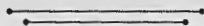


ETGAR KERET: FLY ALREADY. STORIES

(2019)

AT NIGHT



At night, when everyone is asleep, Mom lies awake in bed, eyes closed. Once, when she was a little girl, she wanted to be a scientist. She longed to find a cure for cancer, the common cold, or human sadness. She got excellent grades and had a very neat notebook, and in addition to healing the human race, she wanted to travel to outer space or watch a volcano in action. It's hard to say that something went wrong in her life. She married the man she loved, works in a field that interested her, and gave birth to a sweet little boy. And yet she can't fall asleep. Maybe it's because the man she loves went to pee an hour ago and still hasn't come back to bed.

At night, when everyone is asleep, Dad walks barefoot to the balcony to smoke a cigarette and add up his debts. He works like a horse. Tries to save. But somehow, everything costs just a little bit more than what he can afford. The neckless man in the café already lent him money once and soon he'll have to start paying him back, but he has no idea how he can do that. When

he finishes his cigarette, he hurls the butt from the balcony as if it were a rocket and watches it crash into the sidewalk. It's not nice to dirty the street, that's what he tells his son whenever the kid drops a candy wrapper on the ground. But it's late now, he's very tired, and the only thing on his mind is money.

At night, when everyone is asleep, the boy dreams exhausting dreams about a piece of newspaper that sticks to his shoe and won't come off. Mom once told him that dreams are the way our brains tell itself things, but the boy's brain doesn't speak clearly. Even though that annoying dream recurs every night, smelling of cigarette smoke and wet with stagnant water, the boy doesn't understand what it's trying to say. He tosses and turns in his bed, knowing deep down that at some point, Mom or Dad will come in and cover him. Until then, he hopes that the moment he manages to peel that piece of newspaper off his shoe, if he ever does manage to peel it off, a different dream will come.

At night, when everyone is asleep, the goldfish comes out of the fishbowl and puts on Dad's checked slippers. Then it sits down on the living room couch and zaps on the TV. Its favorites shows are cartoons, nature films, and CNN, but only when there's a terrorist attack or a photogenic disaster. It watches TV without sound so as not to wake anyone. At about four a.m., it goes back to the fishbowl and leaves the damp slippers in the middle of the living room. It doesn't care that Mom will have something to say to Dad about that in the morning. He's just a fish, and if it's not a fishbowl or a TV screen, he couldn't care less.