

The Living Methuselah

METHUSELAH is lying on his bed (a hospital bed might be appropriate). His wife, SERACH, is anxiously attending to him.

METHUSELAH: Bastard.
SERACH: Not this again.
METHUSELAH: Who does he think he is?
SERACH: It's just a song.
METHUSELAH: "But who calls that livin' –"
SERACH: Methuselah –
METHUSELAH: "When no gal will give in –"
SERACH: Thusy –
METHUSELAH: "To no man what's nine hundred years."
SERACH: He didn't know what he was talking about.
METHUSELAH: Age makes a man more handsome, not less.
SERACH: I gave in, didn't I, Thusy?
METHUSELAH: I was younger then.
SERACH: You were nine hundred. At least nine hundred.
METHUSELAH: He didn't even give me my right age. Nine hundred years. Plenty of people have lived nine hundred years. Even that idiot grandson of mine lived nine hundred years. And my grandfather. He almost outlived me, he did. He lived nine hundred and sixty-two years. Clever old coot. And I'll tell you, he was no slouch with women either. Neither was I. Especially when I was nine hundred.
SERACH: I fell for you immediately. It was love at first sight. My beautiful Methuselah. Thusy.

METHUSELAH: Would you stop calling me that insipid nickname?

SERACH: It's not insipid, it's a nice nickname.

METHUSELAH: Why don't you call me Meth? Or Uselah?

SERACH: It's a term of endearment.

METHUSELAH: Or Ethus? Or just Jack, for God's sake?

SERACH: I wish you had a nickname for me.

METHUSELAH: I do. I call you old bitch.

SERACH: That's not a term of endearment. That's horrible.

METHUSELAH: *(chuckling)* Old bitch.

SERACH: Stop it.

METHUSELAH: Come here, old bitch, I want to bang you one.

(He tries to grab her. She avoids him.)

SERACH: Methuselah!

(He subsides. Pause. METHUSELAH closes his eyes. SERACH shakes him, worried.)

Methuselah?

METHUSELAH: Can't I have any rest?

SERACH: Sorry, I was just worried —

METHUSELAH: Thought I'd bought the farm, eh?

SERACH: I just thought you were —

METHUSELAH: Thought I'd kicked the can? Thought it was time for me to start pushin' up the daisies, is that it?

SERACH: It's just that the doctor said —

METHUSELAH: I've faced greater odds.

SERACH: I know.

METHUSELAH: Did I ever tell you about the flood?

SERACH: I remember.

METHUSELAH: My own grandson, mind you. "Two of every kind." "What, do you already have two nine-hundred and sixty-nine year old men on that ark of yours?" I asked. He didn't have much of an answer for that. Goddamn nerve.

SERACH: You shouldn't excite yourself so.

METHUSELAH: Why not?

SERACH: The doctor —

METHUSELAH: The hell with the doctor.

(The DOCTOR enters. He is carrying a chart, which he examines unhappily.)

DOCTOR: I'm afraid I have some bad news for you, sir.

METHUSELAH: What, another organ gone bad?

DOCTOR: In a way, but that's not—

METHUSELAH: Cancer?

DOCTOR: Well, yes, but that's not the whole of it, sir.

METHUSELAH: A heart attack? A stroke? AIDS?

DOCTOR: Yes, those too, but I'm afraid—

METHUSELAH: Lou Gehrig's disease? The Ebola virus? Small Pox?

DOCTOR: Please, sir—

METHUSELAH: The Black Plague? The Red Death? The Martian Flu?

DOCTOR: All these things are true, yes, I've diagnosed them all, but I'm afraid this time it's more serious.

METHUSELAH: Get away from me. I don't want to hear it.

DOCTOR: But, sir—

METHUSELAH: You're a doctor, so cure it. Now go away.

SERACH: It's okay, doctor, tell me, I want to know.

METHUSELAH: Stop flirting with him.

SERACH: I'm not flirting, I'm worried about you.

METHUSELAH: I know all about you two.

SERACH: There's nothing to know.

METHUSELAH: I see the way he looks at you. He's just waiting for me to die. Well, he'll have to wait a little longer.

DOCTOR: Methuselah, how old are you?

METHUSELAH: Nine-hundred and sixty-nine years old.

DOCTOR: You've lived a full life.

METHUSELAH: It's not a full life till I reach a thousand. At least.

SERACH: He's really much older.

METHUSELAH: I am not.

SERACH: It's ridiculous. He's afraid to admit he's over a thousand. He's afraid of getting old.

METHUSELAH: Liar.

SERACH: He's been saying he's nine hundred and sixty-nine for as long as I've know him, which is over two thousand years.

METHUSELAH: Which makes *you* how old?

SERACH: A lady doesn't tell her age.

METHUSELAH: (*Chuckling*) You see. As long as I'm nine hundred and sixty-nine, you can pretend you're even younger than that. It's in your interest, too.

DOCTOR: I'm afraid your body has simply run its course, sir. The human body is just a machine. It had to run down, eventually.

METHUSELAH: Then get me a new body.

DOCTOR: I can't do that, sir.

METHUSELAH: Why not? It's just a machine, like you said. They got me a new liver, a new heart, a new appendix—that was money down the drain, how was I to know the damn things would just keep bursting—new intestines, a new spleen, a new brain, one doctor even gave me a new outlook on life, or so he said. Compared to that, a new body should be child'splay.

DOCTOR: It's not just that.

METHUSELAH: Well? What else is it?

DOCTOR: It's—you. You can't go on forever, you know. Every being has an ending point, a terminus, a final breath. Even the universe has an end. Do you think you will live longer than the universe?

METHUSELAH: Why not? The universe is a mess. I keep myself fit, at least.

SERACH: You should exercise more.

METHUSELAH: Why are you such a nag?

SERACH: And eat better.

METHUSELAH: Nag, nag, nag, that's all she's done, since I married her.

DOCTOR: I'm afraid the clock has begun ticking, for you.

METHUSELAH: Well then, turn it off. Don't wind the damn thing, or take out its batteries.

DOCTOR: You have one day left to live.

(The DOCTOR exits.)

METHUSELAH: You see? That's why I won't go to doctors. All they ever want to do is kill you.

(SERACH starts crying.)

Oh, for God's sake. Old bitch?

(SERACH keeps crying.)

Serach?

SERACH: Yes, my darling?

METHUSELAH: I'll tell you a story. You like my stories. Do you want me to tell you one?

SERACH: Please.

METHUSELAH: Well then, dry your eyes, for goodness sakes.

SERACH: I'm sorry.

METHUSELAH: I wish I still had my handmaidens. They were so much more sensible. Not so sentimental.

(The HANDMAIDENS enter. They are beautiful.)

And so beautiful.

SERACH: Thusy?

METHUSELAH: Shall I tell you about my bastard grandson, then?

SERACH: Yes, do.

METHUSELAH: Ungrateful son-of-a-bitch. He said I was wicked. Just because God had spoken to him, and not to me. I didn't tell him God had tried to speak to me, but I hadn't listened. In those days, God would talk to anyone who was half willing to pay attention.

(Suddenly, METHUSELAH is back in the time of the Flood. A bright light shines on him.)

HANDMAIDENS: Methuselah!

METHUSELAH: What is it?

HANDMAIDENS: Methuselah, wake up!

METHUSELAH: Are you crazy? It's the middle of the night.

HANDMAIDENS: It's God, Methuselah.

METHUSELAH: Yes, I had guessed that one.

HANDMAIDENS: I have determined to make an end to all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

METHUSELAH: The end of all flesh? Are you serious? What sort of solution is that? You don't like us, so you're just going to kill us all off?

HANDMAIDENS: Make yourself an ark of gopher wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch.

METHUSELAH: I'm really not much of a carpenter.

HANDMAIDENS: This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits—

METHUSELAH: Wait a second, wait a second, let me write this down. (*Grabbing a pen and pad*) So its length is how many cubits?

HANDMAIDENS: Three hundred.

METHUSELAH: Are you sure about this?

HANDMAIDENS: Yes, it's three hundred.

METHUSELAH: No, I mean this end of all flesh thing?

HANDMAIDENS: I am sure.

METHUSELAH: What about the animals?

HANDMAIDENS: Two of each will be saved.

METHUSELAH: Just two?

HANDMAIDENS: Do not question me.

(*Thunder is heard.*)

METHUSELAH: I'm sorry, God, I just can't go along with this. I mean, I know this makes me wicked, or whatever, but I can't possibly believe that everyone else in the world deserves to die. I mean, I have grandchildren. And great-grandchildren. And a wife. And some handmaidens. They might not be perfect, certainly Noah is a self-righteous pain in the ass, but even he doesn't deserve to die. Plus, I'd never get that ark thing done. You know how I am. I'd start it, get distracted,

start another project, and before you know it a hundred years will have gone by. *(Silence)* God? *(Silence)* God?
(METHUSELAH rolls over and goes to sleep. HANDMAIDEN 1 walks up to him and shakes him.)

HANDMAIDEN 1: It's raining, Methuselah.

METHUSELAH: Is it really you? Are you really alive?

HANDMAIDEN 1: Yes, Methuselah. I am now. But soon I'm going to drown.

METHUSELAH: Drown? But that's not how you died. I remember...you died from...how did you die?

HANDMAIDEN 1: It's raining. You have to get up and pack. It's going to flood.

METHUSELAH: Flood? Oh, the Flood! It's the Flood!

(He allows himself to be pulled out of bed. The DOCTOR enters.)

DOCTOR: What he is experiencing is severe delusions, in which the actions of the past seem to be taking place in his present. This is also known as having your life flash before your eyes. For the normal man, this may merely take a few minutes, but, in light of his extreme age, I would expect it to take considerably longer.

SERACH: Is there nothing you can do for him?

DOCTOR: Watch. Participate.

METHUSELAH: Noah, you bastard. What do you think you're doing?

DOCTOR: Getting ready to set sail.

METHUSELAH: Why didn't you tell me it was time?

DOCTOR: You will not be needed, on this ark.

METHUSELAH: Of course you need me, I'm your grandfather.

DOCTOR: You are wicked.

METHUSELAH: Not in comparison to the rest of the people of the world. They're really terrible. I could tell you some stories —

DOCTOR: I can only take two of every kind of animal with me.

METHUSELAH: And I said to him —

SERACH: What, do you already have two nine hundred and sixty-nine year old men on that ark of yours?

METHUSELAH: Have I told you this one before?

DOCTOR: I'm sorry. I cannot help you.

(The DOCTOR exits.)

METHUSELAH: Idiot. Well, what do you expect from a man who names his three sons Ham, Shemp and Curly?

SERACH: Their names were Ham, Shem and Japheth.

METHUSELAH: Sure, take his side.

HANDMAIDEN 2: Methuselah, what shall we do? The waters are rising higher and higher. Half the houses are already engulfed. Soon, we shall be covered, too, even up on this hill.

METHUSELAH: Are you alive, too?

HANDMAIDEN 2: Methuselah, please save us!

METHUSELAH: I wanted to, I promise you. But there was nothing I could do.

HANDMAIDEN 2: Save us from the Flood!

METHUSELAH: The Flood? No, you died from...something. Something else.

HANDMAIDEN 2: I haven't died yet. But I will if you don't help me.

METHUSELAH: How can I help you? I don't even have an ark. We'll just have to wait for the waters to reach us.

HANDMAIDEN 2: You must have some ideas. God told you this is coming. Why didn't you prepare?

METHUSELAH: Maybe it will stop raining, soon. It looks like it's going to clear up, to me.

HANDMAIDEN 2: The weatherman predicted rain for the next forty days.

METHUSELAH: Well, what's that big thing, over there?

HANDMAIDEN 2: You mean Mount Ararat?

METHUSELAH: Yes, that. The flood certainly won't reach the top of that. All we have to do is climb up it, and we'll be fine.

HANDMAIDENS: And so Methuselah began climbing Mount Ararat. Every day and every night, for thirty-nine days, he climbed. The waters lapped at his feet as he traveled, but he was always able to keep a step ahead. Finally, he reached the summit; but the waters kept rising, and the rain kept coming. Soon, it rose past his knees, then his waist, then his shoulders. Finally, he was forced to stick his nose in the air, in order to breathe. Then, at the end of the fortieth night, one drop before it would have fully engulfed him, it stopped.

METHUSELAH: It was damned uncomfortable, I'll tell you. When you're over nine hundred years old, the last thing you want to do is stand nose deep in water for a couple of months. And I'm not even getting into the sunburn.

(The DOCTOR enters.)

DOCTOR: I'm afraid you're suffering from hypothermia, starvation and sunstroke. You won't live to see another birthday.

METHUSELAH: Fortunately, it was at that time that I decided to stop having birthdays.

DOCTOR: *(Looking at watch)* Twenty-three hours and fifty minutes.

(The DOCTOR and the HANDMAIDENS exit.)

METHUSELAH: I wish the flood had gotten him. How did he survive the flood, tell me that?

SERACH: He wasn't really there. Nor were the handmaidens. It was just you.

METHUSELAH: Just me, all alone, on top of Mount Ararat, for half a year?

SERACH: Yes.

METHUSELAH: I must have been bored out of my skull. That can't be true. I must have saved someone besides myself.

SERACH: You tried. Those who wanted to follow you could not. They slipped and fell, one by one, into the waters below.

METHUSELAH: How do you know this?