**Mishy Harman (narration):** ​As we were putting this episode together, we kept on asking ourselves this kind of bizarro question ­ what does love *sound*​ ​ like? Our newest Israel Story producer, Bari Finkel, went out to get some answers.

**Vox Pop:**​ What does love sound like?

What was the question again?

What does love sound like?

Love sound like blegh.

Like a dream.

High gain distortion, high gain.

Sex.

Like the sound of the wave.

Something kitsch, you know like a movie, like a movie scene or something.

In sound or text? Either. Uuuuugh.

Love is silence.

I stole this Pulp Fiction, but I think it’s sitting quietly in a car not talking.

I don’t think love makes a sound.

Soft music.

Like her.

Love sounds like a great word.

Hakol, everything. The sound of everything, yeah.

**Mishy Harman (narration):**​ Growing up, Valentine’s Day was never really huge here in Israel. We had ​*Tu Be’Av*​, sort of the Jewish love holiday, which always kind of seemed like a pale version of the holiday of red roses and heart­shaped chocolate boxes we saw on TV. But I guess that as the diplomatic ties between Israel and the US continue to deteriorate, the cultural ones are just getting stronger and stronger. Now? Valentine’s Day’s all the rage. Here’s Or Ginsberg, the head chef at Concierge in Tel Aviv.

**Or Ginsberg:**​ Because we’re all young, romantic owners and people here, so we’re gonna make something really cool for couples. A lot of strawberries, a lot of raspberry coolies, a lot of red and pink colors.

**Mishy Harman (narration):**​ So today, the final episode of our first season, our

Valentine’s Day special, has a particularly eighties­pop­like theme: “What’s Love Got To

Do With It?” Thanks, Tina… Hey, I’m Mishy Harman, this is Israel Story. We have four wonderful stories for you today; all about love, and all those crazy things we do to find it… Arranged marriages in Tulkarm, a Jewish­Arab love affair, the matchmaking quest of my downstairs neighbors. We’ve got it all. But before we begin, a real quick request. I know people hate this, so I’ll keep it as short as possible. You know, Israel Story was basically born by accident. We were just big ‘This American Life’ fans, and we wanted to be able to hear stories like the ones they aired, but about Israel, and in Hebrew. We looked around and there wasn’t anything even remotely like it on Israeli radio, so even though we didn’t know anything about radio *at all*​ ​, we were like ­ “ok, so let’s do it ourselves. Let’s make the Israeli ‘This American Life.’” Easier said than done, obviously… But three years later, here we are ­ Israel Story, or Sipur Israeli really, has become a popular national show in Israel, and now we’re super excited to be finishing our first season in English as well.

Anyway, Israel Story has been extremely lucky to be supported by generous grants from the Righteous Persons Foundation, ROI, the Natan Fund, and the Fohs Foundation. But a big part of what allows us to do what we do, is listener support. So if you enjoy our show, and want to hear more stories about nineteenth century antiquities forgers in Jerusalem, municipal hitmen in Eilat, ultra­orthodox moms who adopt babies with

Down Syndrome, or cursing ex­IDF buffalo farmers in rural Wisconsin, please go to the Israel Story page on Tablet Magazine’s site ­ that’s tabletmag.com ­ and click on the donate button. Anything at all helps, and we have big plans in store for the next season. We can’t tell how much we appreciate your support. Alright, that’s it. We’ve got an episode to play… Let’s begin.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** ​What would you do if your parent’s dying wish was something so utterly opposite to who you are, so completely foreign, that it would change, basically, everything about your life? Ghazi Al­Buliwi had to face this exact question. And well… I guess, you’ll hear where it landed him. TLV1’s Shoshi Shmuluvitz brings us this story.

**Act One ­ The Queen Rania Tree.**

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:**​ ​You can't date without being married. That's like the Islamic way, you can't date someone without marrying to them. So it's like the ultimate

let's­play­Russian­roulette­with­your­life way of marriage. Let's get married and then let's date.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: Ghazi Al­Buliwi is a Palestinian­American writer and director. He was born in a refugee camp in Jordan and then, when he was two months old, his family moved to Brooklyn. That’s where he grew up and he is a Brooklynite, through and through. Ghazi’s family is Muslim, but he’s not religious. And that’s part of the reason why, at age 34, much to his parents’ chagrin, he was still unmarried.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:**​ In the Arab custom, the oldest son usually is the head of the family. That is the case here with me. Arabs will say Abu, which is “father of” and the name of the first son. And in my case, for my dad, it’s Abu Ghazi. He

walks around with this title attached to me — whether he likes it or not.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz:**​ When you call someone Abu ­ something ­ it’s a sign of both respect and familiarity. But it also creates this inextricable link between the father’s identity and the accomplishments and failings of his eldest son. Now, Ghazi’s single status is definitely seen as a failing. And in Arab culture it’s a failing for the same reasons as it is in Western culture. Basically, people wonder what’s wrong with you. And if you’ve ever been single in your thirties, you KNOW what that’s like. For Ghazi, that pressure to get married? Is worse.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:**​ It’s kind of like a scarlet letter. He’s walking around with this name attached to a son who is ​*not* married. Every time his relatives or those around him ask him anything, it’s like “so, oh... how’s your son, did your son get m­­­” “​*No*​.” Basically it depresses the guy.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: His parents offered to find him a nice Muslim girl, but Ghazi refused. The last thing he wanted, was to get roped in to an arranged marriage with someone too religious. So his parents nagged him. For years. And then Ghazi’s dad got sick.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:** ​So, he had cancer of the kidneys, they removed one of his kidneys. The second operation when they removed another half, I’m walking home with him from the hospital ​*[MUSIC BED builds starting from here]*​ and he just stopped me at a stoplight, and I remember exactly where it was, it was like Court and Warren in Brooklyn, and he turns to me as we’re waiting for this light to change, and he turns and he goes, you know, “I want to see your children before I die.” ​*[MUSIC STOPS ABRUPTLY]*​ That statement right there propelled me to do things that I never thought I would do. So I did something very impulsive, I had a conversation with my mom, which I never thought I would have with her, but I

was like, look, I wanna compromise with you guys. I want a woman who is more on the modern side of things. We’re Jordanian/Palestinian ­ I think Queen Rania of Jordan is amazingly beautiful. If I can find someone like Queen Rania of Jordan, I would be ​*so*​ happy. And so, my mom’s exact words, “Queen Rania? Yeah, her family’s from Tulkarm, where our relatives live. I’ll tell you what, in Tulkarm it’s like going to a lemon tree, you can pick all the Queen Ranias that you want. You can just pluck ‘em out.” And she did this thing with her hands where she mimed plucking a Queen Rania off a tree. And I’m like visualizing like beautiful women hanging like Queen Rania on a tree that I would just pluck out when I got there.

So I book a ticket­

I fly into Ben Gurion, where I was proceeded to be interrogated. And I had my American passport. An American passport has some cache to it. It’s not just any passport, it’s America’s passport. So I kind of walk up and there’s this girl direct people to either passport Israeli control or other international visitors passport— so I walk up to her. She looked at my thing, she looked at me. She… I now know she sees the Arab name, she goes, “what is your purpose to coming to Israel?” I said, “Umm, I’m gonna see my family in Tulkarm.” “TULKARM?! Go over there, go to that…” And I turn around and I see this little room. It was like… It’s the equivalent of a smokers’ room, you know, they have these see­through windows, where people can just go in and smoke. It’s such a sad thing, you see people pacing around, smoking and just noone is smiling, no one is talking to each other. This was the same room but it was just full of Arabs waiting to be questioned by immigration. Israeli immigration. And then you’re in the little room, you’re kinda hanging out. And you’re wondering, well why are all these other people in the little room? I mean, I can understand the guy with the beard named Muhammad, who was there. I was like, ‘alright dude, you, I mean, come on, you know… what were you expecting? There’s no way they were gonna let you through.’ So you start judging other people in the little room. And then there was this one white European girl — Why are you here? And she was like, “Oh, I took Middle Eastern Studies back in Oxford.” I was like… ‘oh’... It’s like you just took the wrong class in college and she ended up in the little room. So I didn’t feel so bad after that.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: Six hours later, Ghazi gets out of the airport and into a cab. The cab driver’s Israeli so he can’t go into certain areas of the West Bank. So he stops at the checkpoint near the entrance to Tulkarm.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:** He lets me out, takes so much money, I​ grab my suitcase, I turn around and the guy’s… literally dirt is flying in the air, he’s already gone. And I’m like what the fuck is going on. And I’m walking towards the checkpoint. And now I’m walking towards soldiers, with a huge suitcase, who are literally looking at me with their guns up — not pointing at me — but they’re looking at me like, what is this fucking guy doing. And I’m like “Ohhhh shit.” This is when it dawns on me that you are… this might be a really big mistake, you should not have left Brooklyn. I get to the checkpoint thing, they look at me, they look at my passport. And… they let me in. So I go into Tulkarm and I grab a taxi there, go to what my father told me to go to, which is a section of the refugee camp that my family lives in ­ Harat El­Balawna, neighborhood of the Balawna. The Balawna is my family tribal name. And that is where I pull up. And… You know, meet my family. And then eventually they start taking me around to meet women.

I think that first day we went to see two girls.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: So, in Western cultures, you have these dating rituals. The first date you go for coffee, or a drink — never dinner. You ask each other the same boring questions. And you basically know in 20 minutes whether or not you’re interested. In Arab culture, there’s also this matchmaking ritual. But it’s a little different. Here’s how it works:

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:** ​You sit down, there’s the men of the girl’s family on one side of the living room, my family guys sit on one side. And then you’re just kinda waiting there, you’re kind of small talk, people are like chain­smoking in these rooms and like, I’m like from New York, I’m like dying here. And then eventually the girl, and it’s almost every time verbatim, the girl comes out with a tray of drinks. She serves all the men, the last drink is for you, she makes eye contact with you then sits with her relatives. And then you sit and you just stare at each other like something’s supposed to happen.

# [PAUSE]

It such a weird thing. But a lot of these girls would come out of these rooms and I’m thinking Queen Rania all the way. I’m thinking there’s gonna be a hot girl coming through this door.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: And the first woman he met ​*was*​ beautiful.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:** ​Turned out to be my 17­year­old second cousin. She was actually kinda cute.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: But the cousin thing was a deal­breaker for Ghazi. And from there, things kinda go downhill.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:** ​The whole time you’re there, you’re like, this is really not what I signed up for. I sat with one girl, Islamic girl who asked me, “Do you pray?” Because they made us sit — you’re allowed to like sit with the family and then you can sit privately but her brothers sit in a room like watching you. It’s like a double date with the brother who is like so like intensely Islamic, like staring you down, kinda. And so this girl — who’s a pharmacist, so you can go ‘oh, she’s like a scientist’ — she goes “oh, do you pray?” And I say “no, I’m gonna be very honest with you, I’m not gonna lie, I don’t pray.” She goes, “oh, you’re gonna go to hell.” I was like that just kinda just killed any kind of thought of this going anywhere, not that it was, but... I’ve been on many dates in New York where it’s not “you’re gonna go to hell,” it’s “can I

have the check, please.” OK, I guess she’s not into me. This was like “you’re gonna go to hell.” I guess that was Tulkarm’s version of “can I please have the check.”

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: A week goes by. A week and a half. Ghazi’s going from house to house, drinking tea, meeting women — but his efforts are fruitless. On top of that, the conditions of the refugee camp are really starting to get to him.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:**​ The refugee camp is just like such a depressing thing. Kids with no shoes on, people are poor, dirt everywhere, I would take three showers a day. Nice Jewish settlements with nice clean houses across the fence, which I watch every day. And I wish, why couldn't my family have been Jewish settlers. Why? Why? So I had a nervous breakdown, nervous breakdown being you cry, scream, and then walk through a refugee camp just cursing yourself. **Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: Eventually, Ghazi’s cousin finds him, wandering around the refugee camp, weeping, and he brings him back home.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:** ​We come back and then like someone

goes, “look, there’s this girl. Let’s just go see here, she’s at an amusement park with her mom, we know her, we already talked, they’re gonna meet us there.” So I go with my cousin and my niece, I’m not expecting anything, I’m already like checked out, I’m already going “I’m going back to New York, that’s it, I’m done, I kinda did what I had to do here for my father.” Get to the amusement park, meet the mom. She goes, “oh, she’s with her sister on the ferris wheel, why don’t you go see her, you know?” Alright, so I walk to the ferris wheel. ​*[MUSIC BED].* ​And it’s a ferris wheel’s supposed to do a 360, it’s supposed to do circles, but this is Tulkarm. The ferris wheel is not doing 360s, it is doing a 180. So it would go up and then come down like a crescent moon. And so I’m thinking, alright, is this some kind of Islamic thing where it’s doing a crescent shape? No. And I talked to someone, it’s like no, man, man, everything is breaking down in here. The bumper cars are not bumping. They had like a zoo, the snake died, they told me. It’s like so sad, the conditions there. *[laughter]*​ I mean… Anyway, so I’m trying to figure out what this girl looks like because the ferris wheel is coming down, going up, coming down, going up. And now I’m fixated on a very overweight girl, I’m like ‘great, that’s her.’ So the ferris wheel thing stops and people start getting off — and as the overweight girl passes, doesn’t say an— I’m like, ‘okay, it’s not her.’ But this girl gets out, and I like focus on her, and the girl looked like Audrey Hepburn. She wasn’t wearing a hijab, very Western looking, had really cool looking jeans. I say hello to her, she was a little shy, we walk back to her mom, I sit with her mom, we’re talking. And she’s like completely shy. I’m like, it’s understandable this girl doesn’t want to say anything to me, right? The conversation turns to you know, whatever, ‘would you ever let your daughter go to live in America, you know I live in New York, it’s really nice there?’ Mom’s like, “yeah, totally.” And, you know, it was kind of a done deal there. I was like, ‘if the mom’s agreeing to this, it’s cool.’ I’m walking back with my cousin, I’m like “dude, done. I’m ready, let’s get the guys, let’s just do this.”

That next day, we go to the house, we do the sit­down with the men. We do this kind of ketuba. Ketuba in Arabic is Kitab. Kind of haggling back and forth of how much money do we put for the miqqaddam, which is what are you to put forward if she were to get divorce. It’s just to protect the woman in Islamic law. 10,000 dinars, which is about $15,000 back then, as I was told. Done deal. Let’s sign.

Next morning. We go to the Islamic sharia court, and then I sign this wedding contract. And I sign it in front of the judge there, the Islamic judge.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: And now Ghazi and — let’s call her Farah — are legally married. They met the other day and now they’re married. So now they’re allowed to be alone in a room together.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:**​ At that point, her family starts to allow me into their house, because I wasn’t allowed to, I was like a stranger, but now I’m like the son­in­law.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: So Ghazi’s staying with the family for a few days while they make arrangements for a big wedding party. And one night Farah walks into his room.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:**​ She comes in and she goes, “oh, I wanna show you pictures of my brother.” Who… Her brother’s a police officer in training. She comes from a cop family. And she opens up this folder and there’s a bunch of photos in there. It’s just photos of her brother doing kind of like an obstacle course, he’s climbing the rope. He’s like running, it’s hot out, you can see guys with their shirts off. And then at a certain point it’s him posing with his shirt off. [pause for a beat] And then him posing with a shirt off with a gun, like a machine gun, cigarette in his mouth, like seductive pose. And then she turns to me, she goes, “isn’t he tasty?” “huh? isn’t he tasty?!” And she goes, “can’t you see why all the girls want him?” I’m like, “huh?!” But the way she said it, I’m like, “what the hell just…” It’s like the fourth day and I’m like, “this family’s nuts!”

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: And at this point Ghazi’s also beginning to realize that the family is using him for his money.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:**​ I’m buying them stuff, buying them groceries. There asking me… I’m like, ‘this is weird. This is not...’ As an Arab guest, usually Arabs are supposed to be… You’re the guest you’re not supposed to buy anything. This is the opposite.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: So Ghazi makes a decision.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:**​ We’re gonna go buy a wedding dress the next day. If she asks for an expensive wedding dress, I’m done with her, I’m gonna tell her I can’t marry you.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: And sure enough, the dress that Farah and her mother pick out is really expensive.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:** ​I kind of was like, “tell her we’re going to another wedding gown store, I think that’s a little high.” Mother comes out ­ doesn’t look happy. My wife comes out ­ doesn’t look happy. We start walking — silence. And I turn to my wife. I’m like, “Uhh...what’s wrong?” “Oh, you know what’s wrong. You shouldn’t have upset my mother.” She said it in such a way that I just stopped. It’s been building up. I was like, “you know what, I can’t do this. I divorce you, I’ve had enough of you.” Turned around, I left her in that sh­ that was the last time in my life I ever saw this girl.

I walked to the refugee camp, right, from the town center. Tell my uncle, I gotta get out of this. He says don’t worry, don’t worry, stop, stop, don’t cry. I’m like crying, I’m a 34­year­old guy crying. I’ve been like robbed at gunpoint in Brooklyn and I never cried then. I peed on myself, but I didn’t cry. And here I am, walking through this refugee camp, just crying, just like… a grown man crying. He’s like stop, don’t cry, I know this great lawyer. I’m like who’s this lawyer? He goes, don’t worry, he’s the best in Tulkarm, his name is Arafat Arafat. It was enough to make me stop crying and go ‘Arafat Arafat?’ He’s like Yes, Arafat Arafat, he’s the best lawyer in all of Tulkarm.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: So Ghazi walks back into town to meet the lawyer.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:**​ The guy’s wearing like shorts, like a mickey mouse t­shirt or something. He’s like “tell me, what happened?” I was like “Arafat Arafat, this is what happened.” He goes, “did you enter her?” And then he made a hole with his finger and he put the — I said “no, I tried to, I wish I had entered her.” He goes “ok, that’s good, that’s good, and he sits back in his chair and he thinks, ‘that’s good.’ I said, “listen, I gotta get out of here, I’ve had it, I’m… nervous breakdown, I’ve been crying, look at my eyes.” He goes, “why were you crying? Cuz’ men don’t cry!” I’m like, “this is too much for me.” He goes “don’t worry, I’m gonna make it all better.” He goes “sign this, it’s a power of attorney, I will be you here in Tulkarm. Go back to America, I will take care of this for you!”

And then I go home and I get a call from her uncle, the chief of police, who as I know now is a nut job. He has had people’s legs broken for my wife, just whistling or like saying something to her in a like a come­on way. And sending people to like break their legs. Two guys ended up in wheelchairs for like two months — something like that, some weird beat­down. Now this is the guy that’s calling me that’s saying “I’m gonna send a police car to come get you. And we should really talk about this because you’re not just gonna leave her here like this.”

I’m like, I started freaking out, this guy’s gonna kill me. I said “listen, I’m really emotional, I can’t talk right now, I need to drink some tea, relax. I’ll come see you in the morning.” He goes, “you’re gonna come in the morning?” I was like, “yeah, where am I gonna go? I’m in Tulkarm!” He goes, “alright, I’ll send a car for you in the morning.” Hung up the phone. Ran into my room in that refugee camp house of my uncle’s. Packed that suitcase up, everyone had gone to sleep. And I just lay there with the suitcase, holding the suitcase like it was my mother. And every time a light would come under the door, I’d think, ‘they’re coming for me, they’re coming… they’re gonna come get me.’ And I wait, I know the busses start running at like 5.

I pick up that suitcase, I don’t even say anything to the relatives, I run through that door. And now I’m running through the refugee camp. It’s like semi­dark, the sun is coming out. Chickens are like cackling ​*[imitates chickens]*​. And I’m running with this suitcase on my head and I’m like running through alleyways. People are in their underwear. I see people through windows. I see people having breakfast. I see the news. I’m like running through dark alleys, and I get to the bus, get on that bus, that yellow bus, I remember getting on that bus and I’m like ‘oh, please don’t let them stop this bus at the checkpoint.’ Got past the Palestinian checkpoint, get to the Israeli checkpoint. Now we’re on our road. End up in Ramallah.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: And then he makes it to Jerusalem, where he gets a hotel room and hides out until his flight back to New York. Meanwhile, the men from Ghazi’s family and Farah’s family hold a meeting to discuss the divorce. Because this is not just an issue between two people. When Ghazi abandoned Farah, he didn’t just mistreat her — this was an affront to her family.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:** ​And then it came out that I had, in my hysteria, told someone in town that she’s having sex with her brother. I said, ‘she’s not gonna have sex with me, she’s having sex with her brother.’ Because of course I’m having a nervous breakdown. And this, coupled with the fact that I just divorced her, got back to the brother. So the brother,said “he had dishonored my family by saying I had sex with my sister. I issue a fatwa against this guy. If he is to show his face in Tulkarm at any point, I will kill him dead in the street.” The men in my family didn’t really put up a fight. They said, “this is our son, we really would hope you’d reconsider.”

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: About a week later, Ghazi makes it back to Brooklyn, fully intact, and he talks to his dad about what happened.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:**​ Oh, it was like nothing. It was like, “oh, you’ll get better. It’s OK.” It was like such a nonchalant — Oh, here’s the punch line: Was not dying.

**Shoshi Shmuluvitz**​: Yeah, it’s now four years later, and Ghazi’s dad is still alive. Ghazi is 38, still single. And his parents are still trying to get him married. Not only that, they still want him to marry in the traditional way, the way he did with Farah.

**Ghazi Al­Buliwi:** ​He just Jewish guilted me in his own Arab way to get married for him. And you know, I kinda feel it still. You love your parents so much that you end up hating yourself. And that’s where I am today: I love ‘em so much that I hate myself. Look at what I did! I got married and I had nervous breakdowns and I hate myself for doing it. I should not have done that. But I did it because I love ‘em.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** ​Shoshi’s a producer and correspondent at TLV1 Radio.

Her story was a co­production with TLV1, and featured music by Podington Bear.

Coming up, after 37 years of marriage, a couple from the Carlebach Moshav of Mevo Modi’im, population 252, talk about love.

**Act Two ­ Michael and Leah.**

**Leah Golomb:** ​Thirty­seven years ­­ it’s almost our anniversary sweetie, by the way, hint hint...

**Michael Golomb:**​ My name is Michael Golomb.

**Leah Golomb:**​ I’m Leah, Leah Golomb.

**Michael Golomb:**​ I’m now 64.

**Leah Golomb:**​ I’m 61 years old, and I have six children, 8 grandchildren, another one, at least that we know of on the way.

I grew up in suburban NJ, I was always very

popular, I did well in school without really trying.

**Michael Golomb:**​ Totally opposite of me!

**Leah Golomb:**​ Michael, you once said to me that we probably wouldn't even have been friends but I always kinda felt bad for those guys that were always being made fun of, and you know, had a hard time, so we probably would have still connected.

**Michael Golomb:**​ I was born and raised in Mobile, Alabama, until I was 18 I wasn’t much of a social person. I was like a loner kind of. Really young, 15­14 started doing yoga because nobody else was being my friend. So spirituality was my friend.

**Michael Golomb:** ​Uhh… Been in Israel since 1970. Made Aliyah November 5th, 1970. After going from kibbutz to kibbutz and not working out and try to work, I decided, forget this Israel trip man, I’m going to Tibet. Tibet is the place with the top of the world and all the gurus and the everything. And all of a sudden I had this spiritual experience called a bat kol, like a voice of heaven to go to Jerusalem, and I says, why don’t you check it out. The next day I bought ​*tfillin*​, started keeping shabbos.

**Leah Golomb:**​ It’s so crazy, we didn’t even talk, but I walked out thinking ‘I dunno, I saw this man and I’m not saying he’s my soulmate, but everybody has a soulmate.’ And I said to my

mom, you know I met this guy, I really feel like he’s my guy.

**Michael Golomb:**​ Friday night… we ate and then we went to the shul. After learning some ​*torah*​, I stood up and I said to

Leah, “will you be the mother of my children?”

**Leah Golomb:**​ And I said okay.

**Michael Golomb:**​ And she said okay ​*[Leah laughs]*​ and two weeks later we get married.

**Leah Golomb:**​ I think of when we stood under the ​*chuppa* and I remember feeling like this was the most—I couldn’t love anybody more than I did in that moment and now I think of it and I just want to laugh like we didn’t even know each other, we didn't know anything, I didn't know what it meant to really love somebody so completely.

**Leah Golomb:**​ When we were first married, you remember

what you said to me?

**Michael Golomb:** What?​

**Leah Golomb:** You were married before, and you said to me​ that, “you know my first wife she didn't really understand how much I loved God, and I just want you to know that no matter what I’ll always love God more, like I can’t love you that much. I can only love God the most, not you.” And I remember thinking, ‘I dunno, that sounds so screwed up, like that can’t *[Michael laughs]*​ possibly be true.’ Like I don’t want to be with someone who doesn't love me the most, but somehow I still knew that we were supposed to be together and then it— years and years later you said to me that the truth is the way I love you is the way I love Hashem.

**Michael Golomb:** ​You know Leah’le, when I think back of all our lives together, 37 years you know if I count right, I just wanted to say thank you so much, thank you so much for having guts to come to Israel and marry me and let me have these visions and these visions that last forever.

**Leah Golomb:**​ Amen. Yikes, I can’t look at you cuz I’m gonna cry.

**Michael Golomb:**​ My illness— I have ahhh… cancer — bladder cancer that’s in my whole pelvic area.

**Leah Golomb:**​ It’s called in aggressive Eurolythi­ithial.. I don’t even know how to pronounce it, but a very invasive and aggressive form of cancer, and once it was able to spread throughout his body, there aren’t even statistics.

**Michael Golomb:**​ You know it’s exciting for me to me it was clear life and death. How exciting.

**Leah Golomb:**​ We did very aggressive treatment, and

Michael you were basically falling apart.

**Michael Golomb:**​ Falling apart.

**Leah Golomb:**​ I believe in ​*Mashiach*​ and I don’t fill my head at all with thoughts of what will happen then. There’s a place of timelessness when you love somebody that has nothing to do with their body, or their ability to do things, there is a time when time will fold over. But I definitely still want to be in this world, I feel that I’m still connected to this world. If I could fold the time over… I would really like that.

**Michael Golomb:** ​Maybe my question would be to you is, if

it was my last day…

**Leah Golomb:**​ Yeah? **Michael Golomb:**​ What would you say to me?

**Leah Golomb:**​ I’d say, let’s sit and learn a little bit.

**Michael Golomb:**​ Right ​*[Leah laughs]*​.

**Leah Golomb:**​ I’d say ah… Like, I can’t walk, cuz it’s hard for me to walk, but then I would sit out on the deck and just be outside with you, learn some ​*torah*​, drink some tea, and I’d be davening my guts out that we’d still have more time.

**Mishy Harman (narration):** ​Benny Becker produced that piece. Benny’s our new producer here at Israel Story. The beautiful music was composed and performed by Collin Oldham. ​*[music ends here]* ​At the end of every month, a little, yellow post­it is left on my door. In the top right corner is the never absent ​*b”h* ​or ​*baruch hashem,* ​and around the edges there are usually some doodles of flowers or leaves, or something. Then in the middle of the post­it, in super neat letters, it says: “Hey Mishy, it’s bill time again… Stop by to sort it out? The girls from downstairs.” So, yeah, even though they are all very much women, as you’ll hear in a sec, to me they are always, collectively, the girls from downstairs. This is their love story.

**Act Three ­ It’s Been Six Dates.**

**Mishy Harman:** ​I'm the only non­Orthodox person who lives on my street, and when I moved into this apartment a few years ago I had just come back from seven years abroad and my mom was all excited that here, finally, I was coming back to Israel and I was going to find a nice Jewish girl.

And it just so happened that in the apartment beneath me in my apartment building, there were three Orthodox girls living there. And they were all in their mid­to­late thirties, single, and intensely looking for a match. So as you can imagine matchmaking was the sole topic of conversation in their apartment, in my apartment, in the staircase. And the Orthodox dating scene in Nachlaot in Jerusalem is highly hierarchical, and unfortunately for my neighbors who are really really sweet girls— and really attractive and pretty girls also— they were at the bottom of the pecking order because they were A. Considered old, B. They had not grown up Orthodox, and C. They were— I hope they don't mind me saying this— presumably not virgins.

As a result even though they were really great girls— I really really liked them— they would constantly be set up with all kinds of, you know, sixty year old widowers, people with weird addictions, people with eleven kids, all kinds of really [chuckle] really great catches. What they would do is they would go to a matchmaker, a *shadchanit*​ ​, which is sort of like the analogue version of OkCupid. And, they would sit there with the *shadchanit*​ and tell them all kinds of things about themselves and what they were looking for, and the ​*shadchanit*​ would have lists and lists and lists of guys, and she'd be like, "Hey! How about Itzhak?" And then they would go out on these first dates with these guys. They were religious enough that they didn't want to be seen in public on these first dates, but also on the other hand they didn't want to be just in the room, obviously. So, most of these first dates took place on our staircase.

And, I have a window that looks out right at the staircase, so I would be sitting in bed watching marathons and marathons of ​*The West Wing*​, and I would hear snippets of these first dates, and these first dates were like first dates from hell— if I ever went on a first date like this I would never in a million years think of going on another second date. There was not chit chat, no small talk whatsoever. They would sitting on different landings and they would get down to business immediately. It would be like, "Okay, so what is the kitchen gonna look like? What kind of *kashrut*​ ​ regulations are we gonna follow? What's the ​*shabbat*​ table gonna look like?" And meanwhile on my computer, Jed Bartlet's kinda pounding on the podium, and delivering these phenomenally eloquent liberal speeches.

**Martin Sheen as President Josiah 'Jed' Bartlet:**

There's evil in the world, there'll always be, and we can't do anything about it. [camera shutter]

**Mishy Harman:** ​And I hear from outside, "Okay, so are you going to shave your head and wear a wig, or are you going to wear a regular head covering?"

And then usually the next morning, I would bump into one of the girls on the staircase and we would have sort­of a post­mortem of the date. And, just the way I realized that these dates sucked, so did they. So nothing really materialized from any of these dates. Now, one of the three neighbors was a girl called Meital— that's actually not her name, but it is for this story— and, Meital was thirty­nine years old and she had grown up completely secular in Tel Aviv. She had lived with a boyfriend for seven years, and they broke up when she was twenty­nine, and I guess that's when she became religious. Meital was very harsh in her religiosity, so like, I have a dog Nomi, and Nomi would run into their apartment all the time and jump on Meital's bad and Meital would love Nomi and play with her all the time, and I kept on saying, "Meital you should get a dog, you love dogs so much!"

And she would say, "Oh no, religious people don't have dogs," which isn't even true, but that's sort of her perception of religiosity. Or she would constantly say, "Oh, I'm not looking for romance, I'm just looking for something very practical, for, for a partner. Anyway, Meital would go on these first dates from hell as well on the staircase.

And one day, she was matched by the matchmaker by the matchmaker with a guy called Dan. Now let me just describe Dan a second: imagine a Jewish Taliban warrior with a beard till his belly button, really really long ​*peot*​— sidelocks, and, to cap it all off, Dan is a sheepherder from Bat Ayin, which is one of the more extreme settlements, near Hebron. I saw Dan at the very beginning of the date, and I liked him immediately— Nomi my dog loved him because he smelled like sheep [​*sheep bleat*​] so she was all on top of him. And I went up to my apartment and... was on their first date. And their first date, like many of the other dates, was horrible. But for some reason, Meital decided that she was gonna continue on with Dan, and they went out on maybe five or six dates and I would say I was on maybe three or four of them. I should just say that the dates didn't get much better. They just… clarified in great detail exactly what they thought the house would look like, and how they would run it.

So about three weeks later I run into Meital on the staircase, and Meital said, "Mishy, you know I've gone out with Dan six times already, I really need to decide whether I want to marry him."

I was like, "Meital, that's completely crazy. Why don't you, I dunno, maybe sleep with him beforehand?" Of course Meital did not appreciate my suggestion, and instead of taking what I thought was good advice, she decided that she was going to travel to Uman in the Ukraine, and she was going to pray at Rabbi Nachman's tomb, and get some enlightenment as to whether she should marry Dan or not.

So that did not seem to me to be the best way to go about this but she was quite convinced so, she came up to my apartment, she said that she was going to pray for me too that I should also find a nice girl, and off she was to the Ukraine. She was there for a week, she prayed, prayed, prayed, prayed, prayed, every single day over Rabbi Nachman's tomb, and she finally decided— she came back to Israel, she called up Dan, and she told him that they were breaking up. So, okay, I was quite upset— I had liked Dan a lot, but now Dan was out of the picture. Meital continued going out on these first dates from hell, and nothing happened, nothing materialized. And then she was about to turn forty, and she became really anxious about this birthday, and about the fact that she was still not married, so she went to see a rabbi whose specialty is name combinations. You tell him, "Isaac and Sarah," and he's like, "Yes that's a good conversation, or, "No, that's a horrible combination."

So she goes into the rabbi, and it sounds a little bit like a joke, but she says, like, "Rabbi, Rabbi, why can't I find a husband?"

And he says, "Well, have you gone out with anyone recently?"

And she said, "Yeah, well, I went out with this sheep­herder, Dan."

And he's like, "Dan?" [​*sheep bleat*​]

And she says, "Yeah, Dan." [​*sheep bleat*​]

And then the rabbi looks at her and he says, "Dan and Meital is the best name combination that I can imagine!"

And she's like "No, no, no rabbi, don't tell me this!"

And he's like, "Yeah, I'm telling you, Dan and Meital, it's like a match made in heaven!"

So Meital, instead of just saying that this guy's a total charlatan and storming out of his office, calls up Dan on the phone, tells him to get over there. Dan comes to the office, the rabbi tells him the same thing, and two weeks later they got married.

I tried to convince Dan to move­in to the apartment with the girls, I told him that it was a very European thing to do. They did not seem to think that this was such a good idea, and moved to Bat Ayin. And even though I really tried for a while, it's hard to keep in touch with her— she seems to want to leave her bachelorette days behind her. So I don't really know what's going on with her in her life, [music fades out] but I imagine her on a Friday afternoon, sitting by a natural spring in the Judean Hills near Hebron, breastfeeding her newborn baby. Dan is running around after all the sheep and some of their older kids are picking figs from the tree. [music enters]

Unfortunately for me, Meital's prayers in Uman didn't really help, at least yet. I'm still in the apartment though, and, who knows, maybe the magic of the staircase will strike again.

**Singing:** ​I am a honeybee, shown up from the colony, and they won't let me in. So I left the hive, they took away all my strives, and broke up both my wings.

**Mishy Harman (narration):**​ OK, we’ve arrived at our final act of the season. **Act Four ­ Checkpoints and Secrets.**​ If you’re dedicated Vox Tablet listeners, this piece, by Daniel Estrin, might actually be familiar. It first aired there a couple of years ago, but we like it so much, and it’s such a perfect fit, that we just had to include it in this love episode. Here we go.

**David**​: Well, my first chat with him was like any other chat on a dating website.

**Ibrahim**​: his profile said he was in Jerusalem. He messaged me.

**David**​: He was a very good­looking man. Charming, very intelligent, intriguing.

**Ibrahim**​: He was white. Blue eyes. Innocent. **David**​: I was speaking to him in Arabic, writing to him in Arabic. He saw my pictures. I didn’t seem like an Arab. He thought I was fooling him. And eventually I told him I was Jewish. And he was shocked. I asked if there was a problem. He says, ‘No, no.’

**Ibrahim**​: He was not the first Israeli I talked to. But they all had a problem with meeting Palestinian guys. Some of them thought it was dangerous to meet a

Palestinian guy. Like maybe it’s a trap or something. **David**​: We were chatting every day, getting to know each other.

**Ibrahim**​: And it didn’t take long time to suggest meeting the next Saturday. I still remember his face. How happy he was. I told him that, you are in Jerusalem, and I am in the West Bank, and there is a wall between us. That it’s not a good idea to draw expectations. Like, we cannot really go far with it. But he was so excited, and he really wanted it, and I also wanted it. I invited him to come to my house. And he met my family. They were surprised in a nice way. Like, wow! You are Jewish… Later, my family talked to me, and they told me, it would be a problem if soldiers come to the house and find him in our house. And I agreed, and he stopped coming to my house. And then my mother once asked me about him, she said, ‘How is he? We don’t see him anymore.’ ‘But mom, you asked me to stop bringing him home.’ She said, ‘No it’s fine! It’s ok if he doesn’t sleep at our house. But if he visits, it’s fine.’ The same day or the very next day he came to my house. He was like part of the family, you know? I dunno. We felt that they know we have something special, but I am very sure that they never thought that we are in a relationship. I really can’t tell what would happen if someone from

Palestine would know that I am gay. People here in Palestine, they say that, ‘Oh, that guy was talking about this, he should be killed,’ or something like this. I live in a big lie, which is hiding my sexuality, you know?

**David**​: I told my parents a few months after we started going out. They were very against it. They said that I should think about myself, and if I want to mess up my future with this.I was smuggling him to Jerusalem almost every week, in the weekend. Driving through the checkpoint in full confidence, because the soldiers, if you look Israeli, they let you go. If you look Palestinian, they stop you and they check for permits. Ibrahim: Of course he had to smuggle me because I didn’t have permission to enter Jerusalem.

**David**​: And even when they signaled us to stop or to slow down, I was speeding up, like, with full confidence. Showing them that everything was ok, you really don’t need to talk to us. And it worked every time.

**Ibrahim**​: Everything in the city was new to me. So I needed really to meet people, to go to bars. I loved meeting people, and being myself with them. Like, you know, because I have been hiding it for all of my life, so it’s the time to use to make up those years of hiding.

We were in a party, in a gay bar. And we went home, back to his home.

**David**​: It was supposed to be the first time he'd spend the night In my house. We were very excited about that. And all of a sudden we saw a police car going towards us. And police officers went out of the car, and asked for IDs.

They usually do stop people in middle of night. Usually looking for drugs. I think they were a bit surprised to find an illegal Palestinian. They asked if we were going to my home, and I said yes, and that’s a felony, to host an illegal Palestinian.

**Ibrahim**​: They asked me for a permit. I told them, I don’t have a permit. So they just took us to the police office.

**David**​: In the interrogation they asked us, how did we meet, what were we thinking. We didn’t want to tell them the nature of our relationship, because there were stories of Israeli secret services finding out that people were gay and using it as a tool to pressure them to cooperate. ‘If you don’t cooperate with us, we are going to tell your family or we're going to tell the

Palestinian Authority.’

And it was less an interrogation and more a warning. Like, ‘You can be friends, you can be whatever you want. Talk on the phone! Go to see him in his house, if

you can go there. But why bring him to Israel? No, you can’t do it.’

Eventually I was released and he was taken to the checkpoint, and dropped at the checkpoint to go back home.

Yeah, after that, after we calmed down a bit, we knew that there was no other way. I would bring him to

Jerusalem again.

**Ibrahim**​: For me it was basically love. Like, I didn’t want to hang it on the wall that we are Palestinian and Israeli guys who are in love. You know? But it also made me happy, to, like, that we were doing something special, you know? And at some point I

thought it would last forever.

**David**​: Yeah, we broke up a few days ago. It’s very confusing. I cannot really separate the situation, the political situation, from our personal situation. But the fact is that I’m the one responsible for having this relationship. Because if I don’t come to his place or bring him to Jerusalem, then we won’t be together. And that creates a very uneven relationship. It’s to affirm the power relations that we have as two sides of the conflict. It’s to bring it to a relationship. It’s not what I want to have. I don’t want to reaffirm a situation that is…that I am against.

**Ibrahim**​: Yesterday was a difficult day. He sent his friend to take his stuff, ok? I sent the stuff which are his own. Like he had a few underwears in my closet. But he sent me my stuff, and they are all stuff I bought for him from New York. He never worn these shirts. I really don’t know what he means by sending me, like, he’s erasing me from his closet and his room, and, anyway. I am more and more really not sorry about him.

**David**​: We had a very big love. And that's a very meaningful thing in everyone's lives. My hope is that he gained something from this relationship, and that now he believes that love is possible in his life. That new opportunities are possible. But I think it can happen only elsewhere. Not here. And I really wish that he would find his way out of here.

**Ibrahim**​: Of course Palestine is my country, and I was born here. But for me, my home is the place where I am myself. I really don’t feel that Palestine is my home. I feel like a stranger in this place. I don’t want to be confused, if I broke up with my boyfriend because we just had issues, or because of the political situation. I want (it to be) more clear to me.

**David**​: My intention is to leave the country. Because I had enough. Everything is against you. Everything.

The law is against you, the situations of gays in Palestinian society is against you. The cultural differences are against you. Your parents are against you. This separation is so deep, and when individuals try to break it, they wear out. I am all worn out.

**Mishy Harman (narration):**​ That story was produced by Daniel Estrin, with support from PRX and Bending Borders.

We’re gonna end today’s show with a beautiful extended Israel Moment, recorded and mixed by Elia Einhorn during his recent trip to Israel.

If you enjoyed today’s episode, give us some social media love. FB, Twitter, Instagram, all under Israel Story. You can find all our previous English episodes at ​tabletmag.com​ and ­ don’t forget the donate button, once more. You can also find them on iTunes and Soundcloud. And, of course, if you speak Hebrew tune in to our Hebrew episodes. Our site israelstory.org, where you can hear everything, from the very beginning. And as always, we’d love to hear your thoughts and comments, so post on our facebook page, or email us at ​contact@israelstory.org​.

For music and mixing help on today’s episode, a big thanks to Jonathan Groubert, Tarek

Fouda, and Collin Oldham. Thanks to Dave Isay and Mike Garofalo from StoryCorps, Emily Harris, Avner Shelem at TLV1, and to our friends and partners at Tablet Magazine.

I’m Mishy Harman, and the Israel Story staff includes Yochai Maital, Roee Gilron, Shai Satran, Nava Winkler, Maya Kosover, Benny Becker and Bari Finkel. Julie Subrin’s our executive producer. That’s it, we’ll be back ­ after a short break ­ with a whole new, and exciting season of Israel Story. So stay tuned for that, and meanwhile, yalla bye.