

# The Bathroom Reader

**Six unrelated short stories;  
Each of which can be read in one sitting.**

# By Ruven Daud

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“Outside of a dog, a book is a man’s best friend. Inside a dog, it’s too dark to read.”

— Groucho Marx



## Old Folks

Alice York, the charge nurse at the Pierpont senior care facility, looked up from her daily duty roster. The on duty nurse scurried down the hallway and stopped at the 1<sup>st</sup> floor station.

She took a deep breath and said, "You'll never guess what he did this time."

"I have no time for guessing games Baker," Nurse York replied. "Who are you talking about and what did he do?" Then she paused thoughtfully and asked, "Mr. Ashken? Again?"

Baker nodded her head and smiled.

"What did he do this time?" Alice York asked, and before Baker replied, York closed her eyes and slowly shook her head from side to side.

When Baker finished relating Mr. Ashken's latest transgression against one of Pierpont's numerous rules, York said, "This is more egregious than the wet paint stunt from two years ago."

"You think?" Baker replied.

"I'm going to call his daughters," Nurse York proclaimed as she reached for the phone.

"What good is that going to do?" Baker asked, "You can't send him home."

"Of course not," York replied, "This is his home. He is home and he's our responsibility. We can use some help from his family though, and those two women love him dearly. I'm certain they'll come up with a plan. I hope."

Romanian born, Azi Ashken immigrated to the U.S. when he was in his mid-twenties. He married, had two girls six years apart, became a U.S. citizen and

worked as a mechanic for fifty years at the Custom Chuck Machine Company in Hartford Connecticut. Now at ninety-four, his wife long since passed, he is unable to fully care for himself without assistance. His daughters made financial arrangements and he was registered and moved into the Pierpont, a respected care facility for seniors.

The staff and residents call him Ozie (at his insistence). He is outgoing, affable and courteous. He did have one character aspect that did not make its appearance upon first arrival, however. Within the past two of the seven years that he has been at the facility it has surfaced several times in varying degrees. Not all were mentioned to the staff. At his present age, Ozie is as mischievous as a nine year old boy with a sling shot in his back pocket. The “Wet Paint” stunt Nurse York referred to was one of the few missteps the staff became aware of.

Surrounding the Pierpont’s two storey, renovated Victorian structure was a ground level porch complete with chairs from which the residents could read, talk or just enjoy the landscaped yard and trees. A metal safety rail at the edge of the porch and several feet to the front of the line of chairs provided protection for people to pass without disturbing those seated. The railing had just been painted green. Ozie sat in a rocking chair with his cane in his lap. The *Wet Paint* sign he had previously removed was folded and now resided in his shirt pocket. Three women were about to pass him on their way to seats further down the line. As the first woman, Mrs. Spievack, an eighty-nine year old widow and *First Floor East* resident, was about to pass, Ozie tapped his cane three times in front of her. In an attempt to dodge the tip of the cane from landing on her foot as she walked by she moved to the left then grabbed the newly green painted railing to maintain her balance. The other two ladies did the same as they all scampered past the annoying, and smiling, Ozie Ashken. It wasn’t until the women arrived at their seats, sat down and placed their now green left hands on the arm rests of their chairs that they realized what had happened. The women and all of the occupants of the porch, and quite possibly the entire first floor of the Pierpont heard the three scream as one, “OZIE!!!”

Today’s incident prompted Nurse York to call Elena Ashken White, one of Ozie’s two married daughters. At sixty-three she was younger than her sister Mariana and easier to talk to about her father, or so Nurse York thought.

York: "Hi Elena, this is Alice York from the Pierpont. How are you this crisp, February morning?"

Elena: "Is my father okay?"

York: "Yes, yes he's fine and evidently in exceptionally good health and spirits."

Elena: "Did we miss a payment or something?"

York: "No, certainly not. Your payments are always received when due, before they're due even; no problem there, absolutely not."

Elena: "Alice?"

York: "Yes Elena."

Elena: "Why are we having this conversation?"

York: "Well, there was an occurrence this past hour."

Elena: "Okay, so spit it out already."

York: "Yes of course. Nurse Baker was making her rounds, checking rooms and such. Your father's door was open slightly and when she looked in she saw Mrs. Friedlander in Ozie's bed with him, the covers over the both of them! The nurse was appalled and immediately reported the incident to me. We do not approve of hankey pankey between unmarried residents here at the Pierpont!"

Elena: (Laughing hysterically) "Relax Alice, Alberta Friedlander is eighty-five, my father is ninety-four. I doubt even "hankey" was going on let alone "pankey." What did the nurse tell you they were doing when she looked in?"

York: "Nothing, they were sound asleep."

Elena: (Still laughing) "Well there you have it. If they had had a night of unbridled passion, as you're intimating, they wouldn't be sleeping. They'd be deceased. Just in case, someone should go back to the room and check for pulses. I'll call my sister and one of us will pay Pop a visit today. Take a nip of that Scotch you keep in your file drawer Alice and chill."

At that point Elena ended the call and Nurse York wondered if she hadn't contacted the wrong sister.

Elena White's husband Larry and her nephew Taylor Novak, Mariana's twenty-seven year old son, were sitting on the front steps of the White's split level home. They were talking while Larry smoked a cigarette. Smoking was not allowed in the house. It was February but the bright sun was warming and they were quite comfortable. Taylor often sat with his uncle and talked about careers, cars, Taylor's girlfriends and Larry's obsession to keep his lawn free of crabgrass.

Elena had spoken to Larry about her conversation with Nurse York an hour ago and asked what he thought.

"Should we ignore it or speak to my father about it?" she asked. "You should speak to him Larry; you're his son-in-law."

Larry asked, "What the hell am I supposed to say to him; hey Pop get any lately?"

"Well I don't think that's an appropriate conversation a daughter should have with her father," Elena said then asked, "Do you?"

"No I expect not," Larry replied then followed with, "I have an idea."

Now as they sat on the steps talking, the standard conversations Larry and Taylor were used to engaging in, took a far left turn. Larry explained the latest social *faux pas* they now must deal with courtesy of Pop Ashken. Taylor could not stop laughing. He asked, "Do you really think he could get the job done? I mean at his age and all?"

"That's what you're going to find out," Larry said.

Taylor's laughter came to an abrupt halt.

"Me? No way there is any chance of that happening," Taylor emphatically replied.

“Here’s why you’re the best and only person to check this out,” Larry began, “Of all Pop’s grandchildren, nephews, nieces and sons-in-laws combined you are his favorite and that includes my three kids. Your mother will ignore the situation and basically tell the Pierpont, with a few four letter expletives for emphasis, that for the money we’re spending there to get over it. Furthermore when he went into the home he gave you his treasured signet ring that he bought when he first came to America and you got his pickup truck.”

“That truck was a wreck and I had to pay him \$150.00 for it,” Taylor said smiling recalling the transaction.

Larry said, “He thinks he gave you a special price because, I repeat, you are the favorite.”

Taylor reconsidered. He knew he was his grandfather’s favorite and that meant a great deal to him. “All right I’ll do it but you come with me for support.”

“Done,” Larry agreed and they were off to the Pierpont.

Larry and Taylor arrived at the home and went straight to Ozie’s room. The door was open about six inches. Taylor hesitated, “We better knock, you never know.”

He knocked twice then swung the door open and entered the room. Ozie was sitting in one of the faux leather chairs reading a newspaper. To their amazement, sitting in the chair facing Ozie reading her newspaper, was his presumptive new squeeze Alberta Friedlander.

Larry thought, *There they are, enjoying a relaxing moment and perhaps a bit of post coital repartee, who knows? Pop you old hound.*

Neither of the occupants responded to the knock on the door or the two men when they entered the room. Taylor pulled Ozie’s paper down a bit and greeted his grandfather, “Hi Pop, how’s it going?”

The old man looked up at Taylor then at Larry standing next to him.

He put his paper down and with a big grin and open arms exclaimed, “Look who’s come for a visit.” The grin turned into a laugh as he gestured for the two men to come in for a hug which they did and kissed him on top of his balding head.

“Look Mrs. Friedlander,” Ozie said, “my son-in-law Larry and my grandson Taylor.” then he added, “He’s my favorite.”

Larry looked at Taylor and gave him an “I told you” nod.

After introductions Alberta Friedlander continued to read her paper and the two men sat in side-chairs and visited with Ozie. Taylor brought up many subjects with his grandfather but was still nervous about broaching the one that brought them there. Larry, becoming impatient with the delay in their mission, finally elbowed him to get on with business.

A reluctant Taylor finally leaned in and speaking softly to his grandfather said, “Pop I want to ask you a question about Mrs. Friedlander if that’s okay?”

“Sure,” Ozie said, “but you don’t have to whisper, she can’t hear well at all. What’s your question?”

“Oh, all right then,” Taylor said speaking in a normal tone. “This morning, was she in bed with you under the covers?”

“Yes she was,” the old man replied without hesitation.

Larry moved in closer not wanting to miss a word of what was to follow.

Taylor continued, “My question is, well, that is, I, I mean Larry and I were wondering if, well,” he was still stammering when Larry interrupted.

“Pop,” Larry asked, “can you, ah, still rise to the occasion?” he finally asked.

“I don’t know what you mean,” Ozie said.

“He wants to know why Mrs. Friedlander was in bed with you,” Taylor said.

Ozie looked puzzled and said, “Early this morning I was sitting in my chair reading the paper. It was cold outside and chilly in here since the heat in some rooms doesn’t work all that well. My door was open and Mrs. Friedlander looked in and asked if my heater was working and I said it was but not very well. I asked her why she wanted to know and she said hers did not seem to be working at all. She was walking up and down the hall wearing her bathrobe trying to get warm. I asked if she would like to come in here and get under the covers with me and we could keep each other warm. So we did.”

“And?” Larry asked eagerly.

“And?” Taylor asked echoing Larry’s enthusiasm.

“And what?” Ozie asked, “We got warm and dozed off.”

Taylor and Larry looked at each other somewhat let down, but relieved.

“Good talk,” Taylor said, “we have to go, see you in a few days.”

They kissed the old man on the head, said goodbye to Mrs. Friedlander and left.

Ozie picked up his paper and began reading again.

“Ozie,” Mrs. Friedlander said, getting his attention.

“Yes Alberta,” he replied.

“They’re nice boys,” she said.

“Yes they are,” he agreed.

“You do know I have no problem with my hearing, right?” She asked.

“I know that, but they don’t,” he said.

Mrs. Friedlander chuckled and added, “The question your son-in-law asked, ‘Can you still rise to the occasion?’ That was cute.”

“What was cute about it?” he asked with raised eyebrows and a slight grin.

A smiling Alberta Friedlander looked straight at him and said, “They really have no clue, do they?” then she winked and continued reading her morning paper.

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