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**A JEW ON ETHIOPIA STREET**

by

Allan Havis

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DRAFT - APRIL 1, 2001

## CHARACTERS

EZRA SHLOMO . . . Ethiopian born, 40s, Israeli Absorption Center Official

SONYA GELMAN . . Russian born, 40s, Israeli Absorption Center Official

ETI SHLOMO . . . Ethiopian born, 18, athlete, in Israel 4 years.

HESHI LEBOWITZ . . Ashkanazie Jew, 60s, diamond cutter and merchant.

FISHMAN . . . . . American sports czar, 50s, with Israeli residency.

RONIT MELKAV . . Israeli university official, 40s, friendly with Fishman.

DELAL SHLOMO . . . Eti's mother, Ethiopian, 40s, not assimilated to Israel.

SHEVA ADDA . . . Eti's girlfriend, Ethiopian, 17, still in high school

THE PLAY IS SET IN JERUSALEM, FROM JANUARY TO MARCH 1996.  
THERE ARE 20 SCENES. FOLK AND CONTEMPORARY ETHIOPIAN  
MUSIC IS HEARD BETWEEN SCENES, FEATURING SOME MUSIC  
SUNG BY SHEVA IN DESIGNATED SCENES AND AS SEGUE-WAYS.

SCENE ONE:  
(SHEVA, IN A SIMPLE RED DRESS  
AND MICROPHONE IN HAND,  
FINISHES A ROMANTIC SONG. THERE  
IS WARM  
APPLAUSE. MID-JANUARY 1996)

SHEVA

That song is dedicated to my lovely angel, Eti.  
(SPOT FADES AS SHE BLOWS A KISS OUT TO THE AUDIENCE)

SCENE TWO  
(A GOVERNMENT SPONSORED PARTY  
IN JERUSALEM AT THE HOTEL KING  
DAVID. APPLAUSE FROM SCENE ONE  
DOVE-TAILS INTO THIS SCENE.  
SHEVA'S SINGING IS HEARD EVER  
SO FAINTLY.)

EZRA

I'm working on my English.

SONYA

Be my guest.

EZRA

This is a banquet that spares no expense.

SONYA

It most certainly is.

EZRA

And so many well dressed Americans here. The food is very good.

SONYA

But of course.

EZRA

Except for the egg rolls. Nearly fossilized. 4Who the hell ordered egg rolls?  
(SONYA LAUGHS)

What's the occasion?

SONYA

A circumcision for a late arrival?

EZRA

Circumcision, yes. Your English is far better than your Hebrew.

SONYA

Bullshit.

EZRA

I adore you, dear Sonya Gelman. Russia's foremost linguist. You link the great  
incontinents together.

SONYA

Continents.

EZRA

These strange words simply fall off your beautiful tongue.

SONYA

An adopted language has profound . . .

EZRA/SONYA  
Misery. Mystery

SONYA

Your English is as bad as . . .

EZRA

My Hebrew?

(PAUSE)

Look at the beautiful flowers.

SONYA

Colors of the rainbow.

EZRA

You can smell air conditioned Paradise. Shut your pretty eyes please.

SONYA

I never shut my eyes, Ezra, in the company of unmarried men. I am not a fool.

EZRA

(SHUTS HIS EYES) 5  
I am. My heart is full.

SONYA  
And my stomach is empty.

EZRA  
The Jerusalem cooks put hummus into nearly every dish. What is the meaning of this?

SONYA  
An absurd abundance of Garbanzo beans. Wretched gas for the Greenhouse Effect.  
You'll find half the new buildings use hummus due to the cement shortage. Will these  
buildings stand after thirty years?

EZRA  
Undoubtedly, I won't. Weak prostate.

SONYA  
Quit drinking before noon.  
(HE WINCES)  
Did you give blood this week?

EZRA  
I didn't.

SONYA  
The country's seriously low.

EZRA  
Well, I have a low platelet count.

SONYA  
I gave two pints. A successful blood drive.

EZRA  
Mazel tov. I drink two pints.

SONYA  
You're putting on weight, my old man.

EZRA  
Yes, well, martinis with lunch improves my memory. Are you expecting the filthy rich  
American talent scout?

SONYA  
Which filthy rich American scout?

EZRA

Fishman, the sports czar. Sharansky's pal. He's recruiting for his spanking new soccer team.

SONYA

Don't screw with me, darling. Americans don't play soccer.

EZRA

Now they do. Don't you read Newsweek?

(PAUSE)

You just won't tell me, Sonya. We are terrible friends.

SONYA

We are not terrible friends.

EZRA

What the hell are we then?

SONYA

Political refugees that shared a corner hotel room once.

(EZRA LAUGHS DESPITE HIMSELF)

I was too clumsy, yes?

EZRA

Where is your charismatic husband?

SONYA

I don't know.

EZRA

Still married to this jerk?

SONYA

No. Yes. Somewhere in between.

EZRA

You know I'm working on another project.

SONYA

I know.

EZRA

You don't approve?

SONYA

The next group flying in is not Jewish, Ezra. I read the e-mail.

EZRA

Whose e-mail? 7

I can't say. SONYA

It's true, yes. This is a humanitarian effort. EZRA

This is crap. SONYA

Well . . . EZRA

Something you want? SONYA

Are you asking or telling me? EZRA

I'm asking you. SONYA

You know my answer. EZRA

You're a very complex person. SONYA

Is it my cologne? EZRA

No. SONYA

My loud reputation? EZRA

What reputation? SONYA

A desert Ethiopian from my ass to my elbows. The Jewish Lawrence of Arabia with fallen arches. EZRA

And I'm the incomparable Queen of Sheba who can kill you with two fingers. SONYA

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EZRA

Kill me in bed, cupcake.

(PAUSE)

Who is this singer?

SONYA

Isn't she one of your girls?

(EZRA NODS HIS HEAD, FEIGNING BEWILDERMENT)

This crop of African immigrants is wildly evangelistic.

EZRA

They're persecuted Jews with crosses stamped on their foreheads.

SONYA

So much for The Law of Return for real Jews.

EZRA

Who the hell is real these days? Madonna studying Jewish Kabbalah?

SONYA

I like Madonna.

EZRA

And for years Sammy Davis thought he was a New York Jew trapped in Las Vegas.

SONYA

The Falas Mura have no intention of converting.

EZRA

Open your heart. Give them time in Absorption. They are my cousins.

SONYA

Darling, your "cousins" love Jesus and will go around knocking on everyone's damn door.

EZRA

(DISTRACTED)

Oh Christ, Ariel Sharon is walking in. Fat as ever. Atilla the Jew.

SONYA

Where is your new money coming from?

EZRA

(ATTENTION RETURNS)

What?



SONYA  
The new, clean money. The countable money. Your LEGAL money.

EZRA  
United Jewish Appeal and the arrogant Canadian Jew who runs the Seagram Corporation.

SONYA  
(SWEETLY)  
I don't believe you.

EZRA  
What? You think the government is throwing shekels at us?

SONYA  
When you lie, Ezra, you're eyebrows knit a little twisted X right here.  
(TOUCHES HIM)  
I need your full support with the Knesset vote.

EZRA  
Your happy Russians have enough duty-free vodka until the Messiah, Sonya. One third of the men are drunk and another third are in an illegal racket. Our problems are not equal.  
SONYA  
Government funds were earmarked for Russian Jews.

EZRA  
Where's Sharansky? I want to talk to Sharansky, damnit.

SONYA  
(PERSISTENT)  
And you have Barbara Steisand performing a Tel Aviv benefit for the Falasha.

EZRA  
We don't call ourselves Falasha, Sonya.

SONYA  
Who will sing for the cold refugees from Minsk?

EZRA  
Neil Diamond.

SONYA  
What are you going to say to Sharansky?

EZRA  
I'll ask the Minister if he's been to Ethiopia's capital - Addis Ababa. But we know the answer - TENASTYLLIN. SALAM. INDEMINA? DANA.  
(SARDONIC)

“Hello. Shalom. How are you? I’m just 10wonderful, thanks.”

SONYA

He’ll say, “Falas Mura. Christian inside and out”.

EZRA

What makes this wounded Ethiopian tribe the enemy of Israel?

SONYA

For one, you can’t have a nation of false Jews.

EZRA

Some would say we already have that.

SONYA

This is too small a country and every immigrant Jew is struggling.

(PAUSE)

Ezra, there can be no more airlifts. Wake up! You’re monopolizing all the vacant shelters.

EZRA

Last month you said you would lend support. Are these mood swings?

SONYA

(DEMURELY)

I changed my mind after a talk with the Prime Minister. If you engineer an airlift without his blessings, you embarrass everyone and I’ll catch hell from my Russian refugees.

EZRA

Your people can’t blame you.

SONYA

My job will be a thousand times harder. Work with these limitations. Just like sweet Moses.

EZRA

Moses was black.

SONYA

You have a photograph maybe?

EZRA

Yes, in my wallet. You never know.

SONYA

Spectacular.

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EZRA

The color of a Jew's skin is that of God's heart.

(FAINT APPLAUSE AFTER A SONG)

But unfortunately God has no color.

SONYA

Or no heart?

END OF SCENE

SCENE THREE  
(JERUSALEM DIAMOND CUTTING  
STORE, BACK ROOM. MID-  
JANUARY)

HESHI

Wash your hands.

ETI

I did.

HESHI

Show me.

(ETI DOES)

Sit down. Not there, over here.

(ETI FINDS THE SECOND CHAIR AND SITS).

We have two hours. OK?

ETI

(RESPECTFUL AND PLAYFUL)

OK, boss.

HESHI

Don't call me that.

ETI

(SMILING GENEROUSLY) 12

Mr. Heshi? Hello, Mr. Heshi?

(SINGS A LITTLE DITTY)

“He gives me diamonds, he gives me pearls.

He gives me felafel, he likes my curls.

Mister mister mister mister mister Heshi!”

HESHI

No singing.

(ETI CONTINUES HUMMING)

And don't call me Heshi. Mr. Lebowitz. Say it, Eti.

ETI

Mr. Heshi is sweeter.

HESHI

I make you my student.

ETI

It is my honor.

HESHI

I know you have brains and some gifts.

ETI

(WITH WARM MISCHIEF)

I'm a singer. I'm a lover. That you know.

HESHI

(LAUGHS IN SPITE OF HIMSELF)

I'll bet. Time will tell. And comes to you. All in good time. And so will the young girls. You have good looks, boychik. Clean ebony skin, sharp eyes and graceful hands.

ETI

Thank you. I like your beard. So teach me.

HESHI

A diamond will always seek a Jew. And a Jew will always find a diamond. The first law of science. When a Jew is forced from a country, he takes what he can carry. A fistful of diamonds. For he cannot take his house, his cattle, his furniture or even his bank account. A fistful of diamonds, Eti. Nothing more.

ETI

My brothers and I came with a bag of clothes. We left a wood hut and five goats.

HESHI

I'm sorry for you and your family.

(SOFTLY)  
Are you a pious Jew like me?

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I am, sir. And I fear God like you.

ETI

You pray in the morning and in the evening?

HESHI

I do. In my own way.  
(HUMS A MELODY AGAIN)

ETI

Maybe you are more pious than me?

HESHI

Only God knows such things.

ETI

(DRYLY AMUSED)  
God knows us better than we know ourselves. You make me laugh inside.  
(PAUSE)  
There are the four “C’s to each diamond. Clarity. Color. Cut.

HESHI

Coupon?

ETI

And Carat. There is a rating system. Color can go from “D” to “G, H, I, J” all the way to “Z”. Most appraisers will agree on set principles. And, of course, most jewelers are shrewd to sell diamonds which fool the public. I am not one of them. I am Mr. Honesty. Do you understand that?

HESHI

Yes, I do, Mr. Honesty Lebowitz.

ETI

I’m not a crazy man.

HESHI

No, sir, not crazy at all.

ETI

We live to make some profit, or we drop dead. You would die in Ethiopia. You will thrive in Jerusalem.  
(PAUSE)

HESHI

This is why you must know your alphabet. 14What town are you from?

ETI

Addis Ababa. The capital.

HESHI

Your sponsor told me it was Quara.

ETI

Yes, Quara is the outskirts of the Addis Ababa.

HESHI

Five hundred miles on the outskirts? You still have family there?

ETI

(FLUSTERED)

No.

HESHI

I know more than you think I know.

ETI

People in Quara are very unlucky. Many never made it on the list to go.

HESHI

How did you get on the list?

ETI

I don't know, sir.

HESHI

Your father paid someone.

ETI

No.

HESHI

That's how it goes, Eti.

ETI

Sir.

HESHI

Someone got paid.

ETI

Maybe. I was younger then. It wasn't easy to leave the land.

HESHI

But you'll never return to Ethiopia.

ETI

I don't want my family to suffer.

HESHI

I understand.

ETI

I don't know if God hears my prayers.

HESHI

God does. My brother's wife is from Yemen.

ETI

Yemen is not Ethiopia.

HESHI

Shaaa! She's not as dark as you. But your smile is nicer. I don't know why he married her. I don't know why she married him. A rocky marriage. She will never return to Yemen. Her life hangs on a thread. Those are her words.

(PAUSE)

You will learn how to polish my cheaper diamonds, Eti. That is all you will do. Along the way, maybe in a year I will give you other tasks. We'll see. Cutting diamonds is a master art. I am a master. It could make you rich or make you a soul of greed. I fight my own greed. I am not a perfect man.

(PAUSE)

And you are not perfect. I'll watch you like a hawk. I can see with an eye behind my head. That's right. I have a small insurance policy and two hand guns. I carry one. I hide the other. And I can be more avenging than the Almighty. No matter what favor I owe you.

(PAUSE)

When my wife comes to the store, you must ignore her. I do. Make no exceptions.

ETI

Yes, Mr. Lebowitz.

HESHI

When she offers you her rancid food or some deadly bricks that she baked, just smile and say "no thank you, Mrs. Lebowitz." Hunger has its limits. Eat your meals at home. My wife has other virtues.

(PAUSE)

And when you marry, pick a woman who complains less than her mother and who will not imitate your own mother. I say this to be charitable. OK?

ETI

OK.

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HESHI

You have a girlfriend?

ETI

I did.

HESHI

Oh?

ETI

She trashed me. She's a club singer.

HESHI

A club singer? Who needs aggravation? Better to be free, boychik. You can dance with another pretty girl now.

(PAUSE)

The phone machine is on. We won't be disturbed. Why do you blink so much?

ETI

An illness five years ago.

HESHI

Close your eye. Now look at my finger.

(PAUSE)

That eye is a lazy eye.

ETI

I know, sir.

HESHI

(FLASHING A FINGER IN FRONT OF THAT EYE)

Not blind in that eye?

ETI

I can see everything from both eyes in good light..

HESHI

(SENSING THE LIE, UNDER HIS BREATH)

Oy . . . vey iz meir! I know about the Falas Mura.

ETI

I'm not Falas Mura. I am all Jewish, only Jewish. Not one finger is Jesus.

HESHI

Never say that name inside my shop. OK?



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ETI

OK.

HESHI

Kiss the Mezuzah on the door when you enter and when you leave.

(PAUSE. PRONOUNCING 'POLISH' LIKE THE NATION)

It's time to polish.

ETI

(ECHOING HESHI)

Polish.

HESHI

(NO REAL DISTINCTION AS HESHI SAYS THE WORD)

Not Pole-ish. Poll-ish.

ETI

(ECHOING AGAIN)

Polish. Thank you.

HESHI

For what?

ETI

For helping.

HESHI

I'm a businessman. I'll profit by your labor.

ETI

Before my father died, he told me what he wanted. A fair chance at success.

HESHI

I see.

ETI

And my mother echoed my father.

HESHI

Where is she?

ETI

(LYING)

In Quara. But the Jewish Agency has her file. That will take forever.

HESHI

Still, you don't want to be an orphan in 18Jerusalem.

(ETI SHAKES HIS HEAD YES)

God willing.

ETI

I need to find a living angel. This is a fact, Mr. Lebowitz. I want success denied to my father. If not in the sports stadium, then in the diamond district. I will pole-ish your stones.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FOUR

(RESTAURANT. JANUARY)

EZRA

A lovely meal.

FISHMAN

(PICKS UP THE CHECK)

No, I insist. It was my invitation.

EZRA

Thank you.

FISHMAN

Can I drive you somewhere?

EZRA

Paris?

(SMILES)

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FISHMAN

If your nephew is all that you say he is, I'll owe you big time.

EZRA

He's a bolt of lightning, as fast as Ethiopia's Olympic Deratu Tulu.

FISHMAN

Ezra, you must be very proud of him.

EZRA

(NODDING)

I must thank Ronit Melkav at the university for arranging this.

FISHMAN

I've been on the prowl for some time. Israelis love to cash in on professional sports. Why is he so hard to find?

EZRA

Eti's restless. After army service, college didn't agree with him. Some days he loves to play sports. Other days he's depressed. Ongoing struggles with his mother. As I said over the phone, I'll help recruit him every step to a secure contract.

FISHMAN

And, of course, you'll earn a nice bonus once he signs.

EZRA

Skip that, Mr. Fishman, and do something special.

FISHMAN

I give every year to the Jewish Agency.

EZRA

Splendid. But I'm involved in a dear mission involving the last airlifts.

FISHMAN

I know.

EZRA

(INSISTENT)

No, you don't know. There are thousands of bereft Ethiopians with Jewish blood in their veins.

FISHMAN

I see.

EZRA

You don't have to pay me a thing and you don't need to overpay my nephew. Instead, direct your generosity towards the last Ethiopians - the Falas Mura.

FISHMAN

How much?

EZRA

As much as you can afford and I want you to use your good graces with the Prime Minister's cabinet.

FISHMAN

Ezra . . .

EZRA

I know how influential you are. You helped pay the way for Minister Sharansky to leave Russia.

FISHMAN

You're way off base. Besides, I can only support bona fide Jews. Not the bottom of the barrel. You know there can be no more airlifts. The last official migration ended with Operation Solomon.

EZRA

Many of Israel's renowned operations were unofficial.

FISHMAN

(SARCASTIC)  
Really?

EZRA

Let me relate a story about Solomon and the Queen of Sheba.

FISHMAN

(GLANCES AT WATCH)  
I'm running late.

EZRA

Sit, my friend.

(REACHES FOR FISHMAN'S ARM)  
King Solomon needed Sheba's trade routes while she craved his Mediterranean seaports. He fell deeply in love and agreed to give her a child. That child became . . .

FISHMAN

(IMPATIENT)  
Your blessed Falasha.

EZRA

The celebrated lost tribe of Israel.

FISHMAN

The black Jew on Ethiopia Street.

EZRA

And Solomon heard a bird say that Sheba worshiped the sun. So he sent a message: "There is but one God invisible." Sheba came to his court to argue but the King's angels warned him that the Queen had animal legs under her gown.

FISHMAN

I've known many women with such legs.  
(RISING)

EZRA

Solomon's engineers built a glass floor, but he was reluctant to look up.

FISHMAN

Just find me your nephew, OK?

EZRA

In this instance, don't be like Solomon, Mr. Fishman.  
(REACHES TO SHAKE FISHMAN'S HAND)

FISHMAN

I respect you Ezra. We worship the same God, but you're gambling heavily on these Ethiopians who don't even know three things about Judaism. I'll try to do what I can when the time arrives.

EZRA

Thank you.

FISHMAN

(BREAKING FROM HIS GRASP)  
I really have to be going.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FIVE  
(ETHIOPIAN APARTMENT COMPLEX  
JUST OUTSIDE OF JERUSALEM.  
MID-JANUARY. RONIT  
TRANSLATES  
SEVERAL HEBREW PHRASES)

RONIT

Ish hasakim hashir mamerica (yes, this is the wealthy business man from America).

DELAL

(BLUNTLY)  
Hanaliem shalo mahoarot. Haim hoo sohan mmshti?

She says your shoes are ugly.

RONIT

I like my shoes.

FISHMAN

She thinks you're a government agent.

RONIT

(LAUGHING)  
No, I'm not a government spy.

FISHMAN

You are.

DELAL

You don't need me. Delal can speak to you directly.

RONIT

My dear woman . . . I make too much money to be a spy. Tell her, Ronit.

FISHMAN

Mr. Fishman is a private citizen from the United States.

RONIT

I also have a delightful home in Tel Aviv.

FISHMAN

Homes in several countries.

RONIT

What do you want?

DELAL

To make your family happy and wealthy.

FISHMAN

You look ill, Delal. Are you all right? Atha margish tov?

RONIT

I have a fever.

DELAL

Mr. Fishman, another time would be better.

RONIT

FISHMAN

I'll miss my plane. Ezra promised.

DELAL

What do you want? My husband's dead.

FISHMAN

Delal, I love the old Ethiopia Street. No place like it in all of Jerusalem. That beautiful Coptic church. So much history. I believe in the expanding Ethiopian Jewish community. And I am absolutely stunned by the physical talents of Ethiopia's golden children. Israel is stronger because you are here.

RONIT

Hoo maariss at hakehila hatiopit vomer Israel hazaka ki atem kan (he admires the Ethiopian community and says Israel is stronger because you are here).

FISHMAN

I'm also a good friend of your brother-in-law Ezra.

RONIT

Hoo haver tov shel hagiss shelha (he is a good friend of your brother-in-law).

DELAL

Ezra has too many friends.

FISHMAN

Yes, well, he told me to seek out your extremely gifted young son.

DELAL

Which one?

FISHMAN

Your youngest and brightest. The runner. The amazing athlete.

RONIT

Delal, he wants your Eti - for professional sports in America.

DELAL

Eti?

RONIT

Ze hakasef bbank. This is money in the bank.

FISHMAN

A lot of money, Delal, and a world of prestige. Where is your boy?

DELAL

He left the army.



FISHMAN

I know that, dear. That was many many months ago.

DELAL

He hates the army. He cannot kill. He is pious Jew.

RONIT

Do you want him to go back to college?

DELAL

Yes. And married.

RONIT

Mr. Fishman respects a college education.

DELAL

Where is my brother-in-law?

FISHMAN

Ezra left the country for a few days. He went to Ethiopia. Addis Ababa.

DELAL

I want my son to marry. All my children are married.

RONIT

Where is Eti?

DELAL

With his wild girl friend.

FISHMAN

(TO RONIT)

I spoke with the girl. She sings in small night clubs. They had a fight.

RONIT

A bad fight?

FISHMAN

The police came.

(BOTH THREW A LOOK AT DELAL)

DELAL

Rak lo meshtara (God forbid not the police). The police don't want Eti. No, no, he is good son. Will visit before Passover.

RONIT

She doesn't know his whereabouts.

FISHMAN

I see.

(DELAL WANDERS OFF)

Thank you, Delal.

(QUIET, WRY VOICE TO RONIT)

Do we wait until Passover for him?

RONIT

He'll turn up in the neighborhood. Give it a week. I'll get this all arranged.

FISHMAN

I like your motivation, Ronit.

RONIT

My brother runs an absorption center. It's abysmal. No hot water. Holes in the roof.

FISHMAN

A shame. I'm good for a big pledge. I'll call your brother.

RONIT

We'll probably find the boy as soon as you write the check.

FISHMAN

Everyone along this chain wants a check.

RONIT

That's the definition of Jewish enterprise, Mr. Fishman. We'll find him before Sunday.

FISHMAN

Do you feel that lucky?

RONIT

I had a good dialogue with Eti while he was on my campus.

FISHMAN

Do you always court wealthy Americans for your campus fund drive?

(FISHMAN EXAGGERATES A SMILE. PAUSE)

Is he an observant Jew?

RONIT

You saw the Star of David on Delal's bureau. Is it an issue?

FISHMAN

The press calls Falas Mura many awful names. He might be here illegally.

RONIT

Falasha and Falas Mura are equally misunderstood. If you're persecuted by gentiles in the Diaspora, you might as well be a Jew.

FISHMAN

My cousin works under the Prime Minister. In unofficial cabinet meetings some call them - Sheba's little bastards.

RONIT

Name calling is a modern evil

FISHMAN

Indeed.

(PAUSE)

I'll give you three days to find the boy.

END OF SCENE

SCENE SIX  
(A JERUSALEM STREET CAFÉ)  
MID-JANUARY)

SHEVA

You're late.

ETI

I know.

SHEVA

But you're not sorry.

ETI

I'm sorry, Sheva.

SHEVA

You could have called.

ETI

I hate the phone.

SHEVA

That's wonderful.

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You sing here tonight. ETI

Every Wednesday. With my crazy band. SHEVA

Are you hungry? ETI

A little. SHEVA

I'm starved. ETI

Where were you? SHEVA

Kept late at the diamond shop. ETI

He gave you work? SHEVA

Yeah. ETI

I don't believe it. SHEVA

Because he's Ashkanazim? ETI

That's right. SHEVA

I saved his life last month. ETI

What? SHEVA

I walked into a robbery in Old Jerusalem. Late at night. I chased the thief away. ETI  
Lebowitz owns my cousins' building. Charges them like it's a five star hotel.

SHEVA

So Lebowitz's letting you sweep the floor?

ETI

I'm apprenticing.

SHEVA

He asked if you were circumcised?

ETI

Not yet.

SHEVA

(LAUGHS AND POKES HIM BELOW THE BELT)

He will. And then check you with a jeweler's lens. These puffed up European Jews!

(PAUSE)

Stupid, Eti. My beautiful, lovely boy. Track star and village idiot. You wear two crowns and you quit school for this honor?

ETI

I missed too many classes.

(PAUSE)

Why are you so angry?

SHEVA

Because I want something.

ETI

What?

SHEVA

I want to run away.

ETI

Where?

SHEVA

Anywhere from Israel with a resort hotel and dance floor.

ETI

Inside you're not Jewish.

SHEVA

More Jewish than you. And more pious.

ETI

Prove it.

SHEVA

I know how to shop for bargains and how to talk to God.  
(SNEAKS A KISS)

ETI

I have important things to do.

SHEVA

So you can't run away today with me?

ETI

I have no money.

SHEVA

You have the fastest feet in Jerusalem. That's better than gold.

ETI

And you have the fastest mouth.

SHEVA

If not the fastest, at least the prettiest.

(PAUSE)

An American clown was looking for you yesterday. Expensive clothes, gold bracelet.  
And a red nose.

ETI

He came to you?

SHEVA

Everyone comes to me. I'm a lounge act in a skinny dress. Exotic singer for hire.

(PAUSE)

I said nothing.

ETI

What did he want?

SHEVA

Your goddamn legs. His name is Fishman and he wants to sign a contract.

ETI

You're lying.

SHEVA

Why would I lie, Eti? He gave me his business card.

(PRODUCING THE CARD)

He was with Ronit Melkav, from the university. Is that the woman that kicked you out?

ETI

No, Ronit helped me with medical excuses.

SHEVA

Let's run away.

ETI

(GRABS THE CARD PLAYFULLY)  
No, I have to call him! This is my ticket.

SHEVA

Don't grab. Bad manners.

ETI

Thanks, Sheva.

SHEVA

Say it from your heart.

ETI

I thank you for everything good.

SHEVA

Are you tomorrow's soccer star?

ETI

I could be.

SHEVA

Or our next Olympic runner? And so tough on your poor mother.

(PAUSE)  
The Russian boys from the projects are still following me.

ETI

Don't walk by their street.

SHEVA

They know where I live.

ETI

It's the way you dress.

SHEVA

(TEASING)  
Or the way I walk? Maybe they come to the club to hear me sing. I can't stop that, but I feel eyes on my back in the alleys.

(PAUSE)  
We both want success yet you're . . .

I'm not afraid of anything.

ETI

You're afraid of me.  
(KISSES HIM AS HE FLINCHES)  
Afraid of army service. Afraid of doctor exams.

SHEVA

I gave to the blood drive.

ETI

Did it hurt?

SHEVA

No. Two minutes with an ugly nurse.

ETI

I'll donate this week. At my school you get a free movie pass or pair of sunglasses.

SHEVA

(TEASING)  
So you don't want to run away today?

ETI

I do with your money. We could get to Greece in a day.

SHEVA

Greece?

ETI

You want to fight over Greece?

SHEVA

When we fight, you call the police.

ETI

Then we should never fight about Greece.

SHEVA

Why do you stay with me, Sheva? I have no money now.

ETI

I like the way you kiss. And you'll be rich and famous one day.

SHEVA

ETI



Which reason is more important?  
(SHEVA SMILES)

SHEVA

Kissing is always more important.  
(IN A LOW VOICE, SHE STARTS TO SING A SONG WHILE  
CARESSING HIS FACE)

END OF SCENE

SCENE SEVEN  
(RONIT'S COLLEGE OFFICE.  
MID-JANUARY)

EZRA

I was curious about this semester's testing.

RONIT

The results look promising.

EZRA

And the Ethiopian students?

RONIT

You worry too much.

EZRA

My only pleasure in life, Ronit.

RONIT

Funding will continue for each Ethiopian student.

EZRA

I don't want to see all these kids turn into farm laborers.

RONIT

Some will, despite college.

EZRA

How long have you worked at this college?

RONIT

(SARCASM)

Sixty years. I've seen "generations" of Ethiopians. Beginning with Operation Moses '84 airlift.

EZRA

You directed more funds to the Ethiopian students.

RONIT

Only angels do such stunts.

EZRA

And you've been very good to my nephew.

RONIT

I like Eti. He has the makings of a great athlete. I have a good hunch about him. And I know Fishman's money and connections are good.

EZRA

Let's hope so.

RONIT

I heard a rumor about a secret airlift . . . the end of April.

EZRA

I can't comment, Ronit.

(SHE GLARES AT HIM)

Is it a mistake to have 20,000 additional Ethiopians drop out of the sky?

RONIT

Certainly a remarkable image, Ezra.

EZRA

Do you know how many Ethiopians are in the Knesset?

RONIT

One?

EZRA

While there are three elected Israeli Arabs in the Knesset.

RONIT

As with anything political, you start with one.

EZRA

Ronit, what would you do if you sat on the hat of the Chief Rabbinate?

RONIT

I would die of shame.

EZRA

And I would laugh. The airlift is scheduled for two weeks. It can't wait until April. Cargo planes are hard to hijack. No one knows the timetable. Not even the Ministry. I got to get to Sharanksy.

RONIT

You were one of the first Ethiopian officers in the Air Force. Certainly you have some clout.

EZRA

An intimate connection is needed.

RONIT

You're the mastermind behind this airlift, aren't you?

EZRA

(COVERING POORLY)

No.

RONIT

(RONIT SMILES SADLY)

If you bring more black Christians, you only hurt black Jews already settled.

EZRA

They share the same ancestry. We can prove it.

RONIT

DNA? Photos? Shared memories of massacres?

EZRA

Rally the college for me.

RONIT

And then a Nobel Peace Prize?

EZRA

After this last airlift, I just want to pass a kidney stone.

RONIT

Passing a kidney stone is easier. Get some sleep, Ezra. You look exhausted.

EZRA

Do I?

(PAUSE)

What's really happening with Eti?

RONIT

Your nephew had too many absences. He has some eye trouble. It was his decision to leave.

EZRA

You do keep tabs on him, Ronit?

RONIT

(HANDS HIS A SCRAP OF PAPER)

You might find him with his girlfriend. She's a handful for the entire Israeli army.

END OF SCENE

SCENE EIGHT

(DELAL'S HOME. FEBRUARY)

SHEVA

I made him come back. Eti doesn't trust any woman. Always testing me, Mrs. Shlomo. He wants us to get married but he won't say when. What's a girl to do? Wait for Santa Claus?

Eti's working for a fat white diamond merchant? Look at him. Silent like a stone. When he talks to my family, he whispers. From his mouth they can't understand anything. But they like his smile. Want him to be my husband. I love him. I made him come back to you. Mend his clothes. I cook for him. Sing to him. I understand him in a deep way. I do.

DELAL

Eti?

ETI

What?

DELAL

Look at your hands.

ETI

What?

DELAL

Wash.

ETI

I brought you some money, Ima.

DELAL

Wash your hands.

ETI

You look sick.

DELAL

Wash your hands.  
(TO SHEVA)  
You too.

ETI

Ima. Not enough goods in the kitchen.

DELAL

I make do.

ETI

We can't stay.

DELAL

Food on the table. Sit and eat.

ETI

Not hungry.

DELAL

(LOOKING AT SHEVA)  
She's hungry. Sit. And eat. I cooked all day.  
(BRING A LARGE BOWL OF WATER TO ETI)  
Where are you living?

ETI

In town.

DELAL

With her?

SHEVA

No. I live with my family. My parents would like to meet you.  
(PAUSE)  
Maybe things will change. Yes?

DELAL  
Sheva.

SHEVA  
What?

DELAL  
You talk too much.

SHEVA  
I can sing for you?

DELAL  
Stop talking.  
(HANDS ETI A TOWEL. ETI PUTS HIS HAND IN THE BOWL  
SHEVA HUMS A MELODY SOFTLY)

ETI  
She has a voice, Ima.

DELAL  
Why a diamond merchant?

ETI  
I like diamonds.

DELAL  
Diamonds bring misery.  
(SHEVA WASHES HANDS AND SITS)

ETI  
I'll get your diamond earrings and rings soon. The food smells good. You should  
open a restaurant. "DELAL'S ETHIOPIA."

DELAL  
Your father says don't work for a diamond merchant..

ETI  
(SWEETLY)  
Father is dead. How can he speak?

DELAL  
He speaks to me.

ETI  
I hear him then.

DELAL

Don't be a stranger to this house. You could stay in school.

ETI

Let's talk about this later.

DELAL

Sit.

(HE SITS)

I go to the doctor's clinic. I learn a little each day. You have to learn very fast here. I can read a face faster than you can a book.

(PAUSE)

When Eti was a boy, he made us laugh. The youngest child has such talent. Now his talent is running because he is running away.

(TO SHEVA)

What does he want to say?

SHEVA

I don't know.

ETI

I think Santa Claus is Jewish. When you fly in a bright red suit, you must be Jewish to survive.

Santa should visit every black Jewish home.

(SHEVA LAUGHS)

My mother is not laughing.

DELAL

(STRAINED SMILE)

No.

ETI

(SWEET TEASING)

Why cry?

DELAL

Your brothers are more sincere.

ETI

You wouldn't like me if I were that sincere, Ima.

(PUTS NAPKIN OVER HIMSELF LIKE AN ARAB  
HEADDRESS AND AFFECTS AN ARAB DIALECT)

"Now I am very sincere. My name is Omar and you get no oil until you kiss me."

(SHEVA LAUGHS. DELAL PULLS THE NAPKIN FROM ETI'S HEAD)

I'm taking all my clothes and things, Ima.

DELAL  
Ask your father.

SHEVA  
Your son will be an Israeli hero. Be rich and smart. The best athlete.

DELAL  
I don't care.

SHEVA  
Tell him that he can do this.

DELAL  
He does not believe with his heart in God.

ETI  
I believe in God.

DELAL  
God doesn't believe you, Eti.

ETI  
God was in my dreams. Told me to go for the American offer so I can buy you a house, Ima.

DELAL  
More a boy than a man, Eti.  
(LONG LOOK AT SHEVA)  
She wants to say something.

ETI  
Sheva said enough.

DELAL  
(BEHIND ETI, HER HANDS ON HIS SHOULDERS)  
Speak.

SHEVA  
I'm pregnant.  
(ETI IS SURPRISED)  
It's true, Eti. I saw a doctor yesterday.

ETI  
(TRYING TO PLACATE HIS MOTHER)  
Ima . . .

SHEVA  
I love your son. Please accept me, Mrs. Shlomo. We have a beautiful future.



(DELAL PICKS UP THE WATER BOWL AND WALKS AWAY SLOWLY)

END OF SCENE

SCENE NINE  
(DIAMOND SHOP. FEBRUARY.  
ETI IS SHOWING HESHI  
PHOTOS FROM HIS COLLEGE  
ATHLETIC RACES )

ETI

I broke the school's record by ten seconds.

HESHI

I see.

ETI

This was in the newspaper last year.

HESHI

(DISTRACTED)

Very nice.

ETI

My coach said I was the fastest in Jerusalem.

HESHI

I have something to ask you.

(STACKS PHOTOS TOGETHER)

This is very awkward, Eti. I'm missing a key to the back room.

ETI

I don't have it, Mr. Lebowitz.

HESHI

You haven't seen keys at all?

ETI

No.

HESHI

Do you think I simply lost it?

ETI

I don't know, Mr. Lebowitz.

HESHI

Do I look like a fool? I like you. You know that.

(PAUSE)

Empty your pockets, Eti.

(SILENCE)

You heard me. Please empty them.

(ETI OBLIGES. SOME COINS, A POCKET KNIFE, ETI'S KEYS)

Put everything on the counter.

(HE DOES SO)

Those are not my keys?

ETI

No.

HESHI

(PICKS UP ETI'S KEYS)

These are not my keys.

ETI

Maybe your wife? I've seen her with keys before, sir.

HESHI

Now I have to change the locks. Eti, there are days when I don't trust you. I don't know why that is. Sometimes it's how fast you move your hands.

ETI

I'm going to be a father, Mr. Lebowitz.

HESHI

(HURT)

We have to trust each other. You showed me your school awards.

ETI

Sports can be just a dream. I'll have a real trade in gems. I don't want to be naive.

HESHI

All Ethiopians are. You give blood and the government throws it in the gutter. How naive is that? Are you going to marry her?

ETI

I have to. It's what I feel each night.

HESHI

Have you asked her? She may turn you down.

ETI

I don't think so.

HESHI

I want to meet her.

ETI

Why?

HESHI

You need my approval for all the things you do.

ETI

She thinks your people look down on us.

HESHI

God knows that's not true. You bring her here tomorrow, Eti.

END OF SCENE

SCENE TEN  
(HOTEL LOBBY. FEBRUARY)

EZRA

Sometimes I feel very strange here. Do you like this hotel?

SONYA

The bidets are brand new.

EZRA

Why did you give up your apartment?

SONYA

My marriage is failing. But you're not coming upstairs tonight, even though you're wearing your lucky jacket.

EZRA

My district is boiling over. All due to the wasted Ethiopian blood.

SONYA

The mayor should be shot.

EZRA

It's not just this city, Sonya.

SONYA

There's fear of an AIDS epidemic.

EZRA

My people were encouraged to give blood. There were signs everywhere. Radios spots. Leaflets. We feel like a leper colony.

SONYA

That doesn't make you want to return to Ethiopia.

(PAUSE)

Don't look at me that way.

EZRA

I found a donor who will finance half of the airlift.

SONYA

Who?

EZRA

I can't say. So now I need a favor from you.

SONYA

(THESE TWO LINES OVERLAP)

You want me to speak to the Ministers.

EZRA

Sharansky, your old Russian pal.

SONYA

Don't press me, Ezra.

EZRA

This is a perfect time. The Prime Minister has to show leniency after this blood scandal. A half fueled cargo plane will force a landing.

SONYA

(KNOWING WHERE THIS IS GOING)

Ezra!

EZRA

(NEXT TWO LINES OVERLAP)

And it should come from you.

SONYA

You're dreaming the impossible.

EZRA

A tribute to Ethiopia Street of yesteryear.

SONYA

You've lost touch with reality.

EZRA

Christians Ethiopians believe the Jews among them are sorcerers and transform at night into hyenas.

SONYA

What if you botch this airlift?

EZRA

I can't think like that.

SONYA

The Cabinet Ministers will ask the same question. Certainly Sharansky will.

EZRA

I know we have a major conflict between our wards. It comes down to housing allocation. Let my people come, Sonya.

SONYA

In my "Yud" neighborhood, Zvi Ben-Ari hired a Swiss pilot to smuggle him out of a Zurich prison to come here. The police do nothing. This Russian doesn't deserve citizenship.

EZRA

I'm only asking for 2000 housing units from your wards.

SONYA

You're really out of your mind! How do you expect me to pacify Russians crowded into two room apartments?

EZRA

Sonya, you could convince Yasir Arafat to shave. Russians have professional skills to adapt. A quarter of them are not even Jewish.

SONYA

I need to think it over.

EZRA

Tell me in the morning.

SONYA

I promise nothing.

EZRA

I understand what intimacy is with you.

SONYA

Ezra. You're impossible!

(PAUSE)

I want to leave Israel. I want to live in a place where I can just take care of myself.

(SHE RISES AND STARES AT HIM)

Are you going to call in the morning?

EZRA

I'm sorry about your marriage.

(HE RISES)

SONYA

No, you're not. It's the furthest thing from your mind.

EZRA

He's a putz. You married a shit. I feel for you. Have dinner with me tonight.

SONYA

Nothing more than dinner.

EZRA

A beautiful smile, Sonya. May I say that?

(SHE SMILES WEAKLY AND HE SQUEEZES HER CHIN)

May I, Sonya, may I?

END OF SCENE

SCENE ELEVEN  
(DELAL'S HOME. FEBRUARY)

ETI

What happens when his doctors examine me?.

DELAL

Trust your uncle.

ETI

But it's my eyes, Ima. The army doctor said things to me.

DELAL

What did he say?

ETI

Retinis pigmentosa. Surgery can't fix everything. When I'm tired I see shadows and color. Close up I see a better. Something could happen to the good eye.

DELAL

I'm sorry, Eti.

ETI

If I lie to others about this, God will know.

DELAL

I will make your decisions for you.

ETI

If I get paid big money to play soccer, demons may come for my eyes.

DELAL

These demons are not from Quara.

ETI

It doesn't matter where they are from.

DELAL

If you ask God to help . . .

ETI

How if I cheat others?

DELAL

Is this why you got this girl pregnant?

ETI

The army doctor said that my eyes are like father's.  
And his eyes failed after the famine.

DELAL

Yes, Eti.

ETI

You insulted God, didn't you Ima?

DELAL

Don't talk like that.

ETI

You blamed God for our misery before we came to Jerusalem. Here our family is not Jewish enough. You think that annoys God. You can't speak Hebrew like the chosen.

DELAL

No.

ETI

And you think God hates that I run faster than the white boys.

DELAL

No.

ETI

Then why do you blame God every time I see you?

DELAL

I do not.

ETI

You blame me for being an athlete.

DELAL

Why fool around with Sheva girl?

ETI

She's no girl.

DELAL



I see no modesty.

ETI

You dropped father in Quara like old luggage.

DELAL

(SLAPS HIM)

How dare you . . .

ETI

It's true.

DELAL

He was too sick to travel, Eti.

ETI

I don't believe that.

DELAL

Your brothers know its true. Ask your uncle.

ETI

I will. I'm sorry for saying ugly things.

DELAL

You were my favorite son. When you hurt me, you hurt yourself.

(ETI NODS HUMBLLY)

ETI

I sign this contract and our lives will change.

DELAL

We will see. You work with diamonds now. That has some future, even if you have to wear thick glasses.

ETI

You are a diamond, Ima.

(Pause)

I have to marry Sheva.

DELAL

She is less Jewish than this family. Don't lie.

ETI

So?

DELAL

Does she have Israeli papers?

ETI

Her grandparents were Jewish. Sometimes she wears a Jewish star.

DELAL

Kosher food? Do they work on Saturday? Is there a cross in her home?

ETI

No.

(SHE THROWS HIM A LOOK)

Maybe one or two.

DELAL

You're an observing Jew.

ETI

They know.

DELAL

Your father would stop dead in his tracks.

ETI

We will never know. That makes me very sad.

(A KNOCK AT THE DOOR)

DELAL

Sit down, Eti. Put on a strong face.

(SHE OPENS DOOR)

Ezra.

(EZRA KISSES DELAL TWICE ON THE CHEEK. FISHMAN IS WITH HIM)

EZRA

Shalom, Delal. I think you met Mr. Fishman.

FISHMAN

Hello, Delal.

DELAL

Hello.

(PAUSE)

Come in.

(THEY ENTER)

EZRA

Shalom, Eti.

ETI

Shalom, Uncle.

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EZRA

You're very hard to find, nephew.

ETI

I like it that way.

EZRA

I brought you a gift.

(TAKES OUT A BAG AND HANDS IT TO ETI)

A book on Olympic runners. I think I missed your birthday.

ETI

Thank you.

DELAL

Coffee?

EZRA

Please.

FISHMAN

Thank you.

(DELAL LEAVES THE ROOM)

EZRA

Mr. Fishman has heard a lot about you, Eti. He talked to your coaches and saw the videos of your events.

FISHMAN

Very impressive, young man.

EZRA

I wish Eti's father were here to see this.

(PAUSE)

Mr. Fishman wants to offer you a generous soccer contract. I brought your name to Mr. Fishman. A very big opportunity for our family. You can travel around the world and make a prosperous income. The sort of thing that young men dream about. Be a very prominent Ethiopian in Israel and America. This is important, Eti, to black Jews worldwide.

FISHMAN

Well, to the matter at hand. Would you like to play for the United States?

ETI

Yes.

FISHMAN

Soccer will soon be a very big thing in America. And you've the ability to become the next Brazilian Pele with a million beautiful girlfriends.

ETI

Believe me, one is enough.

EZRA

(TO ETI)

Send the girls to me, nephew.

FISHMAN

(CHEERFUL)

Your uncle told me about your eyesight.

ETI

It's just one eye as the day goes into night.

FISHMAN

Surgeons can do miracles. We can pay for the operation and you'll be healthy. A group of American doctors visit with you soon.

EZRA

(TO ETI)

The army doctors don't know what the hell they were talking about.

FISHMAN

Why don't we go out to dinner and talk about what this all could mean for your family?

DELAL

We don't like to go out to dinner.

FISHMAN

Well, we could talk here then. I've a photo album you might like to see.

DELAL

We are superstitious, Mr. Fishman.

FISHMAN

Really?

ETI

A modern world does not matter.

EZRA

(DISAPPROVINGLY)

Delal . . .

ETI

I don't trust any doctors.

EZRA

These won't be like the army doctors. I thought this is what you always wanted?

ETI

I don't know.

DELAL

Leaving his family.

FISHMAN

You'll have enough money to come back all the time.

EZRA

Are you afraid of success?

(TO DELAL)

He is free to choose his life at his age.

ETI

Maybe I am afraid.

FISHMAN

That's foolish, Eti.

EZRA

You had courage to come to Jerusalem. This contract is a blessing to your family and to Israel.

(SHEVA ENTERS WITHOUT KNOCKING)

SHEVA

I came to get you. Oh . . . you're doing business.

ETI

We're done.

FISHMAN

I'll leave the contract with you, Eti. Take your time and think about the beautiful things. We're talking two hundred thousand shekel signing bonus.

SHEVA

(HALF-DISCREET)

Two hundred thousand shekels . . .

FISHMAN

(WINKS)  
Beautiful, beautiful dreams, Eti.

EZRA

You look sad, nephew.

ETI

I hope not.

SHEVA

We're going to marry.

FISHMAN

Mazel tov.

SHEVA

Now Eti can buy a pretty ring.

EZRA

(TO SHEVA)  
I've seen you before.

SHEVA

Sheva.

EZRA

Hello, Sheva.

ETI

She's a singer in a club.

EZRA

I've seen you sing before.

FISHMAN

When is the wedding?

SHEVA

Tell them Eti.

ETI

I don't know.  
(DELAL ENTERS WITH COFFEE)

DELAL

She knows what she wants.

SHEVA

(EVER SO SWEETLY)  
I come from a good family. I'm carrying his child.

Perhaps it's time I go.

His father wants no part of this.

(CLEAR REBUKE)  
Did father just talk to you, Ima?

Without my husband, I fail.

I will convert, but my blood is already Jewish. A mikvah bath too. I will light candles each Friday night before I sing with my band. All grandparents Jewish.

(TO DELAL)  
I know a very nice rabbi who will work with her. You don't have to worry.

(GESTURING)  
She's good. She's bad. Can't see it. It's in the air. Feel it with your fingers.

(MOCKING WITH AFFECTION)  
Yes, I feel it. Incredible.

Here, nephew. I'll read this with you. Important decisions for you and your mother. And, if you're about to become a father, even more important.

Thank your uncle, Eti. Our world is about to change.  
(ETI TAKES THE ALBUM AND CONTRACTS FROM EZRA)

END OF SCENE

SCENE TWELVE  
(A CLUB NEAR ETHIOPIA STREET,  
SHEVA ENDS HER SONG AFTER  
A FEW BARS. EASY APPLAUSE,  
SPOT LIGHT FADES OUT. ETI,  
SITTING NEAR THE STAGE,  
LIGHTS A CIGARETTE. MID-  
FEBRUARY)

You don't smoke.

SHEVA

You never see me smoke.

ETI

You're upset.

SHEVA

Yes. This was once the only Ethiopian neighborhood in Jerusalem 100 years ago. Big Ethiopian Church in the center of Ethiopia Street. History laughs at us here. Now all the blacks are scattered in cheap boxes and tents on the city edge. Refugees in the Promised Land. We have a famous street, yet we are phantoms.

ETI

You always feel bad, Eti.

SHEVA

Things are moving too fast.  
(UNCOMFORTABLE IN THE CLUB. RISES IMPULSIVELY)  
I got to go.

ETI

Where are you going?

SHEVA

Somewhere to think.

ETI

Don't go. There are Russian boys in the house tonight. Keep me company.

SHEVA

Where?  
(TURNING)

ETI



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SHEVA

In back, but don't be obvious.  
(REACHES FOR HIS ARM)

ETI

I'll talk to them.

SHEVA

Just stay here.  
(PAUSE)  
I have bad dreams too, Eti. Don't believe you're the only one.

ETI

Why did you tell my mother?

SHEVA

(AWARE OF MAKING A PUBLIC SCENE, LOWERS HER VOICE)  
When your mother gets to know me, there will be sweetness. That is how my family taught me to be. It is our child.

ETI

You could have told me first.

SHEVA

I'm sorry.

ETI

And I never said a thing about a wedding.

SHEVA

You did once in bed. Sign the sports contract. Eat in fancy restaurants. Buy a new car.  
(RISES)  
Do we have to talk about this here?

ETI

( TO THE CLUB'S ONLOOKERS)  
That's right. Sheva and I are getting married! I'm the lucky guy this week!  
(KISSES HER)

SHEVA

You want to see other girls. No, you are more righteous than a Yiddish rabbi.  
(PAUSE)  
You hate me.  
(HE GRABS HER)  
Then say you love me in your heart.

ETI

You know how I feel. I have a demon.

SHEVA

And what does he want?

ETI

To pull out my eyes.

SHEVA

Why?

ETI

Because I don't read scriptures and left Ethiopia. Because I can't visit the graves of grandparents and I beat up a Russian boy on the High Holy Days. Because I quit school and I had sex with you.

SHEVA

You're crazy. Don't say stupid things. I'm happy to be your wife.

ETI

If you have this baby, a demon might enter you, Sheva. I know demons and Jewish law.

SHEVA

No you don't.

ETI

You might have a miscarriage.

SHEVA

I don't believe in a punishing God. You don't really want this baby.

ETI

I'm too young to be a father.

SHEVA

Old enough to go into the army.

ETI

Any idiot can go into the army.

(PAUSE)

I'll be a ghost like my father. If I give you money, would you wait a year?

SHEVA

Eti, our bodies have touched. You love me?

ETI

I do.

SHEVA

This is not our country yet, but you pretend it is. This is a land of white Jews. This government asks for our blood, but in secret it throws it away. Our blood, Eti.

(PAUSE)

I don't care about money. I'm a pretty woman, so honor me wherever we go. If you gave blood to Israel, if you can sell a part of yourself to Mr. Fishman, you owe me too.

(PAUSE)

We are Sheba and Solomon. We are the same flesh. You can't hate me for carrying your seed. I was a very young girl before we went to bed, Eti

(PAUSE)

Help your family to like me. And I'll remove my tattoo.

(POINTS TO THE SMALL PRINTED CROSS OVER HER BROW)

I want a wedding before the summer.

ETI

Will you be Jewish for this wedding?

(AFFABLE SARCASM)

We'll get more gifts.

SHEVA

It's enough that I come from a line of beautiful African Jews?

ETI

I know all the high laws.

SHEVA

No, you see me as "dohone" - a cheap pot made of mud and straw. A Jesus Ethiopian.

ETI

I never said that.

SHEVA

You think it.

ETI

"Dohone" is a dirty word.

SHEVA

(OVERLAPS HIS LINE)

"Dohone". Bad Jew who turns gentile out of fear.

(SINCERE EXPRESSION)

I love you, Eti. You need to trust me.

END OF SCENE

SCENE THIRTEEN  
(HESHI'S DIAMOND SHOP. SHEVA  
ENTERS ONCE THE SECURITY \  
DOOR IS BUZZED OPEN. IT'S  
RAINING AND HER HAIR AND  
CLOTHES ARE WET. AFTER A FEW  
MOMENTS, SHE CATCHES HIS  
DEFLECTED ATTENTION. MID  
FEBRUARY)

HESHI

Are you buying or selling?

SHEVA

You keep the front door locked all the time - so close to Ethiopia Street?

HESHI

Yes.

SHEVA

I'm looking for Eti.

HESHI

He's not here.

SHEVA

He said he was going to work.

HESHI

Did you see him today?

(PAUSE)

If you will excuse me . . .

SHEVA

Do you know where he went?

HESHI

No.

SHEVA

Don't be rude.

HESHI

I'm rude to everyone, young lady.

SHEVA

Eti works very hard for you. You think you're God's chosen people.

HESHI

Please, today I have a killer headache.

SHEVA

Eti is more devout than you.

HESHI

God knows.

SHEVA

We're going to get married.

HESHI

I know.

SHEVA

Eti's a religious boy, but doesn't show it. He prays. He knows Torah. He said Kaddish for his lost father. God respects him. And Eti can make a million shekels for a soccer team. He is a very special Falasha boy.

HESHI

Yes, yes, yes. All yesterday's news to me.

SHEVA

I am saving money to remove the tattoo.

(SHE POINTS TO THE CROSS ON HER FOREHEAD)

We had to wear this in my old country to keep the Christians happy. I have other tattoos elsewhere. But I'm taking up your time.

(AS SHE IS ABOUT TO LEAVE)

HESHI  
He's in serious trouble. Your boyfriend.

SHEVA  
Trouble?

HESHI  
He stole from me. I don't know what to do.

SHEVA  
What?

HESHI  
I treat him like my son. He has been better than my own son. This is killing me. The police will get him before the week's over.

SHEVA  
Why would he do that?

HESHI  
Maybe you asked Eti to go shopping? He took a few diamond rings from my safe.

SHEVA  
That's crazy.

HESHI  
Talk to him. He doesn't need to ruin his life. He should return all the rings immediately and I'll drop the charges.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FOURTEEN  
(ETI SHINING HIS SHOES  
AT HOME, TALKS TO EZRA  
MID FEBRUARY)

EZRA

Are you sure it's your child?

ETI

Yes.

EZRA

Do you love her?

ETI

I do.

EZRA

Do you want the child?

ETI

I guess so.

EZRA

Do you want to hurt your mother?

ETI

No.

EZRA

You know how your mother feels?

(HE SHAKES HIS HEAD YES)

She loves you dearly.

(PAUSE)

Eti, you've a bright future. I speak for your father. My only brother. Everything we do involves risk. Have courage to take wise risks. It doesn't really matter if you play sports in Israel or in America. Or if you have a child now or in ten years. What matter is your idea of freedom.

ETI

I know my freedom.

EZRA

I don't think you do.

(PAUSE)

This girl Sheva means well. She seems devoted to you. Your mother feels differently about Sheva. Maybe Sheva's trapping you? You're both very young. She may be confused about her identity. Somewhere in her family tree was a long line of Jewish people. Sheva needs to wake up to her heritage.

(PAUSE)

Our family tree has Jewish definition.

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ETI

Tattoos can be removed, Uncle.

EZRA

You're like your father, Eti. You are gullible to many things.

ETI

I'm not gullible.

EZRA

Sometimes we're all gullible.

ETI

I've signed Fishman's contract. I want to be a soccer star.

EZRA

You will.

(PAUSE)

If you marry, Sheva will stand by you.

(PAUSE)

The political news is very bad now. We are headlines. Street riots and protests about our discarded blood. I want you to accompany me.

ETI

Why?

EZRA

We need to establish calm. You're a rising star.

ETI

I can't.

EZRA

That's not an acceptable answer. Why do you look so scared?

ETI

I don't know.

EZRA

Travel with me for ten days. You'll be connecting to our community.

ETI

I fear something dropping from the sky. Old superstition, Uncle.

EZRA

You can't be superstitious in Israel.

(ETI LAUGHS)

I wish you could talk with your father now. He'd tell you to honor your people.



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ETI

All right. I'll travel with you on your rounds.

EZRA

Thank you.

ETI

The government thinks we're diseased and backward.

EZRA

Some people in the government, yes.

ETI

The land is holy, but most of the men in charge are not, Uncle.

EZRA

You're right.

ETI

You are part of the government.

EZRA

I am.

ETI

Don't you feel shame?

EZRA

I could get paid a little more for the work I do.

ETI

Don't joke.

EZRA

I believe Ethiopian Jews have a home here with equal rights.

ETI

And Sheva?

EZRA

You can help her.

ETI

Sheva and I'll will be refugees again.

EZRA

Fishman can arrange a resident visa for you both in America.

ETI

And if my eyes turn into stones? I need an operation quick.

EZRA

They're getting worse?

ETI

Yes.

EZRA

What did the last doctor say?

ETI

He said maybe I could get better with a laser operation. One eye can be saved. Very expensive.

EZRA

Can you play sports?

ETI

One eye works. What can I say? You should tell Fishman everything.

EZRA

He'll find out soon enough. There's a Yiddish word - basheer- "if it's meant to be."

(PAUSE)

We're pressing our last Ethiopian airlift. You represent our success with Operation Solomon four years ago.

(PAUSE)

Come on, my boy. It's time you began to act like a mensch, nephew.

END OF SCENE

SCENE FIFTEEN  
(RONIT IS VISITING DELAL.  
MID FEBRUARY)

Sorry to bother you. RONIT

You like to visit our house, Ronit. DELAL

I've been trying to contact you day and night. RONIT

I visit my sister in Haifa. DELAL

Delal, I'm not comfortable saying this - the police were looking for your son this yesterday morning and I thought you should know right away. RONIT

(SUBDUED)  
Is he all right? DELAL

Yes. RONIT

Another fight with his girl? DELAL

No. RONIT

(PAUSE)  
There was a jewel robbery in the shop where he works.

Oh God . . . DELAL

I don't wish to panic you. RONIT

Was he shot? DELAL

No one was shot. RONIT

What is it? DELAL

RONIT

The shop owner told the police that your boy stole three diamond rings. You know I am his job reference. The police came to my office. I told them about Eti's sports contract. I had letters from Fishman. It makes no sense for him to steal. This has to be a mistake.

Oh God. DELAL

Where is he? RONIT

I do not know. Did you call Ezra? DELAL

Yes. RONIT

Sheva. She is responsible. DELAL

END OF SCENE

SCENE SIXTEEN  
(EZRA'S OFFICE. MID FEBRUARY)

SONYA  
My husband knows about you, Ezra. He feels humiliated. You met him at a charity function a few years ago.

EZRA  
Yes, he likes to shake hands with a hydraulic grip.

SONYA  
He's whipping up a ton of animosity toward Ethiopians.

I'll talk to him.

EZRA

SONYA  
That would be homicidal. Adultery is one of the ten commandments.

EZRA  
Number seven at last count.

SONYA  
Ezra . . .

EZRA  
Is he a physical threat to you or to me?

SONYA  
He was a bruiser in the army.

EZRA  
Marvelous.  
(AWKWARD SMILE)  
Your other news, Sonya? I thought we would see more of each other?

SONYA  
I wanted to.

EZRA  
But?

SONYA  
This is much too fast.

EZRA  
We're not getting any younger.

SONYA  
I'm past 40. I've lost my capacity to dream.  
(HE APPROACHES HER AND HUGS HER GENTLY)  
It's all too confusing, Ezra.  
(HE NODS)  
I can provide housing for 1000 Ethiopian arrivals. No more than that.

EZRA  
Thank you, Sonya.

SONYA

You helped the Russian assembly vote. I'm returning the favor. I'm angry inside for you. 25,000 healthy pints of Ethiopian blood flushed down the toilet. That's how white Jews accept blacks. You can still eat at the temple's family table and I'll whistle Hava Nagila!.

EZRA

What should I do, throw Molotov cocktails at the Jerusalem Hospital?

SONYA

I would.

EZRA

A cargo plane is about to lift off this week from Ethiopia. Several weeks early. That, my dear, gets all my focus.

(ETI ENTERS VERY DISTRESSED)

ETI

Uncle . . .

EZRA

What?

ETI

There's been a horrible accident. Sheva was attacked by some Russians. She's in critical condition.

END OF SCENE

SCENE SEVENTEEN  
(OUTSIDE HOSPITAL ROOM.  
MID-FEBRUARY)

DELAL

They don't look good. Her parents. No sleep in two days. The doctor scared them. Her family went to eat.

(PAUSE)

Why are you here?

ETI

She might come out of her coma.

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DELAL

God willing.

ETI

I'll wait with you until her family comes back.

DELAL

The police might find you.

ETI

I don't care anymore.

DELAL

I care. Go.

ETI

I didn't steal any goddamn rings, Ima. I have money now. Fishman gave me money in advance.

DELAL

The police will handcuff you and hurt you. You get sick in jail.

ETI

You'll talk to Ezra. He has sense. And Fishman will get me a lawyer. He will, Ima. Before the police get me. A smart lawyer will do things right. Here's the check.  
(SHOWS HER IT)

DELAL

Too many bad things, Eti. The girl is very sick. I feel it in my bones. The police will think you did this.

ETI

Me?

DELAL

You and Sheva had fights.

ETI

Russians in her housing project. They taunt her on her way to school and to the club.

DELAL

Who told you this?

ETI

Sonya Gelman at the absorption center. She'll tell the police the same thing.

DELAL

Maybe. Your baby's gone, my son. She had a miscarriage.

(PAUSE)

Demons come and demons go.

ETI

I know, Ima.

DELAL

Blind like your father. You can pray.

(PAUSE)

Why Eti? Why annoy Ashkanazie Jews and their diamonds?

ETI

Did I ever steal anything as a boy? I saved Lebowitz's life from a street robbery. Did the police tell you that?

(PAUSE)

It's time you take my side.

DELAL

I will pray.

ETI

Sheva will recover. I will run away no more.

END OF SCENE

SCENE EIGHTEEN  
(EZRA'S OFFICE. SONYA  
IS ALREADY SEATED AND  
EZRA IS STANDING. HIS  
FACE IS BRUISED. LATE  
FEBRUARY)



SONYA  
So where is your Mr. Fishman?

EZRA  
He's late.

SONYA  
You honestly expect him to phone the Minister's office?

EZRA  
I'm a gifted actor.

SONYA  
What time did my husband come to your home?

EZRA  
Midnight.

SONYA  
And you let him in?

EZRA  
Yes.

SONYA  
So masochistic?

EZRA  
I must be. We talked. I poured us vodka. He blamed me for breaking up your marriage. Suddenly he got violent.

SONYA  
He could have killed you, Ezra.

EZRA  
(UNDERSTATED)  
I sensed that, yes.

SONYA  
This is not the end of it.

EZRA  
He's not a handsome man, dear Sonya. Yesterday, I bought a German built gun.

SONYA

Magnificent.

EZRA

It was either that or hire a lifeguard.

SONYA

Bodyguard. You should have gone to the police.

EZRA

The thought struck me, but I'm uncomfortable with the story. How did you ever marry him?

SONYA

We met in our 20s. He was so different

EZRA

Like Jack the Ripper.

SONYA

So where is Fishman?

EZRA

Ronit was supposed to bring him here.

SONYA

You're banking everything on him?

EZRA

I have no choice. Everyone said Fishman was my best bet. And I sold him my nephew for a handshake.

SONYA

There are no more miracles, Ezra. You can't afford this fantasy.

(SILENCE)

I'm waiting for a "get" (Jewish bill of divorce) from my husband. I can't initiate the divorce without his signature.

EZRA

Why not have a friend cut his car's brake hose?

SONYA

Don't put ideas in my head.

EZRA

I know a few nice kids you can hire for the job.

FISHMAN

(ENTERS WITH RONIT)

Forgive me, Ronit was driving me to the airport when we got your phone call.

EZRA

We haven't a moment to spare. Thank God you're here. Mr. Fishman, my dear friend from the Russian Absorption Center - Sonya Gelman

FISHMAN

(SHAKES HER HAND)

Nice to make your acquaintance.

EZRA

She was extremely helpful with our housing problem.

FISHMAN

What the hell happened to your face.

EZRA

I walked into a B52 jet.

FISHMAN

I can stay for only a few minutes. I have to catch the next plane. How can I help?

EZRA

You know the problem.

FISHMAN

Your nephew is in jail and his prospects look very unpleasant for us all.

EZRA

That's not the problem.

FISHMAN

I'll dispatch a lawyer. However, his medical health is more troubling - according to my team of doctors. One eye is lost and his good eye is a bad gamble.

EZRA

I told you about his health.

FISHMAN

I don't like those odds. We'll redraft the contract and allow the doctors to make the call.

EZRA

Mr. Fishman . . .

FISHMAN

(FEIGNING ABSENTMINDEDNESS)

But of course there is the refugee flight from Addis Ababa.

EZRA

I have no word yet from Minister Sharansky about landing rights in Tel Aviv. You promised me that he would get behind this!

FISHMAN

No one controls Sharansky except his wife.

EZRA

My friend, 1400 frightened Falas Muras have been airborne for 2 ½ hours. There are no seats, no food or water, no crew. It must land here.

FISHMAN

God willing.

EZRA

The Minister has reversed himself yesterday and refuses to allow the plane to land. That is what he's saying publicly. And I take Sharansky at his word.

FISHMAN

Under pressure by his Russian political party. You and Sonya know that.

EZRA

OK, OK. Let's compromise. Sharansky can grant 1400 tourist visas to reunite the refugees with Israeli relatives for a couple of weeks. Which buys us time.

FISHMAN

It'll be a nightmare trying to round them up for the return trip. I already played that card with Sharansky.

EZRA

Where are your sympathies?

FISHMAN

With everyone Jewish. Do you want me to blame you for your carelessness?

SONYA

(SENSES EZRA'S ANGER ABOUT TO FLARE)

Ezra . . .

FISHMAN

Well, perhaps the plane will be diverted to an American airbase in the Mediterranean?

EZRA

That won't help anyone.

(TRYING TO COMPOSE HIMSELF)  
Call Sharansky.

FISHMAN  
Sharansky doesn't respect me any more. We hardly see one another.

EZRA  
You're his chief fund raiser outside Israel.

FISHMAN  
He doesn't take orders from Americans. Don't you get it?  
(TO SONYA)  
Tell him. Tell him the truth about Sharansky.  
(PAUSE)  
Ezra, he doesn't give a shit about these people.

EZRA  
Pick up the phone right now.

FISHMAN  
Sharansky's never in his office after 2PM.  
(INDICATING SONYA)  
Why not your lovely colleague make the call?

EZRA  
You've given his party a small fortune.

SONYA  
(SARDONIC)  
Call Sharansky.

FISHMAN  
With the plane in mid-flight, it's a long shot, Ezra. Redirect the plane to Turkey, and let the U.S. military handle it.

EZRA  
I'm not calling the plane down, Mr. Fishman. Phone Sharansky! He owes you a large favor.

FISHMAN  
You're fantasizing. Does the American Secretary of State know?

EZRA  
Yes..

FISHMAN

That makes all the difference.

(SMILING WARMLY)

Bottom line - the plane will be allowed to land in Tel Aviv.

SONYA

Israel has turned away planes before.

FISHMAN

And risk American sanctions and horrendous press?

EZRA

I want an insurance policy. Pick up the phone.

FISHMAN

You know I spent a lot of money and political capital on this airlift already.

EZRA

Pick up the phone. Damn it, pick up the fucking phone!

FISHMAN

(SLOWLY, REACHES FOR PHONE ON DESK AND PICKS UP RECEIVER)

This will accomplish nothing.

(BEGINS TO DIAL)

It's ringing.

(HE HANGS UP)

I can't. I'm very sorry for you, Ezra.

(PAUSE)

I'm more important than a wayward African plane claiming a trace of Jewish blood.

(GLANCES AT SONYA, AND THEN EZRA)

I have my own high ethics. Remember that.

(RISES TO EXIT)

END OF SCENE

SCENE NINETEEN

(OUTSIDE FOYER OF JAIL. A GUARD WALKS ETI OVER TO DELAL AND EZRA. ETI IS IN STREET CLOTHES. THE NEXT DAY, LATE FEBRUARY)

ETI

They're getting my things from a locker and I can leave.

(GUARD EXITS. DELAL REACHES FOR ETI'S ARM)

I don't feel well, Ima. Leave me be.

(HE RUBS HIS EYES)

DELAL

You look thin.

ETI

I'm training for Yom Kippur.

DELAL

Come, we'll eat at home.

EZRA

There's good news, nephew. Sheva came out of her coma.

ETI

(DISBELIEVING)

We are still broken.

EZRA

Did you hear me?

ETI

Sheva . . .

EZRA

Is out of her coma. Her condition is improving. She will come through, Eti.

DELAL

She is stronger. You will see.

EZRA

You have to be patient. We'll all go to the hospital, OK?

ETI

Her family thinks I'm a thief.

EZRA

No. They know what happened. I've talked to the jeweler Heshi. The police found the culprit - one of his suppliers from Tel Aviv.

ETI

An Ashkanazic?

(PAUSE)

He came to visit me in jail. The jeweler Heshi. He couldn't look me in the face. Said a few words. Was very sad. Wanted to adopt me. Said I should come back to his shop. Hhe started to cry like he was my father. A Jewish diamond. He is Israel to me, Uncle.

(PAUSE)

And Fishman?

EZRA

He's gone. I'm sorry.

ETI

(TO DELAL)

My brothers and sisters are not here.

DELAL

You'll see them at home.

ETI

They should see a jail, Ima.

DELAL

(EXITS BRIEFLY)

I'll get your things.

ETI

(PAUSE)

What happened with your airlift?

EZRA

The Ethiopians are in quarantine at the airport hotel. We don't know yet if the government will reconsider.

ETI

Reconsider? You're a different generation, Uncle. You've adjusted to things here. You have mastered the language and the barriers. You're like the white Jews. You have enough years to pass.

EZRA

Things are more complicated than that.

(DELAL RETURNS WITH A SACK OF ETI'S THINGS)

ETI

Are they?

END OF SCENE



SCENE TWENTY  
(TRIPLE SPLIT STAGE:  
ETI VISITING SHEVA AT  
THE HOSPITAL, EZRA  
MEETING SONYA AT A HOTEL  
BAR, AND HESHI AT DELAL'S  
HOME. EARLY MARCH)

EZRA

Refueled and sent back last night with all 1400 wearing new sandals, caps and T shirts.  
Enough to make one puke.

SONYA

I'm truly sorry, Ezra.

EZRA

The Jewish Agency got involved. We had media coverage. The best negotiators. The  
Ethiopian community here knows the extent of what happened. They know Sharansky  
folded. And so did the Prime Minister.

ETI (IN ANOTHER AREA)

Sheva, I could peel an orange for you.

SONYA

God knows. Give it a rest.

EZRA

I can't.

ETI(IN ANOTHER AREA)

It's hard for me to eat. I used to like food so much before jail.

SONYA

Sharansky said he will soon go to Ethiopia for a personal inspection. That might yield  
5000 visas. You did everything you can do. Finish your drink

(LIGHT ON HOSPITAL CORNER WITH ETI AND SHEVA IN A  
WHEELCHAIR)

ETI

I spoke to your mother. She knows about our plans

(PAUSE)

I saw photos of my grandparents. My uncle gave his album to me. They're taller than I thought. They were giants, like your grandparents. Beautiful giants, Sheva. From the tribe that wandered far south. Their faces have pain, but I see eternal beauty. My good eye works. I have a magnifying lens.

(SHOWS IT FROM HIS POCKET)

DELAL(IN ANOTHER AREA)

He's not here.

HESHI(WITH DELAL)

I'll come back another time. It was very hard to see him in jail.

ETI

And for distance I can use this glass.

(THE SPYGLASS IS ALREADY IN HIS HAND)

And the world looks perfect. If I could paint, I could show this to you.

(SHEVA STIRS, ETI PEELS THE ORANGE)

SHEVA

(SOFTLY)

Show me.

(LIGHT ON DELAL'S HOME)

HESHI

I blame myself.

DELAL

Yes.

HESHI

Doing business with my cousins for years. How was I to know they would take from me? I nearly died from the news.

SONYA(IN ANOTHER AREA)

You know I have two grown children.

EZRA(WITH SONYA)

You once told me a long time ago.

HESHI

I cannot apologize enough. I want Eti back in my shop. I want to cater the wedding, Mrs. Shlomo. I have to make up the sin. Please understand. I know how to be a better man as God is my witness.

( LIGHT ON HOTEL BAR)

SONYA

I let on about you. They were upset.

EZRA

Because of your husband?

SONYA

No, because you were born in Ethiopia.

ETI(IN ANOTHER AREA)

I still like diamonds, Sheva.

SHEVA(WITH ETI)

So do I.

ETI

If I go back to school, we'll have to get by with just a few shekels.

EZRA

I'm sorry if I caused you turmoil.

DELAL(IN ANOTHER AREA)

My son has a future.

SONYA

I want to keep seeing you, Ezra. I don't care about the risks.

(SHE KISSES HIM)

(LIGHT ON DELAL'S HOME)

HESHI

It is a bright future, my dear woman.

(PAUSE)

I'll come back tomorrow. Thank you kindly.

( LIGHT ON HOSPITAL)

SHEVA

You're the fastest runner in the world, my Eti.

ETI

I love you, Sheva. Thank you for finding me.

(PAUSE)

I've been lost for a long time.

(LEANS OVER WHEELCHAIR TO KISS HER)

END OF PLAY

### GLOSSARY

FALASHA - Literal meaning, foreigner, the term referring to Jewish Ethiopians.

BETA ISRAELI - The term that Jewish Ethiopians call themselves.

FALAS MURA - Historical Jewish Ethiopians who have converted to Christianity.

ASHKANAZIE - The family of Jews from Central Europe and Russia.

KNESSET - The Israeli elected parliament.

MISHIGUNAH - Yiddish term for "crazy".

ARIEL SHARON - Cabinet Minister & Army Officer who led 1980s Lebanon invasion.

NATAN SHARANSKY - Cabinet Minister & celebrated Soviet emigre.

MIKVAH - purification bath for Jewish women.

OPERATION MOSES - First Israeli emergency airlift from Ethiopia/Sudan in 1984.

OPERATION SOLOMON - Israeli airlifts from Ethiopia in 1991.

STAR OF DAVID - 6 Point Jewish Star, symbol of Jewish culture and statehood.

QUARA DISTRICT - Region in Ethiopia where remaining Jews reside.

DOHONE - Derogatory word for frightened African Jews who converted to Christianity.

LAW OF RETURN - Israel's policy to allow any Jew an unimpeded entry into Israel.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE FALASHA/ BETA ISRAEL

Beta Israel people claim lineage to Menilek 1, the known son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. It is assumed, however, that their ancestors came from Ethiopia's Agew peoples who were converted by southern Arabian Jews around the turn of the Christian Era. These Ethiopian Jews observed Jewish practices after the conversion of the Ethiopian Kingdom of Aksum to Christianity in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century, and sadly they were persecuted and driven back to northern Ethiopia. There were sustained attempts to destroy Beta Israel in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, but they kept their autonomy until the 17<sup>th</sup> century when they lost their lands. In more modern times Beta Israel's situation improved in Ethiopia's Lake Tana area where the men work as farmers, weavers and blacksmiths and the women raise children and fashion pottery.

Beta Israel have a Bible (although without the accompanying Talmudic laws) and prayer book written in the ancient Ethiopian language Ge'ez. Sabbath is observed along with many dietary laws and circumcision rites are consistently practiced. Synagogue services are conducted by "kohanim" rabbis and many of the major Jewish holidays are celebrated.

The controversy of how many Ethiopian Jews have immigrated in Israel during the 1980-1992 years continues to this day. According to the Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, almost 45,000 Ethiopians reached the nation during that period. This should be seen in contrast to the 1952-1979 era with under 500 Ethiopian arrivals. Unquestionable, most of these people were Beta Israel/ Falasha, while others were either lacking significant Jewish affiliation or were explicit Christians. The most dramatic Israeli evacuation, Operation Moses (November 1984 - January 1985) airlifted over 6500 lives routed through neighboring Sudan. Israel's Operation Solomon (May 1991) brought over around 14,000 Jews from Ethiopia's capital Addis Ababa.

In an Israeli newspaper expose in the winter of 1996, these Falasha immigrants were greatly humiliated by the Israeli government's mass discarding of all donated Ethiopian blood. Clearly, the government's chief fear was HIV contamination which was and is so prevalent in Africa. One immediate consequence was a violent protest by 10,000 Falasha individuals which led to injuries in more than 70 demonstrators and police officers. These numbers accounted for 1/6th of the 60,000 Falasha community in Israel at the time. Subsequently, the government issued a commission of inquiry chaired by former Israeli president Yitzhak Navon.

In light of the Falasha phenomenon, the most pressing ongoing issue in Israel concerns how many remaining Jews are in Ethiopia's Quara district and also how to view Ethiopia's Falas Mura community which has strong anthropological claims to Beta Israel. Falas Mura people were either forced into Christian conversions or chose to convert over the last few generations. Typically, many Falas Mura individuals wear Christian cross tatoos on their faces as a public sign of fidelity. Because of their discernible ties to Beta Israel/Falasha, many Falas Mura families claim today that they are hounded and despised by their Ethiopian neighbors

