takes the glass, turns for a moment to look at the fields and turns her bum towards him. He looks down, at the two bum folds glistening with tiny water droplets in the sun, and wants to drop to his knees and lick the droplets. But of course he won't do anything, he's Manuel, he just looks. Jane drinks slowly and looks into the distance, to the corn field which stretches to the horizon. She shifts her weight from one foot to the other, so that



her bottom moves, and one fold, the one above the foot she's leaning on, becomes deeper and more arousing. And here's where a guest enters the picture.

**Tsingerbai:** Who?

**Sproll:** You.

**Tsingerbai:** Me? What are you talking about? How could it be me? I'm not even dressed to enter Texas.

**Sproll:** You come through the fields because you've lost your way, or you come in through the main gate. Decide.

**Tsingerbai:** I still can't see how I even reached Texas.

**Sproll:** You're just there. Through the main gate or through the fields?

**Tsingerbai:** Through the fields then. That arouses more sympathy...

**Sproll:** That is indeed better. Because if you'd gone through the main gate you'd have had to pass an interrogation by the servants. This way through the fields, you reach her directly.

**Tsingerbai:** Reach her directly?!

**Sproll:** Reach her directly.

**Tsingerbai:** Is she standing with her face or her back to me?

**Sproll:** With her face.

**Tsingerbai:** Because if it was the back, I'd have first jumped and snatched a big kiss on her bottom.

**Sproll:** You couldn't have jumped straight to her bottom, that would have ruined any chance...

**Tsingerbai:** I'm not asking you.

**Sproll:** In any case, she's standing with her face to you, she sees you approaching.

**Tsingerbai:** That's a different matter.

[He stands up, goes a short distance away from Sproll, looks at an imaginary Jane standing in front of him. Long pause. He occasionally tries to say something, but can't get the words out. He constantly shifts around uncomfortably on the spot. Finally he takes one step forward]

My name's Yohanan...John...Tsingerbai...

[Long pause]

Basically, I have a hundred and fifty thousand lira which are approximately twenty thousand of your dollars...

[Long pause. To Sproll]

She says to me "Please sit down".

**Sproll:** She doesn't say "Please sit down" to you so fast.

**Tsingerbai:** But she does say "Please sit down"

**Sproll:** She doesn't say it. She's silent. She looks at you in silence.

**Tsingerbai:** Maybe now she turns around with her back to me?

**Sproll:** No. She looks at you in silence.

**Tsingerbai:** Looks interested, at least?

**Sproll:** Looks.

**Tsingerbai:** Anyway Gonzales, whatsisname, Manuel, pours me...

**Sproll:** Manuel's not there. He's gone in the house.

**Tsingerbai:** And she's just looking?

**Sproll:** Looking.

[Long pause. Tsingerbai turns again to imaginary Jane, tries to say something to her]

**Tsingerbai:** Basically, that's everything I have, a hundred and fifty thousand, which are twenty thousand of your dollars...and I...

[Pause. To Sproll]

Listen, when I convert my savings into dollars it's very unimpressive. I don't think she's interested in me.

**Sproll:** What makes you think that?

**Tsingerbai:** You'll agree with me that I'm not worth as much as her. I think she can see on my face who I am and what I am, what I have in life, and especially what I don't have. You won't turn a lira man into a dollar man. Oh, America, America. Of course if she'd been standing with her back to me I'd have jumped up and slapped

a big kiss on her bottom, and then, I'd either have been thrown out immediately, or I'd have penetrated through all her barriers with that wild act, and either way I'd have enjoyed a moment of sinking my face into a slice of sublime happiness. But with her face to me...I just need to say sorry, turn around and go back through the field to the main road.

**Sproll:** If I were you I'd try again.

**Tsingerbai:** No, I'm finished with her.

[Sproll stands up]

Where to?

[Sproll walks over to imaginary Jane, takes her in his arms, dances with her]

**Sproll:** Hi Jane, I am Shmuel. Life is really something, eh?

**Tsingerbai:** What are you two doing?

**Sproll:** Dancing.

**Tsingerbai:** Already?!

**Sproll:** Fact.

[To Jane]

And you know what, sweet Jane? A room has corners, but not love. Love has no corners.

**Tsingerbai:** You're sneaky, you are. I'd like to know your secret one day. How do you do it?

**Sproll:** [While dancing] You saw. I just come and take. Lightly, you just have to approach lightly. They like us light. They like us like butterflies. A bit hard. A bit indifferent. Not gushing. They go crazy for us when we're a bit bad and a bit hoarse. Take Jane for example. She's already asking me to stay for the weekend. Wants to introduce me to her parents. She's already thinking about me in terms of eternity. Believe me, her mother's also not bad, I could really go wild in this family. But I'm not staying here. Jane, she doesn't know yet, but I'm going.

[To Jane]

It was nice dancing with you in Texas this morning on the lawn next to your swimming pool...So long sweetie.

[Stops dancing, comes back to the bench and sits. To Tsingerbai]

You're left with Brenda.

**Tsingerbai:** Brenda?

**Sproll:** Brenda, her neighbour. Not far from here, also a villa, and corn fields. Brenda's blonde, rounder, smaller...

**Tsingerbai:** I'm a bit tired now...

**Sproll:** Do you prefer someone taller? There are lots of other girls in Texas.

**Tsingerbai:** I'm just a bit tired now. I've had a hard day. I'm going back to the main road. And I'm looking for a small hotel at the side of the road.

**Sproll:** Motel. All right, you've found a motel. You've gone in. Behind the reception desk there's a tall blonde Texan girl...

**Tsingerbai:** I told you, I'm tired, I've had a hard day, I want to rest.

**Sproll:** All right. Go up to your motel room, a fully air-conditioned room, and get into a soft bed, of course, not before you've bought an American magazine full of pictures of wonderful girls from Texas and California in the motel's kiosk, and you get into bed with it in order to browse and rub one out.

**Tsingerbai:** I told you, I'm tired.

**Sproll:** [Entreating him] Man, a bit of rubbing before falling asleep.

**Tsingerbai:** Do I need a magazine?

**Sproll:** For the pictures.

**Tsingerbai:** How much does it cost me, the magazine?

**Sproll:** A dollar ninety-five.

**Tsingerbai:** Thirty lira! I'll use my imagination to rub one out, thank you very much.

**Sproll:** Don't be silly.

**Tsingerbai:** I won't pay thirty lira for a magazine for rubbing! My budget only includes reality, and for rubbing - I'll rub using my imagination! Expenses, expenses, they immediately give me expenses! And the motel what, is it free?! I bet it's twenty dollars a night, minimum! You've gone mad! I'm not going to any motel! And this whole trip to Texas, you saw what happened to me, how I was received! Going all the way to Texas, a trip which has completely bankrupted me, in order to get lost in the sun in a corn field, to humiliate myself in front of an American girl with a sublime bottom and end up with a magazine in a motel?! No trip! I'm

cancelling the trip! This America will put me in the grave! I'm not going anywhere! Not Texas, not America, not anywhere in the world, not moving a centimetre from here! Not approaching new people, and don't want to meet new people, just like no one wants to meet me. Because everyone knows exactly what I'm worth, the whole world knows exactly exactly what I'm worth! And I'm not going to spend anything on someone like me, and definitely not dollars! I'm not going to waste dollars on me! And rubbing, please, I can do that here as well, in my own filth, it doesn't cost me anything, and I can get aroused by the moon, I've got as much moon as I want here! I'm sitting here and not moving, only here! In one little spot! And even shrivelled up! You hear me - shrivelled up!

[Exits]

**Sproll:** [Calls after Tsingerbai] You can shut your eyes and bury your head under a pillow for a thousand years, but it won't be any use. Out there, beyond your tiny little horizon, Texas still exists!

## Scene 12

[Evening. Berlow's flat. Berlow. Sproll enters. Addresses her like an imaginary woman]

**Sproll:** Hi Kathy. I am Shmuel. Life is really something, eh?

**Berlow:** Life-schmife. How long do the doctors give you?

**Sproll:** They're advising me not to buy next year's calendar.

[Pause]

What are your terms?

**Berlow:** You're late. Yohanan and I will remember you occasionally with sadness.

**Sproll:** The terms, Bella.

**Berlow:** You don't actually want me though, you've just come to say some nonsense, play a bit with the nipples and leave.

**Sproll:** I'm going to die, Bella. I don't want to abandon my entire stock to be lost in the vast expanse of the universe. I want to leave it to someone. I'm serious this time, Bella.

[Plays with her breasts. She strokes him]

**Berlow:** You were a charming man, Shmuel.

**Sproll:** The terms.

**Berlow:** I'm so glad you can't see me. At least you've gotten sick, a wreck: I've just grown old like a fool.

**Sproll:** Time's short: the terms.

**Berlow:** You give me the rubber.

**Sproll:** For how much a pack?

**Berlow:** For nothing.

[They both sing and dance]

[*Romantic duet*]

**Berlow:** Shmuel, you're about to die,  
Why not just give me the rubber,  
Your wife, who will inherit from you  
In a little while anyway?

**Sproll:** Bella, I'm about to die,  
Why not give me fifty percent,  
Your husband, who you will inherit from  
In a little while anyway?

**Berlow:** Shmuel, just because once, for a moment,  
you held a certain charm in my eyes,

**Sproll:** Bella, just because soon,  
I'll need a face to say goodbye to.

**Berlow:** And once, for a moment, you moved something in my heart,

**Sproll:** And soon, for a moment, I will need a sigh,

**Berlow:** And once, for a moment, I wanted you, just you,

**Sproll:** And soon, for a moment, I need an escort on my final journey.

**Sproll:** Soon for just a moment,

**Berlow:** For just a moment, once,

**Sproll:** Take this one-off opportunity,

**Berlow:** Take this one-off opportunity, Shmuel...

**Sproll:** Bella...

**Berlow:** Shmuel...

**Sproll:** Bella...

**Sproll:** Give me fifty percent,

**Berlow:** Take my arms,

**Sproll:** And take the rubber!

**Berlow:** And give me the rubber!

[Stops dancing]

With that I think we've said everything.

**Sproll:** We have.

**Berlow:** And this time there won't be another twenty years.

[Bursts into tears]

It was you I loved, I wanted you all along, I was waiting for you to come...so why...?

**Sproll:** I'll tell you. honestly, Bella: Giving away twenty thousand packs of excellent rubber - is something you can only do out of crazy love. And there wasn't any crazy love here. I haven't had any. Ever.

**Berlow:** No face to say goodbye to. No sigh. No escort on your final journey.

[Sproll collapses. Berlow bursts into tears again, but doesn't go to him]

Oh, Shmuel, Shmuel, if your soul's in heaven - and I can't imagine it would be anywhere else - please, pray to God for me and be an advocate for me, because how long do I have left to live, fifty-sixty years, tell him I haven't lived my life well, ask him to give me my designated serving of happiness now, not to wait until the last minute, and I also want you to watch over me from up there, Shmuel, keep an eye on all my movements, and if you see a ditch up ahead of me warn me, and tell them about me, the angels, tell them what kind of woman I am, not terrible at all, a woman who sold people medicine and offered a lot of love, why should she be to blame if nobody wanted it. And have them bring something for me, the angels, if they come down to us, I wouldn't say no to some kind of miracle, but I wouldn't mind also getting something the natural way, and I'd also like you to get in touch with my parents who passed away, tell them everything, tell them not to just sit there, to get up, do something, all of you do something, Washington thirty six, flat eight, do something for me, do something, do, do ...

[Exits in tears. Pause]

**Sproll:** [To himself] Evening falls on the graveyard. My first evening. All the widows, the gravediggers, the cantors have left. The birds are already sleeping. Quiet. Silence. Row after row we're lying, like children at camp, bed by bed, whispering in the dark after lights-out. What's going on outside, ask the veterans, what's the dollar at today? I tell them what the dollar's at. And what's the afterlife like, I ask. There is none, the veterans chuckle with their mouths full of dust, there is no afterlife. And the fruit trees, and the gardens, I ask, the whale, the banquets, the chorus of angels? Nothing, the veterans chuckle with their mouths full of dust, there are no banquets, no gardens, no angels. And resurrection, I ask, is there already a date? There's no date, the veterans chuckle with their mouths full of dust, it's all rumours, we're lying here and waiting, just lying. Hey, dead friends, I call out, don't stink here grieving, do you remember how, and not just once, we'd dream we were dying and suddenly, right at the last minute, we woke up drenched in sweat, each of us in his own bed, realising it had just been a dream? We'll wake up this time too, oh my friends, this time too, and even if it's a long dream this time. Yes, the veterans chuckle with their mouths full of dust, yes, only this time the dream's long long long and we're dry, dry, really crumbling, so dry. Hey, dead friends I call out, don't stink here grieving, it's Shmuel here coming to the grave with a sack full of condoms, if we're going to dream a long dream - let it be a wet dream. Oh friends, in Texas there are women buried next to corn fields and swimming pools and villas, buried in silver coffins, that's Texas, friends, and what bottoms they've got there stuck in the ground...Hey, do you see what I see? What do you see, ask the veterans, it's dark down here. Beyond the darkness, I say, do you see? Texas. The middle of Texas. A wonderful, wide graveyard, full of trees, flowers and beautiful marble gravestones - what gravestones, villas! - and in the very very middle underneath the biggest and most beautiful gravestone, in the ground - what rich soil! - lies a woman called Barbara inside a golden coffin. She was a wonderful, sporty Texan woman, what a wonderful bottom, large, full, spread out above you like the sky, now she's down here, lying on her back and waiting for us.

[He tries to get up, but can't. He crawls towards an imaginary girl]

Hi Barbara, I am Shmuel...A grave has corners, but not love. Love has no corners.

[He dances on his belly with imaginary Barbara, and crawls out]

### Scene 13

[Evening. Berlow's flat. Berlow in a night gown. Tsingerbai enters]

**Berlow:** And how's your Saturday been, darling?

**Tsingerbai:** Full of thorough preparations. The rubber's already spread and stretched in its place since noon.



[Berlow lowers her gaze to his trousers]

Don't worry, that whole area - burning flame.

**Berlow:** Just don't burn the cheque there.

**Tsingerbai:** Excuse me?

**Berlow:** The cheque. There's a cheque there in your pocket, right?

**Tsingerbai:** There is.

**Berlow:** I actually managed to have a short nap before you came. And I dreamed about you.

**Tsingerbai:** About me? Really? A nice dream by any chance?

**Berlow:** Nice and exciting.

**Tsingerbai:** Tell me?

**Berlow:** I dreamed you invested a hundred and fifty thousand lira in the pharmacy. You were delighted, I was delighted, this all happened in the Spring.

**Tsingerbai:** It's Spring now.

**Berlow:** Yes, it happened just now. The door opened, you came in, you put a greenish cheque on the table, and I kissed you on the mouth. A springtime sun warmed us both.

[Tsingerbai's face falls]

Do you think that dream symbolises anything?

[Pause]

Why are you so pensive all of a sudden? I just wanted to tell you my nice dream.

[Pause. Berlow stretches out on her back. He lays on top of her. He tries to get himself worked up. She tries to help him. He doesn't succeed]

You've always seemed to me like the kind of person who spoils happy occasions.

**Tsingerbai:** You don't know me. When I was a child, about nine years old, I spat out a joke. Don't know how, suddenly just like that, in front of everyone, a joke came out of my mouth. My mother and father and the guests laughed and laughed. I made them happy. That was the real 'me'. Everything that came before that

moment and after that moment at age nine - that's not me, it's a shell. And one day it'll fall away, and in front of your eyes you'll see a nine year old child telling a joke.

[He tries again, doesn't succeed]

Forgive me, I'm a failure.

[And since there's no response from Berlow]

Maybe I should go now.

[Gets up]

**Berlow:** [Leaping onto him] What are you talking about leaving! No one's going anywhere!

[Fondles and kisses him]

My Yohanan. My love, my dear! How could I go on without you?!

[Lays him down on the bed]

Ah, Yohanan, oh, Yohanan, what a kind of man! Silent, violent and aggressive like that! Such a silent tiger, ah, Yohanan! Ah Yohanan, jungle savage! Such a jungle savage! A tiger! From the bushes leaps a tiger kitty, to devour women in the city! A forest cat! A cheetah! A perfect cheetah! So glorious and silent, something outside civilisation, a prehistoric man, a rubber tree, a cheetah, a savage, a dark prehistoric impulse, a mammoth, a cheetah, a cheetah! A sleepy crocodile smells blood, gets up from the mud, devours a pharmacist and falls asleep with a thud.

[Lays on top of him and makes intercourse motions, moans and groans]

[*Yohanan, Yohanan*]

Ach, Yohanan, yes, Yohanan,  
Yes, Yohanan, oh, Yohanan,  
Like that Yohanan, good, Yohanan,  
Oh, Yohanan, yes, Yohanan,  
Good, Yohanan, oh mama, Yohanan,  
Great, Yohanan, carry on, Yohanan,  
Go on, Yohanan, yes, Yohanan,  
Oh, Yohanan, oh oh, Yohanan,  
Ach, Yohanan, yes, Yohanan.  
That's it, Yohanan, fantastic, Yohanan,  
Och, Yohanan, steel, Yohanan,  
Birthday, Yohanan, fantastic, Yohanan.

Yohanan, Yohanan, Yohanan, Yohanan,  
Yohanan, Yohanan, Yohanan, Yohanan!

**Tsingerbai:** Oh, someone's shouting Yohanan and Yohanan,  
As though Yohanan can save us from some threat,  
As though Yohanan can redeem a man,  
As though Yohanan, apart from a little sweat,  
As though Yohanan even can!

**Berlow:** Och och, Yohanan, bravo, Yohanan,  
Hold it, Yohanan, god bless, Yohanan,  
How you, Yohanan, platinum, Yohanan,  
There's no, Yohanan, life without Yohanan,  
That's it, Yohanan, whoops, Yohanan,  
Coming, Yohanan, whoops, Yohanan,  
One more step, Yohanan, that's it, Yohanan,  
Give it, Yohanan, hit it, Yohanan,  
All of it, Yohanan, come, Yohanan,  
Like that, Yohanan, show them, Yohanan,  
Och, Yohanan, what a, Yohanan,  
Och, Yohanan, what a, Yohanan,

Yohanan, Yohanan, Yohanan, Yohanan,  
Yohanan, Yohanan, Yohanan, Yohanan!

**Tsingerbai:** Oh, someone's shouting Yohanan and Yohanan,  
As though Yohanan can save us from some threat,  
As though Yohanan can redeem a man,  
As though Yohanan, apart from a little sweat,  
As though Yohanan even can!

**Berlow:** [With a rhythm which gets slower and slower after the orgasm]  
Yohanan - gentlemanan, Yohanan - biganan,  
Biganan - giantanan, deepanan - stronganan,  
Stronganan - firmanan, firmanan - sweetanan,  
Sweetanan - bubickanan, bubickanan - bubick,  
Mozambique, Zambezi, zumbi,  
Zoommmmm...bzzzzz...zzzzz...zebra!

[She gets up and detaches from him]

**Tsingerbai:** And I didn't even do anything.

**Berlow:** You did do, you didn't do - it was an incredible experience.

**Tsingerbai:** [Looks at his watch] In any case, we can fit in a film after all.

**Berlow:** What do we need a film for, we can watch the cheque.

**Tsingerbai:** Excuse me?

**Berlow:** The cheque, the cheque. We can sit and watch the cheque.

**Tsingerbai:** Yes. The cheque.

[Pause]

**Berlow:** Can't you hear properly tonight?

**Tsingerbai:** Why?

**Berlow:** I said, we'll watch the cheque. Yes, the cheque.

[He takes a cheque out of his pocket, but holds it in his clenched fist. Berlow reaches her hand out. He doesn't respond]

**Berlow:** [Grabbing his wrist] Well, what's going on? Excited?

[Strokes his fingers]

You're all sweaty.

[She tries to pry open his fist. He's insistent, pulls his hand back]

**Tsingerbai:** Hold on a minute. It's not simple. This money - it's me.

[To himself]

Too bold, too bold, it's too bold what I'm doing here. I'm not strong enough to give away such large sums all in one go. Bold, bold, it's a bold act, just the thought of it is turning me hot and cold. Shivers. I'm shaking, I feel like I'm naked in a storm. I don't believe in the life that I'll have from now on. I don't believe anything good will happen to me. I have a hundred and fifty thousand. And in a minute I won't. I think I have a temperature. No, I can't take this much daring. Maybe this course of action isn't right? Maybe a mistake? Maybe a betrayal? Maybe a hundred and fifty thousand lira are calling out to me now "Daddy, daddy!" and I'm plugging my ears, turning my back, abandoning them, discarding them, murdering young children?! Bold, it's a bold act, beyond the power of man, the hand's shaking, refusing to obey the murderer's commands. Go hand, go to Bella Berlow, give her the cheque, my son, my only son, whom I love, and may God forgive us for our sins, because here, in the vale of tears into which we've been thrown, the path to happiness is anointed with the blood of our meagre savings.

[To Berlow]

I trust you that it'll work out for me.

**Berlow:** You can be relaxed.

**Tsingerbai:** I'm relaxed. Will it work out for me?

**Berlow:** It'll work out very well for you.

**Tsingerbai:** [To himself] Of course. It'll work out very well for me.

[Holds the cheque out in front of him]

Goodbye - my life.

[Berlow snatches the cheque from his hand. Tsingerbai, shrivels up all at once as though he'd taken a blow to the stomach. To himself]

Aah! What have I done! A mistake! Suddenly it's so obvious: a mistake! It won't be good for me with her! She's cheated me! The second the cheque passed into her hand, the certainty hit me like a bolt of lightning: a mistake! A big fateful mistake! A second earlier I had had my doubts. A second earlier I still had the cheque in my own hand. If only I'd realised it was a mistake a second earlier! A second earlier everything was still different, here, in my hand, there sat a cheque, right here, in this hand, it's still warm from the touch, a cheque sat here and warmed itself up, all of life was still ahead of me...no, it's not fair for me to pay such a high price because of one second's delay! If I'd at least realised it was a mistake after a week, a day, an hour! A minute! But one second! No! It's not natural! Not natural! A man's not going to be made fun of! Not over one second! There's still some internal logic in our world! Not over one second! Not over one second!

[To Berlow]

It was just a second! Give me the cheque!

**Berlow:** What second?

**Tsingerbai:** It doesn't matter! Give me the cheque!

**Berlow:** What do you mean "give"?

**Tsingerbai:** No meaning! Just give! Give me the cheque and that's it!

[Berlow puts the cheque in her bra]

**Berlow:** What's happened to you?

**Tsingerbai:** Nothing. Nothing's happened. I've stayed the same. And you've stayed the same, and the love has stayed the same, and the sun and the moon have stayed the same, nothing's changed, just give me the cheque and that's it.

**Berlow:** The cheque will be put in the bank tomorrow morning.

**Tsingerbai:** No bank! No morning! Give me my cheque back! I want my cheque right now!

**Berlow:** The cheque's in safe hands, Yohanan, if that's what you're worried about.

**Tsingerbai:** I don't have any worries whatsoever, I told you I don't have anything, I'm happy and cheerful, I just want the cheque back!

**Berlow:** Yohanan...

**Tsingerbai:** Don't want to hear it! The cheque! The cheque!

**Berlow:** There's no cheque! The cheque's mine! You gave it to me out of goodwill ! Tomorrow we go to the rabbi, and look for someone to buy your fridge!

**Tsingerbai:** All right, we're going to the rabbi, we're looking for a flat, now I want the cheque.

**Berlow:** Or are you regretting the match with me?

**Tsingerbai:** No regrets and no regrets! First of all the cheque!

**Berlow:** You're not getting any cheque!

**Tsingerbai:** The cheque, the cheque!

**Berlow:** I said: no!

**Tsingerbai:** The cheque, the cheque!

**Berlow:** One more "the cheque" and I'm locking you in the bathroom, you cockroach!

**Tsingerbai:** The cheque!

[Tries wrestling with her again, she pushes him away]

I'm not going anywhere! The cheque! The cheque! I'll call the police! The fire department! So that they come with ladders and hoses! So that they save my cheque!

**Berlow:** Let them come, as far as I'm concerned the air force can come with helicopters! You won't get any cheque from me!

**Tsingerbai:** [Falls to the ground]

Don't have this on your conscience...I'm not very healthy...much less significant things have caused attacks...and if I get depressed, I might...

[Grabs her leg]

And you are a merciful woman after all...white gown, pharmacist...you're a woman with a heart and merciful...

[Berlow tries to free herself from his grip, he lies on his belly and holds onto her ankles]

Not just mercy...and not just heart...also understanding...a woman with character, strong...solid...and me...what am I...a small man...scared...small...a disgusting cowardly grey mouse...so worthless...no courage, no balls, and also not a man, you saw for yourself...no strength, no honour, no looks, no character...a kind of worm...saliva...dust...dust with a cheque...that's all I've got left in my life, the cheque...please, the cheque...throw me the cheque, my strong, kindhearted one...throw it to your dust, my kindhearted and understanding one...to your saliva...the cheque...the cheque...the cheque...

[While talking he kisses her shoes. With a gesture of revulsion Berlow takes the cheque out of her bra and throws it on the ground in front of him]

**Berlow:** Take it! Take the cheque!

[Tsingerbai lets go of her legs and pounces on the cheque giddy with joy - a hysterical wail. Berlow sits with her back to him and doesn't turn to face him until the end. He clutches the cheque to his chest, puts it in his pocket. Calms down very slowly. Gets up]

**Tsingerbai:** We can still make it to the cinema.

[Laughs with a happy heart]

I'm even inviting us to a restaurant afterwards. An Italian restaurant with wine. On me. We'll have a bit of fun tonight, why not. We deserve it.

[Pause. Sits next to her]

We'll go to the cinema in a nice taxi. What do you say?

[Pause. Gets up. Walks towards the exit. Stops. Comes back to her]

See you tomorrow?

[Pause]

The day after tomorrow?

[Pause]

One day?

[Pause. Sings]

It's as soft as silken thread,  
And as elastic as a lawyer's head...

[Pause]

Will you at least say a word of farewell?

**Berlow:** Throw the condom into the toilet on your way out before it spills onto my carpet.

[Tsingerbai grabs the fly of his trousers to stop the condom from spilling and turns to leave. At the entrance he stops, turns around]

**Tsingerbai:** Are you angry at me for not having largeness of spirit? Angry at me for not knowing how to give? Let those who have give. I don't have. And even if I do have - why should I give?

[Exits]

**Berlow:** [To herself] Like that moment back then in the comedy, twenty years ago, when the lights in the theatre had already dimmed, but the light on the curtain hadn't come on yet, and we sat in the dark, waiting in silence, all our expectations, all our dreams focussed on a single point in the darkness ahead; and then an old curtain creaked open, a feeble yellowish light rose across the stage, and three miserable people stood up there on the floorboards with some cardboard and rags, and droned on about our lives for two long hours, as though there was anything there we didn't already know.

**[End]**