

## November 29, 1947 The Story of a Vote

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QrIjzUK0FKg>

### An excerpt from A Tale of Love and Darkness by Amos Oz

After midnight, toward the end of the vote, I woke up. My bed was underneath the window that looked out on the street, so all I had to do was kneel and peer through the slats of the shutters. I shivered.

Like a frightening dream, crowds of shadows stood massed together silently by the yellow light of the street lamp, in our yard, in the neighboring yards, on balconies, in the roadway, like a vast assembly of ghosts. Hundreds of people not uttering a sound, neighbors, acquaintances, and strangers, some in their nightclothes and others in jacket and tie, occasional men in hats or caps, some women bareheaded, others in dressing gowns with scarves around their heads, some of them carrying sleepy children on their shoulders, and on the edge of the crowd I noticed here and there an elderly woman sitting on a stool or a very old man who had been brought out into the street with his chair.

The whole crowd seemed to have been turned to stone in that frightening night silence, as if they were not real people but hundreds of dark silhouettes painted onto the canvas of the flickering darkness. As though they had died on their feet. Not a word was heard, not a cough or a footstep. No mosquito hummed. Only the deep, rough voice of the American presenter blaring from the radio, which was set at full volume and made the night air tremble, or it may have been the voice of the president of the Assembly, the Brazilian Oswaldo Aranha. One after another he read out the names of the last countries on the list, in English alphabetical order followed immediately by the reply of their representative. United Kingdom: abstains. Union of Soviet Socialist Republics: yes. United States: yes. Uruguay: yes. Venezuela: yes. Yemen: no. Yugoslavia: abstains.

At that the voice suddenly stopped, and an otherworldly silence descended and froze the scene, a terrified, panic-stricken silence, a silence of hundreds of people holding their breath, such as I have never heard in my life either before or after that night.

Then the thick, slightly hoarse voice came back, shaking the air as it summed up with a rough dryness brimming with excitement: Thirty-three for. Thirteen against. Ten abstentions and one country absent from the vote. The resolution is approved.

His voice was swallowed up in a roar that burst from the radio, overflowing from the galleries in the hall at Lake Success, and after a couple more seconds of shock and disbelief, of lips parted as though in thirst and eyes wide open, our faraway street on the edge of Kerem Avraham in northern Jerusalem also roared all at once in a first terrifying shout that tore through the darkness and the buildings and trees, piercing itself, not a shout of joy, nothing like the shouts of spectators in sports grounds or excited rioting crowds, perhaps more like a scream of horror and bewilderment, a cataclysmic shout, a shout that could shift rocks, that could freeze your blood, as though all the dead who had ever died here and all those still to die had receive a brief window to shout, and the next moment the scream of horror was replaced by roars of joy and medley of hoarse cries and “The Jewish People Lives” and somebody trying to sing Hatikvah and women shrieking and clapping and “Here in the Land Our Fathers Loved,” and the whole crowd started to revolve slowly around itself as though it were being stirred in a huge cement mixer, and there were no more restraints, and I jumped into my trousers but didn’t bother with a shirt or sweater and shot out our door, and some neighbor or stranger picked me up so I wouldn’t be trampled underfoot, and I was passed from hand to hand until I landed on my father’s shoulders near our front gate. My father and mother were standing there hugging one another like two children lost in the woods, as I had never seen them before or since, and for a moment I was between them inside their hug and a moment later I was back on Father’s shoulders and my very cultured, polite father was standing there shouting at the top of his voice, not words or wordplay or Zionist slogans, not even cries of joy, but one long naked shout like before words were invented (355-356).

Or, Amos. *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. Orlando: Harcourt, Inc., 2003.