

HANGING MAN

By

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ELI
JOE
EZRA

EZRA: What is this story about?

ELI: it's about love.

JOE: It's about memory and the days of old.

ELI: It's about love.

EZRA: Aging and death.

JOE: Memory.

EZRA: It could be murder, it could be fraud, it could be man's cruelty to his fellow man.

ELI: It's about love.

EZRA: Make sure they understand.

JOE: In the days of old.

ELI: I said already.

EZRA: What?

JOE: In the days of old they let you die on the side of the road.

ELI: It's about love and sex.

JOE: If you couldn't keep up, if you couldn't walk, you would have to lie down.

ELI: And then?

JOE: You'd have to prepare.

ELI: Of course.

JOE: Last breath, last look. The sky, the stars.

EZRA: Look up. There is a man. A two-legged creature.

ELI: Yes. I see him, wrapped in starlight.

EZRA: Joe?

JOE: Yes.

EZRA: This man is going to hang for crimes against humanity.

ELI: Good.

JOE: We don't know when.

EZRA: Sooner or later the man will hang. Upside down in the sky. Terrified. Eyes bulging, soiling his pants.

ELI: An unrepentant cowboy.

JOE: Don't just say things, Eli.

EZRA: Look up. Coins for eyes, dollar bills for balls.
A fat codpiece in his crotch.

JOE: Are those tears? His cheeks are wet.

ELI: Crying for his mother.

EZRA: A rainy mist. Sounds of thunder and the howling mob.

JOE: Cursing the hangman.

EZRA: Ah. Who will the hangman be?

ELI: It might be me.

JOE: It might be him.

ELI: Or it might be me.

JOE: Or it might be you.

ELI: So, hang in there. Ha, ha.

JOE: It's no joke. The man 's a pig.

EZRA: Eli?

ELI: A shout out to my father. It's Sol. His name is Sol. Fifth note of the octave. The Sun.

JOE: Pay attention.

ELI: Ha ha.

JOE: What's funny about that?

ELI: Nothing.

JOE: It's not funny.

ELI: I'm not laughing.

JOE: Yeah, do, re, mi.

EZRA: Do you remember – Eli? -- the rain?

ELI: When?

EZRA: As a baby, first rain.

ELI: No

EZRA: The sound of falling rain.

ELI: No.

EZRA: What a phenomenon.

ELI: What a shame.

JOE: That's so typical.

ELI: What is?

JOE: To call out a negative.

ELI: I missed it, is all, when I was little.

JOE: Why?

ELI: My mother was after me with a broom.

JOE: Oh.

ELI: And a coal shovel in the snow.

EZRA: Look up: Hanging Man, golden in the starry world, as seen from anywhere on Earth.

ELI: In your imagination.

EZRA: Listen. War-like drums, battle cries, hymns of the fallen.

ELI: Nothing.

EZRA: Hard of hearing.

ELI: Am I?

JOE: He plays with his ears all the time.

ELI: Do I?

JOE: Come on.

ELI: Sorry.

JOE: Don't be sorry.

ELI: I do remember the snow. Yes. Galoshes. Galoshes in the front next to the woodburning stove. Wind and snow and freezing cold. Galoshes. Sliding and skating and skiing. No mercy asked or given.

JOE: Mercy?

ELI: We built an icy ramp and flew into the sky and attacked each other on our sleds.

JOE: Winter games. We didn't have that in the city.

ELI: What did you have?

JOE: Gang warfare.

ELI: We had battles. We chose up teams and jumped each other. We yelled and screamed and hit each other.

EZRA: They say God knows himself through Man.

ELI: Who said?

EZRA: Ancient sages in the Holy Land.

JOE: They wore black clothes and ear locks and prayed a hundred times a day.

EZRA: Think of the violence. The pain He suffers through the acts of Man.

ELI: Jews as well?

EZRA: Especially Jews. It's a covenant. And thus, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

ELI: Ha, ha.

JOE: Not funny.

EZRA: The man hanging on that wall over there is a Jew.

ELI: Sorry.

JOE: Look at the wall.

ELI: Which wall?

JOE: That one.

EZRA: Then he dies and goes to Heaven.

JOE: Then we all go to Heaven when we die.

EZRA: Not the Jews.

JOE: Why not?

EZRA: We're not included.

JOE: Why not?

ELI: Blood in the soil.

JOE: What does that mean?

EZRA: Envy and resentment.

ELI: There is no such thing as Heaven.

EZRA: There is no heaven for the Jews.

JOE: How do you know?

EZRA: I do know.

ELI: How do you know?

EZRA: I knew as a child. I read it in a holy book.

ELI: What was the book, Ezra?

EZRA: The Five Books of Moses. The Pentateuch.

ELI: Then it must be true.

EZRA: Memory is the thing for us. Memory and the book.

JOE: We were mercenaries in the days of old.

ELI: You don't know.

JOE: We were the Chosen who built the pyramid at Giza.

ELI: Come on.

JOE: You could look it up.

ELI: I don't think so.

JOE: The man is an idiot.

EZRA: Put a lid on it, Joe.

JOE: We were desert desperadoes who fought for hire. We fought Mohammed and his minions. We fought Arabian tribal cavalries -- and lost.

EZRA: Come on, Joe.

JOE: And then we worked for the Egyptians. As slaves.

ELI: I see a skull.

JOE: A skull?

ELI: In the sky. Hanging there like an effigy.

JOE: An effigy?

ELI: A skull. A shining bone like a moon.

JOE: A swollen brain.

ELI: What do you call that?

EZRA: Narcissism.

ELI: Yeah.

JOE: Blood on the brain.

ELI: Yeah.

JOE: An aneurism.

EZRA: Look. Red-faced. Bellowing.

JOE: His hatred swells like a tumor.

EZRA: He thinks he's a savior.

JOE: His ego swells like a tumor.

ELI: Shoot him in the head.

JOE: His head explodes like a poisonous mushroom.

ELI: A hot air balloon.

EZRA: Spare him for a minute.

ELI: There are no second chances. No more second chances. You live forever with your sins.

JOE: Ezra?

EZRA: No. Not my thought. See the raging politician, hope of the Christian right.

JOE: He rages against the night.

EZRA: Wrong note. He does not rage; He is conscience free.

ELI: Exactly. I'm not sure what I meant by that.

JOE: Yeah, in one ear, out the other.

EZRA: Did you hear what I said?

ELI: Yes.

EZRA: What?

ELI: Neither Man nor God can save us now.

EZRA: Not what I said, Eli.

JOE: A stone-faced killer. Red blotches on his cheeks.
A big red mouth.

ELI: Too many hot dogs. Ha, ha.

EZRA: Come on, Eli

ELI: Too many cheeseburgers.

JOE: Lies foaming in his mouth. He'll fall into the crevasses of the earth.

ELI: Blotches on his face.

EZRA: There will be harsh judgment against this man. In the testament to come. Presently he'll take his revenge on Arabs, now is his chance, to get in there and raise hell, bring a terrible vengeance to his enemies.

JOE: Okay.

ELI: Nobody likes him, nobody will lend him money.

JOE: He'll stiff you and call you names. Stupid fifth-grade nicknames.

JOE: Hanging, blood in his mouth and his ears, stars and stripes and a top hat. He loves his country. He loves his money. Money is his religion.

ELI: How can you tell?

EZRA: He has no religion.

JOE: A celebrity apprentice.

ELI: Can't get along with his neighbors.

JOE: Shit for brains, dickhead, dumbass Gentile.

ELI: Peckerwood.

EZRA: His religion is himself. He worships himself.

JOE: Savior of the American people

EZRA: Add the junk prime minister. The Bolsonaro over the Amazon. Testament to come.

ELI: The Christians have a latte to heaven.

JOE: You mean a *ladder* to Heaven.

EZRA: War of the End Times. Keep your pajamas on. You'll go straight up to Heaven in the middle of the night. Or a few minutes from now.

ELI: Ha, ha.

EZRA: Not us.

ELI: No.

EZRA: We are not invited.

ELI: We are Jews.

JOE: Our man Joseph was vizier to the pharaoh. They dug him up and took him home to his nasty brothers. And then they brought the commandments out of Egypt.

ELI: And a coat of many colors.

JOE: And we live on that to this very day.

EZRA: The Exodus came first, Joe, and then Moses brought the Commandments.

ELI: Tell me: Is the body a garment?

EZRA: Why do you ask?

ELI: Because the body is the coating of the soul.
And when we die, the soul is freed to rise.

JOE: To be a moth or a butterfly.

ELI: Come on.

JOE: What would Spinoza say?

EZRA: He would say that death was part of the cycle of life.

JOE: And God?

EZRA: He would say that God is a causal initiation.

JOE: Come on.

EZRA: First Cause.

ELI: What happens when you hang?

JOE: Come on.

EZRA: According to Spinoza?

ELI: According to anybody.

EZRA: You choke. No oxygen to the brain. Gravity pulls the body down; vultures pick the meat from the bones. Blood seeps into the earth.

ELI: Yikes.

EZRA: Last image when you die looking up at the sky, a barren tree in the sky or a God. Blue sky, black God.

ELI: An Arab.

JOE: A brigand.

ELI: Life is not a movie.

EZRA: Robbing and killing and burning down villages.

ELI: Lying. Lying about everything. Lying about his grief, his hatred, his loss.

JOE: His crimes.

ELI: He slobbers.

EZRA: And there is no remorse.

JOE: Excuse me. I think life *is* a movie.

ELI: Okay.

JOE: You watch it go by in a minute or two.

ELI: Okay.

JOE: It's a short movie.

ELI: Nothing is true anymore, or real. There are no facts anymore. You know – like history and the meaning of things.

JOE: Forget about it.

ELI: Ha, ha.

JOE: Why do you keep laughing?

ELI: I'm not laughing.

JOE: Sounds like laughing to me.

ELI: What are you a funny cop?

EZRA: It's not funny. People suffer. Starving in ditches without food or water, wounds infected, guts hanging out for the flies.

ELI: Hanging Man in the night sky. What meaning could it possibly have?

JOE: It's not funny. Maggots crawling on his face, it's revolting, it's an ugly image for mankind. It's not funny.

ELI: But what does it mean?

EZEA: No meaning. No – it's meaning is self-evident.

ELI: What about love?

JOE: Are you nuts, Eli?

ELI: No.

JOE: Deaf and dumb?

ELI: No.

JOE: Come on.

ELI: It's a normal question.

EZRA: Sex. Reproduction. An exchange of substances. A chemical reaction.

ELI: Not that kind of love.

EZRA: What then?

ELI: Divine Love.

EZRA: Of that I cannot speak.

ELI: Transgressive love.

JOE: Eli -- We're watching the end of the world right here.

ELI: One more thing.

JOE: Yeah?

ELI: What about Romance?

EZRA: Type and polarity. Certain types are copacetic, plus the electricity. I had that with Rose, for sure.

JOE: Pleasure is an attribute of Paradise.

ELI: Who said?

EZRA: Not Spinoza.

JOE: The man in the moon.

EZRA: Dust to dust. Feeds organic life on earth.

JOE: Or the moon.

EZRA: Maybe the moon.

ELI: Fertilizer is what we are.

JOE: Okay.

EZRA: You called me?

JOE: No. He did.

EZRA: Why?

ELI: I want you to save my place in the life to come.

JOE: Fuck-head here is cracking up.

EZRA: Are you?

ELI: Observe the Hanging Man. How he bloats, how he chokes, how he floats like a sky boat in the dusty air!

JOE: Don't get started, Eli.

ELI: How he croaks and how he coughs up worms!

JOE: Calm down.

ELI: I'm so busy trying to survive I forget everything else. The killing fields in – The killing fields in Israel, Palestine. Ukraine. America. There are people out there that are out of their minds.

EZRA: Truly.

ELI: And I'm one of them.

JOE: Definitely.

EZRA: Sorry.

ELI: It's not your fault.

EZRA: I know that.

JOE: Who is Rose?

EZRA: You think too much. Eli.

JOE: You talk too much. Eli.

EZRA: Let him speak.

ELI: We were talking about the capers we did, in the delirium of youth, and we hardly touched the surface.

JOE: True.

ELI: I was a thief. I stole whenever I could from whomever I could. For money, for food. And I enjoyed it. Ha, ha.

JOE: Not funny.

ELI: I gave money to my mother. I gave her 35 bucks a month for thirty-five years. I received the same letter in the mail every month. *Please help me, I cannot pay the rent, I cannot pay the electric, I cannot pay the gas, your father is trying to kill me, I don't know what to do. You're the only one can Help your mother.* Same exact words, exactly. She had a little copier in her head. Each month she sent the same exact letter and I'd send her back a check.

EZRA: No love lost there.

ELI: No.

EZRA: And you?

JOE: Me? I was a ladies' man. I was good-looking and I knew it. I didn't have to do much. I'd wait and they'd come to me.

ELI: Like flies to a wound.

JOE: Come on.

ELI: He was a lost child. Until he found a home with communists.

JOE: That's right.

ELI: Ha, ha.

JOE: Not funny. He was the father of a friend of mine. Fred, a prison guard. He taught me the meaning of life.

ELI: Your friend?

JOE: No, the prison guard. Fred.

ELI: I get it.

EZRA: What was the teaching??

JOE: Communism. The historical imperative. Class war. The inevitable prison revolts. Sure enough, years later there's a riot, they got him and beat him to death.

EZRA: Ironic.

ELI: Go on, Joe.

JOE: That's all.

ELI: I got arrested once during a protest in the local park. Against the War.

JOE: So what?

ELI: Something to remember is all.

EZRA: And now?

ELI: I'm trying to make amends, finally, for the killing and the lying and the wanton destruction of this Earthly paradise.

JOE: Wanton?

ELI: Stupid.

EZRA: See if you can make it to the door, Joe, without dreaming.

JOE: No.

ELI: Go on.

JOE: Where's the door?

EZRA: There's the door. *(J. gets up, walks a few feet, stops returns.)* So?

JOE: Visions of the prison, dark and grey and menacing. And Fred, sacrificed to the system.

ELI: What else?

JOE: I thought of the end times coming like a wash, or a wave, a cleansing force. Coming right at me. And then I worried, I want people to think well of me and come to my funeral when I croak, and at the funeral I want to hear the mourner's kaddish. In the Aramaic.

EZRA: That was a lot going through your head in fifteen seconds or less.

JOE: There is no controversy here. We're talking end of life here, issues of mortality.

EZRA: You're – we are elderly men with issues.

ELI: When are we going to die, for goodness' sake?

JOE: In five minutes.

ELI: Come on.

JOE: Four minutes.

EZRA: Hang on to your hats.

JOE: One minute.

ELI: Done.

EZRA: Well?

JOE: Let's move on.

ELI: Women is a subject for sure, in terms of amends.

JOE: For sure.

EZRA: Give me a break.

JOE: Married three times, eh?

EZRA: I feel bad about it.

JOE: I was good-looking, and I knew it.

EZRA: Same here.

JOE: I didn't have to do much, like going on dates or making proposals. Invitations. You would know, Ezra.

EZRA: I do know.

JOE: You think you are hot stuff.

EZRA: I certainly did.

ELI: Not me. I lived underground like a weasel, tunneling from here to there in search of praise.

EZRA: Full of myself.

ELI: In search of safety.

JOE: In search of understanding – The murderous nature of mankind.

ELI: Right.

EZRA: I took success for granted, not that I was aware of it.

ELI: You just said you were aware of it.

EZRA: My body maybe, not me.

ELI: I didn't think anyone would like me. So, I got into drugs, as you know.

JOE: There's a movie right there.

ELI: There I was in re-hab, on the Pacific Ocean, in Malibu, with a bunch of rich junkies and alcoholic movie stars. I enjoyed it. They treated me well there. Good food and suboxone and interesting meetings. I didn't belong there, but I enjoyed it very much.

JOE: Thank you for sharing.

EZRA: Don't do that.

JOE: It's absurd.

ELI: Do you wish to continue?

EZRA: Do you?

ELI: Not about women, per se.

EZRA: Go on.

ELI: There's the one incident that haunted me more than anything, the one time I stole from the Slaters I was nine or ten. The Slaters had been good to us, putting us up when we were on the road, homeless and penniless –

EZRA: Avoid self-pity.

ELI: So, I knew where Jack Slater hid his dough. There was no cash register just a cigar box. And I knew, having lived with them, where the box was. It was so sneaky of me. That's what gets me now. The sneakiness. I reached up – I can see it like it was right now – I reached up into the cigar box and pulled out a ten. That ten-dollar bill was like a golden

treasure. A fortune. What I did was, I sat down in the alley next door, and I gazed at the ten-dollar bill. I sat there looking at it. I could hardly believe it. What I had done. And then I was afraid to spend it anywhere. Like, where did you get that ten-dollar bill? No, what happened was, I ran into the Slater house. I thought I could hide there. I ran into the kitchen. And Mrs. Slater was sitting at the kitchen table. A stout, kindly woman who knew me. I was maybe nine years old. She saw me and I darted under the table. She looked at me for a long time and then stood up and left the room.

JOE: Then what?

ELI: Nothing. She had seen me for what I was at that moment, a cringing little thief hiding in plain sight under the kitchen table. Then I ran away and hunkered down in an alley and gazed at the money.

EZRA: Joe?

JOE: What comes to mind – I was riding in a car with a friend, maybe the 10th grade, a couple in the back seat – I won't mention names--this kid, famous for his gargantuan cock, is in the back seat getting a blowjob from Shirley Kessler who is moaning and groaning and congratulating him on his pleasurable utility -

ELI: And?

JOE: I said nothing and did nothing. I could have a thousand of those incidents. Shirley. She picked her nose in third grade.

ELI: Ezra?

JOE: And then she ate the stuff.

EZRA: Disgusting. What do you want, Eli?

ELI: I thought you were going to say something.

EZRA: I was not.

ELI: Married three times.

EZRA: So what?

ELI: Come on. What happened?

EZRA: Nothing happened.

ELI: Come on.

EZRA: Okay. One day I came home, East Ninth Steet. and my worldly possessions were in the hall and the door was locked. She had changed the lock. What was I thinking? Why? I was selling pot and working as a waiter. – she was right, so I went back to school. I made good friends there. Stanley the bagel maker. Jerome, the Walt Whitman fan. The Hart Crane guy. Jerry Mazza and jazz piano. The Wallace Stevens person. Larry.

ELI: I'd like to get high just a little –

JOE: Let him finish.

EZRA: And Elaine. Elaine Sperling, my first –How strange it all is – I wonder if she's still alive...

JOE: What do you mean high?

ELI: High. High means high.

EZRA: Fifty years ago. I was in L. A. --

ELI: You have anything to drink or smoke or inject?

EZRA: No.

ELI: Just as well. You were saying?

EZRA: This lady calls me up – you know the story – she calls me on the phone and invites me over to have sex. Naturally, I agree and go over there. All the way to the Palisades. We have nice sex and I put on my clothes, and I go to the door to say a nice goodbye and she hollers FUCK YOU YOU FICKING DOG YOU PIECE OF SHIT YOU FUCKHEAD I HOPE I NEVER SEE YOU AGAIN, FUCK YOU and so on. I'm standing there humiliated. At the door. Standing there in the door flooded with abuse.

ELI: Who was this?

EZEA: This was Lillian.

ELI: What about Rose?

EZRA: Rose was not in the picture.

JOE: And then?

EZRA: Then it happens a few more times and the next thing you know she asks me to marry her. I go see the apartment—she had already picked out the apartment – On the West Side like she knew I'd say yes, she knew I would agree --I go over there and sit down. I

meditated on it. I tried to sense out the vibe. There was no vibe. I lied – foreboding. There was foreboding.

ELI: And then?

EZRA: Finally, I fled.

JOE: Where to?

ELI: Wait a minute.

EZRA: Yeah?

ELO: How often you're standing in the doorway taking shit on your face?

EZRA: Plenty of times.

ELI: You're a masochist.

EZRA: I lacked self-esteem at the time.

ELI: Oh, for God's sake.

JOE: Stop saying that.

ELI: And then you married her for goodness's sake.

EZRA: No. I didn't. I ran away. I changed my name and ran away.

ELI: I don't believe him.

JOE: Where to?

EZRA: Another world.

JOE: Okay.

EZRA: Another galaxy.

ELI: Wait a minute – you're standing in the doorway suffering verbal abuse from this woman and the next moment you're a married man? Same woman?

EZRA: Yes.

ELI: It's a disgrace.

EZRA: And then we come out again into the rained world of Man.

ELI: Wait a minute.

EZRA: Las Vegas, Nevada.

JOE: Eli?

ELI: We must say something.

JOE: What about?

ELI: We are slaughtering Arabs. As we speak.

JOE: I don't want to talk about it.

EZRA: Man's nature, to kill his kind. His brothers, his cousins, his neighbors, his friends, and his enemies --

ELI: Like chimpanzees.

EZRA: His wives.

JOE: The story about the girl in the car -- reminds me --

ELI: Oh, come on.

EZEA: Your turn, Joe.

JOE: One time, years ago, I was making love to a woman -- I was seeing two Nancys at the time, Big Nancy and Little Nancy, six eleven East Sixth Street, Manhattan, and my roommate walks in and tries to get in bed with us -- Big Nancy screams blue murder and runs out of the house. I never saw her again.

ELI: And little Nancy?

JOE: I can't remember little Nancy.

ELI: And the roommate?

JOE: I kicked him in the face.

ELI: Really?

JOE: Not really.

ELI: I still hover. I hang around. I've been that way since childhood. I'd be at a friend's house, and I'd hang around. They wanted me to leave, but I stayed, hoping for a free meal.

JOE: Excuse me?

ELI: Or cookies and milk.

EZRA: As a waiter?

ELI: Yeah. Around a table. If there's a good-looking one at the table. I'll linger you know, hoping for a sign. A look or a smile. Or a touch of her fingers on your hand as you busied her dirty plate.

JOE: Yeah. Where were we?

EZRA Eli was having a nervous breakdown.

ELI: We are killing Arabs.

JOE: Not us.

EZRA: We are not there.

ELI: Our idiot leadership. Narcissism runs amok.

EZRA: Human nature – to kill. To envy and lord it over and carry on come hell or high water.

ELI: Like wild animals.

JOE: Talk to Ezra. He's a trained professional.

ELI: So are many dogs.

EZRA: Okay, where are you now?

ELI: Underwater as they say, looking out to the drowned world.

EZRA: Flatland.

ELI: You know nothing about it.

EZRA: You know I do, Eli.

ELI: Okay, up to a point, up to a point.

EZRA: What point?

ELI: The actual substance, like we were saying -- the substance, the feeling of it -- It's a feeling, you never get over it, of being unequal. Because it lasts a lifetime, the feeling of subversion, of being below, under, underneath the standard for human living, a below the mark type of existence, buttoned into you, sitting there in the back of your head, unconsciously, nagging you, pestering you. I won't go on.

JOE: Don't go on.

EZRA: Man, the worm who makes decisions and plans.

ELI: And God help the wandering Jew.

JOE: Where did that come from?

ELI: I have no idea.

EZRA: We identify with being Jewish.

ELI: We **are** Jewish. And I get paranoid. And we were butchered on our way to the end of the world – cut into pieces, burned up in ovens, shot through the head, hung upside down at the gate to Hell –

EZRA: Flatland cracked at the equator.

ELI: Fear is justified.

EZRA: Fallen were we, into oblivion. It's a fact of history, which some malevolent Gentile retards deny.

ELI: Joe?

JOE: What?

ELI: Say something.

JOE: I don't feel like it.

ELI: Paranoia is the lower caste issue.

JOE: What?

EZRA: Lower *case*. Not caste.

JOE: No, lower CASTE is right. There is a class system in America which means there is poverty from one generation to the next.

EZRA: Thank you, Joe.

JOE: So, what is the substance here?

EZRA: It's like Job, only the other side, like I said, the other side being we are the killers now. We can't get out from under it.

JOE: I agree with Eli.

EZRA: I know you do.

JOE: One more thing I wanted to mention. There are people in high places who don't understand history, who want only the illusion of power.

EZRA: Well said.

ELI: Sooner or later old age and death will lay them low.

EZRA: I couldn't agree more.

JOE: Who are we talking about now?

ELI: I wouldn't mention names.

EZRA: No names. Why? To name the guy would give him credit, authenticate him as a human.

ELI: How about getting high?

JOE: No way.

EZRA: Reminds me, when I was young, going around the Lower East Side with a briefcase full of weed and hashish –

JOE: How many lives have you had, Ezra?

EZRA: Thirteen.

ELI: Come on.

EZRA: Thirteen.

JOE: Long life.

EZRA: Long life. When I die, I'll gasp for breath and fall onto the blackjack table and grunt and groan and go silent and dead. Then I'll float up to the ceiling and watch as they pick up the body, the croupiers and the girls and the guys moving the body of me to the rear.

ELI: A croupier?

EZRA: Good job, good hours, quick hands. It's nice, sensing the movement of the cards in your hands. Watching the gamblers, their faces, the different types. The way people are with money, illusory hopes for a new future. If only the cards will fall their way. It takes the place of the Messiah.

JOE: How many lives?

EZRA: One life is a dealer's life. Two, three years. Then I was an analyst, and then I was a croupier, and so on.

JOE: I knew you way back then, on the Lower East Side.

EZRA: I had top-notch customers. They are mostly all dead now. Mostly dead. Warren was the gas station guy in *Easy Rider*. Stone junkie, then he died.

JOE: It's an interesting combo. A croupier and a psychologist. Two lives side by side.

EZRA: Both are a study of human nature.

ELI: What would you say?

EZRA: Both are hoping for a magical Self, with magical consequences.

JOE: Which of us could become a killer?

EZRA: Anyone of us.

ELI: Of course.

EZRA: Depends on the circumstances.

ELI: It's over for us, Joe. Not today or tomorrow
Or the next day. Or the day after that.

JOE: We could go mad and forget. We could be sitting on a cot in a hall in a hospital for the insane, drooling at the mouth, crying into our pillows.

ELI: Oh, for God's sake.

JOE: Stop saying that.

ELI: My biggest fear. Losing it, losing my sense of self, scattered to the wind and rain. Foaming at the mouth.

EZRA: Take a breath.

ELI: I could close my eyes and die right here.

EZRA: Hold up a minute.

ELI: It's a deluge. I've lost my little Self in the flood.

JOE: Oh, come on.

ELI: Bloody skulls rising in the mud.

JOE: Where are you now?

ELI: Looking for sunlight, looking for love. Forgiveness.

EZRA: Here's a story – after she kicked me out, I was back on the unemployment line in a nasty midtown office. I went up to the clerk – while some Puerto Rican gangster type snatched my beautiful cashmere coat. That was a blow.

JOE: What cashmere coat?

EZRA: Wedding present coat. Money cascading from above, a powerful force cracking marriages and alliances. I was naive, like a baby or my brain-damaged brother.

JOE: What brother?

EZRA: Gilbert, who died one afternoon, at Monticello General Hospital, sun shining in the windows, eyes looking up at us like he didn't know who we were or why we were there. Poor kid, he never had a chance. Brain cancer. Knocked him right out of his bruised world.

ELI: God bless.

JOE: Continue, Ezra.

EZRA: No.

JOE: About money.

EZRA: Money will kill, money will lay you low. It's a force, it's a tsunami. It'll throw you around or drown you in misery.

ELI: Or sail you around the planet on a yacht.

JOE: Not likely. So. What will we do now that we've lost the moral high ground?

ELI: Go on with our lives or kill ourselves.

JOE: We'll go on.

EZRA: And then they kill us.

ELI: We'll hang, for sure. The historical hangman looms above us in the sky.

JOE: You maybe, not me.

ELI: He can feel the noose on his neck, tight. Stiff rope, wet.

EZRA: Is it raining still?

ELI: Age and sickness will do the rest.

EZRA: Water pouring down from the sky – what a phenomenon. Listen.

JOE: Yes. *(Pause)* I'm trying to get something off my chest.

EZRA: Go on.

JOE: I feel like everything is wrong.

EZRA: Like what?

JOE: I can't understand the Human project.

ELI: There is no such thing.

EZRA: *Project* is a lousy word.

JOE: What are we supposed to do?

ELI: Reminds me of a Hasidic story – The Rabbi of Lublin sent a pupil of his –

JOE: You've told this story a million times.

ELI: He asks the young student to die intentionally and go up to God and ask him –

EZRA: What's holding up the Messiah.

ELI: Right.

JOE: And the answer?

EZRA: It's like the answer to Job.

JOE: Take it or leave it.

ELI: You don't know.

JOE: All the bigshots and all the trolls, they have something wrong in their bones.

EZRA: Let's pause.

JOE: Morally or ethically speaking.

EZRA: Let's sit together quietly. *(Pause)*

JOE: It's a joke. Our lives are in ruins.

EZRA: Lie down, take a nap.

JOE: Let's kill that motherfucker. Let's kill our way home. Wipe them all out. The nasties, the shit-for-brains. The psychopaths. Let's kill them all.

EZRA: That'll do it.

ELI: And then?

JOE: We ride on into the sunset.

EZRA: Here's the problem.

JOE: Shoot.

EZRA: We'll be scattered again. Into the wilderness.
If anything is left of us.

JOE: Greed and lust and money-bragging will be left and the killing fields plus the manufacturing of electrical bodies.

ELI: Don't stop now, Joe.

JOE: Like heaters and fridges, cars and trucks, pots and pans, phones and drones, razor blades and guns –

ELI: What else?

JOE: That's all.

ELI: Submarines and planes, bombs and tanks, roads and bridges, satellites and robots –

EZRA: Lovely breasts hath Lillian, plus money and praise and all the rest.

JOE: No babies.

EZRA: No.

JOE: That's a shame.

EZRA: I said to her, I said, no blame, I'll do the education game.

JOE: Okay stop.

ELI: Stop with the rhyming.

EZRA: They treated me well there at Brooklyn College and bid me a fond farewell. Honors student that I was. No harm done. And me and Lillian, we get along. We're friends.

JOE: That's swell.

ELI: Ha, ha.

JOE: As the war continues in the holy land. It'll be fury road all over again. Blasting through the desert storm.

EZRA: Afraid so.

ELI: It's a movie, Joe.

JOE: I know it is. Blood in the water, blood in the Mediterranean Sea. It's those dumb-ass Jewish soldiers gleefully jumping up and down to celebrate the slaughter of innocents. How do you square that with our traditional values?

EZRA: I don't know.

JOE: I don't know either.

EZRA: We'll be dispersed again, strangers wandering the indifferent earth turning regularly on its axis. The moon racing the tides. The icy poles sliding into the oceans.

ELI: Judith. I grabbed her and kissed her violently on the mouth.

EZRA: Who is this?

ELI: Judith. In my youth. The sixties. She was impressed by the forceful kiss. She was another woman I knew then fascinated by sex. "Why such a short shower, can't you wait?" she asked. Mean-spirited. Because I was ready to get it on. One of those dumb things you remember.

JOE: Why?

ELI: Because I felt shattered at the time, like a piece of meat at the time, enthralled.

JOE: Here's a story. Guy's mistress is his mother, his brother is his son.

EZRA: It's Oedipus.

JOE: But think of the woman, her point of view. One son is a lover, the other her child.

EZRA: Happens, my friend, in the wilds of America, the rural out backs, the city slums.

JOE: Here in Vegas?

EZRA: In one form or another, and these people vote.

JOE: And so, idiots are born and flourish, deadly flowers on a polluted lake. Lilies floating on a chemical swamp. Sociopaths in every generation. We'll write poetry and stories of strongmen, men with guts crawling with centipedes.

EZRA: Whoa.

JOE: Mouths open in senseless horror.

EZRA: Lillian.

JOE: What more on Lillian?

EZRA: A pretty woman. She'd suck your cock and make you pay. You'd suffer there once you're screwing Lillian. With insults, not money. Insulting you to the bone, standing there in the doorway as excrement is thrown into your face, getting into your car, putting yourself back together again. Telling yourself it really didn't happen. Until the next time.

Same thing. Sex and humiliation. It's penis envy, is what it is. I want this day to end well so I can sleep tonight with a clear conscience. Not to speak ill of a person.

JOE: We are frozen here in our chairs. We cannot move. We are bound to stay and recite our woes.

ELI: Look up. It's like a sheen or a shimmer, an invisible cloak, or a shield, just above us, a fine vibration in our ears.

JOE: No wonder you can't hear anything.

ELI: Calling to us.

JOE: And then we'll hang from the rafters. Like banners.

ELI: To tell the truth, and then we can get up and go.

JOE: How do you know?

ELI: I don't know.

JOE: Things change -- it's the nature of things.

EZRA: Spinoza again.

JOE: Nature as God.

ELI: God as God.

JOE: Ego is God.

ELI: Love is God. And so on. Searching for my boyhood spirit. Who was I then? A thief and a liar. But that's not all, I ran and played. I played hard. No mercy given.

EZRA: You mentioned.

ELI: But that's not all. My father, Sol --

EZRA: What?

ELI: I thought you were a friend of mine. An essence friend.

EZRA: I am.

JOE: He is.

ELI: The rest of the family, hundreds, they don't give me the time of day.

EZRA: Why not?

ELI: Criminal poverty and mental illness.

Whose?

My father and mother.

EZRA: Why criminal?

ELI: Sexual deviation, incestuous carrying on.

JOE: Say more.

ELI: No.

EZRA: Your father?

ELI: That's all.

EZRA: Okay, never mind.

ELI: They think I'm weird. I have a cousin, Lenny, he looks at me like I'm a creature from the black lagoon. The whole lot of them can go fuck themselves. Middle class propriety.

JOE: Indeed.

ELI: Status hungry Philistines.

JOE: Well, what happened?

ELI: Nothing happened.

EZRA: He's a thinker. He works late and gets up late.

JOE: And he's unstable.

ELI: That's it for me. *(Pause)*

JOE: Ezra, Tell us about Rose.

EZRA: Pretty Jewish woman. Married to a Gentile jerk.

She likes to flirt. I think her husband is an uncircumcised prick. Works in the bowling alley. I'd like to get her up on the blackjack table, you know, and fuck her right there, you know, give her an injection, right there, the full mojo, but I'd probably have a heart attack.

JOE: Love and sex and remorse.

EZRA: You haven't been laid for a generation. Stop already with the remorse. There's remorse and then there's remorse. There's feeling bad and then there's real suffering, which I don't wish on anyone except the killer of innocents, the mass murderer. He feels nothing. General Dusseldorf, his nose up Europe's ass. Stiff German face. Heil Hitler. Tight uniform.

JOE: With a codpiece.

EZRA: Ambition. Fear of censure. Bloodlust.

JOE: When he dies. What nightmares through his head, what pain when he dies.

EZRA: Last gasp. Screw-you attitude right to the end. Mr. Zion. A warrior, a murderer, a con, a martyr. The Prime Minister. They'll enshroud him and lie him down while his woman weeps and half the country mourn -- flags waving -- horns blaring -- it's all so strange.

JOE: It's in the blood and DNA.

EZRA: Whereof thou cannot speak.

JOE: The ancestry.

EZRA: Don't say anything you know nothing about.
I'm one thing one minute and another in the next.

JOE: Money status food vengeance. Defecating on the earth. Blowing it up. It's a mortal sin.

ELI: My goodness.

JOE: What?

ELI: Give us a break.

JOE: No. I'm going to hang myself. Like I said.

ELI: Go ahead.

JOE: Not yet.

ELI: Don't keep us waiting.

JOE: What a putz you are Mister. A moving glob of frozen piss.

ELI: Is what?

JOE: Is a putz.

ELI: You just made that up.

JOE: It's Yiddish for asshole.

ELI: Don't think twice – the fascists are taking over the world. Thumpers. Fatheads. Mark my words. They'll kick us out like they did in Spain. The U S of A. The Inquisition. 1492. Horse and carriage were lined up from Gibraltar to Istanbul. Hardly a space between the carriages. A solid line around the Mediterranean. And then up into the Slavic world, to Poland and Lithuania. Russia was the worst of all.

JOE: Stop.

ELI: Hung from the trees, tossed into the flames, the burning forests.

EZRA: Wait. What do you suppose – the audience?

JOE: They've forgotten all about it. They watch, that's what they do. Their eyes are on us. Their ears are plugged. They're high on methamphetamine.

ELI: While drinking champagne.

EZRA: Give him a rope. Give this man a rope. Joe. He wants to hang himself.

ELI: Wait.

JOE: Hang me in the morning.

EZRA: Nobody wants to see a hanging.

JOE: Not true – they love it, they love to see people hang. People love hangings. They flock to hangings. It's total entertainment. They observe. That's what they do. They'd gather in the plaza. There'd be an orchestra playing Brahms, or Beethoven. The hangman wore a mask and his best clothes. Soldiers would stand and watch. Policemen kept solemn faces. Priests watched.

ELI: Everybody watched.

JOE: The inquisition. Motherfucker's father was Mr. Inquisition. Mr. Zion Netanyahu. He saw the hunting down of Jewish people. The hanging of Jews in the plaza. While the Gestapo drank champagne, enjoying the view, the bloody spectacle in the plaza, the machine gunning and the hangings and the music and the carrying on.

ELI: What a show. Hang me at twilight tomorrow.

JOE: I thought you said --

ELI: Twilight, so we have an audience. With birdsong and the mourner's kaddish.

EZRA: I'm going with you.

JOE: Don't upstage me.

ELI: I'll do it myself. Get up on a chair hanging from the ceiling, you kick the chair away -- Bingo.

EZRA: As the IDF blasts through tunnels and slogs over rubble and bombs the shit out of Palestine.

JOE: Masters of the Universe.

EZRA: Five minutes of glory as the sea of blood ran down the drains. Red rains flowing from the sewer into the Mediterranean Sea.

JOE: And yet we speak of Netanyahu.

ELI: Mr. Zionist. Mr. Jew.

EZRA: May his nightmares -- no, never mind.

ELI: Come true.

EZRA: Apologies for the State of Israel.

JOE: We need no apologia.

EZRA: We have rights.

JOE: We have the right. We have the right of massacre. We have risen. We have arrived.

ELI: God bless everyman.

JOE: What does he mean by that?

EZRA: A blanket pardon?

JOE: A clean slate.

ELI: Let us pray. And say Amen.

JOE: Looking for love. A hug and a kiss and a ticket to Palookaville.

ELI: Ha, ha.

EZRA: Hey, Joe.

JOE: Speak.

EZRA: Lillian –

JOE: Yeah?

EZRA: She calls and says I love you. I think that's something. I think that counts. Oh, and a text from Rose.

JOE: Well, that's something. And you got a text, you got a nice text, hinting at love.

EZRA: Maybe.

JOE: I think so.

EZRA: Maybe, maybe not.

ELI: You'd like to think so.

EZRA: Yes.

ELI: And it rained. Water pouring down.

JOE: So?

ELI: Affecting our mood, our sensibilities.

EZRA: Let's pause now and listen to the rain. *(Pause)*

JOE: It's stopped now.

ELI: Let's get on with it.

JOE: Where were we?

ELI: Looking for Love.

EZRA: God. Tracing a man's life looking for love.

ELI: It's an impossible task.

JOE: Where does it start?

EZRA: It starts in childhood with Mom and Dad.

ELI: There's the question there for me.

JOE: Keep it simple, keep it brief.

ELI: She taught me to read and write when I was four. I saw the newsreels from Germany in '45.

JOE: And Dad?

ELI: He fell off a building and broke his head when he was nine. He tried. He tried his best. Never grew up. Played with his daughters like a child.

JOE: I see.

ELI: He was nine years old in his broken mind.

EZEA: Forgiveness?

ELI: No, not my sisters. They took it with them for the rest of their lives. Me? Maybe my own head will blow up and that will be that. Brains scattered in the wind.

EZRA: Maybe.

ELI: Where are you now?

EZRA: Me, I'm standing in the door taking torrents of abuse: *It's because you're weak. You're weak and needy and you're a mark. People will look at you and smile and insult you and you'll smile, and you'll cough, and they'll insult you again and you'll smile and bow your head, knees weak, and thank your lucky stars you get to live on.*

ELI: Thanks a lot.

JOE: Rose. What happened to Rose?

EZRA: Rose. I think she loved me in a way. I think it was the absence of love that was love.

JOE: I don't get it.

ELI: It's absurd.

EZRA: You know – safe. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. It's a fantasy world – she'd burn to the touch.

ELI: Whoa.

EZRA: Her skin would vibrate like a tuning fork.

ELI: My goodness.

EZRA: I don't know how else to say it. It's not sayable or understandable.

ELI: It's incredibly stupid. We'll both burn up in the flames. Heads blown off. Which leaves me alone because I've always been alone from infancy on.

JOE: You said that already.

EZRA: Everybody is alone.

JOE: Two out of three gave you the boot.

EZRA: True.

JOE: Why?

EZRA: I don't know why.

ELI: Come on.

EZRA: First, I was heading for the hipster life. Academia did not charm me. I was into Blake and Byron and Hart Crane. Mystical Americana. Then I thought I should get laid more often. Nancy. Slipped away in the night. She liked my body more than me. And then there was Lillian and then there was Rose. And many others in between.

JOE: You've had your share of love, my friend.

EZRA: Rose. A pretty little Jewish grandma of a woman. Talks a lot. Irritations of the day, bafflement, moodiness. A lovely feature for me – the exuberant talking, so typical, touched something in me, a deep recognition. As though I'd found something that I had lost. A quality dear to me that was lost. Sounds of the joy of living, that Valley Girl sound. We'd flirted, off and on, for many years. And now we're elderly, but the passion is still there. Then one night we're sitting across from one another at a meeting, and I couldn't look up. I

was shy, afraid of meeting her gaze – I was in love, like a teenager. And so was she. The feeling was mutual. And now it could only end in tragedy. Something must happen -- Acceptance or refusal, or, worst of all, a pretense that nothing had ever occurred between us. A turning away. A connection never made.

JOE: What would it be?

EZRA: The dangerous expression of physical love from which there is no turning back.

ELI: So true.

JOE: Continue.

EZRA: No.

ELI: Come on.

EZRA: Engulphed by the wave. Lost in the deep. Desire. I know who she is. I know her ancestry, how she thinks and feels, how she tastes and smells, her sensitivities and fears.

JOE: And so?

EZRA: I don't know.

ELI: Fantasy and delusion.

EZRA: No.

ELI: You will have sex and wake up and the shit will have hit the fan.

EZRA: It'll be worth it.

JOE: You think?

EZRA: I do, it's more life, more joy, life, it is life, despite the ancient morality of it all. The ethics and the manners and the laws.

JOE: Good luck, Ezra.

EZRA: Thank you.

ELI: It'll be his downfall for sure.

JOE: Not necessarily.

EZRA: If I'd only known.

JOE: Love. More than most.

EZRA: If only.

ELI: No Everyman –

EZRA: And your dad?

ELI: I visited him in prison. One time. He denied everything. Society had it upside down.

EZRA: I would say -- It's me and the sky and the horizon, the distant horizon over the rooftops in Brooklyn. Tell them so they understand – there's no way to win. Not in the Middle East, not Ukraine, not at home against the Fascists. There's no way to win.

JOE: Say it again.

EZRA: There's no way to win.

ELI: We must win. An assassination. A rope. A noose. Machine guns. Poison.

EZRA: And remember the women. Don't confuse the two – Lillian and Rose.

JOE: No love lost, neither one.

EZRA: Love lost. That's the story. I remain in love with Rose.

JOE: End of a life.

ELI: Regrets?

EZRA: No regrets.

JOE: Think of Beckett and Arthur Rimbaud.

ELI: Why?

JOE: I forget why.

EZRA: Don't think anything.

JOE: Moral courage is why.

EZRA: Stop right there. Here's the thing. I'm not the only one. People have checked out. Hung themselves. Jumped out of hotel windows. I've told the story many times about the survivors I waited on as a teenager, how silent and still they were. Thing is, they were

nearly dead. They were dead inside. Life had no meaning. What meaning could it possibly have?

JOE: Suffering servants –

EZRA: So might Martin Buber say -- intentional suffering for God and the Jewish people. The Covenant.

ELI: I don't think so.

EZRA: You think too much.

JOE: I just want to say right here -- You don't know what you'll do when the shit hits the fan and they are coming for you -- the knock on the door, the gun at your head, the noose around your neck. It's not quite a movie anymore.

ELI: I had a pause. I'm not mentally ill. I can't trust myself -- and I certainly don't trust mankind. They'll do anything -- murder, avarice, envy, madness. People want to survive, and they will do anything. Tell them to kill their prisoners, and it's done. Bingo. Kill masses of innocent people. Bingo. Berate them three times that the earth is flat, and they'll believe the earth is flat and cracked down the middle for the Atlantic Ocean.

JOE: Dumb and credulous. What can we do?

EZRA: I've had many lives and I've had enough. The stupidity and murderous self-love. 70 million people voting for an insane con, a creepy thug. Americana. I've had enough. But I still love Rose. I feel like a teenager, saying that.

JOE: What should we do, Ezra?

EZRA: Hang me in the morning. With Joe. Invite an audience. Champagne for all. And charge admission. Might as well make a buck.

ELI: Well. Remembering, that's the thing. Terror and vomiting as he purges his soul over the city of angels, a sea of light shining below, drums booming in the night, stars hissing in the night. He saw his life hanging in the sky-- the hanging man. Luminous in the black sky.

JOE: A golden rope.

ELI: Upside down. The drums roaring, his body shaking, the stars hissing, a warrior in the sky hanging upside down, a golden arrow through his chest.

Hanging Man.

Blackout.

Murray Mednick
5/25/24