

“Moving,” A novel by Assaf Gavron

Published in Israel by KZB, 2003

From the back cover of the Israeli publication

They are Israelis. They are in New York. They want to make money, quickly.

Tomer, Shlomi and Izzy are working in a moving company. They hate their boss, who pays little, lies a lot, and runs them all across America. They have had enough of all the wheeling-and-dealing of the world of moving. Even the tips are not what they used to be! One day, when their boss goes too far, they have an idea: the truck is fully loaded; they can just disappear with it.

What they don't know is that someone else has big plans for the same load.

They drive south in the truck.

The boss is on their tail.

So is the Ukrainian mafia.

The customers are on the boss's tail.

The FBI is on the Ukrainians' tail.

And there are glamorous casinos, neglected loves, a native American beauty, a Jewish mother, and a mysterious old lady in Las Vegas. And the countdown is on, to the big money....

Moving is fast and smart, sexy and funny: a crime-adventure-comedy-road novel. *Moving* is full of action, a wild ride between American characters, and above all a brilliant portrait of Israelis in the land of unlimited opportunity. *Moving* is American in its geography, mixed-nationality in its language, but utterly Israeli in its soul.

Assaf Gavron, 34, traveled to work as a mover in the U.S. to write this book. It is his third book, after the acclaimed *Ice*, and *Sex in the Cemetery*.

From the reviews on “Moving”:

“A wonderfully fun book”, *Dana Spector, Yediot Achronot*

“*Moving*’ reveals Gavron as a talented and truly serious artist”, *Batya Gur, Haaretz*

“A deep and light book all at once”, *Tali Shamir, Walla*

“Gavron has made it, big time”, *Kolbo Magazine*

Moving

An extract from a novel by

Assaf Gavron

Translated from the Hebrew by Evan Fallenberg

New York, Spring 1998

The spring of 1998 wasn't exactly a spring. In New York, for example, snow fell one Sunday (Izzy had set up to meet Shlomi at 125th and Park in the Bronx at seven a.m.; snow fell on his face, the cold seeped into his bones), and the following Friday it was in the mid-eighties and sunny (Jonesy and Izzy were loading huge paintings by an eccentric artist in Brooklyn and sweating like foxes).

The spring of 1998 was especially crazy because of El Niño. Tornadoes, heat waves, snowstorms, floods, merciless sunshine – all in the same week, in the same place, or a few hours' drive away in the next state over. In any case it was spring, and Izzy had this one remark stuck in his head. He'd heard it at a truck stop in Nebraska as he stood waiting in the checkout line holding two large coffees, a bag of sunflower seeds, some Hershey's chocolate kisses and a screwdriver. When the woman behind the counter told the fat truck driver standing in front of him that it was a wonderful day, he said, "Spring's here, and that's the time for changes."

Working as movers, you see changes all the time. You're part of them. You see people at the moment of change, the moment of transition, packing up their whole lives in one place – along with their work, friends, neighbors, experiences that took place between those very walls and in that very air – and you take them to a different place, where everything is new and unfamiliar and exciting and scary. Or else you're bringing them back to the house they've been waiting to return to for years.

Sometimes they're fed up and sometimes they've lost everything they owned or earned a fortune, and it's not only the place and the air and the office they're swapping, it's everything – their path in life, their social status, their worldview, their lives.

And you're there, catching the moment right on the inside. You enter people's lives through the back door for one day or a few. You dig around in their underwear, pack up their sheets, and by the end of the day you've bonded with them.

You get into places their friends or even their children and families have never seen, private rooms and personal belongings they can only show to themselves. You become their friend for a day, an outside observer who sees and hears everything: the quarrels between husband and wife, the significant looks shared by the husband and the wife's sister, the small fears that weigh heavy on their hearts. You're part of their fresh start in life, their adventure, you are the radar that picks up on their feelings, the interior decorator in charge of the furniture arrangement, the go-between helping them meet new neighbors for the first time. As a mover you perform a lot of functions. You calm them down, laugh with them, console them, listen to their stories about Viet Nam or New York, about their grandparents or their children, about the drugs they take and the countries they've visited and the jobs they're about to start. You look at photographs of them in their prime, decades earlier, you pet their cats and dogs. You say to them, "Spring's here, and that's the time for changes." You say to them, "This armchair? It's terrific." You say, "For an apartment like this one, I'd leave Los Angeles, too." For one day or a few you are the son that stopped paying attention to them twenty years ago, you're the husband that walked out. True, you mostly do all that for the tip. But not just. You do it for the experience, too, to see America from right inside its soft underbelly, right inside people's fragile lives.

The three most traumatic things that happen to people are the death of a loved one, divorce, and moving houses – worse even than accidents or illness. It's a known fact. When a loved one dies, family and friends come to console the bereaved, making sure not to let them feel lonely. When there's a divorce, each party has his

side or hers – the family, the lawyer. When there's a move, they have you, the mover. Your jeans may be filthy, you may have been on the road for three days with their furniture, no chance to shower or shave. You may seem like just a simple guy from the Middle East, your only asset the muscles you use to haul their bed, but in fact you're much more than that: you've sweated for them, traveled for days on end for them, crossed the continent and time zones and climates for them, all in order to bring them their belongings. You're a shoulder to lean on, and cry on. You're the sympathetic smile for those with no family to share smiles with. You are the best friend at a stage in life when there are almost no friends to be had.

The Guy from Qatar

Tomer Gonik, or Jonesy as most people call him, or Johnson as his boss Haim calls him, or Tomer – yes, there are still a few people (his girl friend Nili, his mom) who call him Tomer – so this guy, whatever you want to call him, had been thinking long and hard about the plan.

Jonesy's plan was, in short, to make a killing. To score a big hit, to hit and run. To make a nice big bundle that would hold him over for a good few years, a sum that would buy him a nice apartment in Jerusalem, trips around the world, a huge plasma TV in a spacious living room, and, if possible, he would like to destroy his boss Haim Galil, the head of Sababa Moving and Storage, in the process, because that asshole Haim Galil had been pissing him off for quite some time.

Jonesy, Shlomi and Izzy are sitting at Francesca's on 99th and 1st eating lunch. The blue Sababa Moving and Storage truck is parked outside. Shlomi is eating a sandwich he brought from home. Jonesy is holding a slice of pizza and telling

another one of his stories. Every once in a while a mover walks by and says hi to Jonesy. He answers with a nod of the head, never interrupting his story.

“So this fat Arab guy – huge gut – opens the door wearing nothing but underpants and a pair of slippers with pompoms. A prince from one of the Gulf states. He has six Indian servants who do whatever he says and this gorgeous wife with huge tits. Gigantic apartment on the Upper West Side. After a few years in moving you get to know the goods. You know their value, whether they’re crap or decent. So this guy, his stuff was worth billions, you can tell right away. Everything there was top of the line – furniture, pictures, kitchen.

“I’ve learned something,” Jonesy says: “The richer people get, the more they care about their things. Regular people just have some old refrigerator, they don’t care if it gets a scratch or two. But rich people are tightfisted about every little thing. They’ll warn you not to scratch up some old armchair, God forbid. You can say it doesn’t make sense, that they have lots of money so what do they care? But it doesn’t work like that. Rich people are the biggest tightwads of them all. That’s because rich people don’t have anything more important to worry about. Regular people do. You get it?”

“But this guy, the Saudi, no sorry, he was from Qatar, this guy with the pompoms on his slippers, he couldn’t have cared less. He says, ‘*Yalla*, toss all this stuff into the truck.’ There were three of us on that move, along with the Indians and the bombshell with the tits. We finished up in good time and hit the road.”

Jonesy stops talking so he can finish his pizza in two quick bites. He gets up and fetches another slice. At Francesca’s he has pizza days and hero sandwich days. Today he’s stuffing himself with pizza. Plain cheese pizza because he claims the toppings kill the taste.

“So I ask the sheikh, ‘Where’re we heading?’ and he says, ‘New Jersey, Forest Heights.’ But when we get to Forest Heights we can’t find the house. We run around New Jersey for an hour and the guy can’t remember where his new house is. Turns out they bought it in about five minutes one night when they were drunk, and they don’t remember anything at all. He’s driving ahead of us in his Mercedes, we’re tailing him in the truck. We find the place at around two a.m.

“Now it’s Saturday night, and I have this principle: I never, ever in my life work on Sunday. I bust my butt for that asshole Haim all week, I work nights, get up before daylight, come home at two a.m. and that’s okay. But Sunday? That’s my day of rest. I need Sundays to stay sane.”

He folds his pizza slice in two and takes a bite. “We’re standing outside the new house and the guy from Qatar says, ‘Come back tomorrow and finish the job.’ I look at my watch and tell him, ‘In two hours we’ll get the whole business unloaded. Right now.’ He looks at his wife and says, ‘Forget it. We’re going to sleep. Come back tomorrow and I’ll pay you whatever you want.’ I say to myself, Like hell I’m sticking around, and to him I say, ‘It’s not about the money, it’s about Sunday,’ and he looks at me and says, ‘Follow me.’ He takes me to the garage, turns on the light and says, ‘Drive this home and come back in the morning.’ I look, and there’s this Rolls Royce sitting there, brand new, huge, cream-colored. The plastic’s still on the seats.”

Jonesy stops to take a sip from his Coke. He wipes his mouth and smiles nostalgically.

“I tell him, ‘Sorry, it’s Sunday. That’s holy for me.’ So he takes out his phone and calls Haim. Haim shouts at me and tells me to stop fucking with him and tells me to report back there first thing in the morning. Son of a bitch.”

“What did you do?”

“What could I do? I came to work on Sunday. I was just a kid then, still green. But even back then I remember saying Haim would pay for his bullshit.”

He leans back, stretching his arms. “Still, that Rolls Royce,” he says. “Holy shit, what a car. I got home in the middle of the night and took Nili for a ride. Incredible.”

The end of a move is the best moment of the day. Jonesy shouts to Izzy and Shlomi to fold up shop quickly while he settles the bill with the customer. Izzy can feel the muscles in his back and hands. He folds the blankets with Shlomi, shoves them onto the loaded truck. A third floor walk-up, at first there was nowhere to leave the truck so Jonesy double-parked out front and got shouted at by an elderly tenant. He calmed the guy down, became his best friend – a day like any other in the life of a mover.

“God, what a weirdo,” Jonesy says as he starts up the truck and begins driving slowly down Second Avenue in evening rush hour traffic. The customer, a young guy by the name of Joachim Basendworf, got divorced a few months ago and is returning to some small town in Texas. When Jonesy asked where his ex-wife was, he answered, “I don’t know. Maybe in heaven, maybe in hell,” and let out a short burst of laughter. The woman’s clothes were in the apartment. Joachim had a red goatee and wore a cowboy hat he did not remove from his head all day long.

Jonesy says, “And now for what’s really important: the envelope.” He hands it to Shlomi.

Shlomi says, “What do you guys say, how much did he cough up?”

Izzy says, “I say he didn’t leave us anything, he was too crazy.”

Jonesy shakes his head. “No chance you’re right. There’s not a lot, but there’s got to be twenty, thirty each.”

Jonesy is a legend in the world of tips, or *tesher* as they call it in Hebrew when the customers are within earshot and they don’t want them to catch on. He has a few methods for ensuring good tips, methods he does not reveal to anyone. He is only willing to admit that he chooses the method according to each individual client; for each type of customer there is a method that will work. He says, “When I leave New York I’ll reveal all my secrets.” It is not unusual after working with Jonesy for a day to get tips like eighty or a hundred dollars each, which is why so many movers are willing to put up with his shouting and cursing.

With regards to Joachim Basendworf, today’s weirdo customer from Texas, Jonesy used the envelope method. At the end of the day, after becoming friendly with Joachim and making him feel good, he stuck an empty envelope into his hand, gazed fixedly into his eyes, and said, “Joachim, the usual tip for the kind of work we did here today is one hundred dollars per mover, at the very least. But you take this envelope and put inside it whatever you think these workers deserve. I won’t open it up until we’re far away from here.” Only one time in the six and a half years that Jonesy has worked in moving was the envelope empty, and that was apparently because Jonesy had ruined some of the customer’s belongings in an accident, moments before handing him the envelope. “He knew the accident wasn’t my fault,” Jonesy said afterwards. “He could have been more considerate.”

Shlomi opens the envelope. There are lots of ten dollar bills inside. “Izzy was wrong,” he says as he counts the money. All told it is one hundred and fifty dollars.

Izzy says, “What a prince that Joachim is.”

Jonesy says, “Son of a bitch, that’s less than ten percent. What does he think we are, pizza delivery boys?” He is disgruntled when the customer decides to give less than he’s suggested.

Now the stoplights are working in their favor and they race down 2nd Avenue without stopping until midtown, where traffic is congested and moving slowly. Shlomi is chewing gum impatiently. Jonesy cuts through the park and heads over to Broadway, continuing downtown until they can see the screens at Times Square flashing weather reports, news, and stock shares. A few minutes later the truck is parked on 39th Street and they’re on their way up to the office of Sababa Moving and Storage, which is also where Jonesy and Izzy and a few other people live.

The Little Thing After the G

Izzy’s last day in Nazareth was Valentine’s Day. Daphna had tried to hide her sadness from him all evening. Izzy left Israel the next morning.

This was his first time in New York. When he emerged from the subway station at 42nd Street with his huge suitcase, he smelled the coffee, felt the bitter cold of mid-winter, saw the yellow taxis up and down the long boulevards and the steam rising from the manhole covers in the street and said to himself, I don’t believe it, it’s just like in the movies.

A friend back in Israel had given him Haim Galil’s phone number. While still in Nazareth he had phoned Haim and spoken to him for a couple of minutes. Haim said, “Come on over.” So he came over. Two men were pushing a rack of clothing into a shop, a drunk guy was preaching about Jesus, two women were shouting in Spanish; all he needed was a bunch of black guys dancing around a boom box and

two policemen in blue uniforms to complete the cliché. Within a few days he had seen those sights too, more times than he had even realized.

Thirty-ninth Street, three blocks from Times Square between 7th and 8th. The office of Sababa Moving and Storage serves as home to several of the company's employees, even though the zoning in that area is strictly commercial. Below the office is a sorting center for the US Postal Service, with trucks coming and going at all hours; across the street, a few textile shops. The noise is incessant. Even when all the windows are closed and you blast music at full volume, you can still feel the traffic shaking the building underfoot. There is a Jewish bagel shop near the front entrance to the building, and on the first floor a sign advertising 'Mrs. Crystal, Tarot Reader: Open Every Day.' But no one has ever seen Mrs. Crystal. It isn't the most beautiful part of Manhattan, but the piece of 7th Avenue that runs between 38th and 39th is called Golda Meir Boulevard.

Hard to believe, but six weeks have already passed since Izzy arrived.

The number of residents in the apartment changes daily, according to long-distance moves. The big room belongs to Jonesy and Nili, the veteran foreman and the company secretary. The small room is the office of Sababa Moving and Storage. Ohad, once a Sababa employee and now a sales rep for Schleppers, one of the biggest moving companies, occupies that room. Izzy has no room, he sleeps on a mattress in the living room. "The whole living room is at your disposal," Haim told him when he'd arrived. When Izzy is on a long-distance run, someone else sleeps on his mattress.

Sababa Moving and Storage has one truck, and the word Storage is written with a little thingy after the letter g, like this: Storag'e. That mistake, for which Haim

blames his former partners and his former partners blame Haim, has become a New York City joke. But removing the little white thingy would leave a space between the g and the e, and since someone once told Haim that the thingy adds a touch of French class, it has remained.

The apartment is full of furniture and appliances, leftovers from moves: the living room couches, the cupboards, the television in Jonesy and Nili's room, the office computer. Ohad spends most evenings silently playing bridge on the Internet. When Izzy manages to get a few minutes on the computer he writes e-mails to Daphna.

When he first arrived, Haim didn't speak to him for several days. Izzy asked when he would start getting work, and Haim said he didn't know. Izzy wrote to Daphna: "I miss you. Winter is cold in New York. But everything will be okay, I'm waiting to see what's going to happen."

Slowly he got to know everybody: there's Yotam, who mostly does West Coast runs and sleeps on the living room couch when he's in New York; and Shlomi, in a green Alabama baseball cap and an Israel Defense Forces jacket (made in America), who is always trying to get Jonesy and him to attend seminars on Judaism (he is newly religious and lives in an Israeli neighborhood in Queens); and Jonesy, the veteran foreman, six and a half years in the moving business, a tip legend in New York but a son of a bitch on the job. There are all these movers' stories about Jonesy, like 'The Move with the Murder,' when they were loading up a woman and her daughter at Brighton Beach and the husband showed up and killed the woman because he didn't want her to leave him. Or 'The Move with the Crap,' when, in the middle of a move, Jonesy took a newspaper and went to the bathroom. He caused the toilet to back up and told Yoni Bronco, the guy on the job with him, to fix it. Yoni

worked on it for an hour, until finally they had to call a plumber. Or ‘The Move with the Fire,’ when the truck caught fire, though to this day nobody knows why. Jonesy jumped into the flames, removed his bag and walked away.

When Izzy woke up for his first day on the job, at six a.m., the apartment was freezing cold. He went to the window and looked down at the blue Sababa Moving and Storage truck. Somebody was leaning on it; he was smoking crack, lighting one match after the next, inhaling, shaking his head. Izzy watched from above, smoothing his hair back with his fingers, twirling his earring. Shlomi came in with coffee in a blue paper cup and said, “Good morning, fellow Jew!” That scene would replay itself with near exactitude each morning for weeks. They would leave in the morning, return at night, and haul boxes in between.

The Wonderful World on the Flip Side

That night, after moving Joachim, Haim informed Jonesy that the next morning he would be going on a long-distance trip with the same team – Jonesy as foreman, Shlomi as number two and Izzy as helper. Probably.

Jonesy felt the blood rushing to his head. It was so typical of Haim to inform him of a long-distance trip one day in advance. And not to provide any details.

“What kind of trip is it exactly? Where are we going?” he asked, trying to maintain his cool.

“It’s not sewn up yet,” Haim said. “Tomorrow you guys will pack up a big job to Florida, an old couple in Queens. And there’s the guy from Texas. So the general direction is south. You’ll get an update tomorrow morning.”

“He always does this, the cunt,” Jonesy told Nili after hanging up. “He doesn’t know what order the jobs need to be done in, he doesn’t know how big the jobs are, he doesn’t know anything. It’s just *yalla*, let’s go, you’ve got a long-distance trip. I’ll bet you it changes five times.”

She frowned. “But you said you’d stop taking these trips so for once I can have you around a little.”

Jonesy was silent for a few seconds. Then he told her, “This is my last trip, I promise. Afterwards you’ll have me around a lot, okay? Even more than you want to.” He pinched her cheek and she said, “Okay.”

In the morning Haim said, “There’s been a change of plans.”

In his heart, Jonesy said, What a surprise. “What happened?” he asked.

Haim said, “There’s an urgent move on 44th Street that just came up. Something small, one hour tops and you three are out of there. As soon as you’re done, head over to the old folks in Queens. Hopefully you’ll finish loading them and hit the road this evening.”

They are cutting across Manhattan, west to east, in the morning. New York is waking up to a new week and on the radio they listen to Howard Stern say ‘Yeah Baby!’ and ‘Oh behave!’ – which he took from Austin Powers – every thirty seconds or so. The fog that is in their brains and hanging over the city is beginning to dissipate. Jonesy’s left hand is on the wheel and his right is wrapped around a carton of Tropicana orange-banana juice. As for Izzy, only coffee and Howard Stern can wake him up.

Yeah Baby! Shlomi is with them too. His back hurts. Howard Stern is talking about *Titanic* and Leonardo DiCaprio. Somebody had seen DiCaprio in the Village, at the Bamboo Club. Jonesy says, “The Bamboo Club? I wonder if it’s

worth going there?” Shlomi says, “Of course it is, worth a trip to hell. You should try it out, whoever sets foot in there is headed straight for hell.”

Jonesy laughs. He says, “We’ve got a small job, an office on 44th and 5th. Haim promises we’ll be out of there in an hour tops. Piece of cake.”

They’re out of there after four hours of sweating and cursing. It was a complicated job, four heavy desks that wouldn’t pass through any doorway. They had to take the doors off their hinges, lift the desks, swing them around and lower them; they had to work with several dollies at once, all to the background music of Jonesy’s agitated cursing. “Out in an hour, piece of cake, fuck Haim,” Jonesy said as they waited for the service elevator. Shlomi said, “That fucking idiot.” He wiped his sweat with the sleeve of his sweatshirt.

New York office buildings are a world of their own. It all looks simple from the outside: building, lobby, pretty elevators, offices. Not something you give a lot of thought to. But behind the scenes is something altogether different. Dozens of people, a complex system of corridors and service elevators, hundreds of deliveries dropped off or picked up every day, sophisticated waste and paper disposal systems. If you multiply that by the thousands of buildings in Manhattan, you get a whole world that’s hidden from view, the flip side of New York. Not the flip side of the night, the world of drugs and prostitutes, the lowlife. This is the flip side of the day, of work. Every time you start a job in some building you learn its map: the doormen, the security guards, the supers, the paper-shredders, the service elevator operators.

The taller the building, the larger and more complicated and more sophisticated the system. In the skyscrapers of Wall Street, each dozens of stories tall, the world hidden from view is the most developed. They have loading docks that

can handle several trucks at a time. The team includes a person whose job it is to direct the trucks, a person who registers the contents of the pick-ups and deliveries, a person responsible for paper and waste, and a host of other jobs.

Those buildings have back corridors covered in linoleum so that dollies and carts can glide smoothly down them. They have shredding rooms and garbage rooms that work round the clock. And they have service elevators, the ugly, bare ones used by the porters and service people, nothing like the elevators at the front of the building fitted with polished mirrors for the people in suits.

When you pull up with your truck to unload at a building like this you see down the back hallways incessant movement of dozens of people in overalls, huge sacks, and goods on their way in and out. You see all the little wheels that make the building run. After a few months on the job you begin to get to know the buildings and the people. You learn who's important, whom to flatter, you recognize familiar faces in familiar overalls you've encountered in this building or some other, you begin to learn the important routes, the bumps in the hallways you're better off avoiding, which direction the doors open, the elevator that runs faster, the mixed scent of cleaning solutions with the sweat of workers. You learn to love it – that, and the air of respect workers have for one another, the way they help out when necessary, lend a hand with an especially heavy box or dolly.

A mover who spends several years on the job in New York will not get to know the sites, the bars, the restaurants and the secret nooks of Central Park as well as the locals. But he'll get to know the city's flip side far better than any local who has lived there for decades. Such a mover knows, for example, that the newer skyscrapers have been built with service in mind, with wide corridors and speedy elevators and special entrances for trucks. But further up – midtown and uptown – in the older

buildings that grew taller with the years, the service systems aren't worth shit. Like that building on 44th and 5th.

First of all, there's no place to park the truck, so you double-park and the doorman gets pissed off and you wind up leaving a worker with the truck. Second, there's the service elevator: when Izzy sees it he asks, in shock, "What is that?" while Jonesy sputters, "Fucking hell, rotten tomatoes! That's what this crap shit service elevator is." To reach it you pass through the main entrance, down a flight of stairs enveloped in steam from the kitchen of the Chinese restaurant next door and then maneuver through narrow hallways to the back of the building. There you find the elevator, in all its cruddiness, with two buttons – a red one for stop and a green one for go – and the old Chinese guy who operates it. Try making that whole trip with four especially heavy desks and a few assorted other pieces of furniture and boxes and you'll understand what they think of Haim when he says, "A small job. An hour tops. Piece of cake."

The ability to find the building's strongman and establish good relations with him is critical in working efficiently and saving time. The decision of the service elevator operator to befriend a certain worker over another and give him priority in the line to the elevator can determine those workers' fates for that day. Jonesy has that ability in his blood. When he reaches the elevator he gives the old Chinese guy a slap on the back with his large hand, smiles, and says, "Haven't seen you for a long time." After that he talks with him about the building's big boss, about girls, about food. Izzy eventually loses track of what they are talking about, all he knows is that the old Chinese guy smiles and moves them up in line.

Once again they're at Francesca's, the unofficial lunchroom of Israeli movers in New York. You can't pass by Francesca's during the lunch hour without noticing at least two or three moving vans. On this spring day in early April, for example, you could find trucks from All-Boro, Ben-Hur, and the blue truck with Sababa Moving and Storage written on it.

Jonesy and Izzy are eating hero sandwiches with chicken cutlet, eggplant and pizza sauce, Francesca's specialty. Shlomi's got his kosher sandwich. There's a live broadcast from the European soccer championship league on the big-screen TV.

Jonesy walks over to the phone in the corner and calls the office.

"Johnson, why are the old folks from Queens calling me to complain you haven't shown up there? They've been waiting since nine o'clock."

"Haim, lay off. Let me just remind you that it was you who told us to do the commercial job on 44th first. A piece of cake, right?"

"Don't aggravate me, Johnson. I told you to wrap that up in an hour and get out to Queens, didn't I?"

"No, that's not what you said. You said it was a small job that'd take us an hour. You didn't say we should wrap it up in an hour. Did you want us to quit in the middle? There were heavy desks wider than the doors, we had to take apart the door frames. The service system was something out of the seventeenth-century. It's real easy to say 'piece of cake' about a job you haven't seen. So what should we do now, head out to the old folks in Queens?"

"Johnson, don't aggravate me." This time Haim's voice is a tone louder.

"They've been waiting half the day for you already. It doesn't make a good impression, Johnson. Too bad you got delayed. Call me the minute you get there."

Jonesy puts the receiver down. He's pissed off. Once again Haim has promised customers the impossible, and then the customers complain to the movers and don't tip them. How's a guy supposed to work like that?

Jonesy is quiet on the ride to Queens. Shlomi and Izzy sit next to him arguing chocolate. Izzy prefers Kit Kat, Shlomi thinks the Israeli version, Kif Kef, is better.

Izzy says, "Kit Kat's a hundred times better than Kif Kef. Kif Kef doesn't even come close."

"Why's that? Because it's made in Israel? That's totally lame, our stuff is the best."

"What bullshit! Why do you always jump right to Jews verses the rest of the world? I thought we were talking about taste differences between chocolate bars."

"I'm talking about the quality of the wafer and the quality of the chocolate. I'm not even talking about the taste."

"You're not talking about the taste, you're talking about the quality of the wafer? What are you, the Standards Institute? What do you know about the quality of the wafer? Which do you think tastes better?"

"You don't understand, it's not important which is tastier. That's not the question. The question is whether you consider this lousy Kit-Kat up to standards in terms of the quality of the chocolate and the wafer. I'm trying to tell you that it's low quality."

"I give up, Shlomi. I don't understand what we're arguing about. Drop it."

They move on to arguing about skiing versus snowboarding. Shlomi has never been snowboarding, but that doesn't keep him from sticking up for it over skiing, which Izzy favors. Izzy can barely get a word in edgewise.

Lisa and Carl Lemmon have a three-story house in Queens. It is full of furniture and objects arranged just like a house should be. Everything is in its place. Not a thing has been packed.

Jonesy enters the house, says hi to Lisa Lemmon. He tours the rooms, then asks to use the phone.

He dials the office. “Haim,” he says, “is this some kind of joke?”

Haim says, “What’s the problem this time? Their bed doesn’t fit through the door either?”

“Seriously, Haim, is this a joke?”

“I won’t understand a thing until you tell me what you’re talking about.”

“I don’t know where to start. First of all, there’s a lot more than a truckload here. You wanted us to put them on half a truck, but you can forget about that. Second, nothing is packed here. You didn’t mention anything about packing. It’ll take two days. And you wanted us to hit the road this evening?” Jonesy is so furious that he begins to laugh.

Haim is quiet for a few seconds. He says, “Are you sure it’s more than a truckload? That’s not what I was told.”

“This place is three stories high with a million things in it, and all of it gets moved down to Florida. That’s what the old lady says. No way is this all going to fit on one truck. Definitely not with everything that’s already on it. Who did the estimate here? How much is it for, anyway?”

If there is one thing Jonesy hates, it's an estimate that's too low. Because then the owners expect to pay a sum that's too low, and when they're hit with the real bill they get pissed off, justifiably, and the tip suffers.

Haim is quiet a little longer. Finally he says, "Send Shlomi to pick up a truck from Ryder in the morning. I'll talk to John over there. You guys start packing. Split the old folks' stuff between the Ryder and the Sababa truck."

Jonesy mauls his head between his hands. Haim's improvisations drive him crazy.

"Shlomi will take the Ryder down to Florida," Haim says. "You and Izzy stay with the Sababa truck. Now listen, you've got Texas there, you'll have part of the Florida job. I want you still to pass by storage today and take a job that's going to Chicago...."

"Chicago? What's that got to do with Florida and Texas?" Jonesy is now totally confused.

"Chicago. And something new has popped up, too. There's a rush job at Uncle Sam's going to Minnesota. He wants you guys to load up at his place and leave tonight."

These stunts Haim keeps pulling always make Jonesy think again about the plan. He never thought it would come off the ground so soon, but after days like this he just can't stand to lay eyes on Haim ever again. He's sitting with Shlomi and Izzy in the cab of the truck, which is parked next to the house of the old folks in Queens. It's starting to snow. The heater is on full blast. Daylight is starting to fade.

Shlomi says, "Look at us, three grown men stuck in a stinking box, in the snow, like dogs."

There's a silence, and then Jonesy says, "Let's do something."

"Do what?" Shlomi asks. "Last week when Haim drove us crazy with that trip to South Carolina, you also said we should do something. And here we are, just jabbering again about doing something."

"No, I'm serious," Jonesy says. "Why should we let him treat us like this? I'm sitting here asking myself who this guy thinks he is. Think about it: he makes thousands of dollars a day, while we make hundreds, at best. He charges thirty-four dollars an hour for each worker and we, the guys who actually do the job, get ten bucks an hour."

"Ten? I get seven," Izzy says.

"Something is fucked up here. We're the ones who sweat, we're the ones dealing with the customers. Shlomi, you remember the lady who started crying and called the police on us when we hit her with a bill for \$490 dollars in supplies? I don't like being put in a situation like that for a guy like Haim. In the end all we have to show for it is ten bucks an hour."

"Seven," says Izzy.

"And the tip, which is even harder to come by thanks to his wheeling and dealing."

"We've talked about it so many times already. I swear, Jonesy," Shlomi says, "I remember you saying exactly the same things three years ago. And we haven't done a thing about it. What're you gonna do? Start up your own company? Let's face it, no matter how pissed off we get, he's the one who set up the company, bought a truck and took a chance."

"But that's what kills me. He didn't do anything. If he was at least a decent manager I'd say, Okay, great. But Haim? I'm not talking about starting my own

company, I'm talking about something better, something really big. One big hit. I've seen so much wealth here, so many rich folks. And they don't have anything we don't, not one single advantage over us."

"What are you going to do, steal a truck? Run off with the customers' money? How much can you make, ten thousand? Fifteen? That's not worth never being able to show your face again in New York."

"True," Jonesy says. "And that's why I'm saying we have to think of something. Take the money from the move, sell the truck on the black market – that's the first part of the plan. But the rest is missing, the icing on the cake."

Nobody says a word, then Jonesy adds, "Maybe you guys have an idea?"

Izzy and Shlomi look at one another. Shlomi starts to laugh and Jonesy says, "Don't laugh. We've got to screw that asshole."

Ponytails and Tattoos

"Popeye!!!"

Popeye raises his head from the two hundredth episode of The Simpsons.

"Want a bagel?" Pozailov asks him.

Popeye glances at Pozailov's hand, which is holding something unidentifiable.

"Why is it so dark?"

"It's dark because of the kind of flour they used to make the bagel. It's got cream cheese and lox on it. You interested?"

"Hand it over." Popeye takes the bagel from Pozailov's huge hand.

Pozailov remains rooted in place watching the ponytailed young computer programmer bite lustily into the bagel.

“What do you want?” Popeye asks with his mouth full.

“What’s going on? Are you guys making progress or are you watching The Simpsons?”

“We’re making progress, we’re making progress. I need a little inspiration, that’s all. Mordechai’s in there, he’s working.”

“You guys know you don’t have a lot of time, right?”

Popeye turns his attention back to The Simpsons, still talking with his mouth full. “We know, Pozailov, we know. Are you going to remind us every day?”

“Yes. I’m going to remind you every day. Absolutely. Otherwise, how will you guys move your asses? Those machines have to be out of here in three days from now. Do you know that?”

“We know. Three days from now.”

“So, is that going to happen on time?”

“Earlier. We’ll be done in two days.”

“You’ll be done in two days. That sounds too familiar to me. Aren’t you sick of saying that? That’s what worries me about you two; do you understand that if those machines aren’t out of here on Saturday we’re all in big trouble? Do you understand that Vladimir Berkovitch won’t bat an eye about turning all of us into corpses?”

Popeye pulls his attention once again from the television. He’s getting pissed off. “Pozailov! We’ve listened to your threats a thousand times already. The machines will be ready on time, okay? I just need a little inspiration, that’s all. Mordechai is working and I’ll be back in there in another second. If Vladimir wants to turn us into corpses a few days before the work is done, then he can be my guest. There’s nothing I can do about it.”

“Whatever you say.” Pozailov is dissatisfied with his answer, dissatisfied with being the only one feeling the pressure. And his back is itching in a place he can’t reach, driving him crazy for several days now. He tries stretching his arm around but once again is unsuccessful. He says to Popeye, “Can you scratch my back here? There’s this spot I can’t reach and it’s driving me crazy.”

“Here?”

“A little higher. Yeah. A bit to the right. No, just a little to the left. Yeah. Ooooh, scratch it! Wow. Ooooh. Yes, that’s it. Can you look and see what’s there? Pozailov lifts his Chicago Bulls t-shirt.

“God, Pozailov, what is that? It’s a huge spider!”

Pozailov jumps. Then he remembers. “Hey, don’t pull my leg. Is there really something there?”

“Ah, it’s not a real spider.” Popeye scrutinizes the elaborate tattoo in the middle of Pozailov’s back: a spider wed with a small black widow in the center. “The area around the tarantula’s left eye is all red. That’s all. You want me to scratch it some more?” Popeye rests his fingernail on the spider.

“No, no, that’s enough. Leave it alone.”

Popeye lets the Bulls t-shirt fall back to Pozailov’s waist. He has lost all hope of watching any more of The Simpsons now. He stares at Pozailov, who is dressed as if it were summer: t-shirt, shorts, bare feet.

“What’s with you, Pozailov? Why are you dressed like you’re going to the beach? It’s way below freezing out there.”

“You guys insisted on this heat for your fucking machines, didn’t you? Anyway, what’s wrong with a little heat? This isn’t the Ukraine, we’re in the free world.”

Popeye takes the last bite of his bagel. “Thanks, that was great.” He glances at his boss. Pozailov looks like an overgrown child, with his wild, ginger-colored beard, bright blue eyes and balding head. It’s hard to believe this creature spent three years in Afghanistan. Pozailov had told him about it one evening. He’d been in the Special Forces fighting against the Mujahadin, the fundamentalist Islamic rebels. After that he’d done time in the gulag for attempted arms smuggling, something he doesn’t talk about. They called him ‘The Colonel.’ He has a huge panther tattooed on his chest and on his knee an eight-point star which means, he explained once, that he will never bow down to anyone, ever. He had the tarantula and the spider web done on his back purely for beauty’s sake. And then of course there are the fingers: on two fingers of his left hand, like rings, there are tattoos of two letters from the Cyrillic alphabet, A and K. Once Popeye asked him, “So, like was her name Anna Karenina or what?” Pozailov merely shot him his wounded look and said, “No.” He is not willing to discuss that tattoo.

Pozailov is still towering over him; his presence annoys Popeye until he finally breaks: “Okay, okay. You won’t leave me alone until I get up, huh?”

“Nope.”

“So fine.” Popeye stands up. He walks into the next room. Mordechai is sitting there staring intently at the computer screen. “Doctor Mordechai, want something to eat? Pozailov has delicious bagels.” Mordechai raises his face from the screen, says, “No,” and returns to the screen. Popeye sits down at his computer and tries to remember where he left off.

Haim Galil

There are quite a number of movers who claim to be New York's best. One even immortalized his self-proclaimed title by painting it on a bridge in Queens, but nobody thinks much of the guy because no serious mover would ever debase himself in such a fashion. There has never been any official kind of competition, but there are a few legends in the field.

Haim Galil is one of them. Originally from Netanya, he came straight to New York after the army ten years ago. He never wants to go back to Israel but he never says why. He's dead set against giving back the Golan Heights, says, "As far as I'm concerned they can give back Jerusalem, but not the Golan Heights. If they give up the Golan, I'll never set foot on Israeli soil again." Haim often has moments like these.

Most of the time he's silent. Skinny but strong, he wears his hair cropped, and it's going gray at the sides. When his employees ask him work-related questions, he says, "That's very simple. You just do what you have to, it's no big deal." He doesn't care to elaborate or make himself particularly clear. He also doesn't talk much about his past as a mover, but from stories other movers tell it is known that he was a foreman at Flat Rate, worked at some point for Schleppers and, like everyone else, put in a few months at Moishe's.

At Flat Rate he'd met Michel Argamani and Ronen Braun, with whom, three years ago, he'd established Sababa Moving and Storage. Argamani – despised by Sababa employees – returned to Flat Rate a year later as a dispatcher and then moved over to Shiny Happy Movers. He looks like a burnt matchstick: incredibly thin, with thick black hair and glasses, and something not quite straight about his posture.

Ronen Braun went on to work for a shipping company. Haim remained at Sababa,

which became a small company that feeds off the remains of the bigger movers. He considered changing the name to Haim's Moving (Galil was already taken) but gave up on the idea because Americans have trouble pronouncing it, and mostly because he didn't have the money to repaint the truck.

An old Jewish customer, someone Haim once moved from upstate New York to Florida, said, "Tell me, how is it that the Jews, after three thousand years of suffering, have turned into *schleppers*?"

Schleppers is the oldest Israeli moving company in New York. Moishe's is the largest. Both of them started up in the late seventies; now Moishe's handles about fifteen thousand moves a year. They have some sixty trucks on the road every day, two enormous storage facilities, hundreds of employees – three hundred, maybe more. After that there are firms like Schleppers, Flat Rate, Ben-Hur, Alpha, with twenty or thirty trucks, maybe less. Dozens of employees. Below them are the small companies with five or ten trucks and twenty-five to thirty workers. These are modest firms that do a respectable job, like Avi's, Jerusalem, Nice Movers. There are lots more, maybe fifty Israeli moving companies in New York, and that's even without mentioning Miami (Cohen's is the big fish there), Chicago (Samson, Golan), Los Angeles (Avi's again). And then there's Sababa Moving and Storage. One truck and six employees, more or less.

The large companies boast advanced marketing systems, respectable offices downtown, toll-free numbers, telephone receptionists, and a marked presence in the Yellow Pages, the local papers and occasionally on billboards. The smaller firms hand out flyers around the city. Sababa Moving and Storage gets work through Haim's connections. Ronen Braun passes jobs behind the backs of his bosses at the

shipping company, and Michel Argamani relies on Sababa to pick up work when things get too hectic at Shiny Happy Movers. There are a few other such shady moving companies of this variety who pass along customers. So, as often is the case, Sababa employees masquerade as the employees of other companies.

That's what Sababa Moving and Storage – and Haim himself – are like: a vulture that feeds off the carcasses of other companies' prey, circling overhead waiting to see what the lions and tigers of the moving industry will leave behind.

Only once in a great while will the telephone in the office of Sababa Moving and Storage ring with the call of a customer who has read their ad in the Yellow Pages. On those rare occasions, the blue t-shirts of Sababa Moving and Storage are removed from the cupboards and worn on the proud chests of the employees.

From Haim's repertoire of stories: a grand piano that he moved himself and which fell on his foot; an avalanche that got him stuck for four days on a road in Colorado without food; moving Puff Daddy; moving Kim Basinger ('She had this elevator – it wasn't an elevator, it was a wedding hall'); a fully loaded truck that overturned; and many more. Incidentally, the Puff Daddy story has been running strong for the past year; Izzy has heard it from employees of at least three different moving companies, all of whom claim to have moved Puff Daddy. So either Puff Daddy has moved apartments within Manhattan three times in one year, with three different moving companies – all Israeli – or somebody has been stretching the truth.

Haim lives with Nurit, his girlfriend, on the Upper West Side on Ninety-something and Columbus. It's a nice neighborhood. Sometimes Nurit comes into the office with him in the morning. She sniffs around, nags. Once in a while she comes in on her own. No one has ever seen her do anything other than take a ride with the company truck to a laundromat on 23rd Street. People say she owns a few apartments

in Israel and lives off the rent. They say she has a son in the army, back in Israel. They say lots of things about Nurit, about her money, about the German who was her lover.

Today Nurit hasn't come in; only Haim is in the office, along with Nili, and the telephone has not stopped ringing. Uncle Sam is driving them crazy about the urgent move to Minnesota, and the Sababa employees – Johnson, Izzy, Shlomi – keep complaining. Whatever you give them to do, they'll complain. They should say thank you for having jobs and being well paid, and then shut their mouths. Where else would they make what they're earning at Sababa? Too bad, sometimes things happen at the last minute, and plans change. It's not as if they don't know that; they're like a bunch of whining old ladies, especially Johnson. As for today's complaints, Haim knows they'll do the job in the end. A Ryder truck will set out for Florida, while the Sababa truck will head out to Chicago and continue to Minnesota, then down to Texas and finally to Florida to finish off that job. And Johnson can cry all he wants about it.

Moving and Turn-of-the-Century European Art

Izzy is on the subway the next morning on his way to the Bronx where he'll meet up with Shlomi at the Ryder rental office. Here's another of Haim's tricks: when the work piles up, usually toward the end of the month, he rents a truck or two from Ryder, and these work in tandem with the blue Sababa truck. At the time of rental, Ryder records the mileage and then Sababa uses it for a long-distance trip. When the truck comes back it gets taken to a parking lot in the Bronx where the cover of the dashboard is pried open. With a long screwdriver the mechanical wheels of the

odometer are moved back to a number just slightly higher than the starting mileage, the dashboard cover is put back in place and the truck is returned to Ryder. Since most of the payment to Ryder is based on mileage and not on days, the rental winds up costing next to nothing.

The subway train emerges from underground and makes its screechy way across the Bronx bridges. Sitting next to Izzy is a black guy who is unwilling to move over, even a little. Izzy mutters “Son of a bitch asshole” in Hebrew. He’s holding a paper cup of coffee in his hand which cost fifty cents at the Korean deli. At the Korean deli there had been a junkie looking around for salt to put in her instant noodles. She said, “I love you people.” The Korean guy behind the counter said, “I love you, too.”

“What’s up, Shlomi?”

“Thank God, everything’s under control.”

They’re headed for Queens in the yellow Ryder truck. On the way they pass by the sculpture of the globe from that scene in *Men in Black*. Izzy locates the hip-hop station 97.1 FM. A song by Mase is playing, Tell Me What You Want From Me.

“Enough with the blacks, put on 103.5 for something familiar. Maybe we’ll get lucky and hear that one from *Titanic*.”

“Haven’t you heard it enough?”

Shlomi glances in the mirror and says to Izzy, “Look and see if it’s all clear on the left.”

Izzy looks, and it is. But after the yellow Ryder truck takes the turn they hear a police siren.

“I don’t believe it,” Shlomi says, looking in the mirror. “Shit.”

Izzy touches his hair, pushes his fingers through it. He says, “Just don’t get smart with him, Shlomi.”

“License and registration, please,” comes the voice.

Shlomi does not get smart with him. He takes the ticket from the policeman, nodding in disbelief: a seventy-six dollar fine for making a left turn at a no-left-turn intersection. He says, “At least New York cops aren’t shitheads like in New Jersey or Ohio,” and starts the truck.

Last week Shlomi had an accident in New Jersey. A car rammed him, and then he nearly hit the police car that arrived on the scene. The policeman detained him. Shlomi believes all this comes from the Almighty, who is testing him. He accepts it with love. Once Izzy told him, “If this is all a bunch of tests from heaven then it appears you are one of God’s tougher projects.”

Lisa and Carl Lemmon, the senior citizens in Queens, are moving to a retirement home in Florida, like many others Americans who reach old age. Nobody says it out loud, but they’re going to Florida to die. It could happen next month or in five years; one way or another, it’s the last move in their lives. If the average American moves twelve times in his life, then the move to Florida at around eighty is number twelve. The next move is to the cemetery of your choice.

The Florida climate suits old people. True, it rains a lot and there’s a tornado or two every year, but the temps never drop to where the cold penetrates their old bones, causing them terrible pain – like in New York, Chicago or Seattle. That’s why Florida boasts the world’s most flourishing retirement home industry.

As is his custom, Shlomi is enchanting the customers, and Lisa Lemmon has fallen in love with him in about five minutes. Shlomi this, Shlomi that, Shlomi here,

Shlomi there. What does Shlomi say about the idea of wrapping the china plates like this, and when does Shlomi estimate we will set out for Florida, and perhaps Shlomi would like some apple juice? Lisa Lemmon is petite, her eyebrows are plucked, she wears glasses. Carl is tall and thin. He, too, wears glasses, though his lenses are thicker, and he walks with a cane. He looks more worn out than his wife. Like many Americans their age, the European accent they brought with them in the first half of the century lingers in their English. Shlomi has of course plunged into their personal history, which they are sharing with him with relish. Once he told Izzy, “The way to get people to open up is by asking them about themselves. People love talking about themselves. When they find someone who listens they open up like flowers. Incidentally, that’s true about girls, too. I don’t use that technique anymore, thank God, but I thought you might like to know.”

Lisa and Carl came from Germany in 1943.

“During the war?” Shlomi asks.

“Yes,” Lisa answers.

“But how?”

“There were Germans leaving all throughout the war,” she says, lowering her gaze. “People who did not approve of what the regime was doing. People who wanted to get out.”

It is a huge job. The whole house needs to be packed up – all the furniture wrapped in blankets, all the kitchen appliances wrapped in special paper, then the boxes and all the paintings, dozens of them in every corner of the house. “Why didn’t anyone say there were so many pictures? I don’t have enough boxes,” Shlomi complains.

At the Van Damm Deli in Long Island City you can get a first-class breakfast for three dollars and fifty cents, along with Latin music and a Puerto Rican waiter named Carlos who speaks a pretty decent Hebrew: “Yes sir,” he says in the holy tongue, “What will it be? Enjoy your meal. Salt? Pepper?”

Jonesy stops there first thing in the morning. He woke up in a bad mood because of Haim’s bullshit yesterday, but now he is able to calm down a bit. Carlos knows exactly how he likes his breakfast: home fries, bacon, two eggs over easy, coffee. After that he walks to the storage, three minutes away.

Their storage space – typical for Sababa Moving and Storage – is not a huge warehouse as the name implies; rather, like most things related to this company, the name is only a pale reflection of reality. In fact it is one small storage room, which Haim got a good deal on, in one of the huge warehouses belonging to Avi’s, a *real* storage company. Harry, a pudgy Indian, bespectacled and friendly, sits all day long on the loading dock and directs the trucks that come in to load and unload, up to three trucks at a time. He is also in charge of the soda vending machine, which is usually broken.

“Hey Harry, how’re you doing?”

Harry smiles his sweet smile at Jonesy from under his wide, dark glasses. He was an actor in Bombay before coming to America. He thought to try his luck in Hollywood and got stuck in New York. He says to Jonesy, “Hello Jonesy, soda machine not working today.”

“So what’s new?” Jonesy answers. Usually he and Harry share a laugh at that but today it just pisses him off. It’s crazy that in such a place, where people work hard and sweat, the soda machine is perpetually broken.

Jonesy loads the job going to Chicago onto the blue Sababa truck, which is really going to some little town in Indiana not far from Chicago. When he finishes that he loads packing materials and makes his way to Queens to help Izzy and Shlomi with the big job, the old couple on their way to Florida.

When Shlomi learned from Lisa what Haim's estimate for the job was, he was furious. He said to Izzy, "Three, three-and-a-half for this move? If they pay less than eight, nine – even ten, I'm a cocker spaniel. What a son of a bitch that Haim is, I feel really sorry for them. And for us. They'd be crazy to tip us after being treated that way. All my flirting with the old lady isn't worth shit." He wanted to call Haim and shout at him but Izzy convinced him there was no point. "Forget it, we know he's an asshole. But he's gonna pay. We'll come up with a plan. What's with all these pictures?"

Lisa came by to flirt. "Shlomi, what about the boxes for the pictures? Have they arrived yet?" She smiled. Izzy whispered to Shlomi, "She's hot for you."

Shlomi said, "Here, Lisa, they just arrived. I told you not to worry, right?" He beamed his charming movie-star smile at her. "You people have so many things, so many beautiful things, and we want to work carefully and take good care of them, so it will take a little time." Her eyes shone with love when she answered him: "All right, Shlomi, whatever you say," she said in her slightly German-accented English.

"So what's with all these picture, Lisa? You and Carl really love art, don't you?" Shlomi asked.

"Well...in fact the truth is that..."

"Lisa!" Carl called from the kitchen, "can you come here for a minute please?"

Lisa excused herself and left the room. Later she offered them apple juice. She did not mention the paintings again.

They spent the whole morning packing. Shlomi told Izzy he'd gotten his driver's license in the Bahamas. "They take you around the block, you pay eight hundred dollars and you get your license. I'd barely ever even driven a car before that, can you believe it? But Haim needed someone to drive. At first I would shake with fear driving around Manhattan in that huge truck, I scraped the walls of the Holland and Lincoln tunnels plenty. These New Yorkers – if they went to all that trouble to build tunnels, why couldn't they have made them a little wider? But afterwards it got easy."

"Maybe because of that license you keep having accidents and getting tickets," Izzy chuckled.

"I told you, everything comes from God Almighty. It's because I looked at that picture of the naked girl." Two days earlier, at the storage, Izzy had flipped through an Indian porn magazine that belonged to Harry, and Shlomi had peeked over his shoulder.

"But I looked at that magazine, too. And so did Harry." Izzy said.

"It's harder for the righteous and the religiously observant. You know the verse about bad things happening to good people and good things happening to bad people?"

"So how can it be worth it? I enjoyed looking at the naked Indian girl in a whole bunch of different positions and nothing happened to me, while you saw a piece of her ass for a second and BOOM! A seventy-six dollar fine from God Himself via a New York traffic cop. So what are we supposed to learn from that?"

“You don’t understand. This world is nothing, it’s just a tiny speck compared with the world to come. Do you prefer to enjoy yourself for one split second and suffer in hell for all eternity? It upsets me to hear that. Why don’t you and Jonesy come along to a seminar this weekend? There’ll be young Jews from all over America, something really special.”

In the afternoon, when Jonesy arrived, he got them organized and they all worked with great efficiency. He stood on the truck, Izzy brought the boxes from the house and Shlomi continued to schmooze with Lisa and Carl, listening to their requests, calming their nerves, placing green numbered stickers on the boxes and registering everything in the inventory list. He was working in the kitchen when Jonesy came in to fill up his bottle of water.

Jonesy said, “So tell me Shlomi, do you know how much the estimate is for this job? I asked Haim yesterday but that asshole didn’t even answer me.”

“Thirty-five hundred,” Shlomi said.

Jonesy stared at him, appalled. After a long silence he said, “I would tell you I can’t believe it, but where that son of a bitch is concerned I believe everything.”

When he went back outside Shlomi peered at him through the window. He could see Jonesy sitting next to the truck, outside in the cold drinking from his bottle and staring silently at the ground.

The day passes. You load a few things, move a few things. You sit in the house of strangers, you get into the truck. You jump into the mud, munch sunflower seeds, drink Gatorade. You listen to Shlomi expound on the Almighty – mostly good things.

It was Jonesy who came back to the topic of the paintings. One of the times he went into the house to take a piss he said, “Whoa, these pictures look pretty special. Not that I know anything about paintings, but look at this one: it’s dated nineteen-eleven. It’s really really old.” He said to Lisa, “You have a huge collection.”

Lisa grimaced. “Oh...we love art. We’ve been buying for years. A good friend of ours is an artist, he’s given us lots of his work.”

“But there are paintings by all kinds of artists here,” Jonesy persisted. “Some of them are really old.”

“Well, yes, some of them we brought with us from Europe. Some belonged to my parents.”

“Lisa!” It was Carl calling from the basement.

“Excuse me, I must help Carl,” she said, and went downstairs.

Jonesy watched her descend and his brow wrinkled.

“Come on, Jonesy,” Shlomi said, “back to work. Izzy and I have been here since this morning and we’re already sick of this house. Let’s finish up and get out of here.”

“Hang on a minute. What kind of accent does she have? Do you guys know where they’re from?”

“Germany, nineteen-forty-three,” Izzy said. “She told us before. Why?”

“Are they Jewish?”

“No,” Shlomi answered. “Why?”

“I don’t know, I’m suspicious of this business with the paintings. You know how many times I’ve heard my grandmother’s stories about the things the Nazis took

from their house? Expensive things – gold, diamonds, art. It's a known fact, I'm not making this up.”

“So what are you saying, that little Lisa used to steal paintings from Jews when she was twelve? Do me a favor.”

Jonesy glared at him. “You jerk. Maybe it was her father? Doesn't it sound suspicious to you? They're Germans, not Jews, they escaped in forty-three with loads of paintings. Don't you think that's strange?”

“But she told you that most of the pictures are from here,” Izzy said.

“Well what else is she going to say? ‘Ah yes, my father was an officer in the Gestapo and stole pictures from Jews. I hope you don't mind.’”

When Jonesy said the word ‘Gestapo,’ Shlomi jumped and looked around. Izzy was shaken up, too.

At the end of the day Shlomi goes home to Queens in the yellow Ryder truck.

Tomorrow he will finish loading the old folks into the Ryder and set out for Florida.

Izzy and Jonesy go home in the blue Sababa truck.

The Bee Gees are on the radio. Jonesy is tense; he needs to verify with Haim what Uncle Sam wants and when they're supposed to hit the road. He needs to talk with Nili. And he has to speak with Yigal about the paintings.

He says, “I've got to check out this business with the paintings. This could be the missing piece to our puzzle: we can sell those paintings for lots of money.

Anyway, they were stolen from Jews so we don't even have an ethical problem here.”

He laughs.

Izzy says, “You don't know that they're stolen.”

“I’m almost certain about it,” Jonesy says. “We’ll check that out. I have this friend, Yigal, a crazy painter. Every once in a while we take his paintings to exhibitions. I want to pop over to his place and show him the paintings. Maybe he’ll know how much they’re worth. Why do you think I put all the paintings in our truck?”

“And if this Yigal says they’re worth something?”

Jonesy regards him for a moment then returns his gaze to the road. “Then our plan takes off. We’ll sell the paintings someplace, get rid of the truck and the rest of the stuff and then we can say goodbye to Haim Galil and goodbye to Sababa Moving and Storage.” He smiles.

“What about Shlomi? Are you going to leave him out of the plan?”

“Shlomi’s all right, but three’s a crowd.”

“What about Nili? She wants to stay and study in New York, doesn’t she?”

Jonesy sighs. “Yeah, another problem. I’m going to have to talk with her.”

Nili is an indispensable part of the plan. While they run around with the truck she’ll be in the office and can pass along reports about what Haim’s up to. On second thought, however, what reason would she have for going along with this plan? If it works, Jonesy will be finished with the moving business, with Haim, with the apartment. He won’t be able to show his face in New York again. And Nili has enrolled to study in New York. She wants to stay put.

Izzy sniffs his fingers. He misses Daphna more than ever. He feels nauseous, he fiddles with his earring. He can tell that Jonesy is concentrating on his plan. But he is still unsure what he feels about it himself.

He says, “I don’t know, it’s a lot of details. Maybe it needs more planning, more thinking.

Jonesy says, “What bothers me is that if we’re already going for a grandiose plan and stealing a truck and traveling all over America, then we should think bigger. Bigger even than the paintings. I don’t know what, we have to think about it, you know what I mean?”

They enter Manhattan on the bridge and cross the island. They are listening to the radio.

Jonesy says, “We’ll have to see what comes up on this trip, maybe we’ll get some new ideas.”

He says, “Get that rotten tomato Celine Dion off the air or I’ll go nuts!”

He says, “We’re home.”

Popeye Circles the Lake

In a huge overheated house in a beautiful area of Minneapolis on Lake Harriet, a large and agitated man in a Chicago Bulls t-shirt by the name of Pozailov is talking to a thin man of about forty-five with thick glasses and graying hair who is wearing, for no apparent reason, a doctor’s white coat.

Pozailov’s voice is high-pitched, broadcasting the panic he is feeling in every bone of his body at this moment. He says, “What did you say? I don’t think I heard you correctly. Could you repeat what you just said?”

The thin guy, Mordechai, raises his eyes from the computer in front of him, scribbles something on a piece of paper and says nonchalantly, “I said that Popeye went out for a run. He’s circling the lake, he needed some fresh air. The heat in here was making him nauseous...”

“You guys asked for this heat!” Pozailov is shouting.

“We asked for this heat because the machines need it to work properly. These machines are not ours, they’re yours. We’re working on them for you. Besides, Popeye needs to run. So he’s running. Weren’t you supposed to provide him with a treadmill?”

“It’s on the way. But if the machines aren’t ready on time he won’t have a treadmill or anything else for that matter. There will be three corpses here: the two of you and me.”

“Why do you think we won’t be ready on time? If you stand here and shout every time someone goes out for a five-minute jog then maybe we really won’t manage it. See,” he says, glancing at the clock at the bottom right-hand corner of the computer screen, “we’ve just wasted four minutes.”

“Do you two know when these machines need to be ready?”

“Saturday. On Saturday they have to be on their way. Unless something has changed since yesterday, or the day before yesterday, or the day before the day before yesterday, or the day before that.”

“Does Popeye know that too?”

“Of course Popeye knows that.”

“So how could he go out for a jog around the lake just now?” Pozailov’s expression is worried, his ginger beard wilder than ever. His gaze rests on a chessboard upon which a game of chess appears to be in progress. “Chess? How can you possibly have time for chess?” He goes to the window, bends down and moves the curtain aside to get a look at the lake. “Somebody’s running there. Is that him?” Mordechai doesn’t even turn around. On second glance, there are a number of runners out there. Pozailov is disappointed to discover that he cannot even make out whether they are men or women. “Shit, I need glasses.”

“I also wish to remind you,” Mordechai says to Pozailov, “that we are programming these machines to work at a specific time and date. So don’t you think we would know exactly when they need to leave here? Anyway, we’ve found the random seed, which is the most critical stage of programming, so most of the work is already behind us.”

Pozailov thinks for several minutes. Eventually he says, “Okay, Mordechai, you’re the doctor. I was just making sure.” He looks out the window again. “Tell me something: where’d you get your glasses? Do you know any place I can get glasses in Minnesota? I think I need glasses. Come here a second. Can you tell the runners out there apart? Can you make out their faces?”

Mordechai rises from his computer, straitens his lab coat and glances out the window. “Not only can I make out the faces, I can see our friend Popeye’s adorable mug, including his baseball cap and ponytail. You can’t?”

“What, you can really see their faces?”

“My glasses are from Brighton Beach. But there’s sure to be a LensCrafters at the local mall. These days they get it done in an hour.”

“What, and I’m supposed to start running around with glasses?”

“That’s the idea, Pozailov. Now let me get back to work.”

“And for sure you’ll be ready on time, right?”

Mordechai does not answer. He is absorbed in what’s on his computer screen. Pozailov goes out to the kitchen to wait for Popeye to return. He prepares a bagel with fresh lox he picked up earlier from the supermarket, slices a cucumber and thinks about glasses.

Popeye enters, flushed with adrenaline. “Hey, Pozailov! It is so cold out there I froze my balls off! Pretty soon they’ll be skating on the lake. Running outside in these conditions is pretty tough. When’s my treadmill arriving?”

“I told you it’s on the way. The people who are supposed to pick up the machines on Saturday are bringing it from New York. Which means if you keep up the work and the machines are ready on time then you’ll have your treadmill.”

Popeye does sit-ups on the white carpet in the living room. He turns on the television to MTV but keeps the volume low. He is twenty years old, arrived in Brighton Beach with his mother when he was ten. He has never met his father. His mother told him that his father was an athlete, that he was a member of the USSR track and field team at the Moscow Olympics but that he did not compete. Because of her. He met her the night before the competition that would determine the participants in the one hundred meter relay race. They went out, drank all night long. She never saw him again, not even when she turned on the television the next day to watch the race. Popeye was born nine months later. For as long as he can remember he has had the need to run every day. Maybe it’s connected.

“The machines will be ready?” Pozailov is practically standing on top of him.

Popeye continues doing sit-ups. His face is sweaty, his compact body is moving like a piston.

“Because, if you recall, on Tuesday you said they’d be ready in two days.”

Popeye finishes his sit-ups. Breathing heavily he says, “Pozailov, I’m really sick of you, you know? They’ll be ready. How can they not be ready when we’ve been programming them for months to work at a particular time and date?”

Pozailov sits on the bar that separates the kitchen from the living room. He takes another bite from the bagel and offers a bite to Popeye. “Just so you know, Vladimir is apparently going to be here this week. That’s all, just so you know. So everything had better look good, and you’d better not be out jogging when he arrives. Do you know where there’s a LensCrafters around here?”

Mordechai emerges from the work room. Popeye is sweating through stretches and muscle relaxation exercises. “Tell me, Pozailov,” Mordechai says, “did you say that someone’s coming from New York?”

“Yeah. They’re bringing the treadmill and a few other things and taking the machines.”

“Can you ask them to bring me some Salo from home?”

“Hey, that’s a great idea, doctor, I need some Salo, too. I’ll tell them to bring a kilo, two even.”

“Are they going through Brighton Beach?” Popeye asks.

“They may already be on their way, I don’t know. I can ask. What do you guys need?”

Mordechai wants some Salo, a packet of Prima cigarettes and a programming book in Russian that he’s heard is now available in Brighton Beach. Popeye wants more Salo, a few pairs of underwear and socks and his mother’s meatballs. He says, “You taste her meatballs and you just can’t believe you haven’t died and gone to heaven.”

They write everything down on a slip of paper and Pozailov adds more Salo and two bottles of Stolichnaya vodka so that they’ll have something to wash the salty meat down with. An hour later Pozailov sticks his head into the room and says, “Tomorrow at twelve noon they’ll be picking up your stuff from Zatoka. Popeye, tell

your mother to bring it all there.” He does not need to remind them of the address of Vladimir Berkovitch’s restaurant in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn.

Dear Daphna

Hi Baby, Izzy here.

It’s been a while since I’ve written. We were on a long-distance trip last week and I wasn’t anywhere near a computer and the truth is that since we came back to New York I haven’t had a moment to breathe and I never get to use the computer because that jerk Ohad grabs it every evening so he can play bridge online. I just had to use force to get him off.

What’s up with you? Did you send all your application forms to the university? I’m sure you’ll get accepted no problem. I don’t know what’s happening with me yet. For sure I won’t start this year if the forms already have to be submitted now. I’m too busy here. But I’ve started thinking about it. Thanks to Jonesy I’ve been considering psychology. He’s always talking about how in the moving business he’s met all kinds of people and studied them. He’s got all sorts of methods for coaxing bigger tips out of the customers, depending on their personality. Jonesy is one of the biggest tip-scorers in New York. So I figure psychology has to be an interesting way to go, no? What do you think? Is it hard to get accepted?

There are so many things to tell you, I don’t know where to begin. The Oscars just ended. I watched Kim Basinger get an award, and Titanic won twelve. Titanic hysteria is still going strong. Howard Stern imitates Leonardo DiCaprio all the time.

In the last few days, ever since we came back from that last trip, we’ve been doing all kinds of local jobs around New York and got two trucks ready for long trips.

It looks like one will be going to Florida with Shlomi, and Jonesy and I will be taking the other one out for a long haul – first, north to Chicago and thereabouts, then south to Texas and Florida. I say it *looks like* we'll be going because Haim changes his mind every other second. Truth is, Jonesy and Shlomi are pretty pissed off at him, and really fed up.

The last trip was Jonesy, Shlomi and me and it was pretty crowded in the cabin. I think we passed through six states. We left New York when there was snow on the ground and another storm coming down the coast making things worse as we went (your boyfriend drove through a snowstorm on an ice-covered road!) but by the time we got to South Carolina, to a beautiful city called Charleston, it was hot. We came back through Newtown, a really pretty and rich suburb of Philadelphia...

Izzy stops writing for a moment and sniffs his fingers absentmindedly. After writing the word 'Philadelphia,' he pauses, remembering what happened there, what he won't share with Daphna:

A few hours before the end of the trip, on a flawless day on their way back to New York after spending the night at an excellent truck stop in Virginia (in Baltimore they passed through a tunnel that Jonesy said was the most beautiful one in the US; from the outskirts of Washington they could see the big phallus by Capitol Hill), they arrived at Newtown, a pretty northern suburb of Philadelphia. They pulled up at the home of a woman named Brenda to unload a piano and a few other things that she had inherited from a grandmother who had died in Brooklyn. Pianos are the heaviest pieces to move; they unloaded it with tremendous effort. When they finished Jonesy said, "You go take care of the bill. Shlomi and I will be waiting in the truck."

She was sexy. A bit chubby, but pretty. A housewife, Jewish. Her parents had just returned from Israel, but she had never been. Izzy said, “You must come visit.” She gave him a big glass of orange juice. They stood talking in the kitchen. He stared straight into her pretty eyes and she did not look away, even for a second.

There was something in her eyes that said, Try me. Izzy wanted to. She seemed bored. She was a nurse who had moved there from New York four months earlier because of her husband’s job and hadn’t yet found work in her field. Izzy said, “It’s really pretty here.” She frowned and said, “Yes, but I don’t know a soul. The beautiful surroundings begin to get boring after about two weeks.” She was raising their two children, a boy of nine who was in school, and a five-year old girl in kindergarten.

It happened, though later Izzy couldn’t exactly recall how. But there had been something very clear in her gaze.

He asked her if he could wash his face. She still had not taken her eyes off him. She told him, “Follow me.” He followed her slowly up the stairs. She pointed to the bathroom and waited outside the door. He washed his face, mixed some toothpaste with water and spat into the sink. He came out of the bathroom, she looked at him and he took hold of her arm and led her into the nearest bedroom. On the walls there were pennants and posters of Philadelphia’s football and baseball teams. He kissed her and felt her lips melting into his. They kissed like that for several minutes, then he pushed her gently onto the small, narrow bed.

When he returned to the truck, Jonesy asked him, “Did you get a tip?”

“No tip.”

“Why not?”

“I don’t know. She didn’t offer.”

“Did you give her the line, ‘We normally get ten percent of the bill?’”

“No.”

“So how do you expect to get a tip? Did you sign her on the inventory?”

“Of course.”

“I hope at least you enjoyed yourself.”

Izzy smiled in a way that showed exactly what he was feeling at that moment: confusion, humiliation, pride, disappointment, euphoria.

But now it is basically the bad taste, the guilt, that lingers. He continues his letter to Daphna:

The truth is, Haim drove us crazy and treated us like shit. He kept changing our travel plans according to all sorts of things that came up. Suddenly in the middle of the trip he hollers at Jonesy for us to get back to New York right away. Or he lies to customers and tells them their stuff will arrive on a certain day, then we pay the price when the customers are pissed off that their things have come late and we get stiffed. Jonesy hates that. He’s fed up. He’s been starting to form a plan. He’s sick of the fact that he’s been in the moving business for more than six years and hasn’t managed to put away any money, and that people like Haim can control his life. I don’t want to say too much about it, I’m not sure how I feel about it because I feel bad for Haim. I mean, he *is* the one who gave me a job and a place to live for free, and the pay isn’t bad (six hundred dollars for the last trip). On the other hand, that’s no reason to treat us like shit. He really is an asshole. I guess if I’d been here for a while like Jonesy and Shlomi I wouldn’t be willing to be treated like that.

Anyway, sweetie, I just keep talking about myself. I want you to write me about what’s happening in your life. I really miss you, but I know it won’t take that

much longer. And it could be, if Jonesy's plan succeeds, that I'll be home earlier than I thought (with the same amount of money, or maybe more...I'll tell you about it when I have a chance). That would be great.

Hold tight. I'm sending hugs and kisses.

Izzy

PS: A rat just ran by. Fuck it! Or as Jonesy says, 'Fucking hell, rotten tomatoes!' I sleep on a mattress, I'm just hoping they don't run all over me at night. Nili, Jonesy's girlfriend (and the woman of the house...) set out a few traps. It's cruel, plastic squares smeared with strong glue so that when the rats step on them they get stuck and can't move. I saw one that got caught, it was pretty disgusting. The thing is, the biggest rats are too heavy and they don't get stuck. Okay, I'm going to play a little FIFA '98 (it took me so long to get the computer, at least I'll take advantage a bit). Last time I went up a level. I beat Aston Villa one-zero. I'm sure you're proud of me. Bye.

Impulse Shopping

The door to Jonesy and Nili's room is closed. Izzy sets up his mattress in the corner of the living room. Ohad, the last person he wants to see right now, is sitting on the couch all dressed up in a suit and that little goatee of his. For a change, he's not playing bridge online. He is showing Izzy the toilet paper he got from the mail order club he belongs to.

"You know what a mail order club is?"

"Yes."

“I order things from them all the time. They have incredible deals. It saves me money, and the time it takes to shop, and impulse shopping. You know what impulse shopping is?”

“No. What is it?”

“It’s when you’re walking down the street and suddenly you see something in a shop and BOOM! You decide to buy on impulse. You don’t think about it. Later you get home and you say, ‘Wait a minute, did I really need this?’ Well that never happens with a mail order club. I sit comfortably at home, flip through their catalogs and order only what I really need.”

“But isn’t there impulse shopping with those catalogs? Can’t you get excited about something, order it on impulse, and when it arrives you ask yourself, ‘Did I really need this?’”

“But you can always return it and get your money back.”

“You can return it and get your money back at a store, too. Besides, if you wipe your ass on toilet paper that you got by mail order, you can’t exactly return it, can you?”

“Well, you always need toilet paper, you see? My thing is to buy useful stuff.” Ohad’s goatee, well-groomed like the suits he wears to Wall Street, quivers slightly as he says this.

“So why not buy the useful stuff in the stores? Look, I don’t get you. For toilet paper you’re willing to go down to the post office to pick up a package? And anyway, what about those times when you buy something on impulse as you’re walking down the street and you get home and instead of saying, ‘Wait a minute, did I really need this,’ you say, ‘Hey, I really got lucky passing by that store, this is the

most amazing thing I've ever bought in my whole life.' What about that? Aren't you missing out on some great opportunities?"

"With me, that doesn't happen."

"Besides, when you're walking down the street on the way home from work isn't there a chance you'll run into something you want and then buy it on impulse?"

"No, there's no time on the way home from work. I'm talking about when you're out shopping..."

The door opens and Haim walks in with Nurit in tow. He gives Izzy a look that could scorch earth but says nothing. Izzy looks back at him, his hand rising automatically to his earring. Finally Haim asks, "Where's Johnson?" Izzy gestures with his eyes that he's in his room. Haim walks the four paces down the hall and knocks four times on the door. Ohad says, "You get what I mean? I'm talking about when you're out shopping..." But Izzy is no longer paying any attention to him.

Haim is in a relatively good mood as the Sababa employees adjourn in the office. He says, "Johnson, did you hear they dismissed the Paula Jones case?" He finds this very funny.

Nili says, "I hear Israel's pulling out of Lebanon."

Haim frowns. "We'll be back in there after the first two incidents. It's a good idea in principle, but it's a problem with an enemy like the Arabs."

Nurit says, "If they give the Golan Heights back I'm not going back to Israel, I'll never set foot there again. As far as I'm concerned they can give back Jerusalem, but not the Golan Heights."

Izzy and Jonesy exchange secret smiles. It's exactly what Haim says, word for word.

“Let’s get started,” Haim says. “Where’s Shlomi?”

Nili passes him the trip papers. “He said he would come by tomorrow morning to collect the papers and maps. He had a long day.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Haim says, astounded. “I *didn’t* have a long day? Get him on the speakerphone.”

Nili dials and Haim speaks. “Shlomi, you come by and pick up the map of Florida and the papers for your friends the old folks in Queens. Tomorrow you finish loading them. I want you on the road the minute the Sabbath ends on Saturday night, got it?”

There is silence for several seconds on the other end of the line. “There’s no problem loading tomorrow right up until the Sabbath starts, but why can’t I leave first thing Sunday morning? I’ll get started really early...”

“We don’t have time. I need you back in New York as soon as possible. We’ve got a ton of work and I won’t have any people here.”

Shlomi does not respond.

“Don’t start getting spoiled on me,” he says. “It’s just down and back to Florida. I’m already losing on you because of your Sabbath observance, so you can’t steal another half day from me. And tell the old folks that some of their stuff will arrive a day or two later with Johnson. Johnson, you guys will collect the money from them. It’s a tidy little sum.”

Jonesy exchanges glances with Izzy again. Shlomi, on the line, says, “Okay,” and sounds pissed off. The Sabbath has been a sensitive subject with Shlomi ever since he took a flight back to New York in the middle of a trip and left the truck behind. He claims that Haim promised him that if the trip ran into the Sabbath he

would fly him home at company expense. Haim denies it and refuses to reimburse him.

There is silence, bad vibes in the air. The computer beeps. Izzy shakes the ice cubes in his cup. Shlomi hangs up.

“So what’s going on with you guys?”

Jonesy says, “We’re terrific. I understand there’s another job with Uncle Sam...”

“You haven’t been to Uncle Sam’s yet?”

“We didn’t manage. The job this morning was...”

Haim raises his hand to signal Jonesy to stop talking. “I don’t want to hear a word about the job this morning. Tomorrow at eight you guys are at Uncle Sam’s. He has a treadmill and two ice-cream freezers going to Minneapolis. You’ll load them and then go to Brighton Beach,” he says, passing Jonesy a slip of paper with the address. “A restaurant called Zatoka. Somebody there will give you a small package which you will take to the customer in Minneapolis. Okay? That stuff has to be delivered on Saturday. I swore to Uncle Sam we’d manage it.”

Jonesy says, “Wait a minute, who...”

“Listen up, this is a very important client. Some real heavy hitter. Uncle Sam practically pees in his pants every time he mentions him.”

“Wait a minute,” Jonesy says, trying to get a word in. “Minnesota in two days? In this weather? How? Did you forget we have the Chicago job on the way? It doesn’t make sense to me.”

“The truck will keep moving – one of you sleeps while the other one drives. Forget about Chicago, dump Minnesota first and then go back to Chicago. As far as

I'm concerned you can get there on Saturday evening, just make sure it's still Saturday. That's what Uncle Sam promised his client."

Jonesy stands up and paces the room scratching his head. "No, no," he says. "It doesn't make sense. We'll never make it in time. And why should we bypass Chicago without making the drop?"

"Weren't you listening? Because Minneapolis is more important than Chicago, that's why," Haim says, raising his voice. "And stop being so difficult. The fact that you guys are playing games instead of doing the goddamn work is *your* problem. It took you four hours to do a one-hour job and then you went to enjoy yourselves at Francesca's. I heard how long you spent there."

"I don't understand you. This important client has arranged a tour around New York for us. Because of Brighton Beach, which just popped up now, we'll get a late start. That's his fault. Explain it to him, he'll understand."

"He asked if it would slow up the move. I told him no."

Jonesy looks at Haim in disbelief. Haim continues: "Take the atlas along with detailed maps of Minneapolis, Florida, Texas and Las Vegas."

"Las Vegas???"

"Stop interrupting!" Haim shouts. His face is tomato red. "You are going to take two machines from the customer in Minnesota somewhere south..."

"Wait a minute," Jonesy says, stopping him, unfazed by Haim's shouting. "What's going on here? What machines? Will they fit in the truck? And what does 'somewhere south' mean? Since when do we work this way?"

"Since we have customers who pay so well. I don't know what kind of machines but they promised me they'll fit in in place of the treadmill and the ice-cream freezers. As for the destination, it's probably Texas, or maybe Utah. You're

going to Texas and Florida anyway so you'll be able to combine them." Haim still looks extremely agitated.

"I hope you didn't promise a two-day delivery," Jonesy says.

"Could be New Mexico."

"So what's the map of Las Vegas for?"

"Or Las Vegas."

Jonesy starts cackling, a high-pitched laugh. Nili and Izzy join in, but not Haim. Jonesy stops all of a sudden, his face red and his eyes teary. He says, "I just hope they'll figure it out by the time we get there. Who are these clowns, anyway?"

"I have no idea," Haim says. "Russians, apparently, if I understood correctly. Call me the minute you know where you're headed so I can close the price with them fast."

"Russians? Shit! Bad tippers."

"You'd be surprised. I understood from Uncle Sam that if they're satisfied there'll be a very nice tip."

Nili and Izzy arrange all the maps and documents for both trips.

Haim says, "I've got to run. Have I forgotten anything?"

Jonesy nods. He rubs his thumb and forefinger together. "Money," he says, "lots of it. North, south, Texas, Nevada, Florida. There'll be a lot of tolls and gas."

Haim takes out fifteen hundred dollars for Jonesy and another five for Shlomi, which he leaves with Nili. "That's more than enough," he says. "Nili, give them all the papers. Don't forget the maps. Bye." He leaves.

Jonesy says to Izzy and Nili, "I'm speechless." He counts on his fingers: "In one trip he wants Minnesota in two days, Chicago, Texas, Florida and one as yet

undefined destination in the south.” He slams his fist hard into the desk, causing the computer printer to jump. “Only at Sababa Moving and Storage could this happen. Show this itinerary to any foreman at any serious operation and he’ll have a heart attack on the spot. Or he’ll punch his boss in the mouth.” Jonesy’s face is still red, the tears from his laughing fit have made tracks through his whiskers. He is sweating and his hair is mussed up. Nili glances at him, worried. She asks him is everything is okay. He says, “Yeah, why?” and then another burst of laughter leaps from his throat.

Shlomi calls. He asks Jonesy, “Has the fucking idiot gone? Did you hear what he said about the Sabbath? We’ve got to talk, Jonesy. What’s going on with the plan?”

Jonesy says, without batting an eye, “I’ve decided to wait on it another week or two. Planning takes time.”

Shlomi says, “Be in touch,” and Jonesy says, “Of course we will, don’t worry.” After Shlomi hangs up Jonesy turns to Nili, exhales deeply and says, “Now you and I need to talk.”