

Amos & Isaiah  
By: David Libman

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Characters

BELKIN - A man whose features have been made Neanderthal-like by the rare affliction, acromegaly.

MORRISSEY - A bulky man in his thirties or forties.

ISAIAH POTTS - A Black Man in his sixties.

NURSES - Played by the same actress, age open.

AMOS LEVY - About thirty.

THE BURN - Disfigured beyond recognition.  
Like Belkin, of indefinable age.

AMOS & ISAIAH  
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A municipal hospital ward. Upstage are three hospital beds. The one at right is occupied by Belkin, a man whose features have been made apishly grotesque by the rare affliction, acromegaly. (Something like a Neanderthal Man).

In the center bed lies a man garlanded by a variety of tubes and other life preserving devices.

At left lies Morrissey, a bulky, florid man of about forty. At side-left is a bed occupied by Isaiah Potts, a black man in his sixties.

The bed at right is empty.

At center is a table and some chairs.  
It is late at night.  
The stage is dimly lit.

At curtain, a hoarse, resonant SCREAM is being emitted by the man in the center bed. The pitch is unvaried, the rhythm monotonous.

BELKIN  
(Presses buzzer)

Nurse!

(A loud yawn from Potts)

Nurse!

(Morrissey turns and buries his head under his pillow)

Hey Nuuuuuuurse!

(Nurse appears)

NURSE

What's the matter?

BELKIN

Sorry to inconvenience you.

(Nurse approaches the center bed with aloof efficiency)

(She takes the patient's pulse. She leaves and quickly returns with a hypodermic NEEDLE. She injects him)

NURSE

I don't know if that'll do any good.

BELKIN

You don't, eh? Why in Heaven's name don't you?

NURSE

(Effort at patience)

Mr. Belkin...

BELKIN

Yes Nurse?

Come closer, Nurse.

Why don't you come closer?

Come now - don't be like that - come closer.

Nurse?

(The Nurse stands rooted. She is put off and a bit afraid of Belkin but tries not to show it. He has gone into the travesty of an aesthetic stance. Now he laughs like the travesty of a horror show villain, "Yo-ho-ho-ho-ho-ho." The Nurse scurries off. Belkin laughs again, crescendoing then goes back to his bed and begins to get into it. --The man SCREAMS--)

BELKIN

(Getting back into bed)

Pianissimo, mon amour. Sotto voice. Diminuendo.

(The monotonous screams continue and then diminish in counterpoint with the growing light)

(It is daytime and the man is silent. We see a scattering of Christmas Decorations. Belkin, Morrissey and Potts are up and lounging. Morrissey is reading a magazine)

(The Day Nurse, played by the same actress with a change of hair, enters with a man of about thirty. The man carries minimal supplies and may be wearing hospital clothing)

BELKIN

Well Nurse - what have we got here?

NURSE

Rabbi Levy - Mr. Belkin, Mr. Morrissey, Mr. Potts.

BELKIN

A rabbi. Well, bless my soul - we've got a rabbi with us now. Now isn't that just what we need in this season of the year, Pottsy - a rabbi?

(Potts closes Bible he has been reading and looks up)  
But you slighted somebody, Nurse. Mustn't slight anybody. It's undemocratic and all kinds of unprogressive things.

(Gesturing to center bed)  
There Rabbi - see that? Do you know what that is?

NURSE

Mr. Belkin - please.

BELKIN

Oh, he's human all right. See all those tubes and gizmos? That's what's keeping him alive, Rabbi. Alive and gaily metabolizing.

MORRISSEY

Come on, Belkin. Give us a break. I'm tryin' to read.  
(The Nurse is helping the Rabbi get himself settled)

BELKIN

Well, introduce him, Nurse. Go ahead and break the social ice.

NURSE

(To Rabbi)

The patient hasn't yet been identified.

BELKIN

That's right, Rabbi. Unidentified. The archetypical John Doe. However - we can't go around calling a fellow creature John Doe, can we? Where's the human dignity in John Doe? Therefore we've come up with something that distinguishes him at least on a descriptive level. We call him - The Burn.

NURSE

(To Rabbi)

If there's anything you need, press this.

(She shows him cord with buzzer)

Someone will come as quickly as possible.

(She turns to go but Belkin blocks her...)

BELKIN

Hey Nurse - how's about a nice tart and stimulating alcohol bath?

NURSE

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Mr. Belkin.

BELKIN

(Mockingly irate)

Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays? How about now, Nurse? A man in my condition may be dead on Monday, Wednesday, or Friday!

NURSE

The rules are explicit, Mr. Belkin.

BELKIN

Hear that, Mr. Potts? She's got me pinned to chapter and verse.

(He makes a gesture of being crucified.

Potts totally ignores him)

MORRISSEY

(Without any hope of success)

Ahh, clam up already, willya?

NURSE

(After starting to leave)

Oh yes - the menu for the day is posted every morning over there.

BELKIN

Kosher food, Nurse. He won't eat your ham sandwiches.

NURSE

Oh - I'm sorry. We have no provisions for that.

RABBI

That's all right.

BELKIN

Well I'll be dragged over every station of the cross! This Rabbi's a heretic!

MORRISSEY

Clam up, willya!? I'm tryin' to read! I'm in the middle of an article!

(Pause)

NURSE

(To Rabbi, pointedly ignoring the tension)  
Really - I'm sorry.

RABBI

It's all right.

(Nurse flashes and smile and leaves. Pause)

BELKIN

You lucked into the best bed, Rabbi.  
(Belkin smiles)

RABBI

I'll trade with....whomever. I don't mind.

BELKIN

No, no, Rabbi. That's all right.

RABBI

I don't mind - really.

BELKIN

Better hold on to what you can, Rabbi. Isn't that life's hard lesson to us all?

MORRISSEY

A word of advice, Rabbi. Don't try to figure him out. He's unfigurable.

BELKIN

Mr. Morrissey, you are a chug-a-lug of good stout ale. In my bone of bones, I commend you.

MORRISSEY

See what I mean? I let it go in one ear and out the other.

(Potts has been slowly approaching with altar shaped walking device used by people who have recently had operations)

POTTS

Sir - my name is Isaiah Potts. May I intrude on a moment of your privacy?

(Potts tries to maneuver Rabbi over to the side so the conversation can be as private as possible)

RABBI

How do you do? Amos Levy.

POTTS

Your name is Amos!?

RABBI

Yes - what's the matter, Mr. Potts? Shall I call the nurse?

POTTS

Glory be - a rabbi - named Amos!

(Pause as Potts waits expectantly. When the Rabbi doesn't give him what he is apparently waiting for, Potts' smile fades...)

You would not be mistaken in me, Rabbi. I am Isaiah, son of Ezra and Rachel. I too am bound unto the Lord with a ministry.

(Slight pause)

You would not be mistaken in me.

(An expectant pause)

RABBI

Actually - you see - I'm not a rabbi anymore. I haven't been a Rabbi for....several months now. I'm using some medical insurance to which I'm still entitled...you see.

(Pause)

BELKIN

(Who has managed to eavesdrop)

Well Amos - what a tizzy you've put us in.

RABBI

(Somewhat Startled)

I'm not sure what you mean, Mr. Belkin.

BELKIN

Here we were led to believe you were a true man of the cloth. A man with a special hook-up to the eternal ear - so to speak. But now you tell us that you are not a man of God at all but just another bozo. (To Potts) He's just another one of the common herd, Mr. Potts. Whatever notions you've concocted about him, he's obviously as earth-bound as Morrissey here.

(Potts bursts out against his will...)



POTTS

Get thee behind me, Satan!!

(Belkin laughs)

BELKIN

You'll find Mr. Potts full of all kinds of quaint notions, Amos.

(Belkin's beaming countenance forces a reciprocal half-smile from Rabbi. Potts, as if betrayed, turns and labors dolefully back to his bed. -Blackout-)

(In the Darkness we may hear The Burn groaning)

(Lights modulate to indicate early morning. The Nurse enters to give The Burn an injection. We hear various sounds from the other occupants of the room.

Morrissey gets up, reaches for a plastic container and goes to the bathroom. In essence a short ballet or early morning hospital activities.  
Lights go to dark.

When they come up, it is after breakfast. Trays are piled on a cart. Rabbi is writing on a tablet. He keeps crossing things out. He finally gives up, crumples paper and throws it in wastebasket. Belkin has been watching.)

BELKIN

Let me ask you, Amos...  
What finally caused you to abandon ship?  
(Pause)

RABBI

What?

BELKIN

To abandon ship? To...give up the cloth?

RABBI

I'm not here to be interrogated, Mr. Belkin.

BELKIN

With all due respect, Amos. I am feverishly curious. It's a vice with me. It's a terrible vice with me, this curiosity.

(Pause)

RABBI

What's the purpose of this, Mr. Belkin?

BELKIN

Purpose, Amos? Don't be naive.  
Not reasons of the flesh? No? No. I didn't think so.

RABBI

Are you baiting me?

BELKIN

Did something drop out one day? Was that it? Something just drop out...one day?

RABBI

I'm going to complain, Mr. Belkin. I'm going to ask for a transfer to another room. Please stop this immediately.

MORRISSEY

Give us a rest, willya Belkin? Why don't you take up knitting?

BELKIN

You won't do that, Amos. There's something here that compels you to stay.

(The Burn groans)

See? My motion is seconded.

(Two or three more groans)

MORRISSEY

Nurse! Nurse!

(Nurse enters readying a hypodermic needle)

NURSE

Settling in, Rabbi Levy?

(Pause, Indicating Belkin)

Don't let that one give you a hard time. His bark is worse than his bite.

(The injection is ready)

BELKIN

Say Nurse - What's the chances of an O.D.?

NURSE

We must be our lovable selves today, mustn't we?

BELKIN

I'm afraid he'll scare off my visitors.

MORRISSEY

You don't get any visitors. Who'd want to visit you?

BELKIN

I've been here from time immemorial, ol' top. How do you know I haven't had any visitors?

MORRISSEY

Okay - in all the time I been here, you ain't had any visitors.  
(Nurse leaves)

BELKIN

Hear that, Amos? An empiricist. But actually he's right. In all this time, not one visitor. Why it's as if I had sunk into the very bowels of the earth. Except - there is one small except. Tell him who was here last Saturday afternoon, Morrissey.

MORRISSEY

Now that don't count. That was a business call. That was no private visit.

BELKIN

A reporter, Amos. In the employ of a worldwide periodical sold on newsstands everywhere.

MORRISSEY

A reporter is not a visitor. You can't count a reporter as a visitor.

BELKIN

But as I was undergoing an important battery of tests at the time, he left his card.  
(Waves card)

MORRISSEY

Ahh, go ahead, Be my guest. Call him a visitor. See if I care. Why should I care?

BELKIN

It appears they want pictures of me, Amos. Pictures and my story for Morrissey's visitors to read.

MORRISSEY

Ahhh, clam up willya? He gets me all excited over nothin'. Where's them goddamn pills!? Hey - sorry Pottsy. You know how he is. He makes me forget myself. I'm the one who should ask for a transfer. But who knows what kinda circus I'll find in some other room? At least here I'm used to it. But I'm gettin' out. I'm gettin' out of here very soon.

(Morrissey takes a pill and plumps himself into bed)

(Pause)

BELKIN

(To Rabbi)

What's the complaint?  
About you I'd guess ulcer.  
Am I right?

(Pause)

RABBI

Yes.

BELKIN

Not a peptic. A bleeding ulcer. Morrissey's got a peptic. Am I right, Amos? Am I right?

RABBI

Yes. A duodenal.

BELKIN

Hurts?

RABBI

Sometimes.

MORRISSEY

Oh, he's terrific at that. I never seen anything like him. About everybody's illness so far, he's been dead right. He should hire out for a mind-reading x-ray machine.

(The Burn screams)

Uh-oh the injection didn't take!

(The Burn screams again)

MORRISSEY

Jesus H. Christ on a raft! Nurse! Nurse!

(The Nurse appears in doorway. Tense lengthy pause)

MORRISSEY

Yeah. I think he's quit. Yeah.

(The Nurse moves to Burn's bed. A quick look.  
She nods at Morrissey and leaves)

False alarm.

(To Rabbi)

You ain't heard nothin' yet. When he gets started and there's  
no stoppin' him!!

(Morrissey plumps himself back on the pillow - Pause)

BELKIN

Well Amos - now I've guessed you, would you like to guess me?

(Pause)

Would you like to venture a guess at my affliction?

(Pause)

RABBI

No.

BELKIN

Go ahead - try.

RABBI

I prefer not to.

(Pause)

BELKIN

What it is, you see, is a rare disorder of the pituitary gland  
known as acromegaly. Ever heard of it?

RABBI

No.

BELKIN

One day the pituitary gland decided not to play the game.  
Decided to become the focus of the whole shebang. The pith.  
The pivot. The primum mobile'. Well -ecce homo- behold the man.

BELKIN

Millions of years of evolution being undone before your very eyes.

(Pause)

RABBI

How are they treating it?

BELKIN

With endless speculation.

(Pause)

May I beg a small favor, Rabbi?

RABBI

..What is it, Mr. Belkin?

BELKIN

Say a prayer for me?

(Pause)

RABBI

I'm not a rabbi anymore.

BELKIN

But I trust you and no one else. Am I then abandoned to the petty ingenuities of medical science?

POTTS

(Who has been covertly listening)

Turn your back, Amos.

RABBI

What?

POTTS

Be warned, Amos. Turn your back on that man. Maybe you down, but he want to count you clear out.

BELKIN

Mr. Potts does have his quaint notions, don't you Mr. Potts?

(The Nurse enters)

NURSE

Mr. Belkin - you're wanted in Hematology.

BELKIN

One moment, Nurse. I'm in the midst of significant dialogue.

NURSE

You're wanted for a special consultation, Mr. Belkin. There's a team over from Columbia-Presbyterian.

(Pause)

BELKIN

(Yielding)

Adieu amos. Adieu Mr. Potts.

MORRISSEY

Don't hurry back on my account.

BELKIN

Adieu, Mr. Morrissey.

(Belkin leaves with Nurse)

POTTS

(Hands folded over walking device)

Oh Lord - send us Thy light. Cut the brambles of ignorance from our path. Dear Father, help us to see the shape of your intention.

MORRISSEY

A-men Pottsy.

(Potts looks to Rabbi who looks away. Rabbi begins searching through his things)

You lookin' for a smoke, Rabbi?

RABBI

I'm not a rabbi.

MORRISSEY

Oh sure. Sure. I didn't mean any harm by it. Lookin' for a smoke, were ya?

RABBI

I could have sworn I had some. I must have left them down in reception.

(Morrissey reaches into his night table, withdraws a new pack and tosses it to Rabbi)

MORRISSEY

Keep it. I got plenty. There's an area down the hall thataway where they let you smoke.

RABBI

Thank you, Mr. Morrissey.

MORRISSEY

Any time.

RABBI

Thank you.

(Pause)

MORRISSEY

Hey Pottsy - Pottsy - you know what? I'm gonna show Amos the petition. Let's see what he says, okay? Is that fair? Hey Amos. (To Potts) Lookahere, I'm showing it to him. Hey Amos - take a look at this for a minute, willya?

RABBI

(After scanning it)

This is some kind of petition.

MORRISSEY

That's what it is all right. He be far better off in a private room getting special care and attention than here. I mean - I do feel sorry for him - poor guy - but he is too much. I'll come out of here a mental wreck. A man with a wife and five kids can't take any such chances. So willya sign it? It was Belkin who thought of it first, ya see, but his hand don't seem to hold a pen so well so I took it down at his dictation. Burnie in a private room for the good and benefit of all. That's the gist of it. (Pause)  
So willya sign it, rabbi? Sorry - no harm meant.

(Pause)

RABBI

It seems like a fair request.

MORRISSEY

So sign it, willya?

RABBI

Why hasn't Mr. Potts signed it?



MORRISSEY

Pottsy don't wanna sign it. Not that he don't think it's a good idea! But... (Including Potts in this) ..he don't like Belkin too much and I think he's - you know - reluctant to put his signature on anything where Belkin's signature also appears. But if you sign your name I bet he'll reconsider and sign his name because - he ain't out of sympathy with the purpose of this petition.

But even if he don't - with your signature, we'll at least have a majority of the- uh - fully conscious occupants of this room, right?

(Pause)

RABBI

I'll just put it aside and--

MORRISSEY

But why? I mean why wait? It's almost Christmas time. The sooner the better, right? It's to his benefit and ours. I'll betcha we disturb him as much as he disturbs us.

RABBI

..All right. Maybe it is a good idea.

(He is about to sign--)

MORRISSEY

Amos - could you put rabbi before your name? It would be more impressive on the administration.

RABBI

No - I'm sorry.

MORRISSEY

Okay - Sorry I mentioned it. So just sign, okay?

(Rabbi signs)

Okay Pottsy - rabbi signed the petition. Come on - if we could get a hundred percent it'd be much more impressive. I'll hand it to the Nurse and she says she'll send it right up channels - she promised me.

Look - he signed it, right? Amos Levy, right?

You can sign right underneath him so his name separates your name from Belkin's name.

(He holds petition out to Potts.)

After an intense look to Rabbi, Potts takes the petition)

Here's a pen.

(Potts signs)

MORRISSEY

Hallelujah. Now we'll have some peace.

(Morrissey hastens out. Rabbi picks up The Satanic Verses by Salman Rushdie and begins to read.

Potts laboriously rises and makes his way, with the help of the walking device, to Rabbi. The steps are careful and measured. He is standing over Rabbi when he stops)

POTTS

Can't hardly understand it, Rabbi.

RABBI

(Pulled out of his reading)

Oh - I ah....

POTTS

A man once he love God, can't never stop lovin' Him.

RABBI

(Emphatically, but without raising voice)

What is this? Him and now you? Is this some kind of charade? Mr. Potts, will you leave me alone? What's going on here?

POTTS

You say you stop believin', Amos. Lovin' and believin' ain't no material difference.

(Pause. Rabbi decides not to counter)

RABBI

(Recognizing Potts' sincerity)

Look - I'm in no mood for theological discourse.

POTTS

That's the naked fact, Rabbi.

RABBI

Are you for real?

POTTS

Like hand in glove.

(Rabbi gazes at Potts with mixed intentions)

RABBI

I'm sorry - the last thing I want to do is undermine somebody's...personal beliefs. Look, I couldn't help it, Mr. Potts - okay? That's the way the cookie crumbled. Please, I prefer to be by myself.

POTTS

In the Bible, Amos is the begetter of Isaiah.

RABBI

So?

POTTS

I been dreamin' a man would come. A rabbi out of the Old Testament. I been feelin' great pain, Amos. To the neglect of my duties. I been hopin' and prayin' for a deliverance.

RABBI

Oh come now, Potts. This is the 21st century.

POTTS

But the Lord moves in mysterious ways. You some deliverance, Amos Levy.

RABBI

You are obviously--

POTTS

I had in mind a big man. Maybe even a Black man. Older than I is but straight and strong as a tree. And look what I got.

RABBI

You can't be serious. Because my name is Amos and your name is Isaiah, and in the Bible one is coincidentally the father of the other???

(Potts comes closer and painfully bends to his knees.  
He sighs, takes the Rabbi's hand and kisses it.  
The Rabbi jerks it away, drops his book)

RABBI

Now look here!

(Picks up book, drops it, picks it up again. Pause.  
Potts remains on knees gazing into Rabbi's face)

Are you intending to remain like that?

RABBI

Mr. Potts, will you please get up?

(Pause)

I'm just going to lie down and ignore you, Mr. Potts.

(He leans back, looks at Potts, and lies down)

POTTS

Oh God - deliver him. Take that old blindfold from off his eyes and the cloud that darkens his understandin'. Lift him up, 'cause this poor man been in the tomb of abandonment long enough. He on his knees, Lord. He crawlin' on his belly for forgiveness.

(The Rabbis rises. He is vexed, but also somewhat amused at the hyperbole)

RABBI

Hold it. Now wait a minute. You, to be perfectly accurate, are on your knees. I am not on my knees. And as far as crawling on my belly is concerned...look Mr. Potts.

POTTS

Deliver him from the dark night of his soul, Lord.

RABBI

Look, Potts, I've been very patient with you but--

POTTS

(Putting hand over Rabbi's mouth)

From the flashin' sentences, Lord.

(Rabbi slaps Potts' hand away from his mouth)

RABBI

Now watch yourself!

POTTS

From the easy notion, Lord. From the way that's greased by the sickness of his mind.

RABBI

Mr. Potts - I implore you--

(Morrissey enters)

MORRISSEY

Mission accomplished. We should be hearing soon.

(Morrissey goes to his bed, fluffs a pillow, takes off his slippers, gets into bed and pulls the covers over his head. Pause)

POTTS

Ain't no point to it, Amos. Give you poor self a break.

RABBI

I do not subscribe to your premises - understand? Do not! Perhaps I used to but I don't any more.

POTTS

You got that fire that consume you. You sufferin' like Judas - but you ain't no Judas. No, you still in the circle. I can tell. I can feel it.

RABBI

Mr, Potts - please...

POTTS

Listen Amos--

RABBI

No, you listen. You listen to me!

(Pause)

I do not subscribe to your premises. Perhaps I used to, but I don't anymore. Finished!

POTTS

(Clutching Rabbi)

Shhh!

RABBI

Get your hands off, you damn fool!

MORRISSEY

(From under the covers)

Hey you guys, hold it down, willya?

RABBI

You see? We're disturbing him.

POTTS

You got yourself all leashed up, Rabbi. Give you poor self a break. (Potts clutches at Rabbi. Rabbi SHOVES Potts so that the old man topples sideways...)

RABBI

I'm sorry! Are you all right? Let me help you.

POTTS

(He is all right)

Listen Rabbi....

RABBI

(Suppressed volume)

No, you listen! I've had enough of this! I'm not a rabbi!  
I am a broken cistern that can hold no water!

(Pause as Potts smiles slightly as if a communication has  
been made)

POTTS

Jeremiah. Chapter Two. Verse thirteen.

RABBI

Mr. Potts, I do not believe in God!  
(Pause)

Let me help you up.

POTTS

No.

RABBI

I do not believe in God, Mr. Potts. Your Mr. Belkin was right.  
Something just dropped out. In slow increments. And it was  
gone before I knew it. But when I knew it, I pride myself - yes  
- that I had the guts and the decency to quit. It was, after  
all, my first congregation, and considered a plum by the boys at  
the seminary. Never mind. What happened, happened. Please.  
Case closed.

(Pause)

Please. I'm sorry I lost my temper. Let me help you up.

POTTS

(As he is being helped)

Ow, easy now, easy....

(The Burn groans softly)

Strange. The way he hurt, can't tell if he black or white.

(Potts is adjusted into walking device)

RABBI

I shouldn't have allowed myself to become so upset...at what's clearly the best of intentions. Again, I apologize.

POTTS

You got that fire, Rabbi. Except you mustn't let it burn you up.

RABBI

(A wry amusement)

This man is incorrigible.

POTTS

I try to help you as much as I can. You ain't what I expected, but you sure is an interesting surprise.

RABBI

(Looking up, exasperated joking)

Gottenyu - what did I ever do to deserve him?

POTTS

(Slyly)

Who are you talkin' to, Amos?

RABBI

Let me help you to your bed, old warhorse.

(Belkin appears in wheelchair pushed by Nurse.

He seems weak, as if drained by a recent bout with pain)

BELKIN

(As chipper as he can manage)

A minor setback fellas. A minor deflation of the ol' corpus.

(Nurse begins to help him out of wheelchair and into bed)

No-no Nurse. I prefer the semi-upright to the ingloriously supine.

NURSE

Call me if you need me. Or if you feel faint again, or if you have pain. You've got a nine-fifteen appointment with x-ray tomorrow, so rest up.

(Pause)

Relax, Mr. Belkin. Try to relax. Why do you make things so hard for yourself?

(Nurse hesitates, then leaves)

BELKIN

I'm dyin' fellas. The ol' pituitary just won't let itself be curbed. I'm fixin' to kick the bucket. Me fuses are givin' out.

(Tableau; Rabbi, Belkin, and Potts in a triangle. Morrissey comes out from under the cover. -Blackout-)

(In the darkness, we hear the Burn groaning. We hear the sound of wind and the music-like sound of clinking vaculiters. A STRANGE GLOW begins to appear around the Burn's bed.

The rubber tubes connecting him to sources of healing and nourishing rustle like vines.

We make out the Rabbi standing by his bed, gazing down at him. Pause.

Belkin's voice comes out of the semi-darkness)

BELKIN

Does he fascinate you, Amos?

RABBI

(Startled)

Huh - what?

(The effect suddenly disappears)

BELKIN

His eyes don't close, do they? No lids. Like a fish. Or a lizard in the desert. But he's nevertheless human, don't you agree. I mean...he is a human being.

(Pause)

Tell me, Rabbi-

RABBI

I'm not a rabbi.

(Pause)

Please, Mr. Belkin. It's late.

(Pause)



BELKIN

Justify for me the ways of God to man.

RABBI

This is an absolute madhouse. I will ask for a transfer.

BELKIN

I'm in sore need of a little coherence. Not much. Just a stitch to...soften the unraveling.

(Pause)

RABBI

Goodnight.

BELKIN

Can't let life blow by without mulling the ultimate questions - can we?

RABBI

I have mulled them.

BELKIN

The big enigmas? The knotted purposes?

RABBI

Why are you baiting me? What do you expect to gain from this?

BELKIN

(Gesturing in Potts direction)

I don't trust him. But I trust you.

(Pause)

Just a glimmer. Just a candle in the window is all I ask from you.

RABBI

You don't believe in God, and I don't believe in God. This is an absolute madhouse. Tomorrow morning I will speak to the Nurse.

BELKIN

It would give me much comfort if you came here and sat next to me, Amos. (Pause) Indulge me. It would give me much comfort. I am, after all, a dying animal.

(Potts flings his alter-shaped walking device at Belkin)

POTTS

Turn your back, Amos!

RABBI

Mr. Potts!

(A loud yawn from Morrissey - Belkin laughs)

BELKIN

Pottsy - you naughty old fella!

RABBI

Mr. Potts, please keep out of my affairs!

(Pause)

POTTS

Amos...

RABBI

Mr. Potts - please!

(Pause)

BELKIN

You're a good man, Amos. You carry the burden of goodness. These days it's a staggering load.

RABBI

You're mistaken in me, Mr. Belkin. My life is no paragon for anybody.

BELKIN

Oh yes - goodness hangs from you like lead.

(Pause)

RABBI

Goodnight.

BELKIN

Listen - he's calling to you. He's asking you to help him. He's asking you to help him.

(Pause. The Burn groans)

See?

(The burn groans again)

See?

(Pause)

Just coincidence, Amos. Just coincidence. Don't be alarmed.

So let's say - in the name of...goodness and...mercy and...all the other desirables of this, our world...may I suggest an especially desirable measure?

(Pause)

RABBI

Goodnight Mr. Belkin.

BELKIN

Why don't you kill him - Rabbi? Kill him? That man who screams and stinks and hungers for death? Isn't that a bit of what you've been thinking as you've - yes Rabbi - I've seen you gazing down at him every night since you've been here. So why don't you touch him with your mercy? I'm sure he wants to die.

(Pause)

RABBI

You're joking.

BELKIN

Because who knows - if you could do that little thing for him, perhaps - someday I'll ask you to put my lights out as well - rabbi.

(Rabbi approaches Belkin. Belkin halts him)

No Rabbi, no-no. No comfort please. For a while at least, I still prefer to..."not go gentle."

(Pause)

POTTS

Let him be, Amos. He so miserable he want to tear the world down with him.

(Nurse enters with hypodermic needle. When she touches Burn, he lets out a groan, then barely a scream. Morrissey comes out from under the covers)

MORRISSEY

Christ! It's the middle of the night. Now I'll never get back to sleep.

(Nurse injects Burn)

Any word yet about the petition?

NURSE

We'll let you know as soon as we hear, Mr. Morrissey.  
Goodnight.

(She leaves)

MORRISSEY

Uh-oh. Uh-oh, I gotta take a leak. Where the hell is that plastic cup? What the hell did I do with that plastic cup?

RABBI

Is that it? Under the bed?

MORRISSEY

Oh yeah- yeah. Thanks. (Getting it) They want a sample every time I go to the can. They're runnin' tests to see if I'm positive or negative. If I'm negative, it means I can get the hell out of here, but if I'm positive it means I gotta stay.

(Pause)

I think that's it.

Maybe it's vice-versa.

(Pause)

Hey Nurse!?

(He moves after Nurse who has just left, then stops short)

(Indicating cup)

I better take care of this first.

(Nurse appears in the doorway)

NURSE

Yes Mr. Morrissey?

MORRISSEY

I'll be with you in a minute. I gotta ante up some dues.

(Nurse leaves)

With them doctors you never can tell. You think they're sayin' one thing and all the time they're sayin' somethin' entirely different.

They may just as well be talkin' Latin as writin' it.

(He starts for the bathroom. The Burn groans)

Oh no.

(He continues out)

Poor bastard.

(Pause)

POTTS

(In prayer)

God be merciful unto us, and bless us, and cause His face to shine upon us. That His way may be known upon earth and His saving grace among all nations. Let the people praise Thee, O God. Let all the people praise Thee. O let the nations be glad and sing for joy. For Thou shall judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth.

(Pause. -Blackout-)

(In the darkness we hear a chorus of children's voices singing Jungle Bells.

Lights come up slowly on the singing.

The men are up and listening.

Morrissey is especially delighted. The voices are coming from the corridor)

NURSE

(When singing stops)

Thank you children. We all enjoyed it very, very much.

(Nurse leaves and quickly returns with 5 small packages. She gives one to Potts, to Morrissey, but stops at The Burn's bed a bit indecisively. Belkin grins at her.

She places a package at the foot of the bed, palpably recharges her confidence, strides to Belkin and hands him package)

NURSE

How are you feeling today?

BELKIN

Better. Much better. Thank you, Nurse.

NURSE

Good.

(Speaking to all)

We're having roast turkey today fellas. Dressing. Cranberry sauce. Buttered carrots. Chocolate mousse. And a choice of beverages. You can imagine what those are.

MORRISSEY

You mean what they ain't.

BELKIN

Nurse?

NURSE

Yes Belkie?

BELKIN

Hmmmm - Belkie. This must be Christmas.  
Tell me, Nurse. It's a problem that has perplexed me for  
centuries.

NURSE

Yes?

BELKIN

What came first do you think - was it the chicken, or was it the  
egg?

(Pause)

The Chicken or the egg.

Nurse? The chicken or the egg?

NURSE

..Merry Christmas, Mr. Belkin.

(She turns on her heel and leaves. Belkin sighs but,  
still grinning, turns to the others)

BELKIN

What did you get from our juvenile samaritans, Morrissey?

MORRISSEY

(Open package)

St. Christopher's medal. We all get St. Christopher medals.  
I know 'cause my eldest girl goes around to different hospitals  
carol-singing just like these kids do - each and every  
Christmas.

BELKIN

What's the little samaritan's name?

MORRISSEY

Cathy Theresa.

BELKIN

St. Catherine and St. Theresa.

MORRISSEY  
(Chuckling)

Yeah, she's something else, little Cathy. Eighth grade and a regular little lady. The nuns are crazy about her. Hey-hey, you wanna hear something? This is a riot.

BELKIN

Keep it clean, Morrissey.

MORRISSEY

Ahh. How about you, Rabbi? A little story about my little Cathy?

RABBI

Certainly.

MORRISSEY

Hey Pottsy - listen to this. This is a riot. This is when my Cathy was five and half years old. (To all) Now she's almost thirteen. What a little lady! The nuns are crazy about her.

BELKIN

Get to it, Morrissey. Don't leave us hanging.  
(Morrissey waves Belkin off and chuckles)

MORRISSEY

Well, this is a couple of weeks before Easter, see? And Cathy loses her first dropout tooth. So I says to her, "Cathy honey, you go to bed and tuck it under your pillow and in the meantime, when you're fast asleep, the good fairy'll come along and give you a shiny new quarter for it."

BELKIN

That's typical.

MORRISSEY

What?

BELKIN

Typical good fairy behavior.  
(Pause)

MORRISSEY

(Shrugs off his puzzlement)

Well back then I had less seniority so I was still pulling a swing shift. At around 4 o'clock in the A.M. I slips into her

room and there she is - all in pink and snuggled up like a little angel. I goes tippy-toe up to her bed and just as I'm going to slip the quarter in and remove the tooth, her eyes come open. She looks at the shiny new quarter like...like I was plannin' to hit her with it. "No Daddy! No! No!" That's all she says. No! Then she grabs the tooth from under the pillow and guess what she does with it. Go ahead - try to guess.

BELKIN

She hit you smack in the eye with it.

MORRISSEY

Not my kid, buddy. Not my kid. Somebody else's kid, but not my kid. Can anybody guess?

(Pause)

No?

She swallows it.

Yeah. I swear to Christ - sorry Pottsy - yeah - she swallows it. And then you know what she does? She pulls the covers over her head and won't come out. Nossir. Nothin' I say - my wife wakes up then - nothin' either of us say can bring her out from under them covers. We call the doctor.

He says swallowing the tooth's not so bad so she don't have to go to no hospital.

But she won't come out form under the covers. Hardly even movin'. Well - just when we decide - I mean something has to be done - right? I mean, how long can this go on? Up she gets and asks for sausages and eggs.

BELKIN

(A little mockery)

Sausages and eggs.

MORRISSEY

Just like that. And you know what? Not one more word about it to this day. Absolutely mum. Don't like nobody to make mention of it neither. One time I mentioned it and she got up from the dinner table and locked herself in the bathroom pretending she was answerin' a call of nature.

BELKIN

How do you know she wasn't, ol' top?



MORRISSEY

Oh no - you know why? She didn't flush. Cathy's a lady. She always flushes. No, we don't mention it anymore. It's a subject she's very sensitive about.

BELKIN

So life goes on.

MORRISSEY

It sure does, don't it.

BELKIN

(Directly to Rabbi)

Fairyless.

(Morrissey laughs)

MORRISSEY

She's in the eighth grade now. Sharp as a tack. Won the history medal and writes for the school newspaper - regular articles and stories.

Reads everything she can lay her hands on.

BELKIN

I like stories with happy endings, don't you, Rabbi?

(Nurse enters)

NURSE

I've got some bad news, Mr. Morrissey. They turned your petition down.

MORRISSEY

What!?

NURSE

He has no coverage, and there just isn't the room to spare. Sorry, fellas, we can't fight City Hall, can we?

BELKIN

The hell we can't.

NURSE

There just isn't the room to spare, Mr. Belkin.

BELKIN

Make room.

MORRISSEY

Screw it, Belkin. It's their hospital.

BELKIN

Oh? Now where would they be without us? Without your peptic Amos' duodenal and ol' Pottsy's various hernias - not to mention my own rare and intriguing disorder. Oh no, gentlemen - we are not entirely at their mercy.

MORRISSEY

What the hell are you talkin' about!?

BELKIN

Reporters, Morrissey. If one came there's the likelihood of more. Telephone calls can be made, Nurse. You tell those high muckamucks who rule over our lives and comfort that telephone calls can and will be made.

(Pause)

NURSE

I'll see what I can do.  
Mr. Gross won't be in 'till Monday.

BELKIN

Gross the big cheese?

NURSE

He's the hospital administrator.

BELKIN

Then convey our ultimatum to Herr Gross.

NURSE

I'll see what I can do - but I'm not promising.  
Look - I don't blame you fellas, believe me. I do sympathize.

BELKIN

Good Nurse - very good. And you tell Herr Gross he is not dealing with slugs. We are not perforations on some monstrous computer card. We are men. (Doing a curtsey)  
Creation's Masterpiece. Made in the image--

RABBI

I think he ought to stay.

(Pause)

RABBI

I think it's in his best interest even if it isn't necessarily in ours.

MORRISSEY

Now lookahere, Amos - you signed the petition too!

RABBI

I'm sorry. I'm retracting my signature. I'm sorry.

MORRISSEY

Why you no good--

NURSE

Mr. Morrissey!

BELKIN

Easy Morrissey.

RABBI

I'm sorry. If he hears us - if he can see us - if at least something is getting through to him, it may keep his mind alive. By himself...he may just sink into oblivion.

MORRISSEY

Oh sure - but what about us? What about our interests? I got a wife and five kids. He's sinkin' me into oblivion!

BELKIN

That blurs things a bit, doesn't it, Rabbi? Yes - What about us? We are the majority.

(Pause)

RABBI

If you try to push him out, I'll fight it. I'm putting you on notice - I'll fight it.

POTTS

(Softly, but intensely)

Oh God. Dear God. Thank you. Oh thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

(Potts bows his head. Dim to -Blackout-)

(Potts is standing near Rabbi's bed. Rabbi is sitting.  
Lights are on dimly. It is dark over both beds. Pause)

POTTS

(Exceedingly frustrated)

You won't let yourself, Amos! Why won't you let yourself!?

RABBI

Look...can't I be slightly humanitarian without--

POTTS

You want to, Amos, but you got yourself all leashed up!

(Pause)

He been drivin' me crazy too. Can't sleep. Give me bad dreams. I forgotten he a man. I signed that petition and never thought one mo' thing about it. But not you. Not you, Amos. You reach out the hand of mercy to him. And where that mercy come from if not from God?

A wolf don't have mercy. A bear don't have mercy?

RABBI

Mr. Potts.....my dear man....

POTTS

Amos listen - it once have happened to me too. Almost forty years ago when my first wife die - not hardly twenty years of age. Left me with two little kids. One of them got the anemia. The other is the spittin' image of her mother starin' me in the face. I just clean fell apart, Amos. Started drinkin'.

Gets fired from my job, runnin' around. Stayin' out all night. Runnin' around with this one and that one. Young Isaiah is one sorry mess. One Saturday night, I goes off to Birmingham. What happened I still don't know. Wakes up in the hoosegow next morning one eye shut tight as a pocket watch. I be alone cause they says I try to kill somebody - me!

(Pause)

Amos - I loved that woman. She was little and sweet and good. What God want to hurt her for? What God want to make them children motherless? I curses God! Oh yes, Amos- I denies Him. I bangs my fist like a crazy man! Where God if He let this stuff go on!? Let that good woman suffer and die!?

I lays down on that jailhouse mattress and stiffens my neck to God! Listen, Amos. No-no, you listen!

(Pause)

All that day it been raining. You see - for a week it been the same gray clouds overhead.

Now just listen!

Just when I lay down on that piddlin' little mattress - I been screamin' my head off and kickin' at the door all mornin' - just when I lay down on that mattress, them gray clouds break.

All week it been rainin' and then just like that--

(Snaps his fingers)

--them gray clouds break, and through them bars on that little square window comes one single ray of sunshine directly on to my face. Directly on to this face, Amos, which was young, and full o' pain. And it dry my tears and...it like a warm, soft hand that say, "Give way, Isaiah. Peace. Peace."

So whatever He got on His mind, I realize is too big for me to understand. Man - who am I, one black speck in this big world to ask what's goin' on in His mind?

RABBI

Mr. Potts...

POTTS

But they is times, Amos - they is times when He stretches out His hand and it's up to us to receive Him. To hold still for God. To hold still, and come open. 'Cause if we ain't open, how can we be reached? How can God reach us if we ain't open?

(Pause - Incredulous)

You think...all this is coincidence?

You - Amos? Me - Isaiah?

That po' creature who opened the gates of mercy in you is coincidence? That devil incarnate tryin' to drag you with him into the abyss is coincidence?

All this, and you bein' a rabbi - all this, you want to call coincidence?

(Pause)

Boy - the world is magic. Can't you see the magic of the world?

(Belkin laughs. His night light goes on. Pause)

Amos - look Amos - pray with me. Call on God with me, Amos. His children. Amos and Isaiah. Come - you mustn't stiffen yourself to God. Come.

(Potts painfully gets to his knees, pulling at the Rabbi.

The rabbi yields and allows himself to be pulled down.

Potts tenderly places hand on Rabbi's head)

## POTTS

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul. He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His Name's sake. Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death -

(Rabbi's face turns to audience; a flat expression)

I shall fear no evil. For thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord, forever.

(The Rabbi rises and starts forward.)

Potts will continue praying but his words will be hardly discernible and even they will subside until we see him in an attitude of profound and silent supplication. Just as it appears that the Rabbi may speak to the audience, we hear Belkin)

## BELKIN

What are you going to say, Amos? What are you going to tell them? Do you think it will do any good? Are you so foolish? Are you still so foolish?

(To audience, indicating Potts)

Can you do that? Can you simply get on your knees and do that when your souls are heavy-burdened?

(He laughs. Pause. Speaks to Rabbi)

Don't waste you breath, Amos. It seems we're all, more or less, in the same boat.

You may as well come here and sit with me.

(Pause)

(The Rabbi looks at him but does not move.)

Belkin laughs, shrugs, turns away.

Rabbi gazes for a while at the audience, readying himself)

## RABBI

I suppose the last thing that leaves you is the vocation. Still a rabbi - of sorts. If we...stretch the definition?

(Pause)

He's right, isn't he? Our friend Belkin? It is no longer part of our bone and gristle, is it? The New York Times and the Six

O'Clock News and the endless stream of periodicals...and the books. Where would we be without the...wonderful books?

(Pause - Indicating Belkin, who is sitting in a slumped, dejected position)

You know I could have given him another one up on Amos Levy. And if I had told Potts -well- you can imagine how he would have taken it. Belkin saw me night after night over at his bed all right. But he didn't know why. I suppose he thinks it's some kind of morbid fascination. But no - oh no.

(Indecisively, with a kind of wry self-awareness)

You see - when I lay in that corner at night...well, first I'd hear a voice that...without using any words...well, forget about sleep after that. So I would lie in bed for as long as I could and then - like it or not, I'd find myself getting up and...

What Belkin says is true.

He doesn't look like anything human.

His eyes stare straight at you.

No lids - a reptile's eyes. Like some...mythical creature out of the old story books. And I...I began to say to myself - Amos Levy, something is talking to you.

Something is trying to communicate.

(We hear Belkin laugh, though he does not move. Pause)

So Okay - I made a gesture. I would prevent him from being shoveled into a private room. But I also came to the conclusion - the word is important, folks - con-cluuuusion.

(Catch of laughter)

That every night when I heard the sound of vines swaying in the wind....

POTTS

(From darker portion of the stage)

You won't let yourself, Amos. Why won't you let yourself?

(Rabbi does not acknowledge this)

RABBI

(Continues speaking to audience)

And then a voice obliging me to get up and--

POTTS

You want to, Amos, but you got yourself all leashed up!

RABBI

(Quavering determination)

All of it....all of it, a mental aberration. A little frou-frou on which any ordinary practitioner could slap an appropriate label. So I kept it to myself. My secret. But you know - no matter how rational I tried to be. No matter how hard I tried to sluff it off - to explain it - to resist it - every night the same event. And there was no way I could prevent myself from getting up and getting an eyeful...of that face.

Oh yes folks, Amos Levy was sorely tempted, but he didn't succumb. No burning bush syndrome on him. he behaved properly because he knew what everybody but that boneheaded old warhorse would think - you too - what you would have thought if Amos Levy had allowed that peculiar, nightly episode to seduce him into...letting go the leash.

What you would have thought if he had said - come folks, let me tell you about my miracle.

(Pause)

So here I am - Amos Levy, waiting for discharge - with Belkin and Morrissey and Potts and a man known only as the Burn.

I don't think there'll be any more voices.

If there is a God...but there isn't.

Hasn't that been...pretty well established by now?

(Potts remains still, but his voice comes in strong out of the darkness)

POTTS

Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil. For Thou art with me. Thy rod and Thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. Thou anointest my head with oil. My cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord, forever.

(Pause, then - Blackout)

-End of Play-