

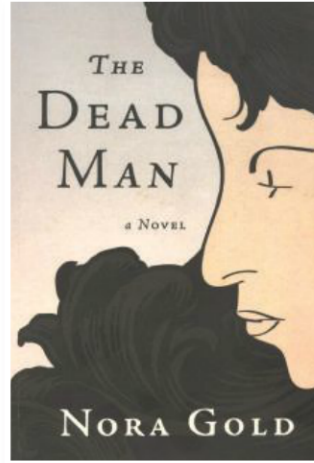
# Flying forward, flying back

NORA GOLD

She's never been obsessed before. This is her first time and it's kind of interesting. It's like watching some psychopath in a movie, stalking someone, plotting to kill them, except that the psychopath is her. In Canada it's not so bad – she can't call Jake from Toronto because he'd see the area code and guess it was her. So it's only in his country, in Israel (where she'll be in 90 minutes) that it happens. There she won't be able to walk by a pay phone without having to wrestle down the desire to do again what she has already done numerous times: Dial his number and then keep silent on the end of the line – an ominous, threatening silence. And then hear the anger mount in his voice as he says, "Hello? Hello? Hello?" And then, when he gets no answer, he'll slam down the phone with a bang so loud that it hurts her ear. When Jake's wife answers the phone, though, it's not anger; it's fear. Instead of her voice getting stronger and more violent like Jake's, Fran's gets smaller and thinner ("Hello? Hello? Hello?") till at the end

there's almost nothing left of it. It's a high and squeaky-scared voice, like a mouse or a little girl. On one of the last times, though, instead of going squeaky-scared on her third hello, Fran gathered all her remaining strength and called out "Jake!" in a loud, frightened voice – calling him, Eve knew, from the phone on the kitchen counter to Jake's study upstairs. Then Eve hung up fast before Jake could come on the line, and stood in front of the orange pay phone on a Tel Aviv street corner, her knees trembling and her hands sweaty.

Eve looks out of the airplane window. It didn't start out like this – as a form of stalking, or harassment, or whatever this would be considered under Canadian law. It started out just as a phone call because she missed him. She loved him and wanted to hear his voice again. But he told her not to call or write him anymore. He said this had to end once and for all – this relationship of theirs, their love, was destroying his marriage. So Eve wasn't allowed to call him after that. But she needed him still. She needed to hear his voice just one more time. His beautiful, deep voice. Even anonymously, if that



was the only way. So she started phoning him and hanging up, each time thinking this time would be the last.

Eve looks out the window at the clouds below. In the beginning dusk, they look like furry, pale grey animals. The backs and sides of hippos, or rhinos. Flying animals floating in the sky. Sleeping in the sky. Jake never sleeps in in the mornings. The first time she called and then hung up on him, it was only six o'clock in Israel, but he was already wide awake. He always woke up before six, and his wife never did before seven, so as Eve had predicted, Jake picked up the phone. He answered the way he always did, with a musical wave in his voice, "Hel-lo-o," with the middle note higher than the others: C, G, E, Eve registered automatically. At that point, Jake's voice still sounded quite normal, if a little surprised at a 6 a.m. call. But after his first hello, when Eve didn't say anything back, it quickly got more insistent: "Hello? Hello?" and then turned frustrated-enraged, "Who is this?" and Eve hung up swiftly in fear. He was yelling at her.

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One-and-a-half years after sending her away, after surgically removing her from his life, here he was, yelling at her. But a couple of hours later Eve, though blushing at the memory of this phone call, was also grinning broadly. There was a funny side to it. And it was validating, too. It reminded her of something that deep-down she knew but kept on choosing to forget: that Jake was not the gentle, sensitive man he'd become in her fantasies (or anyway not only this); he was also someone with profound anger and a very short fuse. Laughing, Eve felt powerful. She had played a trick on Jake, but there was no way for him to know it was her, so he couldn't retaliate. However powerless she had felt over the previous year and a half (powerless to regain his love, or even to make herself visible to him), she realized now that she wasn't actually all that powerless. She could call him. She could torment him. So over the next three years, Eve phoned Jake's house five or six times on each of her visits to Israel (which, between conferences, board meetings, and holidays, turned out to be seven different trips). Seven trips at five or six calls each trip – she quickly does the math – that's altogether 35 or 40 calls. This may sound like a lot, but really it's not all that much. Anyway, she had no alternative. She had to keep calling back because she kept missing Jake and getting Fran instead.

The first time this happened, Eve was taken aback by how nice she sounded. Jake's wife had a sweet voice. She was a therapist, Jake had told her once. Not a music therapist, like Eve, or any other real type of therapist – Fran hadn't studied any mental health profession in university; she just did some sort of New Age bodywork. But still, on the phone, Eve could hear some of that in her voice: the therapeutic tone, the desire to proffer help. In this first "conversation" with Fran (which came after Eve had already called and hung up on Jake several times), she could tell that he and Fran had discussed these calls, because Fran reacted now without surprise. She seemed to have decided that the silence on the other end of the line wasn't coming from anybody dangerous. Just a shy first-time client (or maybe a troubled old one) who had dialed her number but then couldn't screw up the courage to ask for an appointment.

"Hello?" said Fran in a normal voice on that first phone call. Then, after Eve said nothing, Fran said "Hello?" again, but this time encouragingly, with a sort of professional kindness. When Eve still didn't answer, Fran asked in a warm, empathic way, "Is there something I can do for you?"

Yes, thought Eve: You can let me be friends with your husband. (Friends – just

“

*Laughing, Eve felt powerful. She had played a trick on Jake, but there was no way for him to know it was her, so he couldn't retaliate.*

friends. I would settle now even just for that.) And Fran sounded so nice that Eve, always drawn to, and eager for, kindness and human warmth (and in this case to the therapist-empathy that dripped like milk-and-honey from Fran's voice), nearly said this out loud. But then she remembered that as sweet as Fran sounded on the phone, she was the one who had told Jake that he and Eve couldn't stay friends. Friends – just regular friends – that's all Eve was asking for by then. But even this regular non-physical friendship with Jake meant the world to her. She would never have allowed herself to become intimately involved with him if he hadn't promised her, repeatedly and unequivocally, that for sure – 100 per cent for sure – they would remain friends afterwards, no matter what happened. Staying friends meant to her that she hadn't been cheap. That it hadn't been cheap. That apart from the sex, there had been a real relationship between them. Which there had.

But Fran would not agree. She would not allow Eve and Jake to be even the most casual, innocuous of friends. They couldn't even meet in a public place for a coffee (in Aroma or Caffit), surrounded by dozens of other people (mostly English-speakers like them, and at least a few of whom knew either Jake or Eve) once or twice a year when she came to Israel. So now Eve didn't let herself fall for the sweetness in Fran's voice. Fran was her sworn, lifelong enemy. Eve wouldn't say a word to her, not a single word. She just hung up the phone that day. After that, in the subsequent calls, Fran started sounding afraid.

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Then about a year ago, making these phone calls stopped being fun. They even started becoming onerous: a chore, a responsibility, something Eve had to cross off her list of things to do while in Israel. She had no choice but to call Jake at home because he worked primarily at home and was rarely at the institute he'd founded. And she had to call the family phone number because Jake didn't believe in cell-phones. And she had to call from a street pay phone - otherwise he or Fran could trace the call to her cellphone or her hotel. And it had to be early in the morning before Fran woke up so that she'd get Jake on the phone, not his wife. And it began feeling like a huge pain, having to wake up early on a holiday, in order to rush to the nearest pay phone a block-and-a-half away before 7a.m.

But even more than all that, it started to get creepy. Creepy hearing Jake's rage and Fran's fear. Instead of feeling powerful and in control, Eve began feeling powerless and out of control. She wasn't doing this anymore out of her own free will; it had turned into an obsession. A compulsion. An obsessive-compulsive disorder. By this time a year ago, the third week in December, she couldn't walk past any pay phone in Israel without wanting - without needing - to stop and call Jake. This offended her self-respect. What was she - a slave to this thing? Plus one day she told an Israeli friend she had known for many years about these phone calls - told her about them, laughing, like it was a joke she was playing on Jake, just something slightly bizarre. But instead of laughing along with her, her friend blanched and looked at her strangely. Eve realized then that what she was doing was crazy, truly crazy, and maybe she, too, was crazy, tottering somewhere very close to the edge. So she forced herself to stop making these calls.

Still, even though a year has passed since she last phoned Jake (and it's five-and-a-half years since she and Jake parted ways), Eve knows that when she lands in Israel one-and-a-quarter hours from now, and passes her first pay phone in the airport, it will take an enormous effort on her part to just keep on walking. To not stop in front of the pay phone, slide in her phone card, and dial Jake's number, to hear his voice one more time. She turns now toward her window. Outside, darkness is gathering at the edges of the sky and sea. I can do this, she thinks. I'll just do what I did the last time I was here. After they land, after she has collected her bags from the carousel and is heading for the exit, as she approaches the first set of pay phones in the airport, she'll tell herself to keep on going, keep on marching. And at the same time, she'll reach deep into the concealed pocket inside her purse and touch the Israeli phone card she always keeps there, the

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*Eve realized then that what she was doing was crazy, truly crazy, and maybe she, too, was crazy, tottering somewhere very close to the edge.*

one with the picture of a tiger on it - this "transitional object" of hers, as she knows it's called in psychology. She'll touch it and she'll stroke it over and over again, the way she once stroked Jake, and the way she used to stroke her favourite doll when she was little and afraid. Her tiger card, smooth and sleek between her fingers, will comfort her and give her strength.

\*\*\*

Eve's eyes are shut, and she is lying with her seat pushed back as far as it goes and a blanket over her head. At the beginning of this flight the blanket stank of some industrial cleaning chemical and felt coarse and scratchy against her face. But now she doesn't notice. She's listening to the *Largo al Factotum* from *The Barber of Seville*. She doesn't just hear this music; she feels it in her body. Its notes dance like tiny leprechauns on the skin of her arms and up and down the length of her muscles. She can sing this music, dance it, and play it on several instruments. As far back as she can remember, her father walked around the house singing opera, and this aria was one of his favourites. He sang it in the shower, of course, but not only in the shower. Also while making her breakfast. And dressing. Knotting his red bowtie in front of the mirror. Running the comb back through his increasingly thinning hair while he admired his reflection. And then, feeling satisfied with his appearance - and more than that: proud as a peacock - he'd sing to the mirror, "Figaro Figaro Fiiiigaro!" with the same joyful, shamelessly bragging self-worship as Figaro himself. Now, listening to this music, she is once again three years old, hearing her father's voice singing "Fffiiiiiigaro!" Or else, she's three years old and cuddled up with him on his lap, listening to music together as they did every Saturday afternoon, just the two of them, before Daddy got married again, to Julia.

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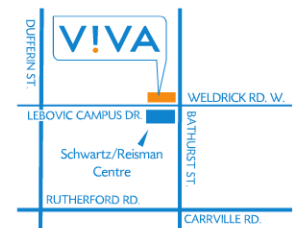
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First Eve and Daddy would hear an opera on the radio broadcast *Live From the Met*. Then they listened to records: mainly Schubert, Mozart, and Brahms. Now, listening to *The Barber of Seville*, she is back in that world.

"Crapper omlep?" someone says right in her ear.

"What?" Confused, groggy, she drags the blanket from her face, causing her earpiece to fall out, putting an end to Rosini. A flight attendant, perky in a navy blue uniform and bright crimson lipstick, is leaning toward her with a smile. "Crepe or omelette?"

Crepe or omelette. "Omelette." But she's sorry as soon as she unwraps the tin foil and is hit by the rotten, institutional smell. She tentatively tries the yogurt – it's sour. The roll, even after she has slathered it with butter and strawberry jam, is so stale when she bites into it that it's inedible. She pushes away her tray.

The pudgy man on her right, however, is digging in with gusto. She watches him for a couple of seconds in amazement: *How can he eat that s---t?* The man turns and smiles at her. Eight hours ago they chatted for a few minutes before they both went to sleep. He's part of a church group visiting

Israel for the first time, which she found interesting until he began talking about the importance of settling every inch of the Holy Land before The Day of Reckoning comes. Now she gives him a vague half-smile, turns away, and again gazes out the window. It's darkening quickly. The sea, the sky, and all the clouds in between are melding together into one big indigo-charcoal-coloured mass. If my clients knew how f---d-up I am, she thinks, they'd never come to me for music therapy. They think I'm so sane and "healthy." When for the past five years, I've been more f---d-up than all of them rolled together.

It's not just the pay phone business, she knows. It's the thousands of letters, maybe the tens of thousands, that she has written to Jake since they broke up. For the first few months, she wrote them down on paper or on the computer. Then after a while it felt like too much work – there were too many words, too many pages – so she just spoke them aloud to him in her head. She was already in the habit of sharing everything with Jake. They'd emailed each other at least four times a day every day of their five-month relationship because he was in Israel and she in Canada (other than the 17 days she spent in Jeru-

“

*It's not just the pay phone business, she knows. It's the thousands of letters, maybe the tens of thousands, that she has written to Jake since they broke up.*

salem). These letters became the emotional focal point of her life, so that even after they broke up, she kept on composing letters to him. Letters full of rage and raging desire, as well as all the other things she felt and thought that she used to discuss with Jake, but now had no one to discuss with. For instance, music. She would be sitting in a concert composing a letter to him, telling him that she found the flutist too "technical" and cold, yet the violinist

accompanying her was too romantic and emotional. What do you think? she would ask Jake in the concert hall.

She also shared with him all sorts of little incidents that occurred in her day-to-day life. The people around her were sometimes strange or hurtful, and imagining Jake's response helped her put into perspective the things they'd said or done. He had an ironic, wry way of seeing things, and he'd look down from above on human folly and stupidity with a sardonic twist of his thin lips. That twist she loved. Those lips she loved. She had never before been with a man with the same sense of humour as her (not even Brian), and it was both a relief and a joy. It was a joy, too, being on the top of Mount Olympus with Jake, standing there side by side with the great man, looking down with him on everyone and everything in the little world below. Jacob Gladstone was a world-renowned music critic, music theorist, and ethno-musicologist who was universally acknowledged as the greatest living authority on Jewish music. He was also credited with the recent renaissance in Jewish sacred music because of the Jewish Institute of Sacred Music (JISM!) that he'd founded 15 years before.

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Eve, listening to him talk about his work, felt that through him she had entered the inner circle of the international Jewish music scene. This was confirmed for her when Jake told her what he thought of the latest CD by Nathan Singelman. (The Nathan Singelman: the founder and editor-in-chief of *Niggun*, the pre-eminent journal of Jewish music.)

"It's second-rate," Jake confided to her on what turned out to be the last of their phone calls. (They spoke on the phone only infrequently because of the risk of Fran overhearing; there were just four calls, one hour each, over the whole five months.) Nathan was 20 years younger than Jake, looked up to him as some sort of father figure/mentor, and paid him handsomely to contribute quasi-regularly to *Niggun*, playing the role of its in-house public intellectual. Nathan, with an obsequious note attached, had recently sent Jake a copy of his CD to get his opinion of it, and Jake had written him back something complimentary. But to Eve he told the truth.

"It's utterly mediocre," he told her bluntly on the phone. "The first part isn't bad, but then at the end he wimps out. He obviously didn't know how to finish his composition, so he just tied it up with a big phony bow. One of those pat, conventional endings. Shows a total lack of courage and character. You'd never do something like that, Eve – just wimp out. You've got backbone. You're brave."

Of course she loved hearing that at the time. But not long afterwards he left her, and along with the many other things she didn't understand was why he'd said that to her. Why compliment someone you're about to dump? Her friend Bonnie thought this was Jake's way of telling her (and even more so, himself) that she would be OK. She was brave and strong, so he didn't have to worry about her, or feel guilty for what he'd done. Who knows? Eve thinks now. But no, I'm not brave. I'm not brave at all. I wanted to die when you left me. When I got that email from you, it was like someone had blown a hole the size of a cannonball right through my stomach, and I was slowly bleeding to death, though no one seemed to notice. I went on with my daily routine – I had to take care of my boys, I had to earn a living. But all I really did was wait for you to come back.

She sips some water from the plastic bottle on her tray. Her lips were getting dry; the water helps. "*Mayim Hayim*," says the label, and under it, in letters formed out of different-coloured flowers: "Live Your Life." She pulls the blanket over her head.

There is only one letter to Jake left in Eve now. All those hundreds of thousands of words, all those tens – or hundreds – of thousands of sentences, have boiled down now into just one: the one-line letter she

“

*From all its long  
simmering and  
bubbling, this letter  
has, like any well-  
cooked sauce, become  
concentrated down to  
its essentials*

has been writing and re-writing for the past two-and-a-half years. From all its long simmering and bubbling, this letter has, like any well-cooked sauce, become concentrated down to its essentials:

*Dear Jake,*

*Thank you for your invitation to meet  
next time I'm in Israel, but I am going to  
decline.*

She'll be cool but not cold, she decides for the 100 time. She also won't be snarky or hostile, much as that's how she feels. Because at this point Jake is the most powerful man in the world in her field. With a single review, he can make or break someone's reputation – he does it every day – so she can't afford to make an enemy out of him. She is just starting out as a composer – she began composing late in life – and she hopes that maybe he'll even help her at some point (back then he intimated once that he would). So she has written this letter very carefully. Two or three hundred times. Two or three hundred drafts didn't seem to her excessive last week when she thought about it, given what's at stake. It's not that many drafts, she told herself; it's not even one a day for a year. But now as she pulls off the smelly blanket with a sigh and looks out the window, it seems quite mad. And anyway how stupid could she have been to imagine that Jake would ever write to her again? How could she ever have believed something so ridiculous?

But she had. She had because Jake had promised he'd contact her again. And also because she had taken him for what he presented himself as: an honest man, a man of integrity. (He used these words – *honesty, integrity* – more often than anyone else she had ever met.) So it took her a while to realize that he was a liar. She had laughed with him like a co-conspirator, an insider, when he lied to Nathan Singelman or to Fran. Yet for some reason (naïveté? wishful thinking?) it never occurred to her that sooner or later it would be her turn. In his final email to her, the follow-up to his break-up email, he wrote,

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*We'll meet again, Eve, I'm sure of it. In three-to-five years, when things have cooled down. Even Fran agreed that in three-to-five years we could be friends. You and I have lots to talk about, and when the time is right, we'll do it.*

He said three-to-five years. He said so. She had it in writing. So for the next three years, she counted every day she didn't hear from him, and every week, every month, and every year. Counting down to the three-year mark, the earliest possible point of re-connection, according to his promise. When he didn't contact her then, she was astonished and deeply wounded. At the four-year mark, as well, Jake didn't contact her. But both these times she assured herself that he would be in touch with her before the five years were up. She was sure of this, because he'd said "in three-to-five years." Five years was the outer limit. So even though by the last year leading up to the five-year mark, she was functioning fairly well externally – building her music therapy practice, seeing friends, keeping in touch with her two boys, both now away at college, and even doing some composing – in fact all she was doing was waiting to hear from Jake.

But not anymore. The five-year mark

came and went six months ago, and now she is starting to really grasp that Jake isn't ever going to contact her again. It's hard to take in emotionally, but intellectually at least, she knows it's true. For Jake, the whole thing's probably in the past, and has been ever since they broke up. Most likely he hasn't thought of her even once in the past five-and-a-half years. Plus even if he did, she is a sore point with his wife, so why would he jeopardize the peace he has re-established with Fran for someone he no longer even cares about?

Of course he'll never write to her again. Why would he?

But still. That letter – the one she keeps re-working in response to the one he'll never send – lives on in her with a life of its own.

*Thank you for your invitation to meet next time I'm in Israel, but I am going to decline. At this late date, I don't think we have anything to say to each other...* (No, don't write that.)

This letter pops into her head unbidden, whenever it wants, as do a few other specific phrases:

*Do you love me?*

*Hold me. Hold me tighter.*

*I've never loved anyone more in my life.*

*You don't love me anymore, do you?*

“

*All those letters she wrote to Jake, and all those letters she read of his, were not (as her father used to say) a total loss.*

*No. You don't care if I'm alive or dead.*

*I don't love you either.*

*I haven't loved you for a long time now.*

*Please don't love me anymore.*

These phrases, like the letter, don't have meaning the way such phrases or sentences usually do. They don't mean what they appear to mean. They're old, dead words

– words that have lost their meaning – but somehow keep popping up, and ejaculating themselves, inside of her. They're like a computer glitch, some weird default computer program that keeps appearing on your screen. They're a stupid, meaningless recurring tic.

Not surprising, though. None of this is uncommon in people who have been traumatized, thinks Eve, as the lights in the cabin turn a shade brighter. I have a broken mind. I've never had a broken mind before. A broken heart, yes. Other men have broken my heart. But only Jake has broken my mind.

She begins to laugh. Crazy. Crazy. Waiting all this time. Wasting all this time. Crazy. And sad.

As she laughs, she hears a baby cry on the other side of the cabin. It cries in just two tones – from a high A to a high B-flat – over and over again. How do babies know how to cry in musical intervals? she wonders. She straightens out her messed-up blankets and retrieves her earpiece from the tangle. Well, one thing that's not sad is music. All those letters she wrote to Jake, and all those letters she read of his, were not (as her father used to say) a total loss. She got a beautiful song cycle out of them.

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About a year ago, on a long, boring, rainy day, she started setting some of their letters to music, and in a way used these to tell the story of their whole relationship, and she likes how it came out. She patterned this composition on the love songs Schumann wrote for Clara and presented to her on the night before their long-awaited wedding. Originally Eve called her song cycle *The Life Cycle of Love*, but by the time it was finished, she was juggling titles like *The Death Cycle of Love*, *The Bi-Cycle of Love*, and *Cycles of Love and Hate*. She still hasn't settled on a title and she also doesn't yet have an ending. But now she begins to hum one of the letter-songs from this cycle under her breath, softly, so Born Again won't hear. This one is a medley of some of the things that Jake said or wrote to her five -and-a-half years ago:

"For a single hour with you, I would burn every music score in the world."

"I've never loved anyone in my life more than I love you now."

"You're the best friend I've ever had. I've never before had a friend like you."

"Look at me, I'm crying I'm so happy. I haven't cried since I was seven years old."

"I'm a new man. I'm not the same person who walked into this hotel room four days ago. You've given me a new life."

"I can't imagine living my life ever again without you in it. We'll always be together, Eve, one way or another. At the very least as friends. That much I can promise you for sure."

The letter-song that she is humming now is set to flute, harp, and strings, one of her favourite combinations because of Mozart's concerto for these instruments. Her letter-song has various complex strands, and multiple voices interweaving with each other, but at the same time it has a simple, beautifully haunting, singable theme. As she quietly hums it, she can feel herself lying in Jake's arms. She is safe and secure, knowing how much he loves her.

The flight attendant with the bright crimson lipstick reaches over Eve's pudgy neighbour to collect her tray. "It's almost untouched," Eve tells her. *Almost untouched* is another way of saying *almost virginal*, but you can't be "almost" a virgin; either you're a virgin or you're not. The flight attendant removes Born Again's tray. Born Again is bug-eyed now, watching the beginning of an episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*. Eve's amazed. What kind of an idiot starts watching a 30-minute TV show 25 minutes before landing? Doesn't he realize they're going to turn it off in the

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*She begins to hum one of the letter-songs from this cycle under her breath, softly, so Born Again won't hear.*

middle? Pull the plug on Larry David? He'll be right in the middle of a sentence, and the screen will go dark.

On her neighbour's screen Larry David looks sort of like Jake. He has much less hair, and straighter hair, than Jake. But still there is something similar about the two of them. They're both white-haired, lanky, 65- or 75-year-old Jewish males. They're both impatient men who don't suffer fools gladly. And they're both brilliant, charismatic, socially awkward, neurotic, tender-hearted, cruel, narcissistic, endearing,

and f---d-up. Of course, to be fair, there are differences between them, too. Jake is an intellectual, a thinker, and "LD" just a comedian. Jake is a serious person; LD is funny. Very, very funny. Or as LD would say, "Pretty, pretty..."

Suddenly there's no more Larry David: the screen's gone black. The pilot's voice booms over the loudspeaker: "This is your captain speaking. We are now beginning our descent into Israel."

Eve, even though she anticipated Larry David's disappearance, is annoyed by it. Descent? she thinks contemptuously. One doesn't descend to Israel; one ascends. Arrival in Israel is a spiritual ascension. Don't Canadian pilots know anything?

"Please place all your hand luggage below the seat in front of you, switch off all electronic devices, and fasten your seat belts."

She obeys. But as she is shoving her carry-on under the seat in front of her, some of those phrases return.

*I don't love you anymore. I don't. I haven't loved you for years.*

Then: *Do you love me?*

There's a pause.

*No. Of course you don't. You don't care if I'm alive or dead.*

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

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## CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

She straightens up in her seat and looks out the window: blackness dotted with yellow lights.

Not *You don't care*, she corrects herself. *He*. *He* doesn't care. Third person. Stop talking to him like he's still your eternal I-Thou after all this time. It's been five-and-a-half years.

The plane plummets and she feels her stomach plummet, too. She clutches both armrests, her eyes shut tight. The plane drops again; it feels like it's diving, and she thinks she is going to vomit. Then the plane steadies itself. She opens her eyes. Gradually her stomach settles down. This thing with Jake, apart from everything else, is embarrassing. First of all because of its banality. The powerful older man at the peak of his career, and the young woman just starting out as a musician (or anyway the younger woman – 50 to his 65). It's such a cliché. Secondly, it's embarrassing because she can't get over it. She's not a fool. She knew from the beginning that a relationship between a married man and an unattached woman couldn't last. But even so, here she is, stuck in this state, and unable to move forward. It doesn't make any sense that she should be so f-----up over what was, after all, just a five-month



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*She knew from the beginning that a relationship between a married man and an unattached woman couldn't last.*

affair. She wasn't like this even after Brian died, and he was her husband and she'd loved him for over 15 years. She did suffer terribly at first after Brian's death, but then she quickly recovered. She had no choice, in a way, 10 years ago: Michael was 10 and Ethan was eight; she couldn't just fall apart. Yet here it is five-and-a-half years since she and Jake parted ways, and she's still obsessed with him day and night. There's something here she doesn't understand. Some mystery she can't solve.

Now the plane lands in a series of three rough bumps. Loud clapping erupts. Right. Israelis always clap whenever a

plane lands. Celebrating survival – implicitly reminding you of all the possible disasters you have just narrowly escaped. The plane is still coasting along the runway, but already people are standing up, taking down coats and parcels from overhead compartments, phoning relatives and friends to say they've arrived, and squinting at hand-held devices to check their email. Good idea, thinks Eve. I should see what I've missed while up in the air. Probably 10 or 15 emails. Still sitting in her seat (practically the only person on the plane not yet standing up), she turns on her BlackBerry. Maybe, she thinks, I'll have an email from Jake. ■

*Excerpted from The Dead Man by Nora Gold. Copyright © Nora Gold 2016. The Dead Man will be published by Inanna Publications on May 5, 2016. It is already available online at Amazon.com.*

*Nora Gold is the author of Fields of Exile, which won the 2015 Canadian Jewish Literary Award, and Marrow and Other Stories, winner of a Canadian Jewish Book Award. Gold is the founder and editor of Jewish Fiction.net, and the writer-in-residence at the Centre for Women's Studies in Education. For more information, visit noragold.com.*

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