**Chapter One: Dad**

I want to stand on a giant stage that stretches to the ends of the earth and scream. I want the whole world to look and listen and pick me up and cradle me in its arms. I want my mother to take care of me. But not that mother. I’ve decided to take the stage. It is on that stage now I sit. The whole world is dark and quiet and listening to me. I have a story to tell. I am not telling it in retrospect. It isn’t over. I am living it as we speak. It has no end. Not a day goes by that I don’t think of ending it.

I was born in 1980, in Israel, in a small town called Ness Ziona. It was a quiet place. One story houses next to apartment buildings and lots of empty lots with nothing but sand. I loved, and I still love, free spaces. I lived there with my parents and my brother who is five years older than me. My mother, a native Israeli, was an English teacher. My father, born in Romania, was an electronics engineer. About two years before my birth, my father was diagnosed with Wegener’s granulomatosis, a severe autoimmune disease. I remember always loving him more than I loved my mother, and always asking myself if it was because he was sick and I knew he would die first. I don’t think that was the reason. I think it was because he was more patient. Even though he did once spank me on the bottom, and another time, he dragged me across the floor to the bathroom to brush my teeth after I refused to do it. But apart from that he was patience itself. He probably has nothing to do with all the stuff that came later, but I am angry at him. For knowing he wouldn’t be there, not all the way at least, and still bringing me into the world.

**Journal:**

Once upon a time, many years ago, I lived at home. I still live at home. More mine than ever.

What is a home?

Think about it.

While you were thinking, did you have a passing notion that a home necessarily means other people beside yourself?

That’s the kind of home I used to live in. It was mine. It’s still mine. According to the national property registry. The court granted it to me.

Back then, it was mine because I lived there with a mother, a father, and a brother.

At some point, this happened when I was eight, a “landline” was put in and then the telephone would ring. Today I make sure the landline is disconnected, unless I want to talk. Which doesn’t happen every day.

Back then, whenever I picked up the phone and one of my parents’ friends was on the line, their first question was: “How’s your dad?”

Boy, was that annoying. I never knew what words had to be uttered to get past this awkward and meaningless parts. What is there to say?

I don’t know if you know what the arm of a person on dialysis looks like. Once, when we came out of the elevator on the way to our apartment, his forearm, which was disfigured with horrible bumps, touched my mouth. “Yuck,” I yelped and ran inside to wash my mouth in the bathroom sink. I spent a good few minutes scrubbing my lips with soap. It probably hurt dad’s feelings, but he didn’t show it.

I’m sorry, dad, for being embarrassed of you. What’s embarrassing about a sick person? And I’m sorry I said yuck after your arm accidentally touched my mouth. I felt immediate shame but not enough to say sorry. The thought went through my mind but I couldn’t muster the courage. It ate away at me and, truth be told, it still does. And I’m sorry that your grave is in such a state and all the flowerbeds around, with the cacti and everything, show how little anyone cares about you anymore.

Weekdays were fine. I went to school, I did activities, I saw friends. But weekends were awful. We never left the house. Sometimes I would go with my best friend Tali and her parents to the beach in Tel Aviv, and then Saturday was more bearable. The drive would take hours because the roads would be jammed, and the whole way we would listen to the songs on Galey Zahal radio, munching on Bamba[[1]](#footnote-1) and grapes. Tali is a small girl with black hair and a pale, skinny body that looks almost skeletal. By comparison, my body is big and pubescent. On one of these trips, as soon as we got to the beach we ran into the water. The moment I dove in, a calm spread through my body and a smile alighted on my face. The sea was choppy; we battled the waves and came back exhausted, beating a path through the bathers. I noticed people looking at me funny, but I ignored them. I hate it when people look at my body. We reached Tali’s parents. Her mom was sitting on a large straw mat, her orange hair spread out over her shoulders, and her dad reclined on a plastic blue beach chair, reading the newspaper. He lifted his gaze from the page and also gave me a funny look, but didn’t say a thing. Tali’s mom motioned with her finger for me to look down. I lowered my eyes toward my body, which I always feel is too big. One breast was hanging out of my strappy black top. I quickly tucked it back in, dying of shame. A feeling of grave humiliation flooded my veins. I wanted to burry myself in the hot sand and never come back out into the world. That was one Saturday. But most Saturdays I didn’t go out of the house and spent the day in a sulky mood, waiting for Sunday.[[2]](#footnote-2)

When I was about nine years old, I started thinking about the fact that my father would die before the fathers of other kids in my class, but I still imagined that it would happen many years into the future. When I was little I loved to go to his bedside for a chat. If mom was angry at me, I would go to him for consolation. I wanted him to take me to kindergarten. I wanted him to make me a sandwich. In my first years of school, when I got moved to a lower math group, he sat with me until I made my way back into the higher group. On Saturdays he’d go with me to the “swing park” where I would swing for hours on end while he stood beside me. As I was coming up on ten, my dad started getting weaker and weaker, and we began to grow apart. He became more passive, and was no longer the dominant figure in the house.

All of my grandparents passed away before my birth or shortly after it. The only one of whom I have even the dimmest memory is my grandfather on my father’s side. He was sick. I’m not sure what it was, maybe Alzheimer’s. We would go visit him on weekends. He lived in a private house with a big yard. My father would pound loudly on the door, to let him know it was his son who was knocking. My grandfather never allowed us to go inside. He lived in his own house and we would sit with him in the yard. I’m not sure if he ever recognized my mother, my brother, or me, but he would talk to us. I remember asking mom what was wrong with grandpa. She told me he had “birds in his head,” and as a child I pictured my grandfather’s hollow head with birds circling inside.

At the beginning of fourth grade, the local activities center started offering a basketball class. As soon as I started, I was hooked. I set aside all my other hobbies and went to play basketball every day after school. I was an early bloomer and by then I was already pretty tall and strong. After a year, despite my young age, I was moved up to the teen squad. Basketball took over my life. I was playing on two teams, with four practices and two games a week. I didn’t want to sign up for any other activity because I wanted to do basketball every day. I dropped everything and became quite the little ball player. I was, of course, captain of my team and played all the positions. I stood out since, at that age, how many girls know their way around a court?

In sixth grade they brought in a new coach. The first practice we had with her she had us doing backward runs. I fell and broke my fall with my hands. I got up immediately, no one really noticed. But it hurt a lot. My hands were shaking. I went up to the coach and asked if I could take a break on the bench. It was maybe the first time I had ever asked to take a break during practice. But the new coach didn’t know me yet. She told me to go wash my hands and come back.

When I got home, I told mom about what happened. The next day we went to see the doctor. She felt my wrists; it was painful as hell, but I couldn’t tell her that. I didn’t know how to express pain, I didn’t know what it was to cry. She said if it had been anything serious I would have screamed by now. That whole week I couldn’t move my fingers. I couldn’t write, and I certainly couldn’t play basketball, but I went to all the practices and sat on the bench. After a week I insisted that mom take me to the doctor’s again. The doctor reluctantly agreed to send me in for x-rays. After that I was referred to an orthopedic surgeon who told us I had fractured both my wrists but it was too late to put them in casts. The worst of it was already over and it would get better on its own. I was disappointed. I want to have a cast, I wanted people to see I was hurt without having to tell them.

During the last two years of his life, as I was trying to disappear into basketball, my dad’s condition got worse. He was hospitalized and mom would spend all day with him, coming home only at night. She didn’t allow me to visit him. I went on with my daily life as usual. After school I would go to the upstairs neighbors’ for lunch, and my evenings were spent at the homes of my parents’ friends who lived nearby.

**Letter to Dad:**

Dear dad,

Hello!

How are you? I really want you to come home, even as soon as tomorrow. Don’t worry about food, I eat lunch every day at Malka’s and dinner at Haviva’s.

Esther buys fruit and vegetables for us. School is as usual, I’ve made a lot of progress in math.

Dad, you are very strong and very brave

And really nice despite your sickness

You don’t yell and you don’t ask for a lot.

Your loving daughter,

Moran

After a few weeks of this, mom agreed for my brother and I to go visit dad at the hospital. Before the visit, I showered, brushed my hair, and put on a blue T-shirt with a picture of Spiderman and white pants, so that dad would be proud of me. A close friend of my mother’s picked my brother and me up from the building lobby. I daydreamed the whole way there, picturing what life would be like after dad got his kidney transplant. I tried not to let the prickles of excitement get the better of me. The hospital was twenty minutes away by car. At the entrance, I saw ambulances, gurneys, and wheelchairs. I felt nausea bubbling up. I took a deep breath, trying to gain control over the bad feeling. We entered the main building and walked down some long, cold, and gray hallways. The smell of illness hung in the air. We were looking for Internal Block C. I was brimming with eagerness. I hadn’t seen dad in two weeks.

Dad lay in a hospital bed, his body strewn on the mattress, his face pale and his eyes closed. I asked mom if we could wake him up and she said he was being given medicine that made him sleep and he couldn’t wake up right now. A painful marble began to form at the base of my throat and my eyes began to sparkle, but I choked down the tears as hard as I could. I never cry in front of people. I stood by the bed for a few minutes that felt like hours. My mother and my brother went out on the balcony. My father reached his hand down and scratched his testicles. I was terribly embarrassed, I wanted to burry myself in a deep hole underground. Maybe it would have been better for me not to come.

A few weeks later he came home, very weak and in a wheelchair. I was mortified. I couldn’t stand that chair being in our home. My friends would sit in it and play around, but I couldn’t even touch it. There was nothing wrong with his legs, he was just too weak to walk or stand. Every time he needed to go to the bathroom, mom would have to lift him up from the chair and place him down on the toilet seat. These days, now that I’m in a similar state and need a wheelchair to get around, I keep it in a storage room outside the apartment.

**Journal:**

Lately, my dad has been saying that he’s a burden, that maybe it would be best for everyone if he committed suicide, that he just might take the Subaru and never come back. I think I know what suicide means, it’s when a person kills himself. But what does he mean? How does he plan to do it? Why does he have to drive there? He’s probably just saying that, he loves me, he wouldn’t leave me here on my own. A few days later I asked mom what suicide was. She said there’s no such word.

Dad stopped working and driving. A year before his death, mom stopped working too and devoted herself to taking care of him. His state deteriorated rapidly, his body was covered in open sores, he found it painful to even wear clothes. Every day mom would drive him to the hospital for dialysis treatments. Aside from these trips, he spent all of his time in bed behind a closed door.

He never complained. He was so restrained in his suffering. Sometimes he would call me from the other side of the door and ask me to get mom. Then, he would ask her for a glass of water. He never asked me. It made me angry. I told him he could ask me to get things for him, but he chose to keep everything close to the chest, just him with his pain. Sometimes I would wake up and find a note that mom had left on the piano: “Dad didn’t feel well during the night, we’ve gone to the hospital.” I don’t remember getting particularly upset or worried on such morning. I’d get dressed, pack my bag, and go off to school like any other normal day.

It might sound like a miserable state of affairs, but I was actually rather happy at the time. Things were going well for me. Scholastically. Socially. I was always “popular.” I don’t know, I was just a kid who loved life. As strange as it may sound, I was always that way, even after my dad died. I spent all day outside. One of the psychologists I’ve been to as an adult claimed that I didn’t want to go home. That it wasn’t a good atmosphere for me to be in. Makes sense, ostensibly. But I don’t think it’s true. I loved my family, but why would a healthy girl spend any more time indoors than she had to when outside there were other kids, swimming pools, bicycles to ride?

**Journal:**

It happened on Saturday. Friday evening I slept over at a friend’s, the girl in the apartment just above ours. The next morning I came down crying because the sheets I had slept in were stained with blood and I was too embarrassed to tell, so I came down to get mom. I came down crying, bawling like a little girl. I walked in the door. You were yelling. I never heard you yell or cry, but this time you were yelling. You were screaming all kinds of things in Romanian. You were supposed to get an insulin shot but you didn’t understand what was going on and you were freaking out something awful. I wanted to see you. I went to your room, wanting to come in, but I was afraid, afraid of you. I peeked in through the doorway, you looked back at me. I wanted to go and hug you and calm you down, but I froze. Your eyes were big and full of fear, like those of a confused little boy. I don’t know if you recognized me through those eyes, I think not. A few minutes later the ambulance came. Two or three men in white came up with a kind of chair. They tied you to it and then took you down via the elevator, and mom also went down with you. I went to the window to see what they were doing to you. They put you in the car and you, dad, you. . . you never came back.

My brother and I went to the video rental machine and brought back two movies. One of them, I’ll never forget, was “Rain Man.” My mother came back in the evening. I don’t remember if she spent the night at home or just came back for a few hours. I think she stayed home and just left there him to die, alone. At Kaplan hospital. I don’t blame her. I’m sorry for her that it turned out that way. It’s not fair, it’s really kind of nasty, putting it that way, but I don’t feel like taking it back. It doesn’t really matter. He had been pumped full of morphine anyway. In any case, that night, Saturday, before I went to bed, I went to their bedroom, the bedroom that was still theirs, and asked her if dad was going to die now. I knew the answer was yes. I wanted to hear different. “Let’s hope not,” she answered. Later, it came to light that it was meningitis. He had been complaining of really bad headaches over the preceding days, but the doctors didn’t catch it.

The next day mom didn’t wake me up for school. I woke up and heard her talking on the phone. I realized she was announcing the news. I got up and went to the living room, when, suddenly, I felt too weak to stand, and so I leaned on the counter and started sobbing, hard and loud. Later, my uncles and cousins came over. Then, all kinds of people came. Some good friends of mine, and lots of other people, as the day went on. My mood wasn’t so bad anymore, I’d recovered, or maybe I didn’t really understand. Most likely, I just wasn’t thinking. I went to pee, or something, and I passed by my brother’s room. His door was open and he was sitting there alone, his eyes terribly red, and it gave me a kind of jolt. I felt bad for not being sad, for not crying while he was. At some point we went downstairs and there were countless people, and I wasn’t at all sure all of them were there because my dad passed away. He was such a quiet, humble, introverted man, he didn’t have a lot of friends. Most of the time, he didn’t even bother to talk. I never thought that many people knew him, knew us. Many of them didn’t even recognize me as a “guest of honor.”

I was chewing gum. Arik, the taylor, came over to me and said it was disrespectful to chew gum on such an occasion. I through the gum into the garbage. But it annoyed me. My father died today, let me at least chew gum in peace. At the cemetery there were even more people, and I thought there must be another funeral going on, they couldn’t have all come here for my dad.

March 8th, 1992, was an overcast day. A thin rain dribbled intermittently. I remember what I wore—my dad’s sweater. It wasn’t even too big for me. My father had become so small. We parked at the entrance to the cemetery and waited for all the people to come. I leaned on the car. I hadn’t really cried, but my eyes were red. Almost all the girls from my class were there, even those who weren’t close friends of mine. The funeral itself wasn’t that hard on me. At first, we stood at the entrance and the *hevra kadisha[[3]](#footnote-3)* people said their prayers. Dad was laid out on a gurney, covered in a white sheet, so small. Mom cried a lot, she could barely stand. My brother too. I couldn’t cry with all those people around. When the ceremony was over, we walked to the burial plot. We stood there for hours. The rabbi said some more prayers and, at some point, they tossed my dad into the pit.

At the *shiva*,[[4]](#footnote-4) everybody bugged me. I wanted to be alone, but kids from my class kept coming over. Even those who weren’t my friends. One kid said to me: “Come on, Moran, cry, how come you’re not crying? I want to see you cry. Cry already.” My room was full of kids, the living room, too, was teeming with people, and I just went to my parents’ bedroom, lay down on the bed, on my father’s side, and tried to cry. It bothered me so much that there were so many people in the apartment. I wanted them all to leave, so I could cry for real.

The team that I captained had an important game during the *shiva* and it was important for me to go, but mom wouldn’t let me. I knew it was just because “it wouldn’t look good” and there was no real reason behind it. It really pissed me off. Wasn’t it **my** father who’d died? Shouldn’t I decide what I can and cannot do about it? How can anyone else have the right to tell me how to behave?

My dad died on a Sunday. The following Saturday morning I went into the shower. I stood under the stream of scolding water for a long time. The whole bathroom filled with thick steam. Eventually I felt weak, the picture before my eyes blurred and then turned black, and I heard strange bleeping in my ears. I passed out. I fell back and hit my head. My mother was in the kitchen with a friend of hers, who asked what was that thud. Mom told her it was probably just a door slamming. Still, they got up to check and found me. They wrapped me up in some towels and carried me to bed. My father died twelve days before I turned twelve. A few days later, a relative gave me a present: a thick book and a journal. I started writing.

**Chapter Four: The Ground Trembled**

At the age of twelve, around the same time that Itzik entered my life, I signed up to be a member of the Nature Protection Society and began going to meetings. I liked the weekly outings and the new friends I made there. We became a tight bunch, spending our lunch breaks together, meeting up in the evenings and lighting bonfires, going to the beach. I’ve always loved being outside, in nature, and now I was becoming a serious hiker. We would venture out on all kinds of arduous journeys of dozens of kilometers a day—mountain climbing, treks where we would carry all of the gear on our backs. Once every few weeks I would go out on a hike that required overnight camping.

**Journal:**

It was a cold night, I snuggled with Matan under the sleeping bag. We huddled together for warmth. Suddenly, Shir came over and asked me if I wanted to go pee. I went with her. We peed, and then she said she thinks I shouldn’t let Matan hug me that way because we’re just friends. It would be different if we were in love, but we were just friends, she said. We were just lying there, holding each other, with our clothes on, with no particular touching, under the sleeping bag. I thought to myself, I’ve already been touched, like all over, so what does it matter?

I told Shir I didn’t think it did any harm, but she said I shouldn’t let anyone touch me anywhere, except the person I really love. I told her I thought it was a pretty childish attitude, but still, the moment she said it, some fuse was lit in my heart.

I didn’t go back to Matan, I went to sit alone by the fire. I felt all my strength leaving me, as if this was it, the ground had been pulled out from under my feet, even though I was literally sitting on the ground. I was agitated, I couldn’t sit still, I felt like I had to tell her that all those places had already been touched, and that it doesn’t matter, but I was afraid. I was afraid to tell her who touched them, and I was even more afraid to tell her that I enjoyed most of it. I was scared that if she knew, she wouldn’t want to be my friend anymore.

I sat and stared at the flames, feeling like I was about to explode, feeling like I had to tell her. At the same time, I knew that I had to think it through, because afterward, there would be no denying it.

I made myself get up and I asked Shir to step aside with me.

“Shir, listen, I need to tell you something related to what we were talking about earlier, something big.” I didn’t know how to tell her. Because I too, for my part, had wanted all those things Itzik did to me. I too came and asked to be touched, I played along, I cooperated. And so I decided to broach the subject as delicately as possible. “It’s about Itzik,” I said, as an opening, just a general statement, but she immediately burst out crying, because she knew. And when she did, so did I.

I told her bits and pieces at first, I was embarrassed to tell her everything and I was afraid she wouldn’t want to talk to me anymore. The whole time I emphasized that I’d enjoyed it and that I’d wanted it. I told her that he would kiss me with tongue, and that the hickeys on my neck were from him. I also told her that I’d touched his cock. Because he’d wanted me to, but I agreed. That’s how I saw a dick get hard, for the first time, his dick, he showed it to me. Finally I told her that he also licked and sucked my nipples. I told her it wasn’t like all those stories in the papers, because I’d wanted it too, and I enjoyed it. I asked her what’s wrong with that. She said she doesn’t know, but that there is something very wrong about it, something we don’t understand yet. She said that we had to stop it, but I said that I thought I was addicted, it felt so good, is it wrong for sure? How can it be? After all, it’s not like he doesn’t love me. And if he loves me, why would he want to do anything to hurt me? She said she can’t really say why it’s wrong. But it’s wrong. I made her swear not to tell. She said she wouldn’t, but that if he tried again I should tell her. I told her I was scared that if she knew she wouldn’t want to be my friend anymore. She said, on the contrary, she would only be a better, closer friend. I told her I couldn’t stop all at once and we agreed that, for starters, I wouldn’t touch his cock and he wouldn’t touch my breasts anymore.

We went back to the group. From there on in, the trip became a nightmare. I don’t remember what happened at the end of the night, but Matan was convinced it was all to do with him. On the way back I mulled over my plan of action, whether I should tell Itzik today, or wait until tomorrow. I knew it would be late at night when I got back and that would be bad timing. Not only that, but if he noticed my eagerness to tell him right away he would suspect that I’d talked to someone about it. He never told me not to talk, but it went without saying. Unfortunately, I’m the kind of person that has to reveal the whole truth right away, otherwise, I feel like I’m lying.

I got home just before midnight. I couldn’t keep it inside. Today, all I do is keep. I told him I needed to talk to him and then pronounced the statement I had rehearsed in my head—“I don’t want you touching my breasts and I don’t want to touch your dick anymore.” He asked who I’d been talking to. I swore it was no one, that I’d just thought of it on my own.

The next day, when he came home from work he said he’d decided that from now on he wouldn’t even give me a peck on the forehead; it was all or nothing. I asked why. He said he didn’t know what I’d go telling afterward, and I replied that I’d never say anything, because I love him and don’t want to hurt him. That part turned out not to be true. That is, I did hurt him.

It’s very hard to say no. I knew that was what I had to do, but what if I was really left with nothing? No sign of affection whatsoever? I “slept” on it, even though it was clear to me what I needed to say, but I was afraid of losing him. In fact, I’d probably lost him already.

The next morning I told him: “nothing.” That night the two of them tried to convince me that I did, in fact, want it to go on. Mom asked: “Who did you tell?” and then added, “No one watching from the side can know what it’s like, we’ve got something special here that no one except us can understand, but we know it’s good, he loves you like a father. It’s not like all those stories in the papers.” I insisted.

I spent the next three months living with mom and Itzik. He tried to “mess around” with me a few more times. At first I would just freeze, but later I began to resist. It was hard for me to fight it, but I asked him to stop. He stopped, and our relationship soured. Itzik wouldn’t talk to me. Mom wouldn’t talk to me either. There was no middle ground. Either I let him touch me, or this was how it would be from now on, the silent treatment.

**Journal:**

Yesterday, I went to the video rental store, I picked out a few movies and went to the counter. I pulled out the rental card because I don’t remember the number, and I don’t want to remember. The checkout girl was young, maybe only a year older than me.

She looked at the number and read his name out loud, Itzik… in a funny sort of tone, with a smile. Then she said: “Say hi to your dad for me.” I told her: “He’s not my dad.” There was a silence. After a few seconds, she said: “Well, say hi anyway, okay?” I replied: “No.”

It hurt to hear her refer to him as my “dad.” Not because she thought the bastard was my father, but because I myself longed to call him that, “dad.” I called him dad only once. It’s hard to think about. It makes me hate myself and fill with disgust. I was so naïve and so blind. The thought of it twists my insides and makes me cringe. I have moments of this kind of self-loathing. It comes in small waves. There was a time when it didn’t use to.

**Chapter Twenty: The Final Chapter**

**Journal:**

Hello. I feel terrible. I really hope Yochai can turn my writing into something. Anything. I relinquish the right to any specific demands. And if not him, then someone else. I, in all likelihood, won’t have the time to open every document and decide what’s right and what isn’t, let someone else do it. There are probably lots of files that no one apart from me should open because they won’t reveal anything but the most personal and intimate details that I would perhaps prefer to remain unknown.

Still, it’s important to me to keep writing each document as if no one will ever open it. As if it’s only mine and no one will ever see it if I don’t give them permission. There is no other way for me to write. It’s a kind of contradiction: I want to make some kind of complete work out of these documents, one that would be worthy of its readers. But I also want my “virginal,” primal writing, writing that comes directly from feelings, thoughts, ruminations—I want to leave it pure. I want to keep writing from myself to myself. I don’t want to put on a façade.

My capacity for movement is very limited. It’s hard to explain. Every motion adds to the pain and the rigidity and the cramping and the stiffness. I can only keep my body in a seated position for so long. Not to mention keeping my shoulders upright and tapping on you, letter keys.

In order to keep going, I’ve realized that I have to do something every day toward reaching my goal. Accompanied suicide. That’s the goal. There is no other way. I am the only person in charge of running my life. That is, if I don’t end up wallowing in my own stench and drugged out of my mind in a home not fit for human habitation. It’s one or the other. I barely go outside. I have no air. I would rather be a hunter-gatherer rather than Moran Vorenshtein, born in the twentieth century. I would have preferred not to have been born. I want to take some pills and go to sleep. I ache. My soul aches. I have to provide as best I can for every single layer in the pyramid of Moran’s needs, but I don’t have the physical strength to do it. The laws of physics make it impossible. Yet, Moran has to do it, otherwise her misery will grow and she will never reach her goal.

I am Moran. I am a person, just like everyone else, and there are things that make me unique. I used to have a passion, and a desire, and a curiosity to do everything there is to be done. And it’s still here, that passion. And it hurts. And it throws up its hands, because it can’t.

On February 4, twenty-four days ago, I opened a new document. I have to write a personal letter to Dignitas.

**Journal:**

I gave up writing a long time ago.

Not because I didn’t need to write, not because there was nothing to write about. But because my body aches so much that I have no more resources for anything. The only thing left is the slow crawl, or if I succeed, the sprint toward oblivion.

It’s been seven years since I wrecked it, my body, but up until a year ago it was still possible to live with it. No more.

Back then, I had wanted to die. I didn’t die, but I was gravely injured.

I recovered, somewhat, from my injuries. In truth, my recovery was good and quick.

I’ve lived seven and a half difficult years since then, but I’ve fought every day to feel better.

A year ago my body began to deteriorate to the extent that I am now constantly in intolerable pain. So I quit.

I’m in Shalvata hospital since Friday. Today’s Tuesday.

Yesterday I sent a text message to Dr. Kron, which read:

I’m crying; I’m really really sad that it’s this hard for me to go; it’s hard that this is how things have ended up; that this is the way things stand; that I’ve been deprived of the option to choose between life or death. When I jumped, I was filled with unequivocal certainty. Things have changed since then. The fact is that I cry and cry over my intention to end my life.

I’m terrified that Dignitas will say no. In my estimation, my “case” has a good shot of getting through.

But when their doctor “examines” me, looks me over, my overall appearance might be my downfall. And that would be worst of all. Because then I would have to try to die on my own. Of course there’s no point in dwelling on it. Obviously I should just try. And if…then…

It tears my heart in a way I don’t know how to put into writing.

The sadness is unmitigated and I can’t contain it, I’m becoming suicidal. And so I need supervision. That’s why I’m here. But I’ve got no choice, I have to gather up my strength and leave this place. The pain is bad, whether here or at home. That will probably always be a given, wherever I go, so long as I am.

But there are a few other “advantages” here: supervision, I see people and I communicate with them.

In the room with me is a sixty-seven year-old woman who looks quite a bit older in many ways. Oh, why sugarcoat it, she looks old. She’s got Parkinson’s disease. Ninety-eight percent of the time she looks terribly miserable and helpless. She’s constantly asking for help, even with things she can do on her own. I’m saying this without any judgment. There can be no judgment in matters like this. She’s in an awful state. It really is sad. She tells me she’s having a hard time, she’s not all there in the head, I don’t know what the problem is exactly. But from my very limited acquaintance with her, I look and I see a woman who, as far as I can surmise, has lived her life. She’s brought five children into the world. She’s worked in education. And now, it’s drawing to an end.

She walks hunched over at a very slow pace, and that looks normal and acceptable to me. It doesn’t look normal and acceptable to me that I should live in a pitiful physical state that will probably never get better. It will probably only get worse, somehow, with all those serious injuries that, let’s face it, haven’t healed. And all those “degenerative changes”—they don’t seem to spell out a bright future.

This morning, I asked my roommate: “You like me a little, don’t you?”

And she replied: “Why just a little?”

Some hardships that are worse at home than they are here. There’s the fact it’s difficult for me to take care of myself. That it’s difficult for me to handle everything. That’s I’m lonely. If only I could see friends, let’s say, twice a week, for two and a half hours each time, it would be a whole different world. If only someone would ask me once every ten days, Moran, what do you need, and then help me with those errands. Shopping, take the car in for a check-up, get my legs waxed, whatever. Taking into account my physical and mental state combined, I can no longer do everything on my own. I need face-to-face communication with people who love me.

**Journal:**

Yochai was here Monday and he said he thinks I can find a way to live with the pain. He also said, “Okay, you’re probably never going to be one hundred percent healthy.” That hit me just now, I remembered it the whole time, but now it hit me, when I went out for a short walk to get my body moving a little.

I don’t want to be someone who will never be healthy. I suffer intense pain every moment that I am awake. Forgive me, or actually, don’t, but I don’t want to live that way. That hit me and I started crying. A little, because I was outside.

And to you, Mr. Yochai, do you have any idea what it would be like to never be healthy again? To spend your life struggling to brush your teeth and wash your face? I, as you know, was born to a father who was already ill with a severe autoimmune disorder and I grew up with him dying before my eyes over the course of twelve years. But I had not even a tiny shred of an idea. Even when I saw him sitting on the lip of the tub, throwing up, and even in the last two years of his life when he was covered in open sores that left bloody stains on the pillows and sheets.

Is that the kind of life you wish for me over the option to get out?

To: DIGNITAS,

P.O Box 17, 8127 Forch, Switzerland

Date: 09/08/2015

Dear Dignitas,

My name is Moran Vorenshtein, thirty five years old, unmarried and with no children. I am requesting assisted suicide from Dignitas […]

**Journal:**

Now that, with great hope and yearning, I’ve officially sent in my request for assisted suicide, it gives validity to the thought that, some things, if I don’t do them today, they will never come into being. And so, I say a big thank you to judge Amiram Binyamini.

For three days we attended, him and I, the same courtroom hall, amidst other attendees. He, the judge. I, the plaintiff. The experience I was granted over those three days, the role of the judge in the dynamic that formed there between the constellation of attendees and in the written opinions, was mighty and benevolent. I remember, or at least I think I do, Amiram Binyamini’s body language, or mainly the way I interpreted it, which was later corroborated by the opinions. Maybe this way I’ll manage to give him my thanks. At the very least, I’ve put it down in writing and stuffed the message in a bottle.

**Journal:**

So I’ve started to go over my writings. I came across things I’d written about Dr. Kron and I wanted him to hear them. I thought they might do him good. I called him. He didn’t answer. While I was opening my email to send him the extracts, he called me back. We chatted. In the end, I only read out a small portion. There was a silence, and I had the distinct feeling that the party on the other end of the line was having some difficulty. I blew out a loud puff of air on the receiver, just like I do to animals when I want to provoke them into responding. That didn’t work. I waited a couple of seconds and then asked, “Are you there?” I also asked if I should keep reading. The answer was no. And then, after another ten or fifteen interminable seconds, Dr. Kron said: “That brought me to tears.” I made sure to remind him that I was sticking to the idea of dying only because of my physical condition. That didn’t help; he said he’d failed. That he wasn’t able to make me want to live. After our conversation I felt terrified. A tremor went through me, as if I’d suddenly realized that I was going to do a horrible thing. But it’s the least horrible of the available options.

Dr. Kron, I’m sorry it turned out this way.

**Journal:**

I’ve made more than a few attempts to find God. They happen when I’m lying in bed, for hours, twisting in pain and wondering. Before this terrible epoch of bodily affliction, I didn’t believe there was anything beyond. Like a good scientist, I thought the moment life ends and there is no more production, transfer, and absorption of matter, nothing remains.

Today I felt the beyond. Without a doubt. It found a foothold and struck root. There is something that might not die along with my body.

I’ve taken a shower, the first one in two days. I’ve sat down on the balcony, which I was deprived of for almost a week until now. The sea, I can see it resuming its calm after a storm. Closer to the coast, the turquoise color changes to a brownish green. At last, the sun is out and the sea is no longer black. It takes advantage of the sun and adorns itself with this gorgeous hue.

And everything is okay. Really. My hair is gathered in a bun above my head. I was very pretty in the mirror. This morning I woke up with the following sentence prodding at my thoughts: “Today I am cleansing my soul; today I am cleansing my soul.” For the first time in my life, without trying, not consciously at least, I felt it. It’s there, my soul. It exists. Inside me it is tortured, but I think it could thrive somewhere else. If it isn’t mangled too much beforehand.

This morning I got my period. Almost two days earlier. Usually it comes a few hours early, twelve at most, that’s how clockwork it is, and it’s amazing how the body doesn’t give up when it comes to this one thing, it keeps going. Yes, you can get a new person out of this reproductive system—but Moran’s genes will not be carried on down the line.

God, please, whoever you are, whatever you are, I am looking for a source of inspiration and I know that never ever, under no circumstances whatsoever, must I try to find it in people. That’s a recipe for disaster. I’m not saying that I shouldn’t communicate, share, converse with people, but I mustn’t look to them for any sort of salvation. Because it won’t come. It can only come from within me. But where can I look within me? Everything is full of pain and chaos. It’s better to turn to God than to any specific human being. Because God resides somewhere here, inside me among other places. And I need to connect with him or her. There is no other way.

Solace, let me find you. Come to me. It pains me to sit here on a chair out on the balcony.

**Journal:**

Entire days go by without me saying a word to a human being. I can’t hear my own voice. Entire weeks. Once every four days, at most, a short phone call. Empty of content. I don’t see my friends’ faces. Loved ones’ faces. Only those of strangers. Among them “familiar strangers,” people who work in particular places.

For the last day and a half I’ve been feeling slightly better and I am in a total panic—do I die or do I keep living? One of my fears: how do I go back to being friends with my friends? I am sitting on the balcony, hearing other people’s voices. A shrill laughter repeatedly sounds in the distance. Will my world ever touch that of another?

**Journal:**

I lay in bed picturing the moments after I swallow the cup of barbiturates. It’s important that I have someone I love next to me. I must see a loved and loving face before I go to sleep.

Since waking up today, and that was a while ago because I was wide awake at three in the morning, I keep having visions of my loved ones’ faces around my grave. I feel really guilty toward them. My mother is not there, I am now suddenly noticing.

It’s a simple gravestone, as simple as can be, and a handful of my friends, along with various other people who care about me, are standing there, their faces—they all wear different expressions. But they all know that this was my wish.

The sadness is for themselves. And for my life—the one that once was, the one that’s been lost—but they have no reason to feel sad about my death. Finally it has all come to an end.

**Journal:**

A dream: mom and I are going to visit dad. Now. At my current age. He didn’t die after all but lives in some kind of institution—he’s been very ill for many years and that’s why he’s there. It’s totally him. A spitting image. The same voice, weakened by illness, the same hands, his wide palms.

At some point my mother and brother exit the room and I’m left alone with you, dad. I tell you about all the things Itzik did to me and about mom’s reactions. I sit on your bed, you’re covered in a rough, brown, somewhat gross woolen blanket. At some point I discover that I’m topless, but you don’t say a word on the subject. Then I am bottomless too—completely naked. You’re not aware of it because I’m somewhat covered up by the blanket. You’re lying in bed and I’m sitting between you and the wall. After a while, I get up out of bed and put on a pair of underpants and you say to me angrily: “Hey what are you doing with your pants off? You don’t think that you can have what you had with Itzik here with me, do you?!” You’re really mad and I ask you to forgive me and not to be angry with me, I say sorry in a little girl’s voice and you’re furious with me for acting like a little girl. I say sorry over and over, standing with my back to you and getting fully dressed; I even put on a bra, to be really proper.

I leave the room and go downstairs. I’m afraid that I won’t know how to find you again, how to get back to you. I know that I have to get to the fourth floor. When I get there I find out that you’ve hurt yourself. I think that you are going to die, but mom says that you’ve only wounded yourself and they’ve taken care of you.

We knock on your door and you reply “No,” and I say: “Dad, it’s me,” and you give me permission to enter but then you see mom and you say: “What are you doing here?” in a tone that indicates you’re not interested in seeing her anymore. I tell mom that I told dad about Itzik. Then she says that I’ve told you only half of it, that I didn’t tell you that I wanted it, that I asked for it, begged for it. You throw her out. Then you ask me in a grave voice: “What do you want?” as in, “What do you want? Can’t you see you’re not welcome here either?” and I say that I thought maybe from now I could come visit you sometimes, maybe we could set up a regular day for weekly visits, I’ve got a car now and I can come see you whenever I want.

I wake up.

I broke off contact with my mother in 2007. We haven’t spoken to each other for a decade, and we never will.

There are very few people who are strong enough to care for, and to support, and to be there for a girl who is completely tired of life. Most of you are afraid when you hear that I jumped out of a window, that I slit my wrists. Many of the close friends I had have lost touch. I’ve never been mad at them. I’ve always understood how tiring it must be to be friends with this depressed creature who just can’t be helped, which is so frustrating because she’s so “smart and beautiful and talented”… And instead of getting on with it she just tries to kill herself again, burns herself again, gets herself into hospital again, and now I am a little angry all of a sudden. I know you can’t be friends with someone if you no longer feel the friendship in your heart, but now, as I try to make the public aware of how important it is to give undying, unyielding, tireless, immediate, loyal support to the victims of life—I suddenly feel outrage.

I went to a new family doctor. She swiped my magnetic card and, squinting her eyes, began to read the long list on the screen. Then, the regular question: “So, did you have an accident?”

Since she didn’t look like someone who would take kindly to jokey hints, I just went ahead and said it as dry as can be: “I jumped from the fourth floor.” From that moment on she wouldn’t look me in the eye. And she didn’t ask any more questions.

So when you catch yourself acting that way, know that, even without meaning to, you are cancelling out the person before you, as if people who try to kill themselves don’t exist. When you ask me what happened to my leg and I answer with the simple truth that I burned myself with a lighter, it’s okay if it’s shocking or upsetting, but those of you who look at me funny, know that you are ignorant, or cowardly, or maybe both. And don’t pull away. I’m human just like you. I’ve just been hurt more. And that can happen to you too. It can happen to your daughter. To your granddaughter. To your niece.

A girl who’s been hurt in her own home, if you take her away from there immediately, if you put her in a different home and give her everything she needs, maybe she will manage to escape the hell I live in. Your fear, your ignorance, and your aversion only make the damage worse, and then you act shocked when you hear about a fourteen year old who took her own life. “For no reason.”

Embrace me to your bosom, to your heart. Not once. Not three times. Always. To the end. Because my pain will be with me to the end. And you, you mustn’t be afraid.

1. A popular peanut-flavored puffed corn snack. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Israeli work/school week starts on Sunday. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The Jewish burial society, the sole officiators of Jewish funerals in Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. The week-long mourning period, a Jewish funerary ritual. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)