

**Lizzie Doron: To the Lions**  
(OT: Nur nicht zu den Löwen)

Sample Translation  
By Lucy Jones

‘This is how I gradually found out something about her.’  
Peter Handke  
*A Sorrow Beyond Dreams*

00:30

[odeliaor@gmail.com](mailto:odeliaor@gmail.com)

Odelia Or, I send you blessings.

You'll probably be surprised to get this mail from me. But please do me a favour and read what I have to say.

I'm Rivi Greenfeld, the old lady who you always see standing at the window, but actually, we don't know each other. For the past six years, you and others have tried to persuade me to agree to the demolition of my apartment building. 'Clearance for new occupancy' is what the project is called. I don't remember the exact details but as far as I can make out, you head the group of people that has been trying to get me to approve the plan. The first time you came over, I told you I'd already destroyed enough things in my life and had no need for more. If I recall rightly, your round, brown and, I have to say, pretty eyes widened, like you were trying to tell me something. But before you could say what it was, I'd already closed the door.

Just so that you know, I opened the door again less than a minute later to explain that I'm not always in tune with other people.

Anyway, a few days later I realized that you'd organised a proper army to carry out your aims. And that friend of yours, Oded Tick, is one of your most loyal soldiers. When he showed up on my doorstep, I saw right away that he's one of those startup hotshots who thinks they can boss everyone around – and sure enough, he offered to buy my flat for twice the market price. I'm certain you already know that I turned him down with a flat-out 'no,' and was about to close the door when he suddenly stuck his foot and then his head through the crack.

'It's for your future,' he said.

'I don't have much of a future left,' I answered.

'But you could still make your dreams come true with the money you'd get,' he said.

I told him I'd already lived my life to the fullest and that he could forget the whole thing.

Months later, I was standing at the window again when I saw you marching over to my apartment with three men. That's when I realized you're just as obsessed with city redevelopment as the settlers are with every little sliver of our biblical land. And that we were going to war. I had to beat you in a subtler way, and so I asked you in and tried hard to be polite. It's not my strong suit. Generally, I'm not very good in social situations, but I wanted at least to tell you my side of the story. I had to make you understand that this apartment isn't just a home – it's actually a museum or a memorial, if you like, to everything that's happened in my life. And everything that *will* happen. You just looked at the floor. I haven't forgotten that moment because I thought I'd convinced you to leave things alone.

So imagine my surprise when another comrade from your brigade – some Joav or Nimrod, don't hold me to a name, I'm certain you know who I mean – showed up here. I was standing at the window then, too.

He said, 'Now you listen to me.'

'I'm listening,' I replied.

'I have five children and I need more space, get it?'

'Of course,' I said.

'So you understand?'

'Of course I understand,' I said. 'But I'm damn sure I won't let what happened to my parents in Europe happen to me here, that's for sure. And your five children are your problem.'

Tell me, how do you put up with these kinds of guys? But let's leave that. The truth is, I'd already forgotten the whole 'clearance for new occupancy' thing. After all, when we saw each other at the window a few months ago, and you told me everyone had signed and I was the

only one holding up the project, six years had passed.

I was glad to be the one holding things up. I still believed I stood a chance to get the demolition of my apartment and this entire neighbourhood dropped from the agenda. But three weeks ago, I saw in our WhatsApp group that your project is going ahead. I felt the pressure and even though I secretly knew the situation was hopeless, I dreamed, hoped, and prayed that something would hobble your plan.

That’s how I managed to get by until this evening.

This evening, when I heard the knock at the door, and saw it was you through the spyhole, I was so shocked that I didn’t open the door. I waited until you were gone before picking up the envelope you’d placed on the mat. I knew straight away it was an eviction order. Now I see that it’s out of my hands to save myself and my home, that I just buried my head in the sand rather than putting up a fight, that I’ve lost and will be forced to move into a temporary place until the new building is finished after which, as you state, I can move back in. I just want to say that, at my age, only God can make that decision.

Rivi Greenfeld, your neighbour

sent

01:22

WhatsApp

Dear Noah, sorry it’s so late. I just had to tell you that I received some horrible news tonight: in six days, they’re going to demolish my apartment building.

Noah, I’m afraid you were right.

4:00

WhatsApp

Noah, years ago, I remember you once said to me that your wounds would not heal in your lifetime. And tonight I understood what you meant. Tonight, I realize that this building will be a part of me until I die, and its demolition will be a festering wound to my last breath. But most of all, I realize I have to start fighting. You know what I'm like. I've never fought or got behind a cause, which is like fighting. But in the last few hours, I've resolved not to depart this world quietly. Enough is enough.

04:10

[odeliaor@gmail.com](mailto:odeliaor@gmail.com)

Young lady,

I'm writing these words at 4 o'clock in the morning. If I'm not mistaken – and I know I'm not – you moved here six years ago, the exact same week my new life was supposed to begin and I was looking forward to a peaceful retirement. My plans were modest, nothing major. I wanted to live the rest of my life in the building I was born in and hoped to spend my last days here, in my own bed. And then you turned up and introduced yourself as the new neighbour, saying you wanted to convince us all to take part in the city redevelopment programme. Believe me, I never thought your ominous plan would succeed until tonight. But when I held your eviction order in my hands, I saw the black hole of death before me. I detest death, even the idea of it. You're still young and death doesn't weigh on you yet – neither do remembrance days or a sudden longing for the dead. When I think about my life, it's hard to understand why I have these sudden urges to live, despite everything. But that's another story.

Anyway, what’s important to me is that you understand the fears I’ve been dragging around with me, my whole life – most of all, the fear of being driven out of my own home or being made a refugee. My parents were refugees, you see, and they taught me what it felt like. I just want you to know that those friends you sent around, in the hope that they’d persuade me to give up my apartment, drove me crazy – the way they pulled themselves up to their full height. The whole history of the Jews flashed before my eyes.

But you also have to understand that I’m not a monster, despite my pain. I completely get you and your friends. This place has no history for you and I know that all the nice young people these days need modern housing . But I’m sorry to say that that’s where our interests clash. Yes, I admit I hoped to beat you and these young men and women in need of shiny new buildings, car parks and all the mod cons. I expect all I am is an obstacle in your way and even now, when dawn is almost breaking, I’m still hoping for a miracle and that your plan will hit a bump in the road.

Rivi

not sent

04:47

WhatsApp

Noah, I couldn’t sleep so I spent the night settling scores with everyone I know. I mostly bombarded Odelia with emails, even though I didn’t send the last one. Noah, it was just something I had to do. Do you think I’ve gone crazy?

Bye,

Rivi

**Six days left**

08:09

[odeliaor@gmail.com](mailto:odeliaor@gmail.com)  
Good morning Odelia,

I've realized that I can't beat you in our dispute, but I still have to tell you and your friends a little bit about myself so you know I'm not just some old woman at the window who no one needs to take into consideration because (you think) I don't belong here anymore. You need to know that even if I leave here and never return, I and many others have put down roots and our hearts and souls have settled in this place. That's why last night, I swore to myself I wouldn't just let our story fade into oblivion. You must understand that, from the moment you left yesterday until right now, I've been consumed by one thought – that the world is cruel and merciless for an old, lonely woman. I want you to know that, despite my age, which undoubtedly seems biblical in your eyes since that's just how young people are (even though I'm just 69 and four months old), I haven't lost touch, have no impediments and am not suffering from dementia. On the whole, my health is very good. I feel very strongly that I mustn't give in. I've given in my entire life but not anymore. As long as this apartment is still standing, I am going to write to everyone who has been a part of my life and tell them how I feel.

I hope you read my words with respect and I also hope that I'm not going over the top.

Best wishes

Your neighbour, Rivi

sent

08:12

How could I?

I was drenched in sweat, so I took a shower, and that’s when I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I’ve avoided mirrors for years, but given the circumstances, I chose to be kind to myself today. I took a hard look at my face and realized that, despite everything, there were still some traces of beauty. I have a full head of hair and my teeth gleam when I smile. My skin looked flawless, but I told myself that was probably due to my poor eyesight. Poor vision is nature’s gift to folks like me and the elderly in general. Then, out of nowhere, a thought came to me: What are old people good for in this world? The answer soon came: The reason we’re here is to tell stories.

09.11

[MichaelS@gmail.com](mailto:MichaelS@gmail.com)

Hey Michael,

Long time, right? I’m sure you’ll reach for the ‘delete’ tab the instant you realize you’ve received an email from Rivi Greenfeld, but after six years of silence, perhaps you’ll feel something like curiosity and read this.

Early yesterday evening, I received news that a city redevelopment project is soon going to start in the building I live in and that I’m being evicted from my flat. I thought I would die, but so far I haven’t. The opposite, in fact. That terrible news stirred something in me and I felt the urge to contact everyone in my life who ever meant something to me.

As you can see, you’re right at the top of my list, just like you always were.

‘Rivi, sweetheart, you’ve done Hebrew a great service, adding dots and lines in all the right places, and you’ve been a bonus to our newspaper as well, of course – but you know times are tough and print media isn’t what it used to be, and you’re only a year away from retirement.’

Do you remember?

That’s what you said, word for word. I listened and stayed silent, and when you’d finished, I took a box from the corridor like an actress in an American movie, packed up my desk, cleared out my office, and left the newsroom where I’d worked for over fifty years.

‘How are you finding it?’ you asked me a week later on the phone.

I said nothing. As you know, I’ve never been much of a talker.

‘You’ll be fine,’ you promised.

Well, it’s been six years since I last heard from you. I take it you know how deeply in love with you I was, but love is not at the top of my list today. Today I want to mourn all the things I’ve lost: my job and years of daily conversations. All it took was a few short sentences that you tossed at me, and there I was, without a job and without you. And in just under a week, I’ll also lose my home.

sent

09:15

I was once a snail or a turtle and when my shell is destroyed, my flesh will be exposed and naked, and how it burns, it burns terribly.

10:48

[docbarley@gmail.com](mailto:docbarley@gmail.com)

Hey Ido,

I hope you're well. I need your help, please. Since last night, I've been having the worst panic attacks. You know the score – racing pulse, dizziness, hot flushes, and a million things going through my mind, just like in the past. Please write me a Xanax prescription.

Thanks a lot,

Rivi

sent

11:10

[noah.flowers@gmail.com](mailto:noah.flowers@gmail.com)

Hey Noah,

There's so much I have to say and I've decided to get it all off my chest. Let me explain. Last night, when I realised the Terminator's countdown had begun, I just felt like screaming. For a moment, I even thought about turning on my webcam and telling the whole world on Facebook or Instagram that my apartment is being torn down. But although I'm quite good with all those new platforms, I was afraid I'd make a fool of myself so I decided to write emails instead. Diaries or snail mail are no longer *the medium*, as the millennials say.

Luckily I'm still in full control of my faculties, my memory is as sharp as a tack and most importantly, I have a wealth of experience to fall back on. People shouldn't underestimate me, especially not my young neighbour who thinks I'm just some batty old woman who hangs around at the window all day.

I’m just writing to you so you know. Because you’re a friend. And so that my heart doesn’t give out and I don’t go crazy. And because I know you understand, just as I do, that life isn’t divided into present and future. For folks like us, sadly, it’s mostly made up of the past.

Your weaver of red wreaths

sent

11:34

WhatsApp

You’re unbelievable, Michael. ‘Sorry’. Just one word and that’s it? Hey, have you lost your mind?

Is that all you have to say to me?

‘Sorry’? What the hell? Have you forgotten me? My flat? My mother’s room?

You always were and always will be a narcissist.

not sent

11:49

I cried when I read Michael’s ‘sorry’. And I thought I’d forgotten how to, but it seems it’s like riding a bicycle – something we remember how to do even when we’ve forgotten. I’m worried I still love him, and this worry alone is enough to drive me crazy – no, it scares me. Just don’t let it get you down, I tell myself, a new mantra . . .

12:12

[MichaelS@gmail.com](mailto:MichaelS@gmail.com)

Hey Michael,

I read your ‘sorry.’ To keep writing to you isn’t easy, but I won’t give up, not this time.

Nobody knows better than you that our relationship was mostly professional, but – for my part at least – we had another connection. I was smitten from the moment we first met, couldn’t even look at you without my entire body trembling. (Let me say straight away that there’s no accusation in me writing any of this. I really don’t feel that way today – I’m just writing about myself.) The most precious thing I have are my stories and when this building is demolished, they’ll be all that remains of me. You once told me many years ago that you weren’t afraid of God, just of women who talk a lot. So I’ll probably scare you a bit because I’m going to talk, but there’s nothing for you to be afraid of. I’d just like you to read this and feel some regret. That would be enough.

I’ve always settled for very little.

I hope to find some peace by writing this. And I hope I don’t come across as pathetic.

More to follow.

sent

14:20

[MichaelS@gmail.com](mailto:MichaelS@gmail.com)

Me again. As you’ve probably guessed by now, my thoughts today are revolving around all that I’ve lost, and largely around you. Of all the memories I have, the one that

keeps flashing through my mind is when I glanced at your diary and saw you’d reserved a table for two, and I thought you’d deliberately left it lying open on your desk. I thought it was your strange way of asking me out to dinner.

That’s how, after working together for a year, in love with you but damned to silence, I dared take a step forward and, as you must surely remember, turned up at the restaurant wearing way too much make-up and a white dress, like a bride, only to catch you in a romantic clinch with Nicky. If I remember rightly (and I do), Nicky was working for our competition at the time. I was stunned, and just stood there as if paralyzed, but then I realized you’d seen me and worse even, had ignored me.

The next morning I walked into your office, ready to confess everything, but then I got cold feet and was about to leave when you stood up from your desk, came over and took me in your arms.

‘Rivi,’ you said, ‘forget what you saw, it was a work dinner, nothing more.’ True, the caresses I saw you giving Nicky in the restaurant kept replaying in my head. But your embrace gave me hope, and I couldn’t tell which was real – the caresses you gave Nicky or the embrace you gave me. A few days later, you suddenly turned up in my office.

‘Rivi, you’ve got a permanent job here now! It’s you and me together until retirement,’ you said, and my whole world turned upside down because I really thought you were the man of my life. You, and not Arik, who’d already vanished into thin air by then.

‘I’ve hit the jackpot,’ you added.

At a distance after all these years, I can say that it was the moment I entered a state of delusion about us. And I think you carry at least some of the blame.

We’ve known each other for almost fifty years but we’ve never talked about what went on – about me and you. Now, though, it’s time for me to open a few Pandora boxes. I’m going to piece together our long, painful relationship. And in doing so, I can’t help thinking that nowadays you’d be accused of sexually exploiting a person who was dependent on you.

But don’t worry – you and all your deeds are beyond the statute of limitations.

Take care,

Rivi

sent

15:45

[MichaelS@gmail.com](mailto:MichaelS@gmail.com)

Michael, the memories just keep on coming. I’m thinking of the day it all began. Arik Packer, the commander of my unit and your teenage friend, had sent me to see you. I’d only just turned twenty-one and walked into your office on a hot summer’s day. You were sitting at a desk laden with files, a strikingly handsome man of thirty-two. Arik had implied that, despite being married, you were still one of the most sought-after men in the city. He also said you were a genius.

I remember you were wearing jeans and a black T-shirt, that you had your back to the window and were enveloped in a cloud of cigarette smoke. You said, ‘Welcome, beautiful,’ and I blushed, not knowing where to look. My eyes followed the curls of smoke and that’s when I noticed the photo of a pretty woman wrapped in your arms on the wall behind your desk. I remember feeling a pang of jealousy and, as if you sensed what was going through my mind, you said, ‘Wow, I didn’t know you were *this*

beautiful.’ I didn’t say anything, not even when you told me I was hired as a proofreader.

My knees went weak for a moment. I didn’t even know what being a proofreader for a newspaper meant. But Arik had sent me to you and he knew what was good for me, so I said yes.

That’s how I was, back then – a naïve, young thing.

You reached your hand out, wished me the best of luck and while we were still locked in a long handshake, you said you’d been told that my track record in editing daily orders and correcting the officers’ spelling and grammar mistakes was excellent. I saw the faintest smile steal across your lips, which is when I realized that Arik had confided in you about his wife finding us out, which was why he’d had to get rid of me and have me fired. And that was how the chapter of my life in the army ended, to my regret. All the same, I comforted myself with the fact that I was profiting from your and Arik’s friendship by being hired as a proofreader.

To be honest, without the army and Arik, I was at a total loss in my life. I was twenty-one, my family offered me little support and I’d been thrown out of the squad of our country’s superheroes.

You know, there were times when the generals seemed like gods to us.

I hoped you didn’t know it was my father who’d demanded that Arik find a decent position for me. Only recently I realised that I was ‘a favour to a friend’ for you.

But still, I gave myself up to it all – comma, dash and full stop. And especially to you.

You were the boss of all those journalists and editors – they all worked for you and all fell in love with you.

I was one of them.

Your one and only

Rivi

sent

15:59

WhatsApp

Hey Noah, I see your name on my display but I'm not in the mood to talk. Don't worry, I'm at home. This idea of writing everything down has taken hold of me and my mind is racing forwards – or rather, backwards. You know me and my obsessions. I'm not going to give up until the job is finished.

16:18

[MichaelS@gmail.com](mailto:MichaelS@gmail.com)

Hey Michael,

As of today, I'm no longer the person you think you know. Today, I'm taking my courage in both hands to let go and write things about me and others. I'm just going to let it all out without thinking. And if someone says that old Rivi has lost her mind, then they can for all I care. Even so, the story I'm sending you is true, totally true, I swear.

I'd be very happy if you read it.

Thanks,

Rivi

It was 2010, 9.30 pm.

The stand-up comedian Louis C.K. was on the TV. I was watching him and laughing –shaking with laughter, in fact. I don’t think I’d ever laughed so hard and if you’d been as lonely as me, you’d understand. Finding someone who can make you laugh is quite something.

But the second or third time I watched his show, something more shocking happened. I was watching his act when suddenly I felt ashamed because all I had on was a faded old pair of pyjamas. The very next day, I went into one of the fanciest stores, even though, as you know, I’m not a Prada girl, and bought a little black dress. And a push-up bra to go with it, and a pair of those shapewear panties that push your belly all the way back to your spine. And every week, when Louis C.K. was on TV, I sat down in my little black dress – yes, with make-up on too. I turned his show into a real occasion. (I’m very surprised, Michael, to be letting you in on all of this.)

I watched every single one of Louis C.K.’s shows and at some point, started fantasising that one day I might be able to write a screenplay about an elderly woman from Tel Aviv who falls in love with a comedian she only knows from the TV, who turns out to be the first ever person she confides in about all the disasters of her love life. I even started making notes about my screenplay for Louis in a notepad.

I wouldn’t tell you this ghoulish story if you didn’t feature in it, even though you didn’t realize it.

I don’t suppose you remember that I once turned up at the newsroom, completely hysterical, and begged everyone in the team to find out the email of Louis C.K.’s agent. And it was actually you, in a generous mood and with all your contacts, who got it for me

in the end. ‘Rivi, what’s going on between you and Louis?’ you even asked and I said nothing, but privately enjoyed my secret and the small chance that you might be jealous. I was delighted with myself and my little plan.

Even I have to laugh now at the thought of it. And just imagine: in a fit of courage that surprised me more than anyone, or perhaps it was sheer desperation, I sent some of my notes to the email address you’d given me. No reply came, of course.

Michael, believe me – only now do I realize how desperate and helpless I’ve felt all my life, not to mention how horrified I am at my foolishness.

What can I say? I couldn’t stop stuffing my drawers with notes for Louis until there was no more space. When I found out he was going to do a show to Israel, I immediately bought a ticket. I took all my notes and seriously thought about trying to meet him afterwards. Luckily, as the evening went on, I came to my senses. Moments of sanity like these come to me now and again. I left the instant I realized I should bury all my ideas and haywire fantasies – and my virtual relationship with him too. At home, I tore everything to shreds.

But in my head, the fantasies carried on, which threw me into a real spiral when, years later, it was revealed that *my* Louis had sexually harassed all those women. I was compelled to write hundreds of emails to him again, like to you now, against my common sense. In truth, I never stopped hoping he’d read them one day. As you know, that’s just the way I am – old and stubborn, but loyal.

Not long afterwards, his show was taken off the air and Louis vanished from my life for good. Why am I telling you this absurd story? Just a coincidence. Because I happened to be cleaning out my wardrobe and came across that little black dress. I

looked at it and wondered if I should laugh or cry. But, in the end, I convinced myself that today, I could do both.

Signed

Little Miss Infantile.

not sent

18:02

Still wearing the little black dress that squeezes my chest, I walk over to the window to get some air but I can hardly breathe. I realize that, over the past six years, my contact with the outside world has been almost exclusively at this window, and that standing here is a legacy or gene passed down to me because, for as long as I can remember, my mother also stood at the window. And now here I am, the second generation at the window.

I spy a man in a hat and coat and imagine he’s the man from Fruma who’s been dead for thirty years. After that, I watch a woman with a pram and she reminds me of Sonja, poor thing, who always filled her pram with knitting needles and balls of wool. Then, a young woman in a pink dress dashes past with a bouncy step, almost surfing, and she doesn’t remind me of anyone because she’s a modern woman. Straight after her, three men tear past and they don’t remind me of anyone either, but I stay at the window until the streetlights go on because this is my favourite time of day, and as usual, I sing.

In the stillness of falling leaves

the day fades over the fields.

Is she walking along paths

Sample Translation „To the Lions” (Lizzie Doron)

recalling nights of love?

From the garden, a song rises

and the sad sound of the harmonica.

Is she still sewing with golden thread,

recalling nights of love?

Gently the weather vane sways,

a willow tree on the riverbanks.

Is she laughing or sad,

recalling nights of love?

The village sleeps after a day of toil,

a star bursts in the sky.

Perhaps she stands by the path

recalling nights of love?

And with this song that I love so much, I bid farewell to the day that has finally  
come to an end.