

I AM Your Grandma

A heartwarming comedy

By Itay Sontag

Inspired by your world and beauty, Haya Sontag of blessed memory

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Characters

JUDDITH (JUDY) SPIEGEL- (70) A bereaved mother, widow, and deeply cynical woman.

BARBARA (BARB) ROSENBERG - (68) A retired judge, recently widowed, free-spirited and liberated, Juddith's friend.

NANCY BLOOM - (72) A lecturer, very naive, married, Juddith's friend.

JOHNNY PARKER - (30) Redevelopment project manager.

PROFESSOR ELI BULL - (75) Sperm bank director, divorced.

SARAH - Sperm bank clerk.

STEPHAIE KATZ - A mother.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1 | Redevelopment? HERE?!

Lights up on Juddith's living room. The apartment is very old, but everything is tidy, with several embroidered pictures that Judy made in the past hanging on the walls. She's speaking, but it's unclear to whom. Two cups of tea are placed on the table.

Judy: Morris! Where's the AC remote? I'm talking to you, what, are you doing this on purpose?!... Oh, yeah, the heat never bothers you, does it?

Doorbell rings.

Judy: (shouting) Who is it?

Johnny: (V.O.) Juddith? It's Johnny.

Judy: (shouting) Johnny who?

Johnny: (V.O.) Johnny from the project. Could you please open the door?

Judy opens the door. Johnny stands in the doorway, holding a form.

Judy: Yes?

Johnny: Pleasure to meet you, I'm Johnny Parker. (extends his hand, Judy ignores it) I'm the new liaison for the project--

Judy: What project?

Johnny: The Redevelopment project.

Judy: Redevelopment? Here?!

Johnny: Yes, you know what I'm talking about. They've been trying to get your signature on this project for the past two years.

Judy: What project?

Johnny: The Redevelopment project.

Judy: Redevelopment? Here?!

Johnny: Why won't you sign?

Judy: Sign what?

Johnny: The project.

Judy: What project?

Johnny: The Redevelopment project.

Judy: Redevelopment? Here?!

Johnny: You know why they brought me in? Because your games won't work on me. I've gotten all the signatures from the building's residents.

Judy: By law, you need 80% of residents' signatures, and I know you didn't get them.

Johnny: I see your Alzheimer's has cleared up.

Judy: Medical miracle. Who signed?

Johnny: The owners of apartment 2E.

Judy: The French guy?

Johnny: I went all the way to the French consulate to get him.

Judy: Very impressive. But that's not enough.

Johnny: The old guy from 4B.

Judy: (suspicious) He also signed for you?

Johnny: No, but I convinced him to sell his apartment to the contractor and move to a retirement home.

Judy: I knew he was a wimp. But that's still not 80%, you're missing the signature of...

Johnny: Nancy Bloom from the ground floor.

Judy: And she hasn't signed for you. Goodbye, you little parasite.

Judy tries to close the door on him, Johnny slips in.

Johnny: Well, you said it - life's full of miracles...

Judy: (shaken) Nancy Bloom signed for you?! (pause) Answer me!

Johnny: Ah, I'm very close to convincing her, she almost signed.

Judy: (laughing) "Almost"! Do you know how many times she almost beat me at Rummikub?! Do you know she almost won Miss Universe once... until they saw her. So I wish you an almost pleasant day!

Johnny: May I ask why you are refusing a new apartment from the contractor?

Judy: I prefer my old public housing.

Johnny: With an apartment like yours, the value will skyrocket.

Judy: You can skyrocket yourself out of here!

Johnny: You'll get two smaller apartments instead.

Judy: More property, more problems. (pushing him to leave)

Johnny: You'll get an elevator--

Judy: I have claustrophobia.

Johnny: A sun terrace--

Judy: It will give me pigmentation.

Johnny: Juddith! (composed) Juddith, I've seen dozens of women like you, grandmothers without grandchildren...

Judy: Who told you I don't have grandchildren?

Johnny: Only grandmothers without grandchildren won't sign, because they have no one to leave it to.

Judy: There's no such thing as grandmothers without grandchildren.

Johnny: I meant... older people.

Judy: So you're calling me an old lady?!

Johnny: People your age always fear new things, but in the end they thank me for changing their lives for the better.

Judy: You want to change my life for the better?! Then get the hell out of here!

Johnny walks toward Morris's picture, Judy following him.

Johnny: I'm sure if Morris were alive, he would have signed.

Judy: Who are you to talk about my husband?!

Johnny: May his memory be blessed. Juddith, I understand you. After my grandmother passed away, my grandfather wouldn't throw away her toothbrush. It's natural that we want everything to stay exactly as it was when they were alive, but they would have wanted us to keep on living.

Judy: (becoming convinced) You think so?

Johnny: I promise you that's what he would have wanted.

Johnny hands her the form, Judy takes it and sits down.

Judy: Maybe you're right. Maybe this is really what Morris would have wanted. Do you have a pen?

Johnny hands her a pen, Judy takes it.

Judy: (taking a deep breath) What's today's date?

Johnny: August twelfth.

Judy says what she's writing.

Judy: "Today, August twelfth... I, Juddith Spiegel, hereby declare... that I will not move from here until I die, and/or until you die, whichever comes first". There you go, dearie.

Judy gives Johnny the form, he takes it angrily.

Johnny: Have it your way... (walks toward the door and back) You're fine now, but one day you'll need nursing care. You'll need to make the apartment more accessible, widen the doors, break down this wall, your caregiver will live in this room...

Johnny walks toward the room. It appears as if Johnny is about to open the door.

Judy: (screaming) Don't you touch that door!

Silence, Johnny is startled.

Johnny: I'm sorry, I didn't...

Judy: Get out of here!

Johnny approaches the door and stops.

Johnny: You don't know me, Juddith Spiegel. I get what I want. You'll sign for the Redevelopment project in the end!

Judy: Redevelopment?! Here?!

Johnny: I swear, if this project falls apart because of you - I'll personally make sure you get the perfect funeral!

Johnny exits.

Judy: Just make sure to bury me upside down so you can all kiss my ass!

Judy slams the door and returns to the living room.

SCENE 2 | RUMMIKUB OR CHECKERS

Judy's living room. Judy, Barbara, and Nancy are in the sitting area. A Rummikub set and teacups are on the table. Judy and Barbara are waiting for Nancy to play.

Nancy: Is it my turn?

Barbara and Judy: Yes!

Nancy: I won!

Nancy puts tiles on the table from her rack.

Judy: You didn't win!

Nancy: What? It's a run!

Judy: Nancy, you can't put a 1 after 13!

Nancy: My Mickey told me it's legal.

Judy: Then your grandson doesn't know anything about Rummikub!

Nancy: He asked chatGPT!

Judy: Barbara, make a ruling.

Barbara: Well, I've listened to your arguments and as a retired judge who was twice nominated for the Supreme Court... According to Rummikub laws, I rule that Nancy did not win.

Nancy: What? But... Oh, I've had it! Let's go back to Bridge.

Nancy takes back the tiles, the girls continue playing.

Barbara: When we find a fourth player, we'll go back to Bridge.

Judy: Ach, how could Edna leave us like that... Now we're left with Rummikub.

Nancy: What will happen if one of us goes?

Judy: We'll switch to Checkers.

Barbara: I posted in the Grandpa Bridge group that we're looking for a fourth player.

Judy: You're writing nonsense on Facebook again?

Barbara: "Grandpa-Bridge" is just a group for Bridge players. A boiling hot man replied to me.

Nancy: Did you meet him?

Barbara: What happens in "Grandpa-Bridge" stays in "Grandpa-Bridge."

Judy: I wonder what George would have said about that.

Barbara: George is no longer here to say anything about that, so enough already. Nancy, your turn.

Nancy: I'm thinking.

Nancy's cell phone rings with Camila Cabello's "Havana".

Judy: What's that song?

Nancy: One of my granddaughters set it for me [/set it as my ringtone] and I don't know how to change it.

Barbara: Don't answer now, Nancy! We're in the middle of a game.

Nancy: Alright, I won't answer. (hangs up) It's Mikey, he had a science test today. I made a deal with him that every time he gets a hundred, I give him five dollars.

Judy: Oh, that new parasite from the project was here this morning, begging me to sign.

Barbara: Is he handsome?

Judy: He's a child! He told me Nancy signed for him. So I told him Nancy's my best friend, and that we'll never sign for him.

Barbara: Of course not.

Judy: Of course not.

Nancy: Of course not. (pause) But my grandson signed for him. Oh, a blue six! Just what I needed. (pause) What?

Judy: What did you just say?!

Barbara: Nancy, what did you do?

Nancy: What? I gave him the power of eternity.

Barbara: Power of attorney?

Nancy: Oh, right, that.

Judy: But we agreed not to sign!

Nancy: (squirming) Yes, we agreed, but... I think it's better to give it in warm hands than in cold dead ones.

Judy: Nancy! You're not a toaster!

Nancy: They said a new apartment would ensure their financial future.

Judy: You looked me straight in the eyes and promised you wouldn't sign!

Barbara: Looks like we'll be playing checkers today.

Nancy: Did you know that we'll have an elevator?

Judy: Did you know that you live on the ground floor?!

Nancy: And lowered ceilings, soft-close doors, wall-mounted toilet, and a concealed flush system!

Judy: We watched the Eichmann trial together, and you're selling me out for a wall-mounted toilet?!

Nancy: And our plumbing isn't what it used to be.

Judy: (shouting) Your plumbing isn't what it used to be! Call your grandson now and tell him you've changed your mind!

Nancy: (dialing) He's not answering, I'm hanging up.

Judy: You're not hanging up!

Nancy: He answered (into phone) Hi sweetie. Sorry to bother you, but I need you to revoke your signature... Yes... But... Yes, because of Judy... Yes, the one from the Eichmann trial. I'm happy you understand, thank you, thank you, I'll tell her, thanks sweetie. (hangs up) He said, not a chance. (pause) Whose turn is it?

Judy: Nancy, they'll destroy the building!

Nancy: Right, that's what Redevelopment means.

Judy: If they destroy the building, they'll also destroy the room!

Nancy: Right, because the room is in the building.

Judy: Nancy!

Barbara: Girls, girls. Allow me. Whereas Nancy wants to bequeath a new apartment to her grandchildren, and whereas Judy wants to preserve that room, it appears to me that the fairest solution for both sides is to pack up the room and then arrange everything exactly as it was - in the new building.

Judy: Don't "whereas" me¹... Madame Judge, if you don't have anything smart to say don't say anything at all. That room is all I have left!

Nancy: So because of that room I can't leave my grandkids a new apartment?

Judy: If I had grandchildren I'd also want to leave--

Barbara: (shouting) But you don't have any grandchildren! (silence) I'm sorry, I didn't mean it.

Silence.

Judy: You know what, tell your grandchildren that after I die, I'll leave them my apartment too.

Barbara: You're willing to give away your apartment just to keep that room?

Judy: What else do I have left? Tell your grandkids to be patient. I've already outlived my mother and my grandmother... I've done my part.

Nancy: Fine, I'll talk to Sean.

Judy: Thank you. Now, if you'll excuse me, I also need to talk to...

Barbara: To whom? Are you still talking to Morris's picture?

Judy: Of course not, I stopped that long ago.

Whereas, shmereas¹

SCENE 3 | MY Morris

Judy's living room. Judy is talking to Morris's picture, a cigarette in her mouth. She's about to light it.

Judy: (to Morris) Come on Mory, don't drive me crazy. I don't smoke anymore.
(pause) Well, I barely smoke. Cancer again? Cigarettes aren't the only things that give you cancer. You should know... (pause) Fine, happy now?

Judy puts down the cigarette without lighting it.

Judy: (to Morris) Stop messing with my head! I'm not signing and that's that! Then it's a bad deal, what do I care! Nancy's grandkids can choke on this apartment, we won't be here anyway. Remember what happened the last time I signed something? I won't sign anything ever again!

Doorbell rings.

Judy: Who is it?

Johnny: (V.O.) Juddith. It's Johnny.

Judy: This kid is like a Rummy card you can't get rid of.

Judy opens the door.

Judy: What do you want?

Johnny: To tell you that... you won. I don't know what you said to Nancy Bloom, but there won't be any Redevelopment in your building.

Judy: Redevelopment?! Here?!--

Johnny: Enough with that! They told me there was someone here who would be a real thorn in my ass--

Judy: It's either a thorn in your side or a pain in your ass. It can't be both.

Johnny: Anyway, even though it's hard for me to admit, I know how to lose gracefully, so... well done, you won!

Judy: So long sucker!.. (about to close the door)

Johnny: (notices something) You have a leak here, it's coming from that room...

Judy: Oh no! no, no!

Judy quickly enters Ben's room.

Johnny: It's probably from the water heater, you know how it is with these old apartments, that's what happens when all the infrastructure... Juddith, are you managing?

Judy enters the living room hysterically with a kit bag and wet army uniforms.

Judy: Everything's wet.

Johnny: What is all that?

Juddith puts down the bag in the living room and goes back to Ben's room. She comes back with a wet box.

Johnny: Wait, let me help you...

Johnny returns with a box containing wet objects from the room - notebooks, a dog tag, various personal items. Judy quickly tries to dry the items.

Judy: Everything's ruined.

Johnny: Nothing's ruined, we can dry the... Well, yes, this is ruined. (picks up a picture with military insignia) Ben Spiegel. (pause) That's why you didn't want to sign...

Judy: I've been guarding this room for 20 years.

Johnny takes out Ben's trophy from the box.

Johnny: He played basketball?

Judy: (focused on organizing) Yes, from third grade to seventh grade. Then he was in varsity, until they went down a league.

Johnny takes out a wet Tetris game from the box.

Johnny: Wow, Tetris! I used to love this game.

Judy: Ben loved playing it too. I hated the noise.

Johnny takes out a pack of cigarettes from the box.

Johnny: His cigarettes are completely soaked.

Judy: Cigarettes? Ben smoked? How could I have missed that?

Johnny: Come on, that's basic, hiding it from your parents.

Judy: My Ben would tell me everything...

Judy continues to dry everything, and Johnny takes out a blue form from the box.

Johnny: Did you know about this?...

Judy: What's that?

Johnny: (looking) Donation number D2102, it's from the sperm bank.

Judy: What bank?

Johnny: To Ben Spiegel, confirmation of sample... (struggling to read) it's a bit wet.

Judy: What does that mean?

Johnny: That your son was a sperm donor.

Judy: A sperm donor?

Johnny: Wait (examines the form) yes, it's a confirmation for the donation.

Judy: What donation??

Johnny: Twenty years ago, your son donated sperm. So maybe he has a kid.

Judy: What kid??

Johnny: If Ben donated sperm and someone received it, then maybe Ben has a kid somewhere, which means you have...

Judy: A grandson?

Johnny: Or a granddaughter.

Judy: I don't understand...

Johnny: Congratulations, Juddith! You're a grandmother!

END OF ACT ONE