

# The Lobster's State of Mind

By : Hovav Heth



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## The Lobster's State of Mind

Ronit looked around Doron's room. On the table by the computer there was a pile of articles he was reading for his seminar paper and a few printed pages lying on top of them. There was a book by Hanif Kureishi with a bookmark in it and a Cyprus guidebook he had bought for the trip they had been planning for the end of the semester. Everything seemed like yesterday, as it had always been, as if her world hadn't shattered. The sheets lay on the bed practically as if Doron had just gone to the bathroom for a minute, a hollow in the pillow where his head had rested, the blanket casually thrown back, and she could still smell the body that had been lying there two days ago – it all seemed so unreal.

Something caught her eye; there was something small stuck between the bed and the wall. She climbed on to the bed where she had spent so many nights and then froze: she was erasing the shape of his body and his smell in the sheets. She tried to pick up whatever it was without messing up the bed too much. It was a little pill, a half-red, half-white capsule. This was very strange. Ronit felt around with her fingers where the pill had been and found another one. What was that supposed to mean? Now she was angry and frantic rather than prudent. She got off the bed, grabbed it with both hands, pulled it away from the wall, and immediately heard the sound of many small objects falling on the floor. What the hell was that? Ronit tried to understand, and she thought how weird it was that only a week before, they had celebrated her twenty-third birthday.

The waiter poured some wine into Doron's glass and stood beside him, bottle in hand, waiting for Doron's verdict. Doron, who was quite ignorant in such matters, smiled, picked up the glass and sniffed it like a real wine connoisseur: "Mmmm, a hint of almond bloom... a ripe

guava... some laundry powder, very expensive powder, maybe some softener as well..."

Ronit giggled, "You're so funny!"

"Then why are you laughing if I am soooooo funny?"

"I'm being polite."

Doron stuck his tongue out in her direction, then he bent across the table for a kiss. The waiter stood patiently with the bottle in his hand.

"I'm sorry, do pour us some wine, please."

"That's quite all right. Have you decided what to order or would you like a few more minutes?"

"We're OK. I'll take the lobster in white wine and garlic, and Ronit?"

"You're eating lobster? Well done! I'll take the sea food casserole with cream sauce and mushrooms." Doron had always been too cautious where food was concerned. He raised his glass: "To our love, until we're a hundred and twenty!"

"Oh." Ronit grabbed him by the back of the neck and gave him a big kiss on the mouth. Doron emitted rather a loud sigh.

"My God, everybody is staring at us," she whispered, and as if to confirm this observation, a middle-aged woman smiled at them and raised her glass: "Look at them, David, they're such a cute couple!"

Doron smiled at her and raised his glass. "I need to go to the bathroom. I'll be right back."

He went toward the corridor leading to the toilet, passed by a half-open door and peeked in. Lots of pots and pans lined the wall and there was a strong smell of frying and spices. A chef showed up with a lobster in his hands, helplessly moving its jointed legs around. The free claws seemed quite menacing, but the experienced chef seemed very calm and definitely unharmed. Doron opened the door slightly and went inside. Could this be the unfortunate one he was about to consume? It couldn't

be; his order hadn't even reached the kitchen yet. This was probably someone else's unfortunate lobster. On the other side of the kitchen, another chef armed with a big knife was chopping onions with incredible dexterity.

"Excuse me. May I be of any assistance?" The chef had a slight French accent and he seemed very friendly.

"I'm sorry, I was just a little curious. I'm out of here."

"No, no, it's perfectly OK."

"It's just that I'm about to eat my first lobster and I saw you with this lobster, so... that's it."

"It's OK. Look, first we cook it in hot water and then we shall bake it. You see this big pot?" the French chef lifted the lobster over the pot.

"Are you cooking it alive? Why don't you kill it first?"

"Oh no, but they die quite quickly, there is no problem." He put the lobster in the pot and a terrible whistling sound emerged. Doron felt his stomach turning inside out.

"Was that the water?"

"No, it's the lobster," said the pleasant chef, smiling. "I think this might have been a bad idea, huh? Oh well, we learn from experience. I am so used to this and... I am really sorry, I hope you will forgive me."

"Oh no, it's my fault, I came into this place uninvited. Thank you very much for your kindness." Doron's stomach continued to feel funny and he quickly got out of the kitchen and hurried back to the table.

"Oh, gross! I want to change my order."

"What happened, was it dirty in the bathroom?"

"No, I forgot to go to the bathroom. Do you know what they're doing in the kitchen? They're boiling the lobster while it's still alive! That's terrible!"

Ronit laughed. "Oh dear, didn't you know that's how they make them?"

You're so ignorant!" But she caressed his hand and added empathetically:

"You had a little shock, do you want Mummy to comfort you?"

"Oh, it's so cruel! Who wants to eat a lobster after it's been boiled to death?"

"What difference does it make? It's just a lobster."

"It's a living thing, isn't it? I bet it doesn't want to be cooked alive any more than I do."

"That's nonsense! The lobster doesn't want anything. Lobsters have no self-awareness, no concept of self; it makes no difference if you keep them alive, fry them or hang them."

"How can you be so sure? Why should a lobster have no self-awareness if a mosquito does? When I try to kill a mosquito, it makes very serious efforts to avoid being killed. They certainly act like they really want to live!"

"Any living organism has survival skills; it doesn't turn them into self-aware creatures. Take for example a huge school of fish. Studies conducted on them have shown that a single fish doesn't show any signs of individual behavior, nothing that differentiates it from the other fish. Those little fish and the lobster as well are automatic survival mechanisms, like politicians. They just live to produce another generation."

"Ha, ha, now you're funny!"

"It doesn't matter if I'm funny or not. Saying that the lobster wants or the lobster is scared is completely meaningless. If you are not aware, you have no desires, so there is no moral difference between throwing a living lobster into boiling water or doing the same to an alarm clock, only the lobster is tastier."

"I'm not so sure you're right. It seems to me kind of presumptuous to determine with such confidence whether they are self-aware or not. You

can't even be sure if I am aware. You can only be sure about yourself, so how can you be so sure about the lobster?"

"Don't get so philosophical. There are indications that tell me that the alarm clock is an inanimate object, that the lobster is an unaware living organism, and that you – well, to be quite honest, you're right: I'm not so sure about you." Ronit laughed loudly.

"I'm very happy to see you so amused by yourself, but I'm going to change my order. I'm going to eat the salmon fillet."

"Ah, I knew that eventually we'd end up with salmon. I must warn you, though, I don't think the salmon had such a swell time getting here!"

"Well, at least it got here dead so I don't have to watch it being tortured!"

After dinner, Doron took Ronit to her parents' house. It was an old Jerusalem-stone house in the German Colony with arched windows and blue wooden shutters, and around it was a beautiful, well-kept garden.

"Why do you have to pick up your parents from the airport today of all days?"

"It only means that the presents will be much nicer!"

"Oh well, I can wait in your apartment, that's no big deal."

"I don't think I'll get there tonight. Do you forgive me? I'll make it up to you tomorrow. It's just that the unpacking and opening of the presents stage is very long with my parents, and it'll probably end early in the morning. Anyway, in a month, there will be no more 'your place' and 'my place' – there'll only be 'our place'!"

Ronit went to the bathroom, and Doron walked around the house and went out on to the circular back terrace that overlooked the garden. There was a wonderful fragrance in the air. Against the wall stood a heavy reddish closet that seemed to be a hundred years old, like most of the stuff in the apartment, but while most of the furniture was in good

condition, the closet seemed to be kind of disintegrating.

“Ronit!” he yelled. “What’s this old closet on the terrace?”

“It’s been here since my grandparents built the house, more or less.

There’s lots of old stuff inside it. I don’t think anybody has opened it in the last fifty years.”

Doron opened the closet. Inside were piles of yellowish papers, old dusty folders and old books. He took a few papers – old drawings of animals – and at the bottom of one of them it said: “David Goldberg, 1953”.

“My dad did these when he was a kid.” Ronit was already standing next to him.

“I didn’t know he had such talent, your dad.” Under the drawings was a pile of old magazines. Doron took one out and tried to shake the dust off it.

“Wow, October 1943!” On the cover was a photograph of an American WWII fighter. “You have such amazing things here. We should really search this place – who knows what we’ll find.”

Doron took out a little book that appeared to be red under a thick layer of dust. He opened it; it looked like some kind of a diary. The pages were covered with short lines in tiny handwriting. Some of the lines rhymed.

“Is he a poet, your dad?”

“No, that’s not his handwriting.”

“Then who wrote this?”

“I have no idea! Since my grandparents built the place, many people have been here. How should I know?”

“Wasn’t it weird for your dad to go back and live in the house he grew up in?”

“Maybe. After my grandparents moved to protected housing for the elderly, it was either selling it or having someone move in, and my dad really didn’t want to sell, so we moved in.”

Doron leafed through until he got to a page whose corner was folded down and read:

The Lord, for all that he created  
For all who dwell between the poles,  
He tore away his own awareness  
So he could give them equal souls

He didn't care for shape or size  
For unlike man he was so wise  
And thus all living creatures won  
Those pieces of awareness torn

The human being, the little ant  
He breast-fed with the milk of soul  
A drop to this one, a drop to that  
Their places equal in his heart

When wretched men with vicious feet  
Tread down upon a nest of ants  
The damage caused is so complete  
Our lord can't stand the sight of it

The ants that die make horrid cries  
Though human beings can't hear them crying  
But for the Lord it's just as loud  
As that of scores of people dying

“Wow!”

“Wow, what?”

“This is like an answer to our argument!”

“This is not an answer to anything; it’s a nice poem, no more, no less.

When did you become such a mystic, anyway?”

“I don’t know. Maybe I’m becoming a mystic right now! I mean, first we talked about whether animals are aware, and now, completely by chance, I find a book marked at the exact page where there is a poem about it.

Doesn’t it strike you as fate?”

“Oh dear, I hope we’re not going to discuss fate now. I have to get going, you know? It’s my fate to pick my parents up at the airport every time they fly.”

“Why can’t they take a cab?”

“That’s not very nice; I might have to report it to my dad. Anyway, I like picking them up from the airport in the middle of the night.”

They kissed and said goodbye and Doron went to his apartment.

Doron opened the door to his building and looked in suspiciously. He inspected the corners of the entrance, the ceiling and the two big flowerpots. It wasn’t dangerous burglars he was afraid to find, but cockroaches. For a few weeks now, there had been a terrible infestation of cockroaches. These weren’t the ugly little one-centimeter creatures he used to find at his parents’ place from time to time; the cockroaches in his building were mighty, scary insects. They were two inches or more in length and were covered with a brownish yellowish armor that contained a substantial meaty mass. Stepping on them caused a horrible cracking sound. Their long, rigid antennas moved nervously in all directions as they cruised around at a hundred miles an hour, and when Doron spotted one of them around, he would always panic, fearing that the monster might attack him with those long ugly feelers. That had never happened,

obviously, but Doron was quite convinced that should it happen, he would have a heart attack and die on the spot.

Doron stepped in and called the elevator. When it arrived, he opened the door and inspected its interior before entering. Wherever he had had a traumatic encounter, he would act this way. He opened the door to his apartment, turned on the light and looked around to make sure his apartment was clean. During the first few minutes in his home, he would always behave like an explorer walking through new and uncharted territory, inspecting the kitchen and bathroom before entering. Only after a few minutes, when he had regained his confidence, would he behave like a true proprietor.

He went into his bedroom, inspected it again, and when he was absolutely sure it was safe, put his rucksack on the chair, sat on his bed and stretched his muscles. What a pity Ronit couldn't be with him now. Together, everything was much easier. He thought about the seminar paper he had to submit. His topic was the big economic crisis in Japan, and he and his partner spent hours in the library searching for material. Everything they found seemed inadequate to their academic advisor. Every article was either too complicated for undergraduates to handle or too simple.

Doron heard mincing sounds behind him and jumped frantically to his feet. Now, when he was finally at ease, the infiltrator appeared – from a very unexpected hideout: the warmth of his bed-linen. Doron stood frozen and looked at the cockroach with horror. He was overwhelmed by panic, his knees began to tremble, practically paralyzing his legs as the cockroach cruised along the bed, descended to the floor, and then went into hiding in the little space under the closet between the drawers and the floor.

Doron knew that he wouldn't be able to sleep before the monster lay dead before him. He went out of his room and into the kitchen, looking back

from time to time to make sure the beast hadn't left its place under the closet, and returned armed with a weapon of mass destruction – a can of insecticide. He held the can upside-down, stood at a safe distance from the closet so he wouldn't get caught in the cockroach's escape route, and began spraying under the drawers like a madman, heedless of the fact that in an hour or so, he would have to sleep in the very same room. His whole body was covered with sweat, even though it was a cool Jerusalem night, and he felt quite stupid.

Doron was very intelligent and some of his fears seemed to him quite important for his survival. He was scared to death of anything to do with motorcycles. He always refused his friend Eran's suggestions to join him for a ride on his Suzuki 500 – one mistake and they would both end up smashed against some concrete wall. This was a reasonable fear and Doron felt no need to apologize for it. His irrational fears, however, caused him shame: Doron could never bring himself to watch a horror movie with his eyes open; in the scary scenes, he would always look sideways or partially covered his eyes with his hands. This made him feel uncomfortable about himself; after all, whatever damage could the two-dimensional creatures on the screen cause him? But the fear of cockroaches was the worst, and with the recent infestation, it had become quite exhausting and even intolerable.

Doron believed that in order to overcome his fears, he had to face and confront them. Using this rationale, he hoped that if he could bring himself to stamp on one of the horrid creatures, his fear of them would vanish. When he walked in the street, the encounter with the monsters was less traumatic. Sometimes when he ran into them, Doron would stand near them (but not too close) and try to make that decisive move. He would approach them, prepare his right leg for the final blow, hesitate, walk away, and come closer again, keeping the beast in his sights. He

would sometimes find himself wasting precious minutes transfixed, reluctant to admit his defeat, but unable to step on the ugly insect. So he would stand there until he got the feeling that people were beginning to stare at him, and then he would walk away defeated.

Now Doron stood in front of the closet waiting for the cockroach to reveal itself, but it didn't. Doron began to worry that the beast had escaped while he was in the kitchen and was now waiting to ambush him somewhere else. He knocked cautiously on the closet with no effect. Finally, he took a squeegee and began moving it violently under the closet drawers. After a few seconds, the cockroach came out staggering like a drunk from the overdose of insecticide it had received. Doron froze and then tried to hit the beast with the squeegee. He missed by a millimeter, but the cockroach turned over and lay helplessly on its back, twitching. Doron was about one yard away from it: its rough-textured legs moved desperately back and forth, its ugly antennas moved left and right.

Doron's heart was beating fast and a big drop of sweat dripped off his forehead and landed on the floor. Would he be able to master his fear, demonstrate his superiority over the little creature, and squeeze it to death? After about a more minute of staring, Doron found himself a lot more relaxed and feeling very foolish indeed. Here he was, six feet of muscle and stupidity trembling and sweating when facing a helpless little creature that weighed a lot less than his little finger. Why did he hate them so much, these pathetic little animals? Maybe, he thought, maybe this was the other side of the disgust he felt toward his own irrational fears, toward the part of him that felt small and stupid like the cockroach that was now dying in front of him.

Doron suddenly remembered the poem he had read earlier that evening and the lobster he wouldn't eat. In what way was this cockroach any

worse than ants and lobsters? Did it deserve this terrible fate just because nature had made it so unpleasant to the human eye? No, Doron decided, and he felt conscience-stricken about the agony he was inflicting upon this miserable creature. If it was self-aware (Doron was not quite sure about that), what did it feel now, this cockroach facing imminent death? Maybe it was scared or maybe it accepted its fate and was now waiting for the final blow that would put it out of its misery. These thoughts did not free Doron from his feelings of disgust when he looked at the cockroach, but he gently turned it over with the squeegee. The cockroach wobbled some and it seemed like it wouldn't last very long. After a few yards of slow movement that led to the living room, it turned over on its back again. Should he leave it be in its final moments or put an end to its suffering? Doron would never know the answer. He lifted his foot and stepped decisively on the creature, making sure that death was instantaneous. The cracking sound was quite atrocious. The cockroach was smeared over the floor with substantial remains on the sole of Doron's shoe. He took lots of folded toilet paper, cleaned up the remains, and threw it into the toilet. Due to the short notice, it was impossible to prepare a proper funeral, he said smiling as he flushed.

Doron went to sleep with some troubling questions in his mind: How many cockroaches had he killed? How many ants and mosquitoes? If all of these were conscious creatures, then he was a mass murderer.

Ronit stood by Doron's door and knocked.

"Doron, are you there? Answer me, you jerk!" For a few days he had been avoiding her, not returning calls, or saying he would talk to her the next day. Could Doron have found a new girlfriend? Now, after they decided to live together and after his declaration of eternal love?

Doron was lying in bed and felt awful. He wanted to see Ronit terribly,

but he didn't want her to see him and the apartment in their present state. He needed some more time to try and explain himself and to tidy up the mess. Maybe when he was better he would make a little zoo for his new little friends. He heard the key turn – ah, what a fool, he forgot that she had a key to the apartment; he should have left his key in the keyhole. He jumped hurriedly out of bed and tried to figure out what to do, but it was definitely too late.

Ronit entered the apartment and looked at the living room; it took a few seconds before she realized what she was seeing. The big window was wide open and the cool Jerusalem wind was blowing in. In the center of the room stood a big garbage can overflowing with garbage. The smell was awful. Three ferocious-looking cockroaches were walking smugly on it. In the corner there was another smaller garbage can topped with fruit remains, and a variety of insects were standing there having the time of their lives. One evidently dead cockroach was lying on its back and a long line of ants stretched from it. Ronit screamed, then she cautiously entered Doron's room, not knowing quite what to expect. Doron was sitting on his bed looking quite dazed. Ronit sat by him, caressed his cheek and looked in his eyes, trying to determine what kind of a mental state he was in.

“Oh dear, you look awful. What's the matter with you? Have you lost it completely? Have you decided to open a zoo in here?”

“What? Oh, no, no.”

“So what is that?”

“Well, it's... it's... Remember the conversation we had a few days ago?”

“Which conversation?”

“In the restaurant, when we talked about the lobster and whether animals are self-aware or not.”

“Yeah?” Ronit found it very difficult to understand what he was talking

about and she felt like her head was about to explode. She looked at Doron and suddenly felt as if she were looking at a complete stranger, as if she had woken up to an unfamiliar reality after hibernating for a few years. Who was this man she was talking to? She closed her eyes, took a deep breath and tried to relax and understand what he was saying to her. “So I figured, if these guys are self-aware, why don’t I do something for them? I’ll clean this, I promise, I just have to regain my strength and then I’ll move them somewhere. Ah, look at this monster!”

Doron laughed as Ronit screamed.

“I put up a ‘Do not disturb’ sign, but apparently they can’t read.”

Ronit stepped angrily on the cockroach.

“Why did you do that? That’s exactly what I’m trying to avoid now.”

Ronit’s head still hurt, but at least she had now figured out more or less what he was trying to say, and it didn’t make her feel any better.

“My sweet, I think you kind of temporarily lost your mind, but I’m going to clean up this place and then we’re going to see a doctor.”

“Ah, nonsense, I just got the flu, that’s all.”

“Honey, you look like shit and I want you to see a doctor. Maybe we should go to the emergency room. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I’m going to take care of your little friends; I really hope you’ll forgive me.”

“Don’t kill them, you don’t need to kill them, they want to live, too.”

“Oh, shut up, will you?” she screamed, wanting to cry. That was it! Could things ever go back to what they used to be? What had happened to this world, anyway?

“Ronit, I don’t want you to kill them.”

She quickly left the room and locked it.

“Ronit, I don’t want you to kill them. You can just throw them out or something,” he screamed, and banged on the door.

“I’ll throw you out, you moron!” Ronit went to blow her nose and wipe

the tears and she was relieved to have Doron locked in his room. She began a thorough clean-up of the apartment, killing all the new tenants in spite of Doron's angry screaming and banging on the door that lasted a few minutes until he got tired.

After a few minutes of work, she found that she was more relaxed and had regained her mental abilities, more or less. She tried to understand this bizarre change in Doron; it was as if he had converted overnight to a new religion. Was it for always? Would he become a vegetarian and refrain from even killing mosquitoes for the rest of his life? Perhaps the new ideology wasn't quite formulated. Would this mania go away in a few days? And what about them? Could she live with this man or was this the end? Ronit suddenly felt how terribly she missed Doron, the old Doron, and she went to his room and cautiously opened the door. Doron lay in bed and looked at her with accusing eyes.

"Does it really bother you that I killed those ugly cockroaches and some ants and stuff?"

"Yeah!" he said, sounding like an insulted little boy.

Ronit sat on the bed and felt his forehead. "You have a serious fever. I'm calling the doctor, OK?"

"Do whatever you want."

Dr. Friedman had been her family's doctor for twenty years. He arrived an hour later, gave Doron some antibiotics, and told Ronit to make sure Doron took the entire course on time and to call him should things deteriorate. Over the following days, Ronit tried to spend as much time as possible with Doron. She brought some chicken soup prepared by her mother and made sure he took his medications on time. Doron apologized for alarming her and admitted that he had behaved like a fool. For a few days it seemed to Ronit that he was regaining his strength and becoming his old self again.

And then, three days later, she got up to find him feverish, pale, mumbling incoherently and generally looking like he was about to die. It took him a few minutes to realize who she was. Ronit called an ambulance and Doron was quickly taken to the emergency room and from there directly to the ICU.

His parents and two sisters arrived later from the north of Israel, and Ronit sat with them consumed by guilt. Obviously, she had talked to Orna, Doron's mother, and told her he was sick – Doron had spoken to his mother as well – but she had told her that things were under control and that there was no need for her to come all the way to Jerusalem. She hadn't shared this zoo madness with anyone, and now, as they sat facing the closed door of the ICU, not knowing what to expect, she wondered if she made the right choices. Why had she censored this information? She had thought how embarrassing this story would be for Doron and that she shouldn't alarm his mother – what a fool she was! Orna might have realized earlier how dangerous things were.

And why had Dr. Friedman's antibiotics failed to work?

Why hadn't she just taken him to the hospital? How important she felt when she summoned the loyal family doctor and discussed the symptoms with him, especially when the possibility of using some prestigious and expensive medical institution was mentioned! Such stupid aristocratic arrogance. What use was all the family money and heritage if she didn't have a grain of common sense? She hadn't shared the whole truth even with Dr. Friedman, He was a medical specialist, not a theologian, right? Still, why hadn't she shared this burden with someone?

After spending a grim evening together, they sat shifts: Mother and Mili, who was 14, were first, then Dad and 17-year-old Dikla, and Ronit took the last shift. In the morning, they all gathered near the ICU, but the doctors still wouldn't let them see Doron. Finally, at one p.m., a sad-

looking doctor came out to them and his miserable face was all they needed in order to know what he was about to tell them: Ronit started to cry and Mili asked what that meant and then they all started to cry and the doctor said he was sorry.

Now Ronit was standing by Doron's bed and she realized that he hadn't taken the pills prescribed by the doctor. She herself had seen him put them in his mouth and had been convinced that he had swallowed them. Why had he deceived her like that? She moved the bed a little further from the wall and shook it some more and another pill fell to the floor. She brought a broom and swept up all of the dirt under the bed, and then she collected the pills from the little pile of dust and arranged them in three rows on the table like a military formation. She opened the closet and took out the box of antibiotics. It contained thirteen pills. There was a total of forty-one pills on the table. The doctor had prescribed six pills a day for seven days. One pill was missing. Could he have swallowed one by mistake, or maybe she had missed one pill? She returned to the bed, took the pillow and blanket and shook them violently. Then she took off the sheet and shook the mattress. She gave the floor another sweep but didn't find anything. Why was she trying so hard anyway? As if by finding the missing pill she could bring Doron back from the dead. She remembered that Dr. Friedman had always stressed the importance of taking *all* the antibiotics. Maybe taking just a little made things even worse.

She went to the living room, sat on the couch and started to cry. Why did she deserve this trauma at the age of twenty-three? So far, her life had been so nice – a pretty girl from a good family, a true fairy tale, and now this! Why did she have to meet him? It was all because of that stupid lobster. Why did she try to change people? Who cares if a person doesn't eat seafood?

Ronit looked at her watch. She had been sitting there for twenty minutes sobbing, feeling sorry for herself. Enough! She got up and looked around her and went back to the bedroom. She looked at the rows of pills on the table again. What was it that Doron said before the ambulance arrived? Actually, those were their last moments together. In the ambulance the paramedic had worked on him, and she couldn't even hold his hand most of the drive. He said he was sorry and sighed and mumbled and Ronit cried and said there was nothing to be sorry about and then he said something else, something to do with the madness that began this whole thing. "Do you think they're self-aware?" he said, and she asked, "Who, my darling?" He didn't answer and continued to sigh, but right before they got into the ambulance, when he was already in the wheelchair, he said: "The germs, I was talking about the germs." And now, with the antibiotics he hadn't taken lying before her, she realized what he was saying: "Do you think they're self-aware, the germs?"