**Onyx Eyes by Eshkar Erblich-Brifman**

**Translated from Hebrew by Yael Assouline**

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The playground was bustling with kids in this afternoon hour in October. The wind undid her black hair and wound through benches and new iron facilities carrying golden autumn leaves with it, like a wool scarf twisting in the distance. The one thing that cannot be controlled yet. It will be soon enough. Laughter reverberated in the air. Worried mothers chasing red-nosed toddlers; most of them carrying colorful plastic food containers, which are naturally compostable, containing genetically-modified vitamin-enriched soy-based fruits, cut into perfect little squares, attempting to stuff their kids’ small mouths with mashed pieces of fruit. A few fathers were sitting on benches spread around the park, with one eye trained on the kids milling around the facilities, the other stuck to their touch screen. Other fathers coached their sons in flying small kites attached at their ends by a string no longer than three meters and securely attached to the wrist. This is what the new regulations dictated. A longer string, or one that was not secured properly, might get tangled up in the electricity lines and cause a disaster.

Two safety inspectors were leaning up against the big artificial elm trees that encircled the playground. One of them was talking into his multi-sensory device. It was the recently launched ‘Passionfruit’ model. One of the inspectors was munching on a baked soy snack from a recycled paper bag that rustled each time he shoved his oily fingers in. He wasn’t supposed to eat while on duty, and three mothers sitting on a bench nearby scowled at him with dissatisfaction. After all, he is meant to safeguard their kids and protect them from any harm.

Onyx sat on one of the benches and attempted to minimize her presence as much as she could. She examined the nearby kids with her big, incredibly dark eyes. Her workday was done, and on her way home she stopped at the playground, just like she did every day, carrying leftover bread for the pigeons. A pleasant feeling of fatigue slowly spread through her limbs, first through her feet, then her calves, and lastly her thighs. She wondered if she’d be able to get up. Her long slender fingers felt their way inside the brown paper bag for the greenish bread and broke small pieces off it. A sour smell rose from the bag, the smell of suki bread. Her face twisted in disgust. Suki was known to be a nourishing and cheap grain, but its taste was vastly inferior to the taste of wheat. She tasted wheat bread only a handful of times throughout her life, during festive meals or extravagant parties.

Now she threw the bread down at her feet. Six faded pigeons landed nearby and cooed melancholy sounds at her. Six pigeons! Her dark eyes brightened, six pigeons at once! No doubt fortune smiled on her today. She remembered that Simon once told her about the times when he was a child, and the sky would be completely covered with pigeons. He described to her how he would stand in the heart of Anderson square and spread breadcrumbs everywhere, of real bread, from wheat and not suki, and how countless pigeons would immediately land, cooing all around him, climbing on him legs, his arms, his head, pecking the breadcrumbs. She smiled and tried to imagine the feeling for herself but failed. For her, six pigeons were a whole flock.

“Excuse me, ma’am.” A male voice infiltrated her thoughts.

“Yes?” Onyx shook herself back to reality.

“What are you doing here, if I might ask?” It was one of the two inspectors, the one with the baked soy snack.

“Oh… I…” Onyx stammered, “I am just feeding the pigeons, as you can see.”

The inspector nodded. “You know if there are any crumbs left, you’d have to pick them up, yes?”

“Of course,” Onyx replied, “but there are never any crumbs left. The pigeons are always hungry, and today there are six here, so there is no chance for anything to be left over.”

“Indeed,” as he looked at them, “six is a remarkable number.”

Onyx smiled politely and resumed feeding the pigeons.

“Are you here alone?” The inspector examined her, “I mean, do you have a child here?”

“A child?” Replied Onyx distractedly, “Eh, no… At least I don’t think so…” She added in a low voice.

“You don’t think so?” The inspector tensed up.

Onyx realized how this might be interpreted and hurriedly added in a loud and sure tone, “no, sir, I do not have a child here,” she looked straight into his eyes. They were grey and devoid of any emotion.

“I see,” said the inspector and passed his fingers over his lips, which were decorated with soy snack crumbs.

“Is there a problem?” Onyx asked.

“It’s just that this is a kids’ playground,” said the inspector, “it’s unusual to come here without any.”

“Is there a law against it?” Onyx pressed on.

“No,” the inspector laughed, embarrassed, “you are free to wander around here, of course.” He was silent for a moment and then added, “you must understand my position. I need to keep an eye out and make sure the kids are fine. There is no way to know what might happen, we must make sure nothing bad happens to them. Do you understand?”

Onyx nodded. She understood. Only she couldn’t see why the safety inspector saw her as a potential threat to the kids, a skinny young woman such as herself, who comes here nearly every day to feed the birds. Maybe it’s because he is new here, she wondered since she’s never seen him before. She knew the inspectors that roved the park, they were older. They knew her too.

A sharp cry made them both jump out of their place. The inspector turned around frantically and whirled towards the voice, ready for action. One of the kids fell off a ladder and hurt his lip. The inspector ran to him quickly and left Onyx alone.

“Is everything okay here?” She heard him ask severely. “How did this happen?”

“He just fell, inspector, sir. It’s nothing, I am very truly sorry…” Mumbled the screaming toddler’s mother. She was fair skinned, with black curly hair, and looked very frightened.

The inspector typed something into his multi-sensory and said nothing.

“Are you going to fine me?” The mother shrieked.

“No,” said the inspector, “I’m only reporting the incident to the authorities.”

The toddler continued to sob and red blood drops dripped onto the synthetic sandbox where he stood. His mother held up a wipe to his bleeding lip, pressing. “Incident? What incident? He just got a little scrape!” She said to the inspector, trembling.

“Ma’am,” the inspector said harshly, “I am only doing my job.”

He finished typing and aimed him multi-sensory at the toddler’s nape. The multi-sensory sounded a short sharp noise. The inspector pressed to confirm and sent the message.

The toddler calmed down in the meantime. Onyx watched him curiously. He was dark skinned, with slanted eyes, almost closed shut. From where she stood, she couldn’t see their color. His hair was brown and straight. There wasn’t a single point of resemblance between him and his mother. Onyx groaned, aware of the twisted logic behind the matter.

She kept watching the kids play in the playground, just as she did every day, trying to guess to which of the supervising parents nearby they belonged.

Night fell and the sun, like a silky egg yolk, slipped between the grey skyscrapers that peeked beyond the park, marking the horizon. Onyx blinked; her eyes blinded by the sundown’s glow. She lazily got up from the bench and dragged her feet on the way to her house. Another day behind her.