

Prologue

*“And they made the plate of the holy crown of pure gold,
and wrote upon it a writing, like the engravings
of a signet: Holiness to the Lord.”*

Book of Exodus, 39:30

Though his lips trembled, he didn't stop nor did he have a change of mind. “And that's why...” he stated, “I think we need to separate.”

And at that precise moment, the familiar cypresses—whose green treetops had scraped the blue sky as they made love between the tree trunks; those same dense cypresses that had concealed them at noon as they devoured each other, those cypresses that had stood like sentinels every evening, forming a protective wall that shielded their youthful love that bred eternal secrets—now turned mournful.

Salty tears did not run down her cheeks, nor did she fall submissively to her knees. She looked at him with a sealed expression, and he couldn't decipher what her eyes were telling him. From the pocket of her flimsy, white skirt she pulled out a sealed envelope that had waited for this very moment. Without removing her gaze from his blue eyes, she handed him the letter which she had written and rewritten a dozen times and had repeatedly read again and again. He held the envelope in his hand as his eyes inquired as to its meaning, but she said not a word and started to walk away from him.

He watched as Melody Geva walked towards the rusty, yellow gate of the kibbutz. The bored guard, sitting in his run-down shack, greeted her as she entered the kibbutz and then disappeared among the old houses.

He remained alone, standing between the green cypresses, under the clear blue sky. After a moment, he sat down in the shade of the third cypress tree and leaned against its old trunk. He opened the envelope and read—from beginning to end—the words she had handwritten:

Eitan,

I'm writing down a bunch of words because I don't have the strength and certainly don't have the courage to say them to you directly. So I'm imagining that this sheet of white paper is your lovely face, and that your eyes are looking deeply into mine, and your gaze, as always, is talking to me silently, knowing me so well. I want you to know that from the moment we were together, there was not a single day—here or abroad, if alone or with others around me, whether I felt ecstatically happy or shed big, hot tears—that you weren't with me, experiencing my life with me and telling me about your life. Ever since we met, a shudder always ran through me (unnoticed by you) whenever your hands caressed my body. In the three years that we've been together I've had the good fortune to think that eternity can actually be real. You imbued my life with genuine significance and gave me back my lost childhood innocence. You chased the clouds away. You banished pain. You dispelled sadness. You filled me with hope. In short—you created happiness.

You know, just before writing this letter, I was going through our old photo albums. Once again, I tried to tell myself the impromptu story concealed within those flashes of life captured by the camera lens, a story that turned my life topsy-turvy, a story called 'Eitan.' I thought that the distance of time would lead me to a more mature interpretation of this complicated

story, I hoped that the years marked by the ravages of time would distance the childish outlook of a young girl in love, and I kept wishing that time, like a sensitive magnifying glass, would sharpen my sight and emphasize the flaws, the pain and the salty tears I had shed because of you. And, lo and behold, that's exactly what happened—I suddenly got very angry at you, and at myself as well, and then, finally, I was able to perceive the flaws and I recalled the pain and my eyes filled with tears, but none of these brought about the desired outcome... I still love you.

I don't know how our intriguing late-night talks became exhausting, how the touch of your caresses on my skin suddenly felt irritating, and how your once-strong pounding heart turned cynical and tired. When did we—no, when did you—become impenetrable and arrogant? These questions led me to call an emergency nocturnal meeting with myself that would end only when white smoke emerged. Smoke indeed emerged, but it was coal black.

I know now for certain—in a few more days, a few weeks at best, you will tell me that we have to talk. You will try to enhance its importance by determining that we meet by the water tower where I met your eyes for the first time, or under the shade of the third cypress tree at the entrance of the kibbutz where I first met your lips. I miss that kiss, you know. Its softness was surprising and I didn't see it coming. Ok, I lost focus there, sorry. Back to business. You won't tell me what really led you to reach your decision and you will pepper your explanations with boyish statements, such as—you miss being alone with yourself, you've forgotten who you are, you need quality time with yourself, etc.

When you finish your (carefully crafted) improvised speech, I will hand you this letter, whose ending alone will reveal its contents. Eitan, thanks to you I believe in love, but thanks to you I also know how painful it can be. All this is so hard for me; I can't bring myself to think of this as absolutely final. Only with you are things absolute. How come you're always so strong?

Damn you. A thousand times, damn you.

Deep down, I want to believe with all my heart that after a while you will want to return to me, but I won't be close by. I will live in some crummy apartment in south Tel Aviv and walk along its grimy streets each morning on my way to the office, alongside the rushing crowds. As if there are no worthwhile attorneys' firms up north. As if doing an internship outside of Tel Aviv is worthless. Honestly, I already long for the greenery of the kibbutz... the quiet... the main dining room... the wooden hut behind the industrial plant where we would make up after fighting... and our secret path to the roof of the mini-market, but especially—I already long for you. But I know that this isn't the right time to fight to save us. I know that you've already made your decision and you're just waiting for the right moment to say goodbye. This isn't a good time because, after this coming semester, I'll complete my law studies, leave the kibbutz, and move to Tel Aviv, and I've never believed in long-distance relationships.

That's why I'm not putting up a fight, that's why I've chosen to honor your wishes. I won't make a fool of myself and beg you to change your mind. I ask for no more than what the heavens have given and, if our future (apart) is written in the stars—so be it. We were together for three years, and every day with you opened a new vista in my life. But it's over now. You are withdrawing, you are asking to be set free, and that is exactly the purpose of this letter—it is a letter of release, Eitan.

Nonetheless, my love, if you don't mind, I want to propose the following suggestion:

Even if it isn't true, let's not think of our separation as final. Let's call it taking a break. Just supposedly, just kind of. Let's decide that we're taking time out, away from each other, the same span of time that we lived together. Eitan, let's take a three-year break during which time each of us will move on with our own lives. Where will you be three years from now?

Where will I be? Will we be apprehensive? Will we hurt? Will we remember and be filled with longing?

Look at your watch now. We will meet again right here in exactly three more years.

*Yours,
Melody Geva*

He folded up the letter with the same care that he had opened it. The third cypress tree at the kibbutz entrance cast its shade upon his back. He looked at his watch: October 8th, 10:30 am on the dot.