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**THE BLACK FOX**

by

Allan Havis

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**CHARACTERS**

Amos ..... mid-70/80s, Israeli-American  
Josie. .... late-30s, black  
Ruth ..... late 60s,  
Hyman ..... mid-70/80s male  
Little ..... mid-40s or 50s female

**SETTING and TIME**

Senior living facility, New Jersey, Summer 2009

**SCENE ONE**  
**(AFTERNOON. AMOS' APARTMENT)**

AMOS  
Move the flowers to the window.

JOSIE  
Why?

AMOS  
There's going to be a loud knock at my door and it's never good news when people bang on an old man's door.

(PAUSE)  
Please move the flowers, Josie. I want the world to know that I am loved.

JOSIE  
Oh, that's a laugh.

AMOS  
No teasing. And I'm fragile.

JOSIE  
The world doesn't care, Mr. Jacobi. Besides the lot outside is for service vehicles only. Just trucks and vans.

AMOS  
So?

JOSIE  
Those aren't your people.

AMOS  
People are people. Blue collar, white collar, high collar.

JOSIE  
I'm not talking about the color of their collars.

AMOS  
I want the world to care, darling. We are not lonely here. No. No. No. You see, only

astronauts are lonely. I feel their loneliness. Don't you?

JOSIE

No.

AMOS

You don't feel their loneliness or you don't believe me?

JOSIE

I do believe you. On Fridays you tell the truth. The other days it's roulette. Thank God it's Friday. It's time for your champagne bath. And then I leave you to fend for yourself.

AMOS

Do I smell?

JOSIE

Like anchovies outside the can.

AMOS

You know I like to conserve water.

JOSIE

Why?

AMOS

I want to be green.

JOSIE

You're gray. Miserably gray.

AMOS

So very green, Josie.

JOSIE

Your feet are green.

AMOS

My feet are ancient. They have climbed the Masada and dangled in the Dead Sea. Let's see your feet in a few years. Slippers off.

JOSIE

I'm not showing you my fleeting naked feet.

AMOS

Not too long ago, *fleeting* John Demjanjuk escaped federal custody. Try to say that name!

JOSIE

Bath time! Your hands are spotted.

AMOS

Demjanjuk, Demjanjuk .. sounds a vile part of the intestines. He escaped custody just hours after six immigration officers grabbed this lying Nazi camp guard from his Cleveland home.

I've a low opinion of Ohio.

JOSIE

The Rock and Roll Hall of Fame is in Cleveland, Mr. Jacobi. Cleveland is cool.

(GIVING HIM HIS EVENING MEDICATION TABS)

Two more pills. Thank you. Your nose is red.

AMOS

That means rain tonight. My *schnozz* is a barometer.

JOSIE

Really?

AMOS

And when my *schnozz* is blue, the clouds unglue . . . into feather pillows.

JOSIE

Lovely image.

AMOS

You know, Demjanjuk was an accessory to 30,000 deaths at Poland's Sobibor camp – the fat dumb *schmuck* SS killer that he is.

JOSIE

(FINDING A PENTHOUSE MAGAZINE IN HIS BEDDING)

Is this *literature* yours?

AMOS

(IGNORING HER QUESTION)

No statute of limitations on genocide. He looks like Tor Johnson – the blockhead Swede wrestler who made B movies with Godzilla. Yes, that fine magazine is mine.

(PAUSE)

Demjanjuk's ten-year-old grandson was in the house when they arrested him. So Josie darling, what was going on in this kid's head during the raid?

JOSIE

Your grandson gave you this, Mr. Jacobi?  
(SHE TOSSES MAGAZINE INTO TRASH CAN)

AMOS

Maybe he did and maybe I stole it from him.  
Hey, don't throw my magazines away.

JOSIE

He's gay.

AMOS

Lots of kids are gay today. It's a fashion statement. Like Cher's kid and Ronald Reagan's boy. I like my grandson just as he is. I just think this body waxing crap has got to stop. You don't wax, do you? Waxing is for moon children.

(COUGHING TO CLEAR HIS THROAT)

In 1969, Buzz Aldrin made history when he and Neil Armstrong became the first to dance on the moon. Now, Aldrin struggles with depression in Fort Lauderdale.

JOSIE

And you don't?

AMOS

I think Fort Lauderdale is depressing. And Miami is worse. There is no paradise for old Jews.  
(PAUSE)

How far is the moon if we really struggle for it? Do you ever struggle for things, Josie? I'm younger and funnier than Aldrin. He was just on *Dancing with the Stars*. I heard him speak at a fundraiser for the homeless. He said he was unprepared for fame and struggled for years with depression and booze.

JOSIE

And you smoke marijuana, Mr. Jacobi.

AMOS

Glaucoma, Josie. Medicinal. A man has got to see. I got to read books and journals. Look, I don't smoke in your presence. I don't smoke in bed. My memory is fine. Aldrin's mother, whose last name was Moon, was a drunk. His father was a drunk. Both parents killed themselves. Pity the orphan astronaut. Tom Wolfe romanticizes the astronaut and NASA loses the historic lunar video footage. Imagine a guy losing his wedding video? Look at that nutty woman astronaut Lisa Nowak who tried to kill her boyfriend *and* her rival. Why was she wearing diapers on that long car ride cross country? Why do spacesuits make people crazy?

JOSIE

It's really bath time, Mr. Jacobi. Or there will be no bath.

AMOS

Do you think I'm too good looking for my height?

JOSIE

You wear lifts and you hardly leave the wheelchair.

AMOS

You think I'm short or I'm too heroic?

JOSIE

I think you have bad posture.

AMOS

I voted for Obama.

JOSIE

So?

AMOS

I think that's good posture.

JOSIE

Because you're Jewish?

AMOS

Yes.

JOSIE

How Jewish are you *today*, Mr. Jacobi?

AMOS

More Jewish than Sammy Davis Jr. You don't even know who I'm talking about.

JOSIE

I do.

AMOS

He had a glass eye.

JOSIE

So does Peter Falk.

AMOS

Peter Falk isn't Jewish.

JOSIE

He's half Italian? Isn't that good enough?

AMOS

I really don't know. Isn't that God awful, Josie? I love the guy and don't know his goddamn nationality.

(RUTH ENTERS WITH A WALKING AID)

So what's up with Dave Chappell these days?

JOSIE

Was the door unlocked?

RUTH

Yes.

JOSIE

My fault, Mr. Jacobi.

RUTH

Doesn't matter. I have a key.

AMOS

Do you, Ruth?

RUTH

You gave me one.

AMOS

When?

RUTH

Labor Day. Our anniversary.

AMOS

What anniversary darling?

JOSIE

Do you want to be alone?

RUTH

Ours. Never mind. Play dumb.

JOSIE

I was just about to run his bath. He needs one.

AMOS

I remember our anniversary Ruth very well.

RUTH

I could come back in ten minutes.

AMOS

I gave you a ring, not a key.

RUTH

And you gave me a key because you don't have Josie every day.

AMOS

I see.

JOSIE

Weekend is coming. It's last call for bath time, Mr. Jacobi.

AMOS

Ruth, do you want to take a bath with me? A bubble bath?  
(JOSIE LAUGHS)

RUTH

Because you gave me a nice ring?

AMOS

Because I gave you a *fabulous* ring. Are you wearing this ring?

RUTH

Yes, I am.

AMOS

Show Josie!

RUTH

Are we engaged?

AMOS

It's a two carat diamond. A one carat would mean a fling at the Hyatt in Morristown.

JOSIE

It's a blood diamond.

AMOS

Nonsense! It's been in the family for generations.

JOSIE

All diamonds, Mr. Jacobi.

AMOS

Shah! Nothing to do with Sierra Leone or Leonardo DiCaprio. An Israeli diamond, Josie, before 1948. No fingers were lost in the unearthing of this gem.

JOSIE

Are you sure?

Go Josie. Take an extended weekend. Come back Tuesday.

RUTH

Go, darling. I'll watch the bastard for you.

AMOS

(TO RUTH)

Kiss, kiss.

RUTH

(TO JOSIE)

You're buying him Viagra and it's not good for his heart.

JOSIE

No, Mrs. Miller. Mr. Jacobi buys it online and it comes in the mail.

AMOS

My insurance pays for it. Blue Cross Blue Shield.

JOSIE

Can't argue with the boss.

(PAUSE)

Good night.

(SHE EXITS)

AMOS

She's tough, Ruth. Josie started like a pussy cat but in the last few months, she's a lioness.

RUTH  
You need some toughness.

AMOS  
Solly had a stroke.

AMOS  
I heard, yes.

RUTH  
Do you care?

AMOS  
I sent flowers already.

RUTH  
Really?

AMOS  
Dozens of beautiful red roses.

RUTH  
Lately you're not taking dinners with the group, Amos.

AMOS  
So?

RUTH  
I'm asking.

AMOS  
I'm not.

RUTH  
Why?

AMOS  
I'm annoyed.

RUTH  
At me?

AMOS  
No. Are you the group?

RUTH

Tell me who you pissed you off.

AMOS

Your girl friend Mindy. Mindy Motor Mouth.

RUTH

Don't say that.

AMOS

She could out-talk Joan Rivers. Mindy has no brain. She might as well be a parakeet on amphetamines. Feathers would help her. So would a little cage.

RUTH

Don't be mean.

AMOS

I know. Mindy gives to charity. Mindy helps the environment. Mindy babysits for battered mothers in Newark. Mindy gives blood. Mindy killed her husband.

RUTH

What's really going on? Is it your health?

AMOS

My health's fine. My eyes are dilating.

RUTH

Your children?

AMOS

My children are fine. My children are dilating.

RUTH

They missed your birthday last month.

AMOS

So?

RUTH

It upset me, Amos.

AMOS

I like leveraging a little guilt their way. You know - guilt for *gelt*.

RUTH

How much *gelt* do you need, Amos? There's more to the story, yes?

AMOS

There's never more to the story.

RUTH

Are you off your medication?

AMOS

Yes. It wasn't helping my memory and I was not sleeping well. I'm becoming incontinent and now I wear astronaut underwear with a little cowboy insignia.

RUTH

Thank you for telling me.

AMOS

They're coming for me, Ruthie.

RUTH

Who?

AMOS

Men in dark suits and dark sunglasses.

RUTH

(IGNORING THE REMARK)

I know about the recent fights you're having wit Hyman next door.

AMOS

He's the biggest idiot of this township. The Hyman of New Jersey.

RUTH

Hyman just likes to provoke you in the dining room. He's an eclectic art collector.

AMOS

And I'm an eclectic Swiss brain surgeon.

RUTH

He has fine art on his wall. Matisse and Miró.

AMOS

Big deal. Knock-off lithographs.

RUTH

Watercolors.

AMOS

Why defend him?

RUTH

He could buy five nursing homes with such assets.

AMOS

The Hyman tells me he's about to bid on the next Hitler paintings auction in London. That's right, Adolf Hitler. I can't wait until he drops dead before his next dialysis.

RUTH

You talk more like this, I'll have to go . . .

AMOS

Don't go, Ruthie . . . sit, I'll make a nice cup of tea. Sleepy time or peppermint? I even got that crappy Lipton which stains your dentures. I'm sorry. My art connoisseur neighbor drives me crazy. He's on the meal plan yet he grills liver on a hot plate and doesn't use the goddamn vent. Who the hell cooks liver today? You want something truly herbal with a little vodka spike?

RUTH

Amos . . .

AMOS

Look at my hands. This is normal arthritis? Or am I the elephant man?

RUTH

(LOOKING CLOSELY)

Water retention.

AMOS

We're so past our menopause.

RUTH

You haven't been the same since you came back from Israel.

AMOS

What does that mean?

RUTH

It means you seem distant. And yet not tan enough.

AMOS

Me?

RUTH

I'm in the same room as you, but you feel elsewhere.

AMOS

Maybe I need to see my kids more than twice a year. Maybe I haven't been wonderful to them. What does that facial expression mean?

RUTH

Nothing.

AMOS

I read your face like a book, but this is a new look. What are you thinking?

RUTH

I'm going to lose you.

AMOS

How can that be?

RUTH

You lie.

AMOS

That's such BS, Ruthie.

RUTH

You withhold a lot from me. What do you want me to say?

AMOS

I don't lie. You know my mind.

RUTH

Who were the men that were here last week?

(PAUSE)

You know what I'm talking about, Amos.

AMOS

What men?

RUTH

Black suits.

AMOS  
Oh. Jehovah Witnesses?

RUTH  
Yes?

AMOS  
No.

RUTH  
Who?

AMOS  
Lawyers. Naturally.

RUTH  
They were from the government. Obviously.

AMOS  
How do you know?

RUTH  
They drove a black Camry, chewed gum, and had sleek government plates. I overheard them in the parking lot.

AMOS  
You did?

RUTH  
My hearing is very good.

AMOS  
What the heck what you doing in the parking lot?

RUTH  
Going to my car.

AMOS  
I thought you sold your car?

RUTH

They had ear pieces. Very suspicious.

AMOS

Don't tease me. We all wear ear pieces.

RUTH

What did the men want, Amos? Are you having more tax problems?

AMOS

No.

RUTH

I think you are.

AMOS

I'm as solvent as General Motors.

RUTH

You sold your Mercedes for cold cash.

AMOS

It was too expensive to repair anymore. Look, Ruth. I don't cheat on my taxes. Never did. I file on time. I keep receipts. I overpay to play it safe.

RUTH

You do so many things with cash.

AMOS

I like cash. Most people don't.

RUTH

You bought that Mercedes with cash.

AMOS

I hate checks. Why do you want from me, Ruth? There were some men who wanted to know about my engineering work many years ago and I told them the truth. There were some problems with quality control and I was a whistleblower.

RUTH

Were they from the government?

AMOS

Yes. Army Corps of Engineers.

RUTH

Are you in trouble?

AMOS

No.

RUTH

Yes, you are. Look at your face.

AMOS

What's wrong with my face?

RUTH

You look constipated.

AMOS

You want me to be in trouble?

RUTH

No.

AMOS

You worry too much and your worrying will take away the botox magic.

RUTH

I only used botox once, Amos, and my cockamamie smile will never be the same.

AMOS

Nonsense. You have a heavenly smile and that is how I fell in love with you.

RUTH

Why did you fall in love with me?

AMOS

You were irresistible. And I was lonelier than a New England lighthouse. I looked like an Edward Hopper portrait. I was fighting depression and early dementia. I thought there was no reason to get older in this isolation. I was enchanted by your good manners and your knitting.

Does anyone knit as beautifully as you in all of New Jersey? Really? Is it fun to go to the movies alone?

(PAUSE)

There are four lovely women for every wretched man in this claustrophobic facility, darling, and still I don't like the odds very much. Most of the "dashing" men are succumbing to Alzheimer's. And the men that are functional are impossible. Hyman uses restylane filler and steroids. Did you know? You can't tell when he's smiling or flexing when he's breathing.

It's like a polyurethane death mask with air holes.

RUTH

When did you fall in love with me?

AMOS

During the field trip to the art museum. And I have such trouble with contemporary art.

RUTH

I don't remember that.

AMOS

I do. There were lifelike Duane Hanson sculptures of fat tourists. And don't confuse Duane Hanson realism with George Segal's ghostly white figures. You wore a sleeveless dress and you had heels on. Not flats. I don't know how you were able to walk around with heels.

RUTH

I was a dance instructor. I can walk in my sleep with stilettos on a sheet of ice.

AMOS

That's right. I forgot. You're a gazelle with naturally long legs.

RUTH

And you fell in love with me because of my legs?

AMOS

I fell in love with you because of my legs. My legs are failing. I can't even twitch my toes. And violet varicose veins are the weeds in my garden.

RUTH

You're afraid of me.

AMOS

Why should I be? You're just a jejune Jersey Jewish princess. The youngest gal on the block.

RUTH

We used to kiss more. We used to hold hands a lot.

AMOS

You know I like kissing. It's very social and aerobic.

RUTH

You leave my apartment whenever my family visits.

AMOS

You like privacy.

RUTH

Amos, you're part of my family.

AMOS

I know. I'm on speed dial. What letter? Q?

RUTH

Say it like you mean it. Go ahead, old man. Say you're part of my family.

AMOS

I am part of your *mispucha*.

RUTH

You look at me differently, you know you do. You look past me and your eyes don't flirt any more.

AMOS

My eyes never could flirt. I've transformed into a civil engineer, Ruthie. The emphasis on *civil*. Judge me lightly. Laugh at me, if you must.

RUTH

We both have physical pain.

AMOS

But you're spiritual and I'm a sack of clay.

RUTH

I question that assessment. Honest to God.

AMOS

Pinch me. Feel the clay. I hate aging. Three months ago I could move my legs. A year ago I could have danced with the stars.

RUTH

You never pray?

AMOS

God help me. I did, and the next day I was ten years older. You want to lecture me on the power of prayer? The poignancy of the Mourner's Kaddish? Helping the deceased's transition into the next world? Where is the next world, Ruth? Be tangible. What comfort is there when we doubt? We prayer that we don't succumb to skepticism. We prayer to stay childlike

and innocence. I struggle with my anxiety.

(PAUSE)

That's enough about prayer.

RUTH

And on your death bed?

AMOS

I will sing a silly song.

(FINDING A WINNING SMILE AND SINGING OFF KEY, WITH CHARM)

I love you, a bushel and a peck!

A bushel and a peck, and a hug around the neck!

A hug around the neck, and a barrel and a heap

A barrel and a heap, and I'm talkin' in my sleep.

About you. About me? About you!

RUTH

That was beautiful, Amos.

AMOS

I know.

RUTH

So who are these very tall men in the parking lot?

AMOS

Must we talk about this?

RUTH

I got to know.

AMOS

Vulture creditors.

RUTH

From a bank?

AMOS

From Hadassah.

RUTH

Amos?

AMOS

A credit union of international engineers. You know my work took me many places overseas. I was a very good engineer, Ruthie. I made a lot of money for people and I think I was underpaid. But what's the point? Rich people go to hell. And poor people think they have no choice but hell. We don't take money when we die and we're faulted if we spend too much on our grave stones. *Kaynahorah*, I gave my children a trust fund to be sure.

(PAUSE. HE WHEELS CLOSER TO RUTH)

I went to a strange party when I was eighteen. I'll always remember this event. A lean Spanish woman in her thirties chose me. She smoked and was wrapped in a dozen red scarves. She took my hand and read my palm. Her breathing was heavy and her perfume stung my nose. Her fingers traced my lines and she promised many wonderful things for the future. She stopped suddenly and said I cannot say anything more. I begged her to finish the prophesy. She relented. "You have rings of Saturn where they should not be." She said in breath terribly cold. And I demanded to know what the hell she was talking about. Rings of Saturn meant that I would die a violent death. And she dropped her mouth so slowly I hung to her with dear life. I looked at my chubby hands and I looked at the riddle and I believed her idiot that I am. I had to believe her because for all her weirdness she was sincere. And for days and for years I thought I may not know the date of my death, but I'll at least know the manner of my passage.

RUTH

That is a miserable memory, Amos.

AMOS

She could have said rings of Uranus and I'd have laughed.

RUTH

Maybe it was how she pronounced the planet? Are you superstitious?

AMOS

No.

RUTH

But the palm reader scared you?

AMOS

I think about death.

RUTH

We all do here. Why did you pick this place? It's not your neighborhood and it didn't come cheap.

AMOS

My daughter chose it.

RUTH

And that was that?

AMOS

Does it matter?

RUTH

Look. I met your daughter a few times. She is very veiled.

AMOS

I know. And you?

RUTH

I chose this center.

AMOS

You have control over your destiny,

RUTH

I wish.

AMOS

You have lovely children and I am envious.

(PAUSE)

We control nothing, Ruthie. The retirement money in our mutual funds is turning into confetti. Social Security hardly covers our cable TV.

RUTH

Darling, listen carefully. My daughter wants me to move back in with her. She's three hours from here. She knows you don't want me to move in with you.

(PAUSE)

You're crying, Amos.

AMOS

I've trouble with these eyes.

RUTH

Stop smoking.

AMOS

When I smoke, there is a little relief and some pleasure. I know you don't like my smoking in the courtyard.

RUTH

You're getting stoned by the water fountain. People see and people talk.

AMOS

I don't care for the management of this facility. We're chattel and wish we had cooler A/C in July. I sweat too much, no matter what my salt intake is. Now Josie has a thought or two about a great amount of sweat equals long life. She says it cleans out the pores and we clean out our lives - the pores every precise way, mind you, we won't suffer any cancer. No one in her family has cancer. So she's making me *schvitz* and I'm aware of my odor.

(SMILES)

So I douse in Armani cologne and you tell me I make you sneeze. Josie puts me on this stationary bike while I watch Animal Planet.

(THEY BOTH LAUGH)

You're laughing. You think I'm very funny, don't you. Don't move in with your daughter, Ruth. I beg you. Come closer. Please.

(SHE DOES)

Two weeks and my life will change. You'll see my other profile. And I hope you will understand.

(HE KISSES HER)

END OF SCENE

SCENE TWO

(LIBRARY AT THE SENIOR CENTER NEXT DAY)

HYMAN

So Professor Henry Louis Gates gets arrested during the day in front of his lovely Cambridge home because this is America and he's a *schvartze*, and famous professors forget house keys, and smartass PhDs like to insult the arresting cop - it doesn't get better than that! Who do you blame, Amos? Come on, talk. Who do you blame?

AMOS

The grammar is – *Whom* do you blame?

HYMAN

So the President calls the cop stupid. But he's a good cop and is known to do good things for *schvartzes*. So Obama invites everyone over for a beer and now the country is post-racial and all is forgiven. Are you following the news? Listen, O.J. might get a hearing in Las Vegas to reduce his jail time because he's worried about his golf handicap. And what's his name, Tiger,

has got a little sexy addiction for the short skirt. What do you think about that, Jacobi? What's the connection? And Michael Jackson let his doctor kill him. Why is it so hard to be black in this country?

(PAUSE)

Did you read this month's newsletter? This place is under new management. That's why they're painting the exterior halls beige. The first owners were Scientologists and we had space aliens as custodial help. At least we were treated well and we had great calamari. Do you ever test the emergency pull chords in the bathroom? Mine sometimes triggered the washer/dryer. God forbid it's life or death and the chord breaks? The security cameras are hit and miss too. The back door was unlocked last night. Claire had her purse stolen from her room last Thursday. Custodial claims no responsibility. Can you believe it? Jacobi, I'm talking to you. You had your camera stolen last year. Right? The Carlyle Group. Bought up all of Manor Care. Henry Kissinger's Equity buddies profiting off of our hides. Remember they promised us a sauna room, an indoor swimming pool, and WiFi?

(PAUSE)

Don't you like a good bottle of wine every now and then. Some expensive port at night. And a cigar? I see everything.

AMOS

I'm trying to concentrate.

HYMAN

You know the previous owners were brothers and one of them also had a car dealership in Short Hills. I once bought a car from him. He lost all his money thanks to Bernie Madoff. Now that's a Jewish villain for modern times. We don't need any more Jewish bad guys.

AMOS

An Italian invented the Ponzi scheme.

HYMAN

Remember the happiness of buying an expensive foreign car? Mercedes or BMW. Driving off the lot with the new floor mats. Valet parking at an exclusive restaurant. I'd rather drive a luxury car than any other thrill.

(AMOS ROLLS HIS WHEEL CHAIR VERY FAR AWAY FROM HYMAN)

HYMAN

Mel Brooks' show is doing well in Germany. What do you think about that, Jacobi? It's the final irony for Springtime For Hitler . . .

(APPROACHING AMOS)

I spent a lot of weeks in the crafts room making origami art with expensive color paper and all of my excellent figurines were on display up until last night. Do you know what happened, Jacobi?

AMOS

No.

HYMAN

I think you know.

AMOS

I told you I don't know.

HYMAN

Must have been late last night. After 10pm. Someone in this facility took a pair of scissors and vandalized my work. I felt this was going to happen,

AMOS

That is criminal, Hyman. Absolutely criminal.

HYMAN

And security, they have something on tape, the back of someone's wide head and the time of day. I asked them to make a full investigation.

AMOS

So who is it?

HYMAN

What?

AMOS

I'm dying to know. Who did it?

HYMAN

Someone with a bright red jogging suit and a red hood.

AMOS

A red hood? Well, that should lead you to the culprit.

HYMAN

You don't have a red suit.

AMOS

Do I look like Santa, Hyman? And I don't jog.

HYMAN

Maybe you have something red in your closet.

AMOS

Isn't red a gang color?

HYMAN

But you wear sweatshirt hoods.

AMOS

You're thinking about Leibowitz. I don't wear hoods because I'm nearly bald and material on my head brings out horrible hives. Did you ever have hives, Hyman? Or shingles? Psoriasis?

HYMAN

You know my day aid-companion quit. Not even a week's notice.

AMOS

Really?

HYMAN

I need care weekly. Just like you, Jacobi. Bathing is not easy when my back goes out and I need a driver to take me to my doctor appointments.

(PAUSE)

How much do you pay your girl?

AMOS

Seven hundred a week.

HYMAN

Off the books?

AMOS

That's right.

HYMAN

Maybe I didn't pay enough.

HYMAN

You like your girl?

AMOS

I do.

HYMAN

You trust her?

AMOS

Enough.

HYMAN

Her real name is Josie?

AMOS

That's right. Josephine.

HYMAN

Are you embarrassed when she baths you?

AMOS

No.

HYMAN

Not at all? What about assistance with the toilet?

AMOS

I am very competent, Hyman. I assume you are too.

HYMAN

Did she come from an agency?

AMOS

No. Through Craigslist.

HYMAN

You're kidding.

AMOS

You pay a lot through an agency. And they make you pay health benefits too.

HYMAN

Benefits are benefits.

AMOS

Off the books, pure cash.

HYMAN

You got to be moral.

AMOS

I'm very moral, Hyman. Don't get on your damn soap box.

HYMAN

Don't curse, Jacobi.

(PAUSE)

Did you contribute to the staff holiday fund last winter?

AMOS

I did.

HYMAN

No you didn't. I'm the community treasurer.

AMOS

If you know, why are you asking me?

HYMAN

I know you only use cash. Never write a check.

AMOS

I don't like checks.

HYMAN

Why?

AMOS

Because I'm a Jewish mobster.

HYMAN

I'm trying to make conversation.

AMOS

Don't. Take a walk.

HYMAN

You don't like me very much do you?

AMOS

I like everybody here.

HYMAN

Liar.

AMOS

I like most everybody.

HYMAN

You like the women, but not men.

AMOS

The men at this facility are lacking something, Hyman. They're weak. Or suffer dementia. Everyone's complaining about stupid things. Muzak in the elevator. The generic 4 ounce can sodas. Single ply toilet paper in the lobby restroom. Changeover to fluorescent bulbs. Not my kind of company. This is a *farshlepteh krenk* (a chronic illness).

HYMAN

Major General George O. Squier invented muzak in 1922. I know because it was on Jeopardy.  
(PAUSE)  
I don't have dementia.

AMOS

Major Squier, you say?

HYMAN

Major Squier. That is correct.

AMOS

Didn't you say you have dementia?

HYMAN

No, I said I had some bouts of depression. And that can cause cloudiness. You told Ruth that I was going into a serious phase of dementia.

AMOS

No.

HYMAN

Yes, you did.

AMOS

My friend, I know you don't have dementia. You have all your marbles. If you had dementia I'd probably talk to you more often.

HYMAN

We have a few things in common, Jacobi. College educated. Affluent. Widowed. Our kids aren't visiting enough.

AMOS

Hell, mine never visit.

HYMAN

Our doors are almost contiguous.

AMOS

Except for the utility door.

HYMAN

I join you at the lunch and you look the other way most days.

AMOS

I have vision problems.

HYMAN

You see me now, *boychik*.

AMOS

I'm not always social, Hyman. I have my *mishigosh*.

HYMAN

You never enjoy talking to me.

AMOS

I'm talking to you now.

HYMAN

You're angry.

AMOS

I'm not angry. I worry a little and that is not the same as anger.

HYMAN

Look at your eyebrows. They show anger right now.

AMOS

Come on . . .

HYMAN

The front desk staff thinks you're angry.

AMOS

They said that?

HYMAN

Yes, they did.

AMOS

Liz and Gladys? The two dazzling brunettes?

HYMAN

You bet.

AMOS

I'll have to talk to them.

HYMAN

Don't say you heard it from me.

AMOS

What did you do to your hands?

HYMAN

I had a manicure. Not here. At a salon next to Macy's.

AMOS

Nail polish?

HYMAN

Don't laugh. Yes, it's colorless. Protects the extremities. Allows me to handle my art collect with total assurance. Joe DiMaggio had his nails done. Really, when he was selling Mr. Coffee on TV.

HYMAN

I remember Mr. Coffee . . .

AMOS

And representing the Bowery Savings Bank. You know, Dom DiMaggio was almost as good on the field but nobody recalls Dom.

(PAUSE)

Almost had my hair colored but you need a head of hair. Men are doing that. It doesn't cost that much. Did you ever . . . well, probably not you . . . you know I'm three quarters Jewish, my grandmother was Italian. I like Italians more than anyone, Jacobi, and there are no Italians here. It's wall to wall Jew. Italian guilt is no different from Jewish guilt. Although Italian guilt only lasts a few days right - after a night of sex. Italians sure do have a lot of fun. Love to talk with their hands. Love to cook with their mouths. I guess some Italian women have hair lip issues but today you can fix anything. What book are you looking for?

(PAUSE)

What book?

AMOS

Henry Miller.

HYMAN

Colossal *putz*.

AMOS

He had a lot of talent.

HYMAN

In his Brooklyn prick?

AMOS

Williamsburg boy.

HYMAN

Lived in Paris. Died in California. He fucked more women than Warren Beatty *and* Walt Chamberland combined.

AMOS

Wilt Chamberland. What the hell do you want, Hyman?

HYMAN

Conversation.

AMOS

You got what you wanted. Can I be alone?

HYMAN

My father was a salesman and he developed seven rules of active engagement. He theorized that people could not resist the persistence of human exchange. The open hand. Freedom to buy what you don't need. Gratification from someone's smile. Validation that you are special.

AMOS

Hyman. Go to the game room. This is a fucking library.

HYMAN

Watch the movie with me tonight. It's Sean Connery in *From Russia With Love*. The best Bond film ever. Lotte Lenya plays Rosa Klebb. The ultimate villain since Margaret Hamilton's Wicked Witch. Watch out for switchblade shoes Jacobi!

AMOS

Don't like James Bond.

HYMAN

Pussy Galore? You don't like action films?  
Don't like spy films? Love stories? *A Man and a Woman*? Comedies? You like Billy  
Crystal?

AMOS

No.

HYMAN

Billy Wilder? Billy Bob Thornton? All right. I'll leave you alone.

(AFTER A LONG SILENCE)

Josie is very attractive. I noticed her right away. High cheek bones and such a sexy smile.  
She's a cross between Angela Bassett and Cecily Tyson. Do you find her attractive?

(PAUSE)

There's something in the root system that works for black people. They understand the life  
cycle. They laugh through crisis. Money doesn't matter. Death's a joke. They are absent the  
guilt we Jews suffer.

(PAUSE)

Ruth was happier before she met you and yet . . . she says she's happy. I talk to her each  
morning at breakfast. I remember when she first moved in years before you got here. She was  
not comfortable. She paced the halls. She complained about the food. She likes you, Jacobi.  
You never come to breakfast. That bothers her. What? You can't get up early enough to be  
with her? You don't like getting dressed? I have to say that I'm jealous of you. Not because  
of your high class science work or your worldly travels, and not because of your damn army  
stories or your government connections at Picattiny. You should know . . . I wanted Ruth to  
be me with me. She and I had chemistry. Did you know that, Jacobi? And I made an effort  
with her. I want you to know that. I am better for her than you. And do you know why? I  
don't lie and you do. I have integrity but you have *bupkes*. You cheat on your taxes. Do you  
know the meaning of integrity?

AMOS

Do you want me to punch you right in the kisser?

HYMAN

Yes. Go ahead.

AMOS

I will. Nothing will give me greater pleasure.

(HYMAN STICKS OUT HIS CHIN AS AMOS COCKS HIS FIST)

You're such a *schmuck*.

HYMAN

And you're not? What joy do you give to Ruth? Your morbid sense of humor?

AMOS

I don't cheat on my taxes.

HYMAN

Come on, Jacobi. Something's missing.

AMOS

What's missing?

HYMAN

There are government agents prowling around this center. What the hell's going on?

AMOS

And what do you have to offer Ruthie?

HYMAN

Predictability. I'm a very straight line.

AMOS

Good for you.

HYMAN

If you're not a very straight line, what are you?

AMOS

A curved line.

HYMAN

I have many attributes, Jacobi.

AMOS

You have prostate cancer.

HYMAN

So?

AMOS

I feel sorry for you.

HYMAN

Don't want your pity.

AMOS

Take it, Hyman. I am your friend.

HYMAN

Flat screen TVs give you cancer. You were smart to keep your fat tube, Jacobi.  
I know. You didn't buy the converted box and you can't pick up the digital signal.

(PAUSE)

DiMaggio and Arthur Miller had to have met sometime in their lives, don't you think? After Marilyn's death? And maybe they went out for dinner to talk. Think how they would have seen each other. Or John and Bobby Kennedy discussing Marilyn. Same thing?

(PAUSE)

We're like DiMaggio and Miller. I know you can't walk anymore. You were on your legs only a year ago. You were a physically strong guy. You still got a strong handshake.

(PAUSE)

Say something, Jacobi. Sometimes your silence is like a knife.

AMOS

You're buying Hitler paintings on eBay. I heard from a few people here.

HYMAN

So?

AMOS

*Muenchen?*

HYMAN

Who told you? He wasn't a bad watercolorist.

AMOS

You've Jewish blood in your veins, Hyman. Yet you act like a damn a hybrid. Like a Prius with a little brain damage.

HYMAN

Very funny.

AMOS

Am I misstating?

HYMAN

What are you a Super Jew?

AMOS

Compared to you I am. I've risked my life for the right cause. But you're fucking out of your mind. What's on your walls? *Entartete Kunst?*

HYMAN

You don't know what's on my walls. You haven't set foot inside my apartment.

AMOS

Ruthie told me about the German crap that's hanging up.

HYMAN

(JOSIE ENTERS QUIETLY, WITHOUT NOTICE)

She likes the things I own and once I played her a rare Beethoven recording conducted by Toscanini. Symphony Four is under praised these days, but it moves me to tears. And Wagner overtures overwhelm her.

AMOS

*Everything* German gives you an orgasm.

HYMAN

(LAUGHING SWEETLY)

Toscanini is Italian. You had a fancy German car, my friend.

JOSIE

Mr. Jacobi . . . .

AMOS

I risked my life, Hyman, for the Jewish people.

JOSIE

Mr. Jacobi . . .

AMOS

What?

JOSIE

It's time for your eye doctor's appointment. Let's not be late.

AMOS

I already did the drops.

JOSIE

He has more testing to do.

HYMAN

Go, go. You need to see. I'll be here when you come back.

AMOS

Josie. This man is certifiably insane. He must have Asperger's. I'll get my medication and

we'll go.

(AMOS ROLLS AWAY, EXITING)

JOSIE

Is he bothering you, Mr. Hyman?

HYMAN

Not at all. I don't know why he's hurting so much. He's lucky to have you. But maybe that's the way things stay in balance. If you believe in balance. He should count his lucky stars because you are so dedicated to him. You know I can't keep a girl for more than a few months. I've gone to the best agencies.. The last woman was going through my private papers. It's the days of the week when I feel this searing emptiness . . . the days of the week when I hear someone down the hall has died but the TV is still playing in their room. The leaf blowers shatter my ear drums. And my hearing aids. I wish I could make an offer to you.

JOSIE

An offer to leave Mr. Jacobi?

HYMAN

Yes.

JOSIE

I couldn't do that.

HYMAN

Yes, I know. But what if he passes away next month?

JOSIE

Let's not think like that. You'll only get me in trouble.

HYMAN

Do you enjoy his company?

JOSIE

I do.

HYMAN

Do you think he's a straight, honest line?

JOSIE

(LAUGHING)

That's funny.

HYMAN

Is it?

JOSIE

I guess when you get old, words take on new life.

HYMAN

Words are broken links in a large fishing net according to Wittgenstein. I am trapped inside this net like a mermaid. Do you hear words spin from everyday meaning? Do you like the sound of your own voice, Josie?

JOSIE

I do.

HYMAN

Do you think history is kind? Do you like the new president?

JOSIE

I do. I like his family too. He's very smart, Mr. Hyman.

HYMAN

Beautiful wife. Strong, muscular arms

JOSIE

The perfect First Lady.

HYMAN

She's got real muscles on her arms.

JOSIE

You need them, Mr. Hyman. She's working on a lovely garden. That's the right idea. The White House had no life for generations. And it was too white. You give your talents to soil. And the soil sees what you give. And that keeps things simple and true. I had a garden when I was growing up and it kept me out of trouble. Because we had our share of trouble and we had little devils trying to play with our minds. And because sharp little devils can be fun, we entertained them for a short spell.

HYMAN

Little devils that you can see?

JOSIE

Of course. With your own eyes.

HYMAN

Little devils that you can feel?

JOSIE

That's harder to say. Sometimes Mr. Jacobi is a little devil but that's OK. In the south we probably are too exposed. Even if we go to church every Sunday and even if we carry Jesus in our heart. In the south we accept all the crazy things that a small town can display. And in the summer we see crazy things double up. And heat always has that affect. And birds and insects flock to the crazy things because nature takes sides. And it's not just good versus evil, Mr. Hyman. We throw off our shoes and walk in grass, walk in gravel, walk in the rain, doesn't really matter. We run after the children that want to leave town, run after the children that get naughty, run after the children that are looking for their fathers. You don't see that kind of behavior in New Jersey and I guess the country is too big to keep towns that strange. Since I have a sister who still lives in Durham, I visit twice a year. And Durham is not like the other towns where we grew up. There are a lot of fat people in Durham and it must be the Mecca for America's fattest people seeking "rice diet" cures. And you know most people hate eating rice, unless you whip it up into a risotto. Not like they prepare it here. No, no. But at a good Italian restaurant.

HYMAN

Durham.

JOSIE

When I arrive at the airport, all I see as far as they eye can travel  
 - the fattest people on earth -  
 And fat people are fighting so hard to look normal and happy.  
 And fat people are constantly searching for clothes that hide the fat.  
 And fat people give birth to fatter children.  
 And fat people are losing the battle, you know.  
 And fat people cured can never stay thin for long.  
 And fat people have an odor, it's not their choice.  
 Because a really fat person owns the elevator.  
 Owns the crowded airplane.  
 Owns the turnstile  
 that cannot turn a sad inch no more.

HYMAN

Where did you grow up?

JOSIE

Atlanta.

HYMAN

How did you get to New Jersey?

JOSIE

I took a bus. One way. I was destined to enter Amos Jacobi's life and he knows that's too true. It was the last time I'll ever hop a bus.

END OF SCENE

SCENE THREE  
(LIBRARY. THE NEXT DAY)

RUTH

I wanted to go on the field trip today to Manhattan with Amos but he's not here.

HYMAN

He had an eye doctor's appointment. His sight is failing.

RUTH

Oh.

HYMAN

Let me go with you.

RUTH

I'm with the girls, Hyman.

HYMAN

Fine. These are nice ladies all in all.

(PAUSE)

Something's wrong with Amos Jacobi. I wonder if you know what's going on.

RUTH

I don't know anything.

HYMAN

I'm worried for him. I want to tell the people he's closest with to keep an eye out.

RUTH

Okay.

HYMAN

He may have creditors. His health? He may have tax problems, God only knows. His girl Josie is a big help and I've talked to her. I've talked to the front desk staff too.

(PAUSE)

I'd like to take you out dancing sometime, Ruth. Remember Roseland in Times Square?

RUTH

Yes, Roseland was very nice. But I don't like to dance anymore.

HYMAN

Just for the exercise.

RUTH

I prefer walking, Hyman.

HYMAN

Walking is very social. I know you're in a relationship.

(PAUSE)

You know, I'm watching The View on TV, Ruth, and I feel like I know all the reasons we do what we do. Women are smarter, Ruth. Particularly Whoopi Goldberg. That I've learned this late in life is awkward and I am uncomfortable telling you. Maybe you'll respect me in new ways. Aretha Franklin respect. If I were .in a wheelchair, would I appeal to you more?

RUTH

That's totally silly.

HYMAN

Do you miss your husband?

RUTH

Very much.

HYMAN

Does Jacobi remind you of your husband?

RUTH

No.

HYMAN

You resent my question?

(PAUSE)

Do you know what hurts me?

RUTH

No.

HYMAN

Do you want to know?

RUTH

It's not my business.

HYMAN

I told Mindy.

RUTH

Good.

HYMAN

She seems very empathic.

RUTH

Mindy is very empathic. You're absolutely correct.

HYMAN

For a few months last year, she expressed interest in me. I was not feeling good about it but she was struggling with her health and I was trying to be sensitive. She probably knows that my interest in women is . . . well, this is so awkward because you remind me of my wife and just saying that scares me.

RUTH

Then stop talking about this.

HYMAN

My wife was my best support. I am scared to be alone. I have night terror and I won't admit this to my own doctor.

(PAUSE)

Prostate cancer really has transformed my life, Ruth, and I understand what Giuliani went through. A man loses his virility and his vitality. Maybe women feel this with ovarian cancer?

RUTH

I was misdiagnosed with ovarian cancer.

HYMAN

I know.

RUTH

You should talk to Mindy, not to me.

HYMAN

I knew you would say that.

RUTH

Then you know me very well.

HYMAN

Don't you find me attractive?

RUTH

You're making me feel on edge, Hyman.

HYMAN

Can't you say yes?

RUTH

Yes. Happy?

HYMAN

That pleases me, Ruth.

RUTH

You know I'm seeing Amos.

HYMAN

I know.

RUTH

He gave me a ring.

HYMAN

I could give you a nicer ring.

RUTH

I don't want a nicer ring.

HYMAN

Does the art on my walls offend you?

RUTH

No.

HYMAN

If something happened to dear Amos, would you look at me differently?

RUTH

It's a stupid question, Hyman.

HYMAN

Then I am a stupid man. You once thought I was nice and reminded you of your husband. He loved the finer things in life like museums, ballet, and Leonard Bernstein. And when you said that to me I was elated and yet I became extremely shy. Isn't it silly that we had more courage when we were youngsters hanging out in the streets of New York?

(PAUSE)

Maybe you didn't hang out, but you know what I mean.

(PAUSE)

I don't have Asperger's Syndrome.

RUTH

He's never said that to me.

HYMAN

You never know, Ruth.

(PAUSE)

May I please see the ring he gave you?

RUTH

Why?

HYMAN

You've shown the ladies the ring at the dining room.

(SHE SHOWS RING)

It's a beautiful ring.

RUTH

Thank you.

(HE CONTINUES TO HOLD HER HAND FIRMLY)

Please Hyman. Let go.

HYMAN

Does this mean you're engaged?

RUTH

I don't know what it means.

HYMAN

He won't let you move in with him. It's a Friendship Ring.

RUTH  
Yes.

HYMAN  
A special friendship.

RUTH  
Yes. A special friendship.

HYMAN  
I have to confess something to you, Ruth.

RUTH  
What?

HYMAN  
Promise you won't hate me.

RUTH  
I promise.

HYMAN  
I acted impulsively a couple of weeks ago. Say you won't hate me.

RUTH  
Go. Speak.

HYMAN  
I wrote to the IRS office and reported that Jacobi has been a tax cheat. I gave evidence. And they phoned me right away.

RUTH  
You really did that?

HYMAN  
I was very angry with him for an entire week.

RUTH  
How could you do such a thing, Hyman?

HYMAN  
We all know he underreports.

RUTH

That's none of your business.

HYMAN

Please don't hate me. Forgive me please. You must try to understand.

RUTH

Why the hell did you tell me this today?

HYMAN

Because I'm a person who fails at good judgment when I'm touched by my emotional demons and I'm a person who fails at being unselfish when I feel unwanted and I'm a person who cannot take another year of aging in this high priced, well upholstered torture chamber. Dearest Ruth, I'm hopelessly in love with you. Like never in my life.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FOUR

(THE NEXT DAY INSIDE AMOS'S APARTMENT)

AMOS

I watch you, Josie, day in and day out and I know you know me better than I know you. Isn't that so?

JOSIE

I think we know each other equally.

AMOS

How is your daughter?

JOSIE

She's fine. We talk each week. Skype cam on the laptop. She likes college. Her grades are good.

AMOS

You had her at an early age.

JOSIE

My last year of high school. We did okay. My Mom helped. I got my nurse's license at night.

AMOS

Did you want more children?

JOSIE

One was enough. I could have waited a little bit.

AMOS

It was destiny.

JOSIE

I guess. My daughter treats me like her best friend and I trust her.

AMOS

When you bathe me do you see me as child?

JOSIE

I don't know.

AMOS

Because I feel like a child in the tub.

(PAUSE)

And when I fall asleep on the sofa in the middle of the day, do you see a child asleep?

JOSIE

No. I see a man.

AMOS

I feel dependent like a child.

JOSIE

You're in a wheelchair. You were never meant to be cemented into your seat. And you're cranky ol' coot fighting a heart condition.

AMOS

Only you know that.

JOSIE

Yes, Mr. Jacobi.

AMOS

You know that I'm in trouble with the government.

JOSIE

Ahuh.

AMOS

You know the details.

JOSIE

You told me once before.

AMOS

I might get jail time.

JOSIE

They're not going to throw you in the slammer. You're too old and it costs too much to maintain you.

AMOS

Do you want to make a bet, Josie?

JOSIE

Twenty bucks?

AMOS

Okay.

JOSIE

Do I need to know any more details? How much is your fantasy, Mr. Jacobi?

AMOS

1981 U.S-made Israeli warplanes destroyed Iraq's nuclear research facility near Baghdad  
That was the beginning of my new horizon.. That is a new detail

(PAUSE)

There was an engineer's philosophy that I had to adopt. Are we saving lives? Are we in a race with time? Are we in a race against the people of Islam? What was moral? What was national security for Israel and for America? Were Jewish borders safe? Is America a country or a cultural idea without demarcation? Does an engineer see only straight and parallel lines when lines are forced to merge?

(PAUSE)

So in the mid 1980s there was a solution to Iraq, Iran and Syria and I - an engineer in New Jersey - was a necessary part of that solution.

JOSIE

Picatunny, New Jersey.

AMOS

There were many Jews at Picatinny, but I was deputized.

JOSIE

Am I the only one who knows?

AMOS

I don't know. Probably you are.

JOSIE

Why is that, Mr. Jacobi?

AMOS

Because I thought I was going to die this year.

JOSIE

I don't understand.

AMOS

I didn't want to die, Josie. I thought if I told you something in secret I would be given another year's extension. There's no logic to this, but that's how I think. And you see, it worked for one year.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FIVE  
(NEXT DAY)

LITTLE

I phoned before. I think I spoke with you.  
I'd like to see Mr. Amos Jacobi please.

JOSIE

He's in the bathroom taking medication. Who are you?

LITTLE

Ella Little. I'm with the government.

(SHOWS BADGE)

I have a calling card too.

(SHE GIVES THE CARD)

Would you please have him see me now?

JOSIE

Sounds urgent.

LITTLE

May I come in please?

(SHE ENTERS)

Are you his caregiver?

JOSIE

Yes.

LITTLE

May I ask you name?

JOSIE

Josephine Cleveland. Mr. Jacobi calls me Josie.

LITTLE

Thank you, Miss Cleveland. I promise I won't be unpleasant with him. But yes, it is rather urgent.

(SHE SITS ON COUCH)

Where is his wife?

JOSIE

Oh, she passed away about eight years ago.

LITTLE

I see.

JOSIE

A glass of water?

LITTLE

That would be lovely, yes.

(AMOS ENTERS IN A BATHROBE)

AMOS

Hello.

LITTLE

Mr. Jacobi? Good morning. I'm Special Investigator Ella Little. FBI.

(FLIPS BADGE OPEN)

We've phoned you several times.

AMOS

Not to my knowledge.

LITTLE

I'm based in Washington. With your permission, I have a few pressing questions. May we please be alone?

(GLANCES AT JOSIE)

JOSIE

I can come back in an hour. Yes?

LITTLE

Thank you.

(SHE EXITS)

She's very nice, Mr. Jacobi. It's hard to get good care these days. My mother is in assisted living in Silver Springs and frequently the conditions are negligent.

(PAUSE)

I've studied the Picattiny Arsenal dossier and our office is very concerned with your work in the 1980s. Do know what I am alluding to?

AMOS

Yes.

LITTLE

Have you been in correspondence with any foreign government over the last 35 years?

AMOS

Absolutely not, but we worked with engineers overseas.

LITTLE

Have any private individuals approached you about missile systems?

(PAUSE)

Can you please answer that question?

AMOS

No one has approached me.

LITTLE

You were very familiar with the Patriot missile system.

AMOS

Yes.

LITTLE

Did you get money for the things you did outside of Picattiny?

AMOS

How do you mean?

LITTLE

Contract work in the private sector?

AMOS

No. I was on salary, Mrs. Little. You're investigating something many decades ago. Is that necessary?

LITTLE

We have no choice.

AMOS

The timing's odd.

LITTLE

Perhaps so but there's no statute of limitations in areas of military intelligence. We've records of your phone calls to several people of interest and you've been in communication with the Israeli government.

AMOS

Let me tell you a strange legend, recorded in the Midrash. Are you rushed for time?

(Little nods)

A Torah portion among a series of legends. In the text there is no name to the passage, but let's call it "The Parable of the Healing Herb." The legend tells of a Jew who had departed Babylonia in a journey toward the West, the Land of Israel. On the way he witnessed two birds

were engaged in mortal combat, ripping and tearing at one another. Do you know this story?

LITTLE

No, Mr. Jacobi.

AMOS

Finally one bird overpowered the other and clawed it to death. The surviving bird did a strange thing: It swooped down upon a certain bush, plucked a small herb with its beak and applied it to the lifeless bird. And lo and behold, the dying bird came to life.

(HE COUGHS TO CLEAR HIS THROAT)

After seeing this miracle, the man said, "It'd be a good thing, if I take some of this green leaf and revive with it the dead of the Land of Israel—*vachaya metaya de'Yisrael*." So began his journey to the Holy Land. *Nu?*

(LITTLE CHECKS HER WATCH)

On the road, he saw the carcass of a black fox on the road. He placed the herb on its snout and the creature came to life. Nearing the Holy Land, he stumbled upon an injured lion on the trail. He placed the herb on animal's open wound and the lion returned to good health. But this beast was hungry. *Nu?* What did the lion do? He roared and ate the man who had just saved his life.

(HE TAKES OUT A TEA BAG FROM HIS POCKET)

*Nu?* I always carry this tea bag.

LITTLE

You were called the Black Fox, Mr. Jacobi.

AMOS

What don't you know, Miss Little?

(HE ADJUSTS HIS HEARING AID CAREFULLY)

A black fox in Hebrew is translated as שועל שחור . . . "shu-AL sha-CHOR".

LITTLE

There are many names on the list but perhaps foremost is Rafi Eitan, a former Mossad officer. Can you tell me please how well you know Eitan and how frequently you corresponded with him?

AMOS

I don't know Rafi Eitan.

LITTLE

Eitan was an adviser on counterterrorism to former Prime Minister Menachem Begin.

AMOS

(AMUSED)

Do you think I was a foreign agent? Is that what this is about?

LITTLE

Maybe that's the wrong choice of words.

AMOS

I'm in a wheelchair.

LITTLE

Yes.

AMOS

Are you meeting with the other engineers from Picattiny?

LITTLE

Only the Jewish ones.

AMOS

I've been through army clearance many times.

LITTLE

What can you tell us so that we can close the investigation this month?

AMOS

I don't understand the investigation.

LITTLE

Documents on weaponry were supplied to Israel in the mid 80s and the traces lead to you. The Israeli Bureau of Scientific Research – in Hebrew LAKAM - was the recipient of your work.

AMOS

(CORRECTS HER DICTION)

LAKAM.

(PAUSE)

What traces?

LITTLE

Witnesses. Evidence from Picatinny's library. Phone logs.

AMOS

A little of this. A little of that.

LITTLE

You hold two passports, Mr. Jacobi.

AMOS

I spent many years as a child in Tel Aviv. Ms. Little, I think I should call my lawyer . . .

LITTLE

Picatinny Arsenal is in Dover, Mr. Jacobi?

AMOS

That's right.

LITTLE

A very small town. I don't wish to speak to your lawyer and I promise to give you a break get if we just finish out the day with a few good questions. A few good stories.

AMOS

You want I should tell you stories?

LITTLE

Yes, Mr. Jacobi. And one or two wonderful Jewish jokes. How many Jewish mothers does it take to change a light bulb? None. "*I'll sit in the dark, tatala.*"

(PAUSE)

What do you say? You're too old to go to jail. Can you trust me?

AMOS

Yes, I can trust you. But I'm not a spy.

LITTLE

Can I trust you, Mr. Jacobi?

AMOS

I'm an old man. With fading memory and failing instincts.

LITTLE

I know you've a fine memory and I infer excellent instincts.

Look, you'll get a phone call soon from Yaguri or Ari Cantor and told to be quiet. To deny everything.

AMOS

I met Ari Cantor in Israel five years ago. I was already retired. I let Israel know what she already knew about missile defense in 1986. That was not a crime.

LITTLE

Take me at my word. I'm not like other agents. And I won't transform you into Jonathan Pollard.

AMOS

Pollard sold classified documents to other countries besides Israel.

LITTLE

You ran in the same circles as Pollard and my guys think you've done equal damage to the U.S.

(PAUSE)

Mr. Jacobi, you didn't exaggerate your actions. I don't think you wanted to play James Bond of the Catskills. You've never met Pollard?

AMOS

No.

LITTLE

He's an asshole and never going to leave jail. You're not very far apart in the sphere of things. Two degrees of separation in the span of twenty five years. You need to see the truest measure of Jewish espionage is drawn from 1950 and the life of Julius Rosenberg. The stakes were very dangerous, and the contest with Russia was atomic. They were close to accomplishing their goal, Mr. Jacobi.

(PAUSE)

Do you watch Bill O'Reilly on Fox? He's very funny. Reminds me of my older brother who would beat the Jesus out of me in the bathroom. My brother would make me laugh and suddenly turn because he thought he was so *moral*. That was so ass backwards. I was educated by nuns in the Bronx. There still are nuns in the Bronx, Mr. Jacobi. And half of them now carry mace.

(PAUSE)

You began professionally in October, 1963. Weeks before Kennedy's assassination. You went a very long time and separated from Picatinny in January 1990.

(AMOS NODS)

And you stopped freelance consulting too.

(PAUSE)

The Picatinny Arsenal is headquarters of the US Army Armament Research Center known for creating the Patriot missile and the Bunker Buster aerial. You had very high clearance.

AMOS

Yes.

LITTLE

We assume from '79 until '85, you gave a dozen national defense related documents to an Israel. Our analysts believe you had information about nuclear arms and F-15 fighter jets.

AMOS

Why now?

LITTLE

I don't understand.

AMOS

Why are you doing this to me now?

LITTLE

My office wanted to interview you years ago but there was no urgency and directive. Your behavior was sterling. You involved no other nations beyond Israel. We felt comfortable looking the other way.

AMOS

I wish I could believe you.

LITTLE

Twenty five years later is a reasonable delay. By coming now to your door, we knew we could spare you jail time and other hardships. You are nothing like Jonathan Pollard. I swear to you that is the truth. Please tell me something so we can wrap this today.

AMOS

Alright. The Patriot system was very specialized. I knew the dangers surrounding the Holy Land. I was approached by Israeli security. I'm not repeating the lives of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg. Israel is a friend of this country. You have to honor that fact. I borrowed classified documents from the library of Picatinny and supplied them to an Israeli agent. He offered money. I said absolutely no. Picatinny was not compromised nor was the American military. I was being used before LAKAM began with Pollard and I was folded shut before you nailed Pollard in 1985. Who in Congress triggered this investigation? So who in the White House wishes to embarrass Israel?

LITTLE

Right now there are several Jewish aids to the President who really hold sway and want to shift the fulcrum in the Middle East peace talks. Maybe they're self-loathing Jews?

AMOS

I won't argue with that.

LITTLE

Work with me, and there'll be a modest fine and no jail time.

AMOS

And who wants to destroy my reputation?

LITTLE

No one, Mr. Jacobi. You've had a charmed, affluent life. There's nothing ahead that you

hadn't earned. But now you make me think of *The Merchant of Venice* and the misinterpretation of the Jew on stage. Asking for a pound of flesh was an exercise in irony and not retribution. You don't need a PhD in irony to comprehend that. I think the virulent anti-Semitism of Shakespeare's world could not allow the power of irony informing Shylock's position. Shylock, after all, was a humanist first and a usurer second. He was a loving father. But Shylock cannot sway the court so he is left with an absurd position. He sounds strident and has lost everything. He cannot wink. His daughter Portia abandons him.

AMOS

Shylock's daughter is *Jessica*.

LITTLE

That's right. And *Portia* argues the passions of mercy to Shylock.

(PAUSE)

Still, he fails the moral legacy of Judaism. He is left demanding the impossible. Only a dolt imagines he wants to murder Antonio.

(PAUSE)

You may have helped a Jewish state be stronger for a span of years, but how bad it would be if your legacy ultimately marred Judaism.

AMOS

That *goniff* Bernard Madoff marred Judaism.

LITTLE

You're right, Mr. Jacobi. But to the vultures in the media, it's a toss of a coin. I don't want you to phone your lawyer today. I don't want you to phone anyone. I'll guarantee nothing bad happens to you and your family. Admit to the smallest things. That's easy enough. You and I both regret doing this now. And you'll write a check to our deficit-prone federal government and that will be the end of any further sorrow. Agreed?

(SHE EXTENDS HAND AND HE HOLDS HER HAND BETWEEN HIS HANDS)

Thank you, Mr. Jacobi. It may be awkward to say this but I feel like your daughter and I will continue to earn your trust despite your fears of the FBI.

END OF SCENE

SCENE SIX

(THE NEXT WEEK, IN AMOS' APARTMENT)

RUTH

This is not like you.

AMOS

I'm very anxious, Ruth.

RUTH

You have xanax in the cabinet.

AMOS

I don't like taking it. The men are back.

RUTH

Why are you asking me for money?

AMOS

You once said I could rely on you.

RUTH

I never said that.

AMOS

You have said that. Several times over dinner. Move in with me, Ruthie.

(PAUSE)

Look. It doesn't matter. I apologize for being a nuisance. I can't turn to my children.

I'm running into a larger problem than I anticipated. I need a big bond to stay out of prison.

I haven't always used my money wisely.

RUTH

Cash in one of your annuities. I've no liquidity, Amos. I'm on a fixed income.

AMOS

You used to have more assets.

RUTH

After I sold my house, I created a trust for my grandchildren.

AMOS

I didn't know that.

RUTH

Now you do. I'm leaving the facility next month, Amos.

AMOS

I've really embarrassed myself.

RUTH

I understand.

AMOS

Maybe embarrassing myself in front of you is a form of intimacy.

RUTH

You're right.

AMOS

I wish I were wrong. It could be worse too.

RUTH

Hyman's in the hospital.

AMOS

I just heard the news.

RUTH

He had a seizure.

AMOS

God willing, he'll get better. He's built like an old goat.

RUTH

He's still in ICU.

AMOS

The girls in the front desk are keeping you abreast?  
(SHE NODS)

RUTH

God forbid he has more medical trouble. Everyone's talking about the fight you two had in the library.

AMOS

I didn't give him a seizure.

RUTH

Some think you set off his condition.

AMOS

Fine, but my problems are beyond Hyman.

RUTH

Go visit Hyman.

AMOS

Okay. I will.

RUTH

Thank you, Amos.

(PAUSE)

Are they going to arrest you?

AMOS

I don't know yet. My lawyer thinks the FBI is willing to make a deal. No jail time.

RUTH

Wonderful. You're far better off than Hyman. .

AMOS

Please don't say that. I am guilty of secreting blueprints and military documents.

RUTH

What does that mean?

AMOS

It means I saved many Jewish lives at no one's expense in this country.

RUTH

Famous Amos. Another kind of cookie. Of all *alta kakas* to be painted a spy

AMOS

I'm not a spy. A spy is human cancer. It's a three letter dirty word. A spy destroys society. I did not violate our nation's security. I swear this to you, Ruth. FBI agent Robert Hanssen was a spy and did untold damage to America. I did nothing harmful, for I love my country.

RUTH

Are you becoming a stranger to me?

AMOS

I was a different man in middle age.

RUTH

You're the same man, Amos, but you would be buried by your secrets.

AMOS

I meant well.

RUTH

I'm sure you did mean well. But sometimes words can't conceal deeds.

AMOS

I was able to shift the military fulcrum.

(PAUSE)

I didn't hurt a soul, Ruth. I protected everyone at risk, including my family.

That's why I kept distance from my two children. That should solve one mystery for you. I am capable of being a wonderful father. My distance was a skillful way to protect them from harm.

(PAUSE)

You don't believe me.

RUTH

I believe you.

AMOS

Do I scare you?

RUTH

I don't know how to answer that.

AMOS

Yes or no.

(PAUSE)

Say it. Ruth. Is that why you're moving in with your daughter.

RUTH

Yes. You scare me.

AMOS

You've been to Israel.

RUTH

Twice. Group tours.

AMOS

You know the dangers.

RUTH

I'll never go on another group tour.

(SHE TOUCHES AMOS' HAND TENDERLY)

I know the Israeli military is very strong.

AMOS

The military will never be strong enough. Security's an impossible commodity.

RUTH

Why is the FBI hounding you now and not two decades ago?

AMOS

I don't know, Ruthie. Maybe they were just giving me an extended lease on life.

RUTH

Will the government treat you like Jonathan Pollard?

AMOS

I don't think so.

RUTH

Good luck, my darling. Does anyone know about this here?

AMOS

No.

RUTH

The front desk?

AMOS

Only you and Josie.

RUTH

Josie?

AMOS

Yes.

RUTH

Did you tell her?

AMOS

A long time ago.

RUTH

You're joking?

AMOS

She was fine about the news. Nothing fazes her.

RUTH

Why didn't you tell me when you told her?

AMOS

Because I love you and I wanted to protect you.

RUTH

I don't believe you. Why did you tell Josie?

AMOS

She talks to no one, Ruth. I took a chance.

(SILENCE)

RUTH

Don't you regret what you've done?

AMOS

I did what I had to do. And I would do it again without hesitation.

END OF SCENE

SCENE SEVEN  
(A FEW DAYS LATER)

HYMAN

I'm epileptic. Never knew it until now. The condition I have is uncommon, Ruth. Normally, epilepsy surfaces earlier in one's life. But that is what caused my hospitalization. And I can work with this information. My mind is clear. I can function. Can you?

RUTH

Each day at a time.

HYMAN

He's gone for several weeks. Let me take you to dinner tonight.

RUTH

No.

HYMAN

Please.

RUTH

I have no appetite anymore.

HYMAN

You got to eat. You got to take care of yourself. We are fragile and these shocks hit hard.

(PAUSE)

I didn't know.

RUTH

I knew.

HYMAN

I know you knew. And you had to be the first. FBI casing the building for months. Who could have guessed this? When I saw the news I nearly fainted. It's so incredible. And now we have nothing but TV vans and an army of news people. A circus gone wild. And yet I have to say it thrilling and entertaining. Jacobi is a celebrity. But I know you're upset and the pain is with all of us. I don't exaggerate or make fun out this. Really. I have never seen you so sad, Ruth. And on TV you look even sadder.

RUTH

I can't help it. Yes. I knew. I knew a few days before. But his children didn't know. Probably his wife never knew This was secrecy, Hyman. Absolutely.

HYMAN

Why ruin his life? Why ruin it for so many Jews? First Michael Milken, then Bernie Madoff and now Amos Jacobi.

RUTH

Amos did not steal from anyone and did not hurt a soul.

HYMAN

Do you live an entire life in denial? And lie to everyone you love? Do you trick yourself into believing each lie? Believe that your hidden self will always remain hidden?

(PAUSE)

Can you really feel the same way about him?

RUTH

It's tragic.

HYMAN

He has a tragic smile. And yet he looks strikingly handsome now.

RUTH

Amos is a good man.

HYMAN

You love him.

RUTH

You don't prosecute an old man for helping an ally.

HYMAN

You're right. Didn't think we would be this close to someone cloaked in espionage . . . but you still love him.

RUTH

He's too old for prison. And too infirmed. Yes, I still love him.

HYMAN

I wish I were in his place.

RUTH

He was heroic in being so quiet.

HYMAN

You're closer to him than ever before. Isn't that so, Ruth?

(PAUSE)

You think about him day and night. You would die for him? I see this all on your face. And I thought I knew jealousy before. I despise myself. I can't compete with this guy. How pathetic is this? I'm five years younger than him. I've never been in trouble with the law. I have genuine relations with my children. I eat in the dining room and always socialize. I write down my friends' birthdays and I celebrate. I volunteer for all of our fundraising events. I

know the magic word. *Mensch*. Maybe Jacobi qualifies in your eyes. Maybe the standards of judgment are profoundly imprecise. If your boyfriend goes to jail, I know that I will see your tears. If he gets clemency, I know that I will lose you forever. So how do I reconcile myself, Ruth? When did crime become an attribute? When did misery become an asset? Two years ago. Yes, two years ago. What was my reticence? Did you know how much head over heels in love with you I was? I am? I will always be? I should have bought you a diamond ring from Tiffany and stacked a dozen powder blue boxes a mile high against your front door.

END OF SCENE

SCENE EIGHT  
(EITHER AMOS IN ADVANCING DEMENTIA OR A SCENE  
THAT TOOK PLACE ONE YEAR AGO IN HIS APARTMENT)

AMOS

You are very nice to look at, yes. Your name again?

JOSIE

Josephine Cleveland. Josie Cleveland.

AMOS

I'm happy to meet you, Mrs. Cleveland. Please sit down.

JOSIE

Thank you.

AMOS

You live nearby?

JOSIE

Next township over.

AMOS

I've a small apartment but I am comfortable here. I had one helper a few months ago and she had trouble with asthma. I had to let her go. How is your health?

JOSIE

Fine.

AMOS

That's good. Are you OK about lifting things?

JOSIE

Lifting you?

AMOS

Well, yes - that too. Out of the seat and into the tub. But I have two strong arms. You were a nanny once according to your paperwork.

JOSIE

Yes.

AMOS

Why are you looking for something else?

JOSIE

I guess it was time to get some time away from young kids. I'm not Mary Poppins.

AMOS

You don't like umbrellas?

JOSIE

Children fight a lot.

AMOS

We have our arguments here. We're cranky old monsters – and if we had our teeth we'd bare them.

JOSIE

Very funny.

AMOS

Am I?

JOSIE

Is everyone Jewish here?

AMOS

Yes, I think so. Is that okay?

JOSIE

Sure.

AMOS

Jewish people are a lot of fun. We groan when we sing and sing when we groan. This is doubly true if you're very old and Jewish. And if we sing and dance at the same time, *you* will end up groaning. Jewish people get along with black people, Mrs. Cleveland, in case you didn't know that. The Civil Rights Movement in the '60s showed us that worked. Can you schedule five to six days per week?

JOSIE

Yes.

AMOS

Can I phone your references?

JOSIE

Of course.

AMOS

Your hours are open?

JOSIE

I'm very flexible, Mr. Jacobi.

AMOS

When?

JOSIE

When?

AMOS

When do you want me to start?

JOSIE

Any time.

AMOS

Wonderful. Next week? I will give you my list of prescriptions and you can study the

interaction of my drugs if we fail to follow doctor's instructions. I like to take weekly drives to the ocean in good weather days. The smell of the beach and feel of the wind. Will that be okay? I like to attend classical concerts too. We might do that on Saturdays. And if you hate classical music, I won't force you to attend.

JOSIE

I like classical music.

AMOS

That's good. I was married for thirty years and the pleasure of this convention stays with me. I miss my wife greatly. You have no idea. She wasn't an angel but she was a good woman and I continue to honor her today. She joked that she would leave me. She joked that I would live to one hundred years. She knew I worked very hard to provide for the family and she teased me about my work.

JOSIE

What kind of work did you do?

AMOS

Well, mostly I was an engineer for the government. I did that for thirty two years. And I was also a spy for another country.

JOSIE

You were a spy?

AMOS

That's right, Mrs. Cleveland. I had a separate identity and I was very secretive. I was called the Black Fox. Not to be confused with Redd Foxx. You know . . . that old TV show, *Sanford and Son*.

JOSIE

That's very funny.

AMOS

Yes, I think so too. I'm telling you this to avoid jinxing my life any longer. Someone told me I had to confide in one stranger in order to live an exceptional year longer.

JOSIE

Do you tell everybody this?

AMOS

No. I need credibility.

JOSIE

I see.

AMOS

Only you.

JOSIE

Why me?

AMOS

Because you surprise me.

JOSIE

How do I surprise you?

AMOS

You have a beautiful smile with the most honest eyes I have ever seen. Your eyes are like sunshine from heaven.

JOSIE

Thank you.

AMOS

I have a girl friend at this facility, Mrs. Cleveland. I call her pumpkin when she's not around. Sometimes being with her is pure joy and other times it is not so much fun. Dating at my age is an extreme sport.. Picking up a restaurant check. Buying flowers. Dressing up in a wheel chair. Do you know what I mean?

(JOSIE SMILES)

You do. I'm a lucky man.

JOSIE

What is her name?

AMOS

Ruthie. The girls here call her Ruth. When we first met I entertained her with a little psychology story game. It enthralled her beyond my expectation. I asked her to imagine that she was in a forest.

JOSIE

A forest?

AMOS

Yes. Was the forest friendly or cold? Day or night? Was there a path inside the forest?

JOSIE

There's no path in my forest.

AMOS

Ruthie said the same thing. And that conformed to her imagination.

JOSIE

In my forest, I would follow the light.

AMOS

The light from the sky?

JOSIE

Ahuh. Sunlight beaming through the leaves.

AMOS

What season of the year is this?

JOSIE

Summer.

AMOS

I asked Ruthie about a cup that she finds on the ground. She went into some detail about the cup.

JOSIE

I can see the cup.

AMOS

What sort of cup?

JOSIE

Ceramic. Smooth. Not very dirty. Blue or green.

AMOS

What do you do with the cup?

JOSIE

I keep it. I like it.

AMOS

I asked Ruthie to keep walking and then come upon a key.

JOSIE

I see the key. Under a log. It's an old style key – for an antique door. Very rusty.

AMOS

What do you do with the key?

JOSIE

I keep it. I like it. I put it in the cup. It fits.

AMOS

I asked Ruthie to walk a little further until she sees a stream.

JOSIE

I see the water. It's very clean, clear, cool. Bubbling brook.

AMOS

What do you do?

JOSIE

What do I do? I guess I take my shoes off and go wading. Is that what Ruth did?

AMOS

No. She said the water was too cold.

(PAUSE)

You leave the brook and come upon a wall.

JOSIE

It's a stone wall. Low to the ground. Lots of vegetation growing over it. Some stones are missing.

AMOS

What do you do?

JOSIE

What do I do? I look over the wall. I climb on top of the wall. I walk along the wall for a few minutes. I jump to the other side.

AMOS

I told Ruth that the forest stands for life. The cup stands for friendship. The key stands for knowledge. The stream – sex. The wall – death. Your summer forest was full of optimism. Your cup was worthy and you honored it. Your key was far from contemporary but you thought to keep it safe inside your cup. The brook was inviting and you took off your shoes. The wall did not scare you and you had more than enough height to see beyond it. Your world is very secure, Mrs. Cleveland, and you give a lot to your world.

JOSIE

Thank you, Mr. Jacobi. I liked that very much.

(SILENCE)

Does she know?

AMOS

Does she know what?

JOSIE

That you're a spy?

AMOS

Oh no. Of course not. No one knows. Certainly, no one here knows.

JOSIE

Really?

AMOS

If people knew, I'd end up in jail. In a flash. And that would be worse than hell.

JOSIE

Yes.

AMOS

My wife never knew.

JOSIE

Because it was a secret?

AMOS

That's right, Mrs. Cleveland. I regret that every word was shrouded by secrecy. Language veils the most truthful conceits. And we are victims of our own language. Men should go through every phase of childbirth and then we would know the truest secrets of life.

(PAUSE)

Did you ever go outside this country?

JOSIE

England and Canada.

AMOS

Ever want to go to Israel?

JOSIE

Some folks in my church have gone.

AMOS

It's not very safe these days. Still, the cradle of life can be traced all the way to Jerusalem. Maybe that's become a tired expression. You've heard that before?

JOSIE

Not really.

AMOS

I'll take you to Israel next summer. For a week. This would be something quite memorable.

JOSIE

Did you work for Israel?

AMOS

Indeed I did. *Pro bono*. Free of charge.

(PAUSE)

What kind of church do you go to?

JOSIE

Baptist.

AMOS

I see.

JOSIE

It's a big church, Mr. Jacobi.

AMOS

I like big churches. I like church architecture. Really like spires. I think they convey a powerful spiritual idea and late at night the idea really can sink into the soul. I like the old southern cities and Georgian architecture. I regret how suburbia has redefined our nation. I was born in Connecticut but soon after my family moved to what was called the British Mandate of Palestine. I served in both the American and British military during the Second World War. I love American democracy and the American dream. I am a product of that dream.

(PAUSE)

I hope you'll take me to see the inside of your church, Mrs. Cleveland. I would like that very much. It would give me an entire day of peace. Maybe I will find a little respite from my normal routine. What do you think?

END OF PLAY

