Suddenly

The Cameri Theatre of Tel-Aviv
Based on stories by Etgar Keret

Directed by Zvi Sahar,
PuppetCinema

Adapted by Zvi Sahar and Oded Littman
Dramaturgy by Oded Littman
Set and costume design by Aya Zaiger
Music by Gai Sherf
Lighting design by Ofer Laufer

DATES: DEC 6—9 at 7:30pm
LOCATION: BAM Fisher (Fishman Space)
RUN TIME: 1hr, no intermission

#BAMNextWave
Suddenly

NY Premiere

Based on stories by Etgar Keret
In Hebrew with English titles

Director
Zvi Sahar, PuppetCinema

Adaptation
Zvi Sahar and Oded Littman

Dramaturgy
Oded Littman

Set and Costume design/
Visual development
Aya Zaiger

Lighting design
Ofer Laufer

Music
Gai Sherf

Sound effects
Kobe Shmueli

Puppet design
Gili Kozin Ulmar
Yana Malishev
Amira Pinkas

Puppetry director
Gony Paz

Associate director
Danny Levy

Assistant director
Yoel Rozenkier

Cast
Nadav Assulin
Simcha Barbiro
Yuval Segal
Neta Plotnik
Gony Paz, Puppeteer
Ilya Kreines, Cinematographer
Dani Halifa, Cinematographer

Production manager
Nili Beeri

Technical coordinator
Yoav Weiss

Stage manager
Idan Tamano

Lighting operator
Yoav Gindi

Sound operator
Naor Izsak

Online video director/operator
Ohad Levitan

Translation of the stories
Miriam Shlesinger

Translation of the story “What, of this Goldfish, Would You Wish?”
Nathan Englander

Title editing
Tami Rubin, Omer Strass

International tours PuppetCinema
as is presenting arts
Gal Canetti, Dalit Itai
Suddenly development was supported by Asylum Small grant and Gettysburg College Research and Development Grant (for designer Eric Berninghausen).

Suddenly was developed in part by the Visiting Artist program of Israel Institute, Washington, DC; the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center; and the Theater, Dance, and Performance Studies and the Gildenhorn Institute for Israel Studies at the University of Maryland.

With the following collaborators: Leslie Strongwater (Dramaturgy and Production), Eric Berninghausen (Designer), Mark Costello (Cinematographer, lighting, and projection), Tyler Gunther (Puppet Designer), Chelsey McLaughlin (Puppeteer), and Nitsan Scharf (Puppeteer).

With the support of the Office of Cultural Affairs, Consulate General of Israel in New York.

About Suddenly

A writer is sitting alone amid the heap of rubble that was once his room, his life. Suddenly, a knock on the door: three despairing people come up to him in their search for solace and demand that he does what he has decided never to do again—tell a story. Left with no choice, the writer takes them into his narrative world, where he hopes they will understand the price he pays for the stories they want to hear.
The Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv

The Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv, founded in 1944, is the largest theater in Israel, staging up to 12 new productions annually along with 20 productions in repertoire. The Cameri has produced some 500 productions on its stages, with more than 2,000 performances every year.

The company includes 80 of Israel's finest actors, and its plays are directed by celebrated directors from Israel and abroad. The theater's productions are performed in five auditoriums as well as on tour. This is not the first visit to BAM, and the Cameri Theatre has performed at leading theaters and festivals worldwide, including the Lincoln Center Festival in NY, Barbican in London, Hannover Expo, Washington Shakespeare Festival at Kennedy Center, Gdansk Shakespeare Festival, National Center for the Performing Arts (The Egg) in Beijing, and Moscow Theater of Nations, and more than 100 international tours with other productions. Forthcoming tours are planned to Europe, North America, and Australia.

The Cameri's yearly international theater festival recently included companies such as the Berliner Ensemble (Robert Wilson's *The Threepenny Opera* and *Arturo Ui*), the Volksbühne, the Schaubühne, Deutsches Theater (Berlin), National Theater of Norway, National Theater of the Czech Republic, the Public Theater, National Theater of China, Shakespeare's Globe, and more than 70 other theaters worldwide.

The Cameri's productions have won more than 120 awards, including the Israel Prize for Lifetime Achievement and Special Contribution to Society and the State of Israel. The theater received an honorary fellowship from Tel Aviv University for its singular contribution to Israeli culture, for its rich repertoire, and for nurturing excellence in all aspects of theatrical performance.

The Cameri Theatre is supported by the Ministry of Culture and Sport, the Tel Aviv Municipality.

The North American Tour is made possible with support of Israel's Office of Cultural Affairs in North America and Mifal Hapais.

Shmulik Ifrah, General Director
Omri Nitzan, Artistic Director
Ofer Shahal, Chairman of the Board
Haviva Hadar, Deputy Director Finance
Sigal Cohen, Director International Relations Department

Flights
Signal Tours, Alex Morison

SHMULIK IFRAH
General Director, The Cameri Theatre

Shmulik Ifrah, general director of the Cameri Theatre of Tel Aviv-Jaffa and a graduate of the Beit Zvi Performing Arts School, is a trained actor, teacher, director, and independent producer. Ifrah was until recently the director general and artistic director of the Be’er Sheva Municipal Theater. Ifrah led a substantive change at the theater, the city, and the Negev Regional Council by transfer of budgets for socio-cultural activities for the residents of Be’er Sheva and the Negev Regional Council. Ifrah is also the founder and director of the Be’er Sheva Children and Youth Theatre which is the first theater of its kind in the Negev. Its entire work is dedicated to the expansion of cultural knowledge and activity for the benefit of the future generations of the theater, in particular, and the city of Be’er Sheva and the Negev in general. Ifrah
also founded and managed the Goodman School for Play in the Negev. This is the first drama school established in the Negev, and within a relatively short period of time, it has become one of the leading drama schools in Israel, with increasing numbers of graduates and teachers among the best performing professionals in Israel. Every year, there are nearly 20 graduates who successfully move on to stages in all active theaters, cinema, and television screens in Israel.

OMRI NITZAN
Artistic Director, The Cameri Theatre

Omri Nitzan is himself a prodigious director in both theater and opera. Nitzan has accumulated many prizes for his productions in classical and contemporary drama. Among his many honors, he is a five time winner of the Israel Theatre Prize for Director of the Year and five-time winner of the Israeli Theatre Prize for Production of the Year. Nitzan has directed operas for the Israel Opera, in Antwerp, and in Tokyo, as well as guest performances with Opera of Rome, Deutsches Opera Berlin, and the Opera Festival in Wiesbaden, Germany, among others.

The Creative Team

ETGAR KERET
Author

Born in Ramat Gan in 1967, Etgar Keret's books have been published in more than 40 languages. His writing has appeared in The New York Times, Le Monde, The New Yorker, The Guardian, The Paris Review, and Zoetrope: All Story. Over 60 short movies have been based on his stories. Keret resides in Tel Aviv and lectures at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. He has received the Book Publishers Association's Platinum Prize several times, the Prime Minister's Prize (1996), the Ministry of Culture's Cinema Prize, the Jewish Quarterly Wingate Prize (UK, 2008), the St. Petersburg Public Library's Foreign Favorite Award (2010), and the Newman Prize (2012). In 2007, Keret and Shira Geffen won the Cannes Film Festival's Camera d'Or Award for their movie Jellyfish, and the Best Director Award of the French Artists and Writers' Guild. In 2010, Keret was honored in France with the decoration of Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres. Keret's latest book, The Seven Good Years, was chosen by The Guardian as one of the best biographies and memoirs of 2015. Keret was the winner of the 2016 Charles Bronfman Prize in recognition of his work imparting an inspiring Jewish humanitarian vision.

ZVI SAHAR
Director/Adaptation

Zvi Sahar holds a BA (cum laude) from the department of theater at the University of Haifa (2010) and is also a graduate of the Yoram Loewenstein Performing Arts Studio (2006). He has won grants from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation and the Jim Henson Foundation.

Sahar attended Puppet Lab in New York (2011), where he developed the language of PuppetCinema, a theater stage language combining puppets and closed circuit video.
He was a guest lecturer at the University of Maryland school of theater, dance, and performance studies (2016). He directed the Hazira Performance Art Arena production of *The Road to Ein Harod* (*Salt of the Earth*, 2014 Next Wave) in Berlin, Croatia, and Poland; *Planet Egg*, a miniature puppet theater performance (Hong Kong National Festival, festivals in Denmark, Italy, Estonia, Czechoslovakia, and around the US); and *Gulliver* at Hazira Performance Art Arena in Jerusalem (premiere at the International Festival of Puppet Theatre in Jerusalem, August 2017).

As an actor Sahar has performed with director Rina Yerushalmi’s Itim Ensemble in *Three Sisters, A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *Witchcraft* (directed by Yael Ronen); and with Be’er Sheva Theatre in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, *A Comedy of Errors*, *The Seagull*, and *The Office*. Together with director Oded Littman he adapted and performed in *Richard III* at Tmu-na Theatre and *Tonight: Oedipus* at Hasimta Theatre. He is the father of Aya and Ella and Dafna’s best friend.

### ODED LITTMAN
Adaptation/Dramaturgy

Director, dramaturg, and theater teacher, Oded Littman holds a BA in directing from Kibbutzim College of Education, an MA in theater and performance from Bern University of the Arts (HKB), and an MA in psychodrama therapy. He has created a number of independent productions in Israel, including *Richard III* at Tmu-na Theatre and *Tonight: Oedipus* at Hasimta Theatre. From 2010—14 he lived in Switzerland where he worked as a director, dramaturg, and performer in various theaters, including the Bern Municipal Theatre, Dampfzentrale Center for Contemporary Dance in Bern, and various fringe venues around Switzerland. He was also the regular dramaturg for choreographer and performer Emma Murray and supervised and mentored MA student projects in the performing arts. He recently returned to Israel and currently works as a dramaturg and co-creator in various productions, including *The Road to Ein Harod* at Hazira Performance Art Arena. Alongside his work as a creator he gives various workshops and courses for youth, students, and young creators, and also practices therapy.

### AYA ZAIGER
Set & Costume designer

Aya Zaiger, artist and designer, specializes in developing visual concepts as an art, set, and costume designer. Zaiger holds a BA (cum laude) in set and costume design from Shenkar College of Engineering and Design, and an MA in art studies from Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design. She is currently participating in *The Road to Ein Harod* (directed by Zvi Sahar) onstage as a performer and photographer, and offstage as a designer and member of the production development team. Her first solo exhibition *To Infinity* was mounted in April 2015 at Ramat Gan Museum of Israeli Art. She is currently working on an independent video art project. She lives and works in Tel Aviv.

### OFER LAUFER
Lighting designer

Ofer Laufer graduated from HIT-Holon Institute of Technology, department of industrial design. He has created designs and lighting objects for many artists, including Uri Shafir (*Somewhere in the Now*); Ido Feder (*Wigit*); Guy Biran (*Book of Joshua, The General and the Sea, Nefilim*); Zvi Sahar (*Gulliver*); Mark Eliyahu (*Mekudeshet Festival*); Tami Leibovitz; CutOutClub; Jane Bordeaux, and others. His light installations include the Hedim Festival 2016 and Nightlight Festival 2016. Other lighting designs include Uri Shafir and Ido Feder (*Curtain Up*, 2015); Nava Frenkel (*Learning Songs at the Israel Festival*, 2015); Talia Beck (*W*); Anat Danieli (*Ana Vagana*); and others.

### GAI SHERF
Music

Gai Sherf is an original music and sound creator for theater and dance. He is a member of the Hummingbird ensemble, the Flora Trio, and various musical ensembles
past and present. Plays and performances for which he created the music include *The Road to Ein Harod* at Hazira Performance Art Arena; *W* and *Botanica* by choreographer Talia Beck; *Savannah, Gulliver*, and *Terminal* by Amit Drori; *Josefina* by Josef Sprinzak; *All the Flowers Await You*, a musical performance; and others. *Schmetterling*, a music/theater performance based on an original instrument he invented, won the Akko Festival of Alternative Theatre Award in 2005. He graduated from the School of Visual Theatre in Jerusalem, where he has been teaching for six years.

**KOBE SHMUELI**

Sound effects

Kobe Shmueli studied at Rimon School of Jazz and Contemporary Music, and sound engineering at Sapir Academic College. He has played saxophone and keyboards in numerous ensembles and currently engages mainly in musical production, composition, and recording in his studio in Jaffa. His work includes the soundtrack (music, effects, and foley) for *Planet Egg*, and the sound arrangement and recording for *Salt of the Earth* (2014 Next Wave), in addition to writing music and composing soundtracks for films.

**DANNY LEVY**

Associate director

Danny Levy holds a BA in theater directing and education from Kibbutzim College of Education, and an MA from the interdisciplinary program in the arts at Tel Aviv University. He adapted and directed *Exercise for Beginners of 25 and Over* as part of his graduation project. He was assistant director on the Jerusalem Khan Theatre production of *Man Equals Man*, and the Cameri Theatre production of *On the Grill*. He served as artistic advisor for *Pinter First Floor* at the Rega Ehad Festival and created *Begedadam* at the Creating a Place Festival.

**CAST**

**NADAV ASSULIN**

Nadav Assulin, born in Jerusalem in 1971, is a graduate of the Jerusalem Arts High School, served in the IDF Theater Unit, and graduated from Nissan Nativ Acting Studio. He started his career at the Cameri Theatre in 1997. Among the theater productions in which he has performed are *Twelfth Night*, *Murder, Petra, Mr. Wolf, Match Making, An Enemy of the People, Cabaret Levin, Recital, Singles Popper, Gorodish, The Ketubah, Hamlet, Sallah Shabati, The Servant of Two Masters, A Comedy of Errors* (for his role of silversmith he was nominated for the Israeli theater award as the actor of the year), *On the Run, Requiem, Rendezvous Hotel, As You Like It, The Commissioner of the Human Resources, Shira (Agnon)*, and *A Child of My Own* (Hagit Rachabi). He has also directed numerous plays at the Nissan Nativ Studio Theater and the IDF.

**SIMCHA BARBIRO**

Simcha Barbiro graduated from Beit Zvi School of Performing Arts in 1991 where he won the Zvi Kalir Prize for excellence. Among the many productions in which he has performed are: *Here Comes Elijah* (Akko Festival of Alternative Theatre); *Dot and Anton, Arsenic and Old Lace, A Winter Festival, Good Guys, King of the Jews, Cry the Beloved Country, Melinki, Three Sisters, The Good Soldier Svejk, Jaffar in Nasr e-Din, Marco/Rabbi Aharon Vistoso in Bustan Sepharadi*, and *Winnie in The Odd Couple* (Habima Theatre); *The Lower Depths, Pal Joey, Feste in Twelfth Night, Lord Hastings in King Richard III* (Hasifriya Theatre); *The Blue Angel, Pantalone in The Servant of Two Masters* (Be’er Sheva Theatre); *Yvonne Princess of Burgundy, Chico in The Dog’s Will (Jerusalem Khan Theatre:); Benny Southstreet in Guys and Dolls (Beit Lessin Theatre); *Lice, The Woman Before Me* (Tmu-na Theatre); Li Ho’s Jewelry Box (Tzavta Theatre); *Weisskopf in Ghetto* (Hebrew Theatre); *Theatre Games*
Show (Orna Porat Theatre for Children and Youth); and Thomas Mowbray/Gaoler in King Richard II, Lord Hastings in King Richard III, Herr Morschel/Lauterbach/Jenke/Nurse in Little Man, What Now?, Lennox in Macbeth, Card player/Montfleury/Monk/Cadet/Sister Claire in Cyrano de Bergerac, Kosich in Ivanov, Tiger Brown in The Threepenny Opera, Beck in Mephisto, Rumel in The Pillars of Society, and Inspector in The Human Resources Manager (Cameri Theatre). His work in cinema and television includes The Hard Core, Sport Theatre, Emergency Room, Murder at the Dead Sea, Zap to One, Hedgehogs, HaNephilim, The Island, La La Land, Naor’s Friends, Gary Mandelbaum, Polishuk, Ron, Ruling Family, and Celebrations. He produced and collaborated on Classic Duets and Songs from Musicals, and wrote and collaborated on the Another Matter radio show and the satirical Breakfast with Freddy. He also does voiceovers for television and cinema.

DANI HALIFA

Dani Halifa graduated from the Jerusalem School of Visual Theatre in 2016. For the last four years she has produced The Opposite of Alive, a performance by Michal Vaknin. She took part in the Jerusalem Season of Culture in 2014—16 and won the Jerusalem Mayor’s Prize for directing What’s All the Noise? She has created three visual performances at the Tower of David.

ILYA KREINES

Ilya Kreines, illustrator, painter, graphic designer, cinema, and stills photographer, is a graduate of Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design Visual Communication Department and a workshop on documentary filmmaking with Eldad Rafaeli. He was director of photography for the films I Clown You, Child’s Play, Daria, and Noam. He illustrated Tauride Garden for Samokat Publishing House, Moscow, in 2014, and has illustrated and published three other books. The book Back and Forth was exhibited in Pilsen as part of the events for Pilsen as European Capital of Culture 2015. He won the Best of Russia photography competition in 2012 and as part of the award he participated in a touring exhibition in Russia and Europe. Additional photographs and illustrations have been published on various media channels: Walla, Ynet, Eretz Acharet, and others. His work has also been shown in the art exhibitions La Culture, Winter Time, Creator’s Line, and others.

GONY PAZ

Gony Paz, interdisciplinary creator, performer, puppeteer, and tap dancer, graduated from the Jerusalem School of Visual Theatre and won the Jerusalem Foundation Prize for Excellence. She also graduated from the Holon School of the Art of Puppetry and the School of Medical Clowning, and in the past 10 years she has puppeteered and done voiceovers in a wide range of productions and television shows for children and adults. These include Little Monsters, Red and Ovir, Sesame Street, and Adventures of a Pale Blue Donkey. Her work in opera includes Maesa Pedro’s Puppet Show and The Empress’ Feet. She appeared in Yellow Curtains for Mario, What Happened to My Voice?, and Challenging Death. She recently created a performance titled You’re Not to Blame performed at Tmu-na Festival in 2016 and the children’s play Night Journey with Michal Ben-Anat, which was performed by the Train Theatre at the 2016 Jerusalem International Puppet Theatre Festival.

NETA PLOTNIK

Neta Plotnik did her military service in IDF Theatre and studied at the Nissan Nativ Acting Studio in Tel Aviv, where she was awarded two grants for excellence. Her work in cinema includes Maya (a film by Michal Bat-Adam), and in television, Loving Anna and Tel Aviviot on Channel 10, Danny Hollywood on Yes TV, and School for Witches on Logi. Theater credits include A Midsummer Night’s Dream (Tmu-na Theatre), and Mekubalin Umehadkim (Kibbutz Theatre,
winner of the Children’s and Youth Actor of the Year Award for her leading role. Her previous work with the Cameri Theatre includes Orli in *Meagre Fish*, Miki in *The New Criminals*, Victoire in *Hotel Rendezvous*, and Phoebe in *As You Like It*.

YUVAL SEGAL

Yuval Segal was born in Tel Aviv and graduated from the New Actors Workshop in New York under the tutelage of director Mike Nichols. He began his acting career as a child at Beit Lessin Theatre in *Marvin’s Room*, *Conversations with My Father*, and *A Letter to Noa*. In New York he performed with the Third Premise Theater Company in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* and directed and acted with the Chalk Circle Theater Company in *Virtual Reality* and *Nevermore—An Evening with Poe*. In cinema he performed in *Or* and *Nerds Club—The Movie*, and on television in *The Pajamas*, *HaHafranim*, *Comeback*, *Our Town*, *Dan and Muesli*, *The Eighties*, *Friendship*, and *Sabri Maranan*. He was screenwriter for *The Pajamas*, *Alifim*, *Sabri Maranan*, and *HaNefilim*, and he has done voiceovers for many shows and animated films, including Sanjay in *Sanjay and Craig*, Miss Piggy and Fozzie Bear in *The Muppet Show*, and the lead role in *Cars 3*. His previous work with the Cameri Theatre includes *Stempenyu*, *Punk Rock*, *Requiem*, *Macbeth*, *Everybody Wants to Live*, Friedman in *Gorodish*, Jonah in *Bad Jews*, Maxim in *Hotel Rendezvous*, and Silvius in *As You Like It*.

About PuppetCinema

By Zvi Sahar

I took my first steps in the theater in Yoram Levinstein’s acting studio. I started working with Rina Yerushalmi as part of the Itim Ensemble, and later at the Be’er Sheva Theater. At the same time, I continued to study theater at the University of Haifa and looked for my artistic language as a storyteller. I was particularly interested in the direct and unmediated encounter between the actor and the audience, and together with Oded Littman, created independent productions in which we integrated elements of closed-circuit video (*Richard III*, Tru-’na Theater).

**Planet Egg**

One evening I was having dinner at my parents’ house. We ate eggs, while my father fixed an old radio. Suddenly, my egg seemed to me like the ground of a planet and the particles my father had dismantled like its tiny inhabitants. We soldered some electronic components, took a black canvas backdrop from my mom’s studio, and with a camera lens aimed at plate height we created a picture from a science fiction movie—intergalactic life. This is how *Planet Egg* was born (co-director, Michal Vaknin), the first production in the style of PuppetCinema. Only then I still did not know I would call this my style.

After a while I took part in the PUPPET LAB in New York (St. Ann’s Warehouse), where artists from different aesthetics meet for a year and receive training and artistic accompaniment to develop a style and a show to be presented at the festival at the end of the year. After the debut of *Planet Egg*, I was intrigued by the parallel between the action of photography and the action of the puppet animation—two manipulative actions aimed at creating the illusion of life. Since then, the video and the puppets (the stage illusion of making the inanimate come alive) have become an integral part of my work—not just as an aesthetic expression of the dramatic content, but one of its key elements as a creative starting point (one in which the mechanism behind the illusion is exposed).

**Salt of The Earth**

With these insights I began working on the next project, *Salt of The Earth* (2014 Next Wave). A new element was added to the puppets and video that I wanted to animate on the stage—the scenography. The show opens with a thousand pounds of salt poured on the stage of the theater, which
form the various landscapes the protagonist inhabits. The camera moves between these landscapes and produces, with different angles of photography, varying relations between the audience and the puppet. The developing style began to focus on simultaneous images—what was happening on the stage and what was happening on the screen, and on the combination of dramatic and visual language.

The Artistic Principles

As a storyteller, I use all tools at my disposal to convey to the audience—my partner in this story—what is going on in my head and in my heart.

The theater enables a rich encounter of different media on stage. I look for the best way to convey the story in the most precise way: The actor offers contact with the audience, the text, plot and poetry, the scenery, the lighting, and the costumes create the ultimate illusion. The puppet invites the audience to take part in creating the emotions (as the puppet does not express the emotion as an actor does, but invites the audience to charge the puppet with his own feelings).

Like walking down a street where our attention is split between store windows, phone calls to someone, the crosswalk, the sidewalk, and the sky, I try to create a complex picture on the stage with independent and equal focus centers. I believe we are capable of simultaneously viewing different focal points, and my role as director is to offer the audience a clear narrative structure, while allowing it to look at other happenings that will support the stage action.

The artistic challenge is to synchronize a multitude of bodies, actions, and media, to allow the audience the choice to look at both the film and the way it works, while listening to the story. Like watching a basketball game, the main action is held by the ball, but the drama is also in the hands of the one waiting for the delivery, the one who goes down to the defense as well as the one who sneaks in and dunks.

The Process of the Current Production

Following the performances of Salt of The Earth, I was invited to teach the PuppetCinema language at the University of Maryland in the US in 2016 as part of the visiting artist program of the Schusterman Foundation. As Jim Henson’s alma mater, the university fosters a contemporary curriculum that incorporates puppetry, theater, and video.

For the class course I was looking for material that would contain fantasy, human sensitivity, and realistic simplicity. Choosing Etgar Keret was obvious to me—a writer, through which American students could learn about Israeli literature and culture and connect to stories on the universal human level.

During the preparation for the course I focused on Keret’s book of short stories Suddenly, a Knock on the Door. I felt that there was something that could connect the stories to a whole performance, which would expose their need to be part of a story. With Oded Littman, I started working on the adaptation while at the same time creating the visual aspects of the show at the Clarice Smith Performing Arts Center along with the theater, dance, and performance studies program at the University of Maryland together with Leslie Strongwater and Eric Berninghausen, long time PuppetCinema collaborators living in Maryland.

It was only natural to end the process of development with a full production in Israel. I am very happy about the production house found in the Cameri Theatre, and also pleased to return the show to UMD to the Clarice and to return once again to BAM, completing more than one circle.
Fungus

By Etgar Keret
Translated by Sondra Silverston

The skinny guy fell to the café floor. His stomach hurt more than he thought it ever could. A series of involuntary spasms shook his body. “This is what it must be like when you’re going to die,” he thought. “But this can’t be the end. I’m too young, and it’s too embarrassing to die like this, in shorts and Crocs, on the floor of a café that was once trendy but hasn’t been making a go of it for years.” The guy opened his mouth to scream for help, but he didn’t have enough air in his lungs to let out a scream. This story isn’t about him.

The waitress who went over to the skinny guy was named Galia. She never wanted to be a waitress. She’d always dreamed of teaching school. But there’s no money in teaching school, and there was in waitressing. Not an awful lot, but enough to cover her rent and all. That year, she’d started studying special education at Beit Berl College. On the days she was at school, she worked the night shift at the café. Not even a dog came to the café at night, and she earned less than half the tips, but school was important to her. “Are you okay?” she asked the guy on the floor. She knew he wasn’t, but she asked anyway, out of embarrassment. This story isn’t about her either.

“I’m dying,” the guy said, “I’m dying, call an ambulance.”

“There’s no point,” said a dark-skinned, bald guy sitting at the bar reading the financial pages. “It’ll take about an hour for the ambulance to get here. They cut their budget down to the bone. They work Saturday hours all week now.” While the man was telling her that, he was hauling the skinny guy onto his back, and added, “I’ll take him the ER. My car is parked right outside.” He did that because he was a good man, because he was a good man and wanted the waitress to see that. Five months had passed since his divorce, and that sentence and a half was the closest he’d come in that period to having an intimate conversation with a pretty girl. This story isn’t about him either.

Traffic was jammed up all the way to the hospital. The skinny guy, who was lying in the back of the car, moaned in an almost inaudible voice and drooled on the upholstery of the dark-skinned bald guy’s new Alfa sports model. When he got divorced, his friends told him that he had to replace his family-sized Mitsubishi with something else, a bachelor’s car. Girls learn a lot about you from the car you drive. A Mitsubishi says: wiped out divorced guy seeks shrew to take place of last bitch. An Alfa sports car says: a cool guy, young at heart, seeks adventure. That skinny guy convulsing in the back seat was a kind of adventure. The bald guy thought, “I’m like an ambulance now. I don’t have a siren but I can beep for other cars to let me pass, go through red lights, like in the movies. While he was thinking all that, he almost floored the gas pedal. While he was thinking all that, a white Renault van crashed into the side of his Alfa. The driver of the Renault was religious. The driver of the Renault didn’t have his seat belt on. The crash killed him on the spot. This story isn’t about him either.

Whose fault was the crash? The dark-skinned bald guy who accelerated and ignored the stop sign? Not really. The van driver who didn’t buckle his seat belt and was driving over the speed limit? Not him either. There’s only one person responsible for that accident. Why did I invent all these people? Why did I kill a guy wearing a yarmulke who never did anything to me? Why did I make a nonexistent guy have pain? Why did I destroy a dark-skinned bald guy’s family unit? The fact that you invent something doesn’t exempt you from responsibility, and unlike life, where you can shrug and point up to God in heaven, there’s no excuse here. In a story, you’re God. If your protagonist failed, it’s only
because you made him fail. If something bad happened to him, it's only because you wanted it to. You wanted to watch him wallow in his own blood.

My wife comes in the room and asks, “Are you writing?” She wants to ask me something. Something else. I can see it on her face, but at the same time, she doesn’t want to interrupt me. She doesn’t want to, but she already has. I say yes, but never mind. This story isn't working. It's not even a story. It's an itch. It's a fungus under my fingernail. She nods as if she understands what I’m talking about. She doesn’t. But that doesn’t mean she doesn’t love me. This story is about us.
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