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Circa 1950s.

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NOT FINAL

VASILY COMES HOME

To be called up for the prizev, which is what they termed the draft service in the Czar's armies, was a hated thing in all the provinces. But nowhere was it more hated than in the peaceful town of Starabin, and by no one was it regarded with greater dread than by Vasily Petrovich.

Vasily Petrovich was a sensitive lad who was rapidly nearing his twenty-first year, the age for service to the Czar. Vasily was deeply in love with Olenka, the neighboring Zoldonev's pretty daughter, and that is why he hated all the more the word prizev and its awful meaning. When Vasily and Olenka would walk hand-in-hand under the hot sun along the forest paths, Olenka would sometimes ask with concern:

"How soon, Vasily, how soon will you have to sign up for the prizev?"

And Vasily Petrovich would look down at the dirt path and his head would throb with the pain of

Vasily is much  
better for  
peaceful  
work

Must. Smart  
in in Yoke  
of Russian, hate  
every army,  
I have seen  
to escape

perhaps  
looking  
forward

? younger, but hated  
since brother  
was killed in  
army

the word, and his heart would beat faster at its horrid meaning. Prizev to Vasily was like blight to his wheat stalks, like storms to his cut hay.

He would answer with restraint:

*borrow  
ruble*  
"There is time, my dear Olenka.. But let us not talk about such unpleasant things..."

And often there would be silence after this, a silence that was mournful to the young lovers. Vasily's fair-head would be filled with frightening thoughts of vulgar cossacks charging down upon peaceful towns, of his being pulled out of the pleasant fields and away from home and from Olenka, of his trudging through the winter bogs, and of the floggings Ivan, his friend, had described to him with such bitterness. And anger would leap into his chest and in his throat, he would feel a curse for the Czar and the army and the prizev.

But his mind was made up now on this day as he stood in the gloomy corner of the dimly-lit cottage room, throwing his meager belongings into the dirty sack. He would not sign up for the prizev. He would leave home. Just for awhile...until his twenty-first birthday was past and gone. Perhaps they would forget about him if they did not see him for several months bringing the wheat in to the marketplace. Or perhaps he could make enough in the big city across the borders to come back to Starabin and pay the prizev

officials the three hundred rubles for his freedom. He was not sure what he would do, but of this he was certain: he must leave Starabin before they came to take him by force.

And while his head swam with these thoughts, he tied a knot in the top of the sack, threw it over his shoulder, then turned for a last look at the cottage. He looked at his mother Olga, who seemed old and worn and tired as she stood before the great black-bellied stove, her hands folded across her flat breasts. Then at his father Semyon Petrovich, who sat quite unconcerned on the hard bench picking lice and chaff out of his unruly hair and wiping his findings on his coarse trousers. And at Shasha, his quiet little sister, who was in the corner scrubbing the brass pots.

"Well, mama, I am going."

"You have decided?"

"Yes. It is wise to leave while there is yet time."

"If you have made up your mind, Vasily, then go in peace." Her face looked hard and graven in the dimness of the candlelit room. She showed no emotion. "But, Vasily, how will you get across the borders?"

bitter

mother must  
be more grim,  
Sullen -  
she hates & hates  
house w. hate  
because  
1) poverty  
2) hard work  
3) stupid husband  
(spats w. him)

consider Vasily's  
going one less  
mouth to feed



~~The son touched the mother on her shoulder.~~

"A Jew will help me. I met him in town last week. For <sup>10</sup>~~fifty~~ rubles he said he would take me across the borders to the big city."

A howl of anger came from Semyon Petrovich. "Ivreiska Morda!" "Filthy pig of a Jew! For twenty kopeks they would sell their mothers into slavery! If I were drunk enough, I would kill out every Zhid in the Czar's provinces."

"It is the only way. I will give him the fifty rubles. It is all that is left, but it is the only way."

And Vasily Petrovich put down the sack, walked across the room to the far corner, and before the ikon which bathed in the little light from the melting candle, he crossed himself, and genuflected as he murmured softly. Then he turned, and his eyes took in the great black stove, the hard bench and the straw bed mats, the shiny over-polished samovar, the lithographed portrait of the Czar. He felt strange and confused and sighed deeply. He tossed the sack over his shoulder, and as he walked toward the door, ~~he heard his mother say softly:~~ "The Lord be with you, Vasily."

Boy leaves in rage

- II -

In the big city across the borders, which was far from Starabin and still farther from the prizev,

There is no freedom person is all Starabin than you - we have not one friend among our neighbors because of you - They still talk of how you stole in others' fields  
Mother - Slap him, "Get out of here, you little pig" get out

mother: where are you get 10 rubles?  
Vasily - borrowed from other peasants

mother: let me see (She fingers them, with look in her eye) you have 12.

Vasily: I will need for food on trip  
mother: (takes 2) here you leave us to work in old age, harder

we gave you everything, you gave us nothing

Vasily: what has that to do with 2 rubles

mother: you are greedy

Vasily: I am greedy? There is no freedom

Vasily Petrovich felt lost and lonely. For weeks he wandered along the broad avenues looking for employment. His stomach was tight with hunger and his face grew thin and was framed with a black beard. Then he found employment as a porter in the great woolen works in the center of the city. He worked from early in the morning till late evening in the great factory with the ceaseless drumming noises of machines. And soon the tightness in his stomach was only a memory, and his face looked full even behind the beard, and the loneliness and sad thoughts had left him.

They liked Vasily at the great woolen works.

Three years passed,  
becomes  
boisterous

Even the fat foreman with the brushy mustache liked him. Often the foreman would say to his assistant that "the tall, handsome muzhik is a good worker. He is tall as a sapling, strong as an ox, and quiet as a tabby-cat," and then he would turn to Vasily and add, "You don't drink, you don't play with women, you must be castrated!" And everyone would roar with laughter, and Vasily Petrovich would smile and continue his work. He felt a warmth licking his chest, and he was tickled with pride, for they paid him attention and called him a "good worker".

And on week-ends, he would sit in his tiny room with the bare walls, take out the wooden box from under his bed, and count the big paper bills.

He is remarkably making up for  
years of hunger  
same taller, same  
weight, but still had  
thinks of people  
looks like men  
of 30 - specs

Then he would finger his beard while looking out across the square, at the little people rushing back and forth, at the troikas with the tinkling bells, and he would whisper to himself, "Soon I shall be rushing too, rushing back to Starabin. I will pay off the prizev, and I will bring back gifts to Olenka. Maybe a new dress...and for Shasha, ~~maybe slippers...~~"

*lonely feeling, like to see Olenka  
aching emptiness about home*

That Friday was a day of joy for Vasily Petrovich. Before the entire staff of the great woolen works, the general manager himself announced that "the tall, handsome Petrovich" was chosen the best worker of the year and, therefore, was to receive a bonus of one hundred rubles. In addition, he was to be appointed Chief Porter of the entire floor, and moreover, was to receive an increase in salary. Vasily Petrovich stood breathless and bewildered as the many smiling workers shook his hand and patted his broad shoulders in congratulations.

Immediately after the announcements, Vasily sprang and hopped and ran to his tiny room which now seemed huge and expansive like a mansion. He locked the door behind him, pulled the neatly-folded bills from his breastpocket, and stacked them atop those in the wooden box. For the next thirty minutes he patiently counted them, finally concluding that the total was ~~six~~ hundred rubles!

*three*

*And in a moment he thought of his mother and that day when he departed... But he swiftly dismissed the unpleasant thought from his mind.*

His mind whirled with thoughts. First, a new suit, a new shirt with a collar button, and new shiny shoes. He was getting ready for <sup>himself</sup> ~~home~~, for Olenka his beloved. <sup>Five rubles a week.</sup> The ~~Chief Porter~~ job be damned! <sup>He was returning to Starabin!</sup> There <sup>Next,</sup> was <sup>And the next</sup> three hundred for the prize, about ~~seventy-five~~ for travel, and ~~the rest~~ for gifts, and new clothes. <sup>The proprietors would understand!</sup>

Yes, new clothes. Vasily Petrovich was coming back to Starabin like a count, a nobleman. No one would know him, so splendid would he look. Hah, hah!

His mouth was filled with laughter, Who will recognize Vasily Petrovich with his black beard and his new shirt? It is a miracle, they will say. Just so short ago Vasily Petrovich was one of us, a <sup>shining little</sup> peasant, a muzhik, and now, now look at him! a count, a nobleman! And they will shake their heads and exclaim, "He is an aristocrat, a true aristocrat, even to the beard!" <sup>and stomach!</sup>

His body tingled with a rush of warmth and his heart danced with joy as he strutted before his window looking admiringly at the reflection of his <sup>proportions</sup> ~~expanded~~ chest. How good it will be to see Olenka, my beloved. O how Olenka will be proud of me!

And he stared through the window watching the warm golden sunshine fall across the square, and he thought how pleasant it will be in Starabin the day when Vasily comes home.

- III -

"Stop here at the Kretchma!" Vasily Petrovich ordered. The driver reined his horses to a halt, and Vasily stepped down <sup>from the carriage,</sup> carrying his cardboard satchel. He handed the driver some coins, then entered the inn.

Kulkin Semonov, the barkeep, looked blankly at the bearded stranger in the suit. <sup>and cap.</sup> Then <sup>his face</sup> <sup>immediately</sup> betrayed mingled surprise, fear, and <sup>complete</sup> confusion. <sup>Who</sup> is this aristocrat who enters my inn? What does he want here? Maybe he is a new district collector who has come to take my inn from me? His mouth opened to ask questions but his tongue lay rigid with fright.

look like a Jew

"Kulkin Semyonov, you horse thief, how is my old friend?"

"Pardon me, ~~etc.~~" Kulkin was dumfounded. <sup>Pardon me, Sir.</sup>

"There is some mistake."

"There is no mistake, Semyonov. Are you not glad to see me?"

"Y-yes. But, sir, I fear I do not know you." The stranger laughed softly and his teeth shone white against his beard.

"How are your bunions, Kulkin?" The barkeep stood aghast; his face filled with bewilderment. How does he know of my bunions? And the stranger chuckled warmly and extended his hand, explaining that he was Vasily Petrovich, son of Semyon Petrovich, the peasant.

He calls me by my first name.



The barkeep shook hands, then quickly drew back his arm, <sup>as he retreated further behind the counter,</sup> "I am pleased to meet you," he said with the uncertainty of disbelief.

"O Kulkin Semyonov, you foolish ass, you still do not believe me. I am Vasily, Vasily Petrovich. I have come back from across the borders," and he told the bewildered man behind the counter to look closely at his face. Then Vasily ordered a drink and over the glass he spoke freely and intimately of his family, of Olenka, and of the <sup>point's</sup> wheat fields.

Kulkin Semyonov's frozen disbelief began to thaw out over the warm conversation and several glasses of vodka, and in a few moments he roared with delight and his body shook with laughter.

"What an old fool I am, Vasily! I am glad to see you, my boy," he said joyfully. They shook hands again, this time warmly, and Vasily Petrovich said he must hurry home.

There were several versts between the inn and the Petrovich cottage, and with long swift strides, Vasily soon stood before the doorway.

He stepped into the cottage and quickly said "hello" to the little girl who was sitting on the hard bench scrubbing a brass pot. The pot banged against the floor with a ringing sound, the little girl jumped to standing like a straight shaft, her mouth wide open, her eyes filled with terror.

"Stop behaving like a terrified mouse, Semyonov. What good are your spectacles when you cannot see old friends? Are you so blinded by my suit and beard?"

"But - but" the barkeep hesitated as his mind reached for a discreet phrase. "Vasily was a frail lad. Why he was no stronger than this <sup>little</sup> <sup>meeting</sup> <sup>when he left</sup> <sup>Parashin</sup> <sup>you, Sir.</sup> But you, Vasily, ask about home."

Kulkin: I do not like to tell you - but since you've left your mother, has become a terrible one. There is always screaming in the cottage - in the kitchen they are afraid to do business with her - your father comes here angry

Vasily: Perhaps it was my fault - I will see them anyway before visiting Olga



"Hello," he repeated.

The terrified little girl was frozen where she stood, and the rag dropped from her hand.

"Don't be afraid," the stranger laughed, "I won't eat you..."

As though cornered by a wild boar, the child was struck with fear and she darted across the room and hid behind the fortress of the mountainous stove.

~~This struck the stranger as immensely funny and his chest heaved with laughter.~~

He made several steps toward the stove and softly asked:

"Where is your father, Semyon Petrovich?"

"He--he is away," she answered, her eyes wide with fright.

"And your mother, Olga Petrovich, where is she?"

"She is also away."

"Where have they gone? To the marketplace?"

"No. They are at the wedding of Vladimir Andreyevich and Vanya Zarubkin..."

"So. So those two old ones have finally married. Well, is it a large celebration?"

"Yes." The grip of fear was somewhat relaxed from the little girl's face.

"Tell me, do you expect your mother and father to be home soon?"

her eyes hollow,  
she looked old  
beyond her years

Vainly looked  
toward her, his  
mind filled with  
overlapping thoughts.  
"Little Shasha... So  
terrified... She, too, does  
not recognize me... I will  
have to explain  
to everyone...  
at the same time...  
there is no use  
explaining..."

"Yes. Soon."

"Well, until they come, would you be <sup>a</sup>good ~~little~~ girl and give this stranger something to eat."

"No. I can't..." The stranger moved closer to the child who now stood beside the stove.

"Not even for this?" And Vasily Petrovich held a dazzling ruble toward his little sister.

As she handed the stranger thick slices of cheese and black bread, she stuffed the ruble into her bosom, and watched the <sup>heavy</sup> ~~fat~~, bearded man finger the big roll of paper bills which he thrust into his breast pocket as he began to munch the food.

And after he had consumed the black bread and cheese and the black tea which she poured him from the samovar, he yawned lustily, said he was tired, and decided he would nap a bit until the father and mother returned. In a matter of moments he had thrown himself across the <sup>shaky four-posted bed</sup> ~~straw mats on the~~ ~~hard bench~~ and was snoring noisily.

-IV-

From the other side of the door, the little girl heard the rasp of argument and the clash of drunken voices. They were back from the wedding. She rushed toward the doorway to tell them of her good fortune and to show them the dazzling evidence.

Semyon Petrovich, whose fur hat sat backward on his mussed-up hair and whose Sunday suit coat lapel was ripped, could not quite make out Sasha's prattle about a stranger, but he nevertheless spread out his palm to receive the ruble. Olga, <sup>Petrovich</sup> ~~his wife~~ <sup>from the wedding breakfast</sup> ~~who was also slightly tipsy but yet more alert than~~ <sup>he</sup>, <sup>snatched</sup> ~~he~~ smacked him across his palm and cursed his greediness as she took the ruble from Shasha and firmly planted it in her sunken bosom.

Behind Shasha who held her finger to her lips, Olga, followed by Semyon, tiptoed into the cottage. Together they paused after a few steps. A low whisper of amazement came from their lips as they dimly beheld <sup>in the faint light of the kerosene lamp the thick form of</sup> ~~the sleeping~~ stranger with the black beard, the new shirt and the shiny shoes. "Ivreiska Morda!" Semyon grunted, "It can only be a filthy pig of a rich Jew in clothes like that. Ouch!" Olga had kicked him in the shins. "Swine! Keep your stupid mouth closed. Do you want to wake him?"

Then Olga pushed her daughter and her husband behind the great black stove for a council of strategy. In the shadow of the Petrovich bulwark, Shasha told with quiet excitement of the roll the size of a big Christmas sausage, that it is in his pocket, and she pointed to her left breast.

3  
What is he a Jew,  
a fat Jew? What  
is he doing here?

Olga's eyes flashed, and the heat of her wild thoughts boiled into vapors the alcohol on her brain. "Are you sure it was that big?" she asked Shasha, and not waiting for a reply, gripped Semyon Petrovich's arm and said with fierceness: "Semyon, we cannot waste any time. You must rush immediately to Kulkin Semyonov and ask permission to use the gun which he has for thieves."

"But, but what if he wants to know why I want it? It is a strange request to make to Kulkin Semyonov without good reason."

"Then tell him a wolf has come out of the forest and into our cottage. But go, at once. And hurry back. We cannot waste time!"

Semyon Petrovich leaped like a wild one across the dusty roads. He panted like a bear, and before his eyes he could see only the roll big as a Christmas sausage in the breastpocket of the rich Jew stranger, and under his breath he muttered over and over again; "Ivreiska Morda!" Damned Jew, damned filthy Jew, damned filthy rich Jew!"

The door made a loud bang, and Kulkin Semyonov looked up from behind the counter at the panting, sweating Semyon Petrovich. Waving his arms limply before him, Petrovich blurted, "Kulkin, my good neighbor....a favor, I beg of you...your gun, please loan it to me for a few moments...I need it...the gun you have for thieves...please...~~the wolf has come out of...~~"

thoughts of  
poverty, what money  
would mean in  
terms of kind, etc.

S: Why? what are  
you going to do  
Olga: What danger  
the stupid ass - don't  
ask questions, do as  
I tell you -

first impulse,  
she's a terrible  
woman

"Hold on, Semyon Petrovich. Settle down,"  
Kulkin, the barkeep, drawled. "Why all the excitement ~~about a wolf?~~"

*wait... in*  
"You see, the ~~wolf... it came out of the for-~~  
~~est... into~~ the cottage... the gun... your gun, I need  
it..."

Kulkin threw back his head and laughed. "You  
are pulling my leg. It must be all the excitement  
over your son..."

"What?" Semyon was stunned.

"Yes, stop pulling my leg, you old jokester,  
Semyon Petrovich." Kulkin wagged a finger in front  
of Semyon's nose. "I know why all the excitement...  
your handsome son, Vasily Petrovich, is back, and  
you are playing games with me..."

"Kulkin, stop it. You talk circles!"

"I am not talking circles, Semyon. Vasily  
Petrovich, your one and only son, stood on this  
very spot only one hour before. And I tell you,  
friend Semyon, Vasily Petrovich ~~looked handsome.~~ *looked my boy surprise. My, how he has changed.*  
~~Why, I could hardly recognize him with his beard, a~~ *looks twice as big as the boy*  
and new suit, and collar button shirt, and shiny  
shoes. He looked like a nobleman, a true aristocrat!  
And with so much money!"

*full-grown man,  
a  
waistline  
like this, and*

A piercing cry of pain filled the entire inn and turning on his heels Semyon Petrovich flew out the door, and galloped madly back along the road kicking behind him forests of dust. "Mother of mothers, Vasily, Vasily my one and only, o holy saints!" Semyon crossed his breast over and over and repeated all the fragments of catechism he could remember. Twice he tripped and fell flat on his face. Each time he stood up, dusted his Sunday suit, and bitterly cursed the fallen pines which were obstacles on his way home.

He continued his frenzied flight, and as he hopped over rocks and wagon-ruts he pleaded with the saints to forgive "our evil thoughts, our sinful desire to do harm our Vasily, our beloved Vasily..."

As he came to the doorway of the cottage, his chest was pounding like drums, his mind was <sup>whirling</sup> ~~bursting~~ with thoughts of <sup>the thief Vasily</sup> ~~guilt and money~~. He paused and made another cross on his dusty breast. Olga, his wife, emerged from the gloom of the cottage. In one hand, she held the roll of rubles big as a Christmas sausage, and in the other she clasped a kitchen knife.

"I thought you would never come," she said.



[start]

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## DENIED IT ALL

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

When Mrs. Melkinson said she was "delighted" to meet you, there couldn't be the slightest doubt in your mind that she meant it entirely, completely, without pose or ulterior purpose.

She was that kind of person and everything about her, her small and energetic figure, her open dark face with its eager black eyes, her intense and still lighthearted manner, her family's standing in Weston and her own reputation from childhood on for service to the shul and community, all composed a unity of human excellence whose appeal was immediate and undeniable.

Mrs. Gordon, a taller, more heavy, and slower-moving woman, felt all this vaguely but nonetheless definitely when she and Mrs. Melkinson happened to meet late Thursday afternoon in front of the ladies' blouse counter in Rodacks', the larger of Weston's two department stores.

"Sheila, where have you been? I haven't seen you in ages! I am so delighted to see you!" Hannah Melkinson said this in almost one breath which was merry and warm and conveyed on an attractive smile.

They held gloved hands for the moment during which Sheila Gordon smiled warmly in reply, and then gaily wagged her head exclaiming, "Oh, you know, the kids been keeping me busy and Jack's just got over the flu, and one thing and another..."

Sheila Gordon was about the same age as Hannah, although her larger and fleshier build and her tortoise-rimmed eyeglasses made her appear at least several years older. She was also less organized and less active in her personal and social life, preferring to idle away evenings in gossip with friends who dropped in, or in watching television until she dozed off, rather than dress up and go to a meeting, or go ringing doorbells for some charity, or help prepare for some banquet. That was her nature, and when from time to time she did overcome it, she and her close friends considered it a <sup>sheer</sup> triumph of will.

"I don't mean to pounce on you, Sheila, or to exploit our meeting like this, because I am really very happy to see you, but," Hannah Melkinson said eagerly, touching the <sup>left</sup> forearm of the other woman, "but I am surprised that you haven't come to any of the sisterhood meetings."

"Well..." Sheila Gordon looked straight at Hannah for a brief moment, turned her eyes away toward the blouse counter, and began sneezing in the manner of a sensitive child. "Well, you know, March, the grocery store and all...". Her eyes confronted the smaller woman's again, and she suddenly spoke forthright, bolting her words: "I don't like the idea of holding sisterhood meetings of a shul upstairs over a grocery store, any more than I like holding Friday night services there. Downstairs they sell pork and kum and alich chazarai and right on top of that we keep a Torah scroll and the holy ark and we call that praying to God..."

March waited a full minute after the sudden blast of voice had spent itself, and rather than become indignant or at least irritated as she, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ the president of Boston's Temple Israel sisterhood, had a right to, she remained composed as before. Only now her

eyes grew softer and more womanly, and her clear crisp voice surrendered its edge in the shallowness of a plea.

"Oh, Sheila, now really! After all we've been through..." she said with quiet authority. "You know that second floor upstairs is only temporary." Suddenly a lift came into her voice bearing some of her former excitement and force, "I know you better, Sheila; there is some other reason for what you're saying."

"Well..." Sheila Gordon shifted her weight onto her left foot, took her glasses into her hands and stared at the lenses as though concentrating on an important truth. "I tell you, Hannah, I've heard some very unpleasant stories about what happened to the shul, and if they're true - and I believe they are because I heard them from reliable people who don't make it a practice of spreading false tales - if they are true, I don't want to have anything to..."

Hannah interrupted Sheila's grievance by turning her head from side to side, seeking out someone or some place, and then, taking Sheila by the elbow, she said emphatically, "Look, Sheila, this is no place to talk. Let's go over to that booth in the luncheon apartment and talk this over."

The taller woman led the way through the counter circle. They sat opposite each other in a booth, and asked the uniformed waitress to bring them two black coffees.

Hannah Wilkinson sat bolt upright as she removed her gloves. "Sheila," she said gravely, for the first time revealing little wariness in her face or voice, "I don't know what stories you've heard about the shul, and I don't care. There are so many going around and not all of them can be right, can they? Sheila, this is the story, from the beginning to end, and it's the only true story because I was in

on the whole thing."

Hannah paused for a moment as she noted that Sheila Gordon was resting sluggishly against the wall of the booth and staring distractedly ~~intently~~ at her black hair combed back in a bun, then at her face and her brown striped worsted suit. Hannah eased from her stiff-backed position, and resting her elbows on the table, began to speak slowly, deliberately in order to win Sheila's attention away from her appearance and on to her words. At length Sheila sensed her friend's being discomfited by her staring; ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ she straightened her posture and was eager to listen.

"I think, Sheila," Hannah said, starting her explanation, "I think I know Eleanor Rosen better than anyone in this town, better, perhaps, than the rabbi does, and certainly better than her own husband..."

Sheila Gordon smiled, her lips wryly savoring the remark.

"No, I mean it. And I'm not being gossipy. I went to school with Eleanor and we were always the closest friends. You know as well as I that we raised our children together, and I don't think I'm being unfair to her when I tell you that she shared confidences with me that she kept from her husband."

Hannah paused for a moment while the waitress served the coffee, and her face remained intense while she sipped from the cup and continued to look over at Sheila. She opened her eyes wide as Sheila said, "I still don't know what really happened with Eleanor and Leonard..."

Hannah quickly put her cup down, touched a napkin to her lips, and declared, "You see, I told you you didn't know the real story behind it all. From your question I know you couldn't possibly have heard the truth."

"Well, my Lord, what is the Truth? I want to be set straight, if I'm wrong," she said, almost whining, her palms opening before her shoulders in a small desperate gesture.

Hannah sat back in the booth, crossed her legs, and continued in a calm deliberate voice. "Listen to the whole story and you will understand for yourself. As I started to say, Eleanor Rosen and I were very close. Intimate is probably the proper word. Throughout all the years she served as president of the sisterhood, I worked hand-in-glove with her. I was with her down to that last terrible day."

"Really?"

"Yes. No one else will ever really know how terribly she suffered. Her marriage to Leonard Rosen was a tragic mistake. It should never have taken place. Not only did it ruin their lives, but it <sup>also</sup> made a mess of their daughter's; and the fact that it had such repercussions in the shul itself shows how enormous a mistake it was."

Her words had now secured Sheila's undivided attention. Pushing her coffee to one side, Sheila hunched over the table and concentrated her senses in such a way as to absorb everything that came from Hannah's direction, phrases, inflections, movements of the eyes, small quiverings of the lips, every aspect of personality that affected the flavoring of the account. Hannah paused a moment in which to realize Sheila's tendency to rumor would convert her explanation almost inevitably into such an unwonted direction, and she counseled herself to an even more deliberate, matter-of-fact manner of telling.

"They were entirely two different types of people. Incompari-  
ble applies to them more than to anyone else I know in Boston, or any-  
where else, for that matter. She was mature, emancipated, a truly  
brilliant girl who would have been educated had she never gone to  
college. You know as well as I what a wonderful leader she was." She



interrupted her narrative a moment to consider a fragmentary memory which she released in the brief rapping of her spoon against the side of the cup. She was aware that Sheila's eyes inquired into her musing and followed its dissipation along the spoon.

"Her only trouble," Hannah continued, looking up at Sheila, "really her curse, her mark of Cain, was her terrible frightful temper. As long and as well as I knew her, I never was able to determine whether the violent things she did to people and to herself as well was because of just plain temper, which a person can eventually control, or because of a headstrong, vindictive nature, which I suppose, I don't know, is simply untamable. Sometimes, despite her brilliance, I thought her simply insane..."

"I'll bet you," Sheila asserted with a near sinister quality of one falling on some secret, prohibited finding, "that Eleanor Rosen was the one who drove Esther away from home! Isn't it strange, and terrible, how that happened? I tell you, Hannah, I shudder at the very thought of it," and her shoulders twitched even as she spoke.

"Yes, it was Eleanor who drove away the poor kid. I doubt whether Leonard had the strength to tell his only child to leave home and never come back again. I doubt whether any of us, or any of our husbands, would be able to. But Eleanor Rosen could. To her it was clear as the light of day. And above all else, it was reasonable, the logical thing to do.

"She told me that she happened once to talk to Esther about it before the girl went away to college, and she said that she had told her quite dispassionately, as a matter of theory, that if she were ever to marry a Gentile boy she should not bother to come home. Well, Eleanor applied her theory. The day Esther came home with her

husband, Eleanor opened the front door, ordered them to leave, and then bolted the door as they walked away from the front steps."

"And Leonard?" Sheila asked.

"Leonard is a kind and sentimental man. He didn't like the idea of Esther's marriage, a secret one at that, any more than Eleanor did, especially since he considered himself more observant, more Jewish, than Eleanor, but really because he was the president of Weston's only shul, the largest shul in the state, and what would the people say? He tried to argue that it was all an error, that they could straighten it all out, somehow a compromise of some sort could be worked. But Eleanor would hear nothing of it. She turned on Leonard with that withering, lacerating look that only her type of woman can so mercilessly manage, told him to keep his foolish mouth shut, and then she drove Esther out."

"And then?"

"Well, you know about their fight. The details aren't important. They didn't hurt each other so much physically as they did otherwise. Leonard was as proud and stubborn as he was conventional and sentimental. He wanted Eleanor to apologize in public when they came to court for the divorce proceedings, but she refused. When he spat on the floor in front of her, that killed any possible hope that they might come together again."

"After all this, Hannah, I can't understand how they continued to hold offices in shuls. How could they face people? I mean, after all, they were leaders in a religious institution?"

"Well, Sheila, with Leonard Rosen, it was a matter of pride. He wasn't going to have people say his wife drove him from the presidency holding it after so many years. Then, too, he invested so much money in the shul; it was his last source of self-esteem. The rabbis <sup>into</sup> asked him none too subtly to 'consider' the entire situation and resign as an honorary cost of

some kind or other. That was a real blow to Leonard who couldn't quite see what difference his personal life made to the shul, and he stubbornly - and from what I am told - rather ungentlemanly-like refused. "

"And what about Eleanor?"

"Now we come to the heart of the story, the Truth, as we started out calling it," Hannah said, winking her eye, then shifting over to the other leg. She reached for her purse, produced a pack of cigarettes, offered one to Sheila, and then after both had exhaled several times, she continued. "First of all, in Eleanor's case, there was no one who dared ask her to resign. The rabbi once visited her in her newly-rented apartment to talk things over about the sisterhood, its future activities, et cetera, but it seems he couldn't bring himself to discuss her resignation. Temple Israel's sisterhood was just inconceivable without Eleanor Rosen as its president.

"Aside from that, Sheila, being sisterhood president was not a matter of personal pride or esteem for Eleanor, as everyone felt and knew. It was rather a matter of principle, a question of issues which, Eleanor had said time and again long before this whole mess came to pass, had to be dealt with, regardless of who was president. And that really was the cause of our downfall as a congregation."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, soon after Eleanor Rosen became president of the sisterhood she embarked on a one-man crusade which she openly called 'the emancipation of the Jewish woman'. I don't have to tell you what she meant by that, do I?"

"No, Hannah. She was really terrific, and I was all for her. And so were most of the other girls, although none of us were as outspoken or could defend ourselves half as well as she did."

"She was one of the few people who actually campaigned for what she believed in. Women help as much as the men in keeping up Temple Israel, so there is no reason why women shouldn't share in the management of its affairs."

"That's why three women are on the Board of Directors, isn't it, Hannah, because of her?"

"That's right. Of course, it took years and years of battle on her part, and funny thing, mainly against her husband's opposition. He didn't like the idea of women running a shul, particularly such an important shul as this one. He couldn't argue with Eleanor, because, I suppose, there was no arguing down her logic. He just felt it was wrong. Besides, it was not traditional, he used to say. Everything Eleanor proposed he labeled not traditional. Men and women sitting together? Not traditional! Confirmation of girls? Not traditional! The fact that women were emancipated politically in this country and were as educated as men, many of them having as much Jewish knowledge as the men, pitifully meager as that might be, had nothing to do with it, he argued. These were radical ideas, and Temple Israel was not a radical institution! And that was the end of it.

"Well, as we know, it was not the end of it. Angered as she was by her husband's obtuseness and downright stubbornness - she was convinced he rejected her every proposal simply because he didn't want her showing him up - she nevertheless managed most of the time to behave discreetly and tactfully. For her, that is, because for most others her discretions would have been whopping indiscretions, if not outright faux pas. At any rate, she did avoid any open breaks and kept her more venomous personal antagonisms out of the shul and sisterhood meetings."

"Hannah, dear, I still don't understand what you meant

by Eleanor's attitude being the cause of 'the downfall of the congregation'?"

Hannah blew a puff of smoke in the air, ground out the cigarette in the ashtray, and then pointed her forefinger in Sheila's direction. "Sheila," she said, "this is the part of the story that you don't know and that I want you to know, because your attitude toward the sisterhood and the shul depends on your knowing the truth. And this is why I want to paint the whole picture for you, even at the expense of rehashing a great deal that you know firsthand or had guessed at. The perspective is important..."

"Well," said Sheila, "I'm all ears."

"After they were divorced, Eleanor Rosen decided that her cave of pussyfooting - that was the very word she used, pussyfooting - her campaign were at an end. She figured she no longer needed to appease Leonard, she knew that the rabbi was on her side even though he hesitated forcing the issue because he feared his president's stubborn and possibly violent reaction. And so she took off her kid gloves and took on Goliath..."

"What do you mean, Hannah? I don't get that."

"By that I mean, Sheila, that Eleanor had decided the time had come to stop ~~her~~ evading what she called the 'fundamental democratic ~~of~~ right of Jewish women' which is to read the Torah in the shul on an equal basis with men. You must have heard about it, Sheila?"

"Some of the girls were over my house some time ago and they were talking about, but I thought it was just, you know, talk, sort of talking about: play-acting, like/ how would you like to be a rebetzin? But something inside me told me then it must have started with Eleanor. Isn't that interesting?"



"Well, Sheila, apparently Eleanor thought hard about this because she told me she decided to make a great big symbolic act of it, like the storming of the Bastille, that sort of thing. Well, as you know, <sup>celebrates</sup> Shavuot is the time of the giving of the Torah to the Jews..."

Sheila Gordon nodded her head.

"...and Eleanor planned on the first day of Shavuot, right in the middle of the services, to walk up onto the bimah and to demand as her democratic and Jewish right to be called to read a portion of the Torah. And you know she knows as much Hebrew as her husband, ~~xxx~~ ex-husband, that is, and she more than anybody else could read it..."

"Well, my Lord, Hannah, what happened? I didn't hear anything about this! What happened? How come I don't know about it?" Sheila was a bubbling of excitement, her eyes <sup>flamed</sup> two ~~xiaws~~ of expectancy, and her mouth open wide as long.

"Unfortunately, Shavuot came out on a Saturday, <sup>were</sup> so there/no other women in shul because they were all helping their husbands in the stores, this being the busy season just before vacation. And there was just ~~xb~~ about a minyan of men, mainly the older men who would be more offended than the others and with whom Leonard Rosen's stock and esteem is greater.

"Eleanor just didn't care anymore. She had lost her patience waiting and waiting, she was infuriated by the fact that her former husband was the major impediment to any progress in Weston's Jewish life, and she decided now or never.

"So on this first day of Shavuot, just after the Torah scrolls are taken out, Eleanor Rosen walks up to the platform, and firmly demands of the rabbi and the men standing around up there that she be called to the Torah.

"Well, when Mr. Rosen sees this, he gets up from his seat



and screams out hysterically, at the top of his voice: 'If you let that woman stand on this pulpit and violate that Torah, you're not going to have a pulpit to stand on any more...'. And before the rabbi or anyone could stop him, he turns around, throws his tales and siddur on the chair, and stalks out of the shul his face purple with rage.

"That same night the fire engines came blazing in from all over the county. I don't think anybody will ever forget that fire, the scrolls, the ark, the building a heap of smoldering ash."

"My Lord, my Lord," Sheila Gordon said over and over again. She fell back limp against the boothwall.

"The only people who know what happened was that minyan of men. And the rabbi made them swear that same morning they would not tell anyone what had happened that morning, he thought it so ugly and unfit to be passed on in the streets. He told me about it, though, because he asked me to take over as president of the sisterhood and he thought I should know the real reasons why both Eleanor and Leonard Rosens left town so soon after the fire."

"Then it wasn't because..." Sheila blurted out, her eyes staring in disbelief.

"No, it wasn't because Leonard Rosen held an insurance policy on the shul which no one was supposed to know about. And it wasn't because we couldn't afford to pay off the mortgage. And it wasn't because this was a way the 'old men' could oust the rabbi 'who was getting modern ideas'. The reason is the one I just told you, and that's the truth behind it all."

[end]

Original documents  
faded and/or illegible



Theme for Radio Drama

In small Brazilian town man chronically ill is on verge of death. Physicians ~~were~~ called in from largest medical clinics in South America, ~~and~~ <sup>is</sup> proclaimed there ~~was~~ no hope for ~~his~~ recovery. Only most delicate surgical operation might be of avail, but the ~~greatest~~ <sup>most</sup> surgeons ~~consulted~~ declared their technique - although universally heralded as the finest and ablest - ~~would be unable~~ <sup>inadequate</sup> to perform successfully in this case.

The child of the doomed man frets, despairs. In her desperation she wanders aimlessly through the dusty, grimy roads. On the edge of town, she passes an elderly bearded man who sits atop a mound, neath the shade of a tree. <sup>Manuel Costa</sup> ~~Juan Pablo~~ - that is he - notices the depression writ on the child's features. He calls her to him, and asks why the despair? Carmella unloosens her shriveled soul in description of her father's plight. When she finishes her tale, the man - most distinguished in features and with a strange mystic strength emanating from ~~from~~ his face - says nothing, arises, takes town. Carmella by hand, and trudges off to the ~~city~~.

In the town hospital, he asks to see Carmella's father. He is refused entrance. But his quiet insistence, and the alarming statement that he has come to save the man startles the attendants who give way before him. Entering the darkened room, he ~~is~~ walks over to the bed of the doomed man.

He says nothing. He looks at the man, then at the sterilized surgical instruments lying encased at his side, but says nothing.

Behind him there gathers the hospital staff protesting, remonstrating. He turns, looks severely at the group which slowly quiets down at the sight of his strong, ~~mystic~~ unusual face and stronger yet mystic-like gaze.

In a clear voice which belies his elderly appearance he orders two physicians to hold his hands and the remainder of the gathered to do likewise in forming a circle about the "doomed patient". The lights are then ~~x~~ doused.

In the strangely quiet atmosphere punctuated only by the dyspeptic breathing of the bed-ridden man, a voice is heard. It is the clear but subdued voice of Juan Pablo intoning a chant-like passage. He speaks in Portuguese yet the quality of his chant is somewhat Arabic - Hebraic. The heavy, irregular breathing and the chant of Pablo pervade the darkened room - and then - the most amazing sounds. The clicking of metal upon metal is heard. The cut of the scissor, the ~~scrape~~ scrape of the scalpel are discernable to the physicians' ears. They are impelled to move but they dare not. They grasp firmly the hands of Pablo who chants on.

Forty minutes pass. Still the breathing, the intonation of Pablo, the metallic clank of metal - plus the wincing noise and stirring groan coming from the area of the encircled bed.

Each member of the circle ~~gr~~ squeezes tighter the hands

*sweating*

of his neighbors.

At the end of fifty minutes Pablo suddenly calls out:

"That is all. Turn on the lights". The entire group, drenched with perspiration, rushes to the bed.

Carmella's father is asleep, but breathes heavily.

At his side there lay blood spattered scissors, scalpels, and tweezers.

The physicians turn to Pablo. He is not there.

Four days later, the town newspaper's headlines read:

"DOOMED MAN WILL LIVE".

On the man Juan Pablo, the story carries the remark of Carmella:

"Who is he? He is the man who sits on the mound <sup>near</sup> ~~under~~ the shade of the tree..."



## YOU CAN NEVER TELL...

by Marc H. Tanenbaum

Maybe it was a coincidence...then again, you can never tell...

It happened several years ago. I was spending the week-end with my brother, the one who is a theological student. We had returned to the dormitory that Saturday night, tired and rather fagged. A few casual remarks while we undressed and climbed under the covers, then asleep.

It was a cool, clear night. Ever so often a whisp of wind blew through the shadowy, winding corridors. I felt strange sleeping in the dormitory of a theological seminary. I never did put much stock in theological systems and divine inspirations. But that's how it was - I was fatigued - too fatigued to wrangle with God or his disciples. And the bed was so comfortable.

It must have been about four o'clock when I heard a sharp, almost nervous banging on the door. A muffled call echoed and re-echoed down the hallway. First a murmured "Harold, wake up...it's me...Elihu... wake up, please...", a pause, then a loud "HAROLD, WAKE UP!".

Whoever the nocturnal intruder was, one thing was certain. He was excited and anxiety teared his call. I sat upright in my warm bed. "WHO IN THE HELL'S THERE...Jeez, What time is it...?" Rubbing my eyes and brushing back my tangled hair, I looked about the room. An eerie spark jolted me.

"HAROLD? PLEASE...IT'S ME...ELIHU...PLEASE, OPEN UP...". The door rattled as fists pounded impatiently.

I was awake, fully awake. Harold was still sleeping obliviously, snuggled in cover-folds. I reached out to jostle him, hesitated. Should I open the door? "HAROLD, PLEASE OPEN UP...!"...I NEED YOU...".

"Hold your pants - we'll be over - don't make so damned much noise!"

There was terror in the guy's voice. Something was wrong. I shook Harold. "Heh, you'd better get up...someone wants you...get up, Harold."

The poor kid was tired. He turned slowly, looked up at me, muttered: "Hmmm...wh...what's wrong...". He was still asleep. The fists drubbed on the door-panel, shattered all stillness in the room. Harold opened wide his eyes and sat up. "What's wrong?" he asked.

"Somebody wants you," I said.

I opened the door and the impatient caller rushed into the room. He was wringing his felt hat. He fairly shouted, with a crack in his voice, "What's wrong with you? ... I've been screaming at you for ten minutes! ... Get out of bed, please get out...I need you...now!"

*Candles*  
Harold leaned forward. ~~I flicked on the light.~~ The beams shone down on this fellow, Elihu. His face was wet with perspiration. His mouth quivered as he tried to say something. ~~You would had to have been blind or dead not to sense that something was wrong, gravely wrong.~~

Harold quickly introduced us, slipped into his shoes, then asked: "Why the commotion, Elihu...It must be near four o'clock...".

Elihu tried to explain something. His face twitched. A tear trickled along the ridge of his eye. He nervously handed a crumpled

yellow sheet to Harold. It was a telegram. Harold glanced over the sheet and startingly moved back. "Holy cow! ... ~~Ben...Ben~~ in a coma...Oh, GOD!" A shudder and heavy pall enveloped the kid's face.

~~I didn't know what was happening, but I felt misfortune had struck hard at both these boys. I was an outsider looking on.~~

Elihu chokingly murmured that they were saying Tehillim in his room upstairs. Harold rushed about the room, gathering up his bath-robe, a yamulka, and a siddur. He pushed a folded yamulka and a small, blue-covered book into my hands, and said: "Come with us... I'll explain later". Elihu matted his wettened eyes. He blubbered, "I'll see you in my room. I have to...to get two more fellows for a Minyan."

*shows shuffling*  
We whisked along the corridor as Harold explained that Ben was Elihu's oldest brother, that he had just been ordained. He was struck with spinal meningitis, and according to the telegram, had been in a coma for eighteen hours. Harold added that Ben was a close friend. That's all he could say. Like Elihu, he had a catch in his throat.

*feel*  
~~To me, all this was as queer as queer could be.~~ I felt strange enough just being in a seminary. And now they asked me to do something I hadn't done in eight years - daven. Just didn't make sense. The more I thought about it, the more peculiar it seemed.

*from behind the open door of Elihu's room, light streamed forth. Harold and I entered.*

*had a feeling*  
~~A circus. That's what it appeared to be.~~ A circus with

*contributed* *ambassadors, cigarette light*  
~~Painted clowns and that strange, unreal air.~~

Small, huddled groups of two and three boys conversed in muffled whispers. All of them were in pajamas, bathrobes, and slippers. Some were embarrassingly wiping cold creams from their faces. Others were wiping sleep from their glued eyes. ~~Most of them yawned,~~ asked inquisitively what had happened.

*Contributed*  
~~The ceiling light threw eerie shadows about the room.~~ A breeze seeped through the open window, rustled papers on the table. Seated at the table in the center of the room was Milton. *Right here,* Harold told me he was the middle brother, a rabbi. He had just driven in from New Rochelle. He was the only fully clothed person in the room. Hunched over the table, he bathed his damp, reddened cheeks with a crumpled handkerchief. With his other hand, he shakingly turned the pages of the prayer book. Ever so often, he sighed, whimpered depressedly.

The door slammed. Everyone turned to see Elihu throw his coat carelessly on a chair. He approached Milton, uttering: "We...we have a Minyan...". Milton slowly raised himself from his chair. He stared only at the brown, *contributed* dog-eared pages, and announced weakly: "Turn...please turn to ~~an~~ page nine...". He paused momentarily, wiped his glistening eyes, then in low, subdued tones read the Hebrew lines. *looks quiet and calm. dimmed lights, made for good story*

Everyone gazed intently at Milton and Elihu, the sobbing, whimpering brothers. They began to chant. Their chant grew louder. The brothers were crying, *humming, moaning, praying*, praying. A charge shot through the room. A half-crazed frenzy took hold of everyone. The berobed boys, as though

transfigured, intoned the psalms.

Strenuously and intensely they prayed, page after page. The minutes passed. The volume of strained voices increased.

Quiet darkness bordered the window. ~~The moon painted a pale white finish on the panes.~~

Milton clutched his soiled handkerchief, waved his arms in the air. He cried, "...the Heavens are the Heavens of the Lord but the Earth hath He given to the children of men. The dead praise not the Lord nor they who descend into the silent grave...". *Emphasized as this is beautiful*

*Could be* The atmosphere was high-pitched and tense. Milton and Elihu were practically wailing. I thought they were hysterical. Over and over they chanted the Hebrew passages.

Milton coughed nervously, wiped his soggy palms on his coat-lapels. Elihu stood in the corner, shaking from side to side. He wined, "Ben... oh, Ben...please, don't leave us...please...God, please...please...God...".

Milton lamented tearfully, "O, Lord! I beseech Thee, deliver the soul from death, the eyes from tears, the foot from the slipping...".

*clasped*  
Milton again ~~stretched~~ his hands together, waved them loosely, pleaded. Suddenly, there came a dull, firm knock. Milton froze in his position. Elihu stirred, was stunned.

The intent look on the drawn faces gave way to startled eyes, gaping mouths.

There was another rap on the door. Like statuettes, everyone stood molded before the open books.

I glanced about the room, then rushed briskly to the door. A boy



handed me a telegram. I brought it into the room. Milton and Elihu stared icily, moved toward me to touch the envelope. They dared not. "Whhh - Whhh - Whhat is it - Whhat does it say?" they blurted together.

I fingered the envelope, ripped open the flap. I looked up at the brothers. ~~They had covered their eyes.~~ The others gathered about them, lightly touching their shoulders.

I glanced at the typed words and read:

"The crisis is over...Ben will live...Praised be the name of the Lord...Signed, Father."

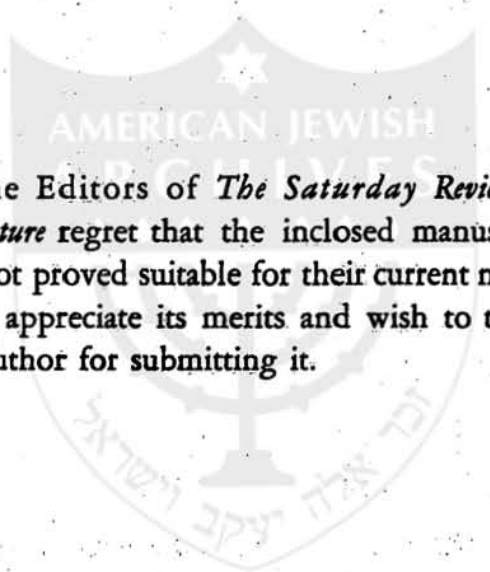
~~Like crushed paper houses~~ they crumpled into chairs. I looked out the window. With a half-murmur, half-sigh, I said to myself:

Maybe it was a coincidence...then again, you can never tell... .

# *The Saturday Review*

of LITERATURE

25 West 45th Street, New York 19, N. Y.



The Editors of *The Saturday Review of Literature* regret that the inclosed manuscript has not proved suitable for their current needs. They appreciate its merits and wish to thank the author for submitting it.

## MANEUVER FOR FREEDOM

I looked out, far out across the glazed waters  
And saw with clear eye  
Civilization's freedom-guarantors.  
Huge were they, like their creators  
And their pale drabness of gray  
(surely reflective of their makers' state)  
Shone defiantly under heaven-sent rays.

Amidst the cordon of freedom's bulwark  
Dipped the graceful gull  
(surely not propelled by atom's mangleful drive)  
Untrammelled she soared and dipped.  
No fears, no hates, no suspicion  
Marked her maneuver.  
Surely was she free as she flapped her wing elegant  
Baring a white breast, so glistening white  
(surely reflective of her maker's state).

The somber, monochromed armada  
(of certain technological perfection)  
Inched awkwardly, mechanically, slicing the waters  
Whilst the gull flapped heavenward, then (at will's desire)  
Glided sylphlike to water's surface, pausing refreshingly.  
But the pale hulks plodded onward, ever onward.  
In their black cavernous depths, their creators  
(once their creators, now their shackled serfs)  
Moved in order, disciplined in action (and thought?).

Maneuver for freedom did the giant automata  
To the clank of hard, beaten chains (symbolical?)  
And the gull softly, peacefully, unrestrainedly winged  
On nature's breeze; hovered o'er man's proud creation  
Wondering, "maneuver for freedom?"

Deep in her white, feathered breast she buried her head  
And shed a tear, salty and bitter  
Dropping it gravely upon these  
Maneuvering for freedom.

ITZHIK  
WHY ~~ITZHIK~~ BLASPHEMED

By Marc H. Tanenbaum

(Numerous short stories and articles by this author who hails from Baltimore, have appeared in the English and Anglo-Jewish newspapers and magazines. He is a journalist, public relations consultant, and staff member of the Eternal Light radio program. -- EDITOR)

Itzhik Levin was a small quiet man with pale eyes and a quizzical pucker on his face. His little shop, with its faded "Holiday Greeting Cards" sign painted on the window, seemed to complement his stolid appearance. When, years back, he first moved onto Lombard Street, he became the center of considerable controversy, although it is only today that he became aware of the tempest he brewed then.

During the first week of his arrival, when he began his daily ritual of sitting before his shop, he did notice the unusual activity of his neighbors. The tailor opposite his store was constantly flitting across to his side of the street to whisper with the grocer behind the open-air pickle barrel; they whispered, he noticed, then nodded in his direction. The fruit-stand proprietor would duck into the poultry shop next door, and after a brief huddle, both the poultry and fruit-men would peer out at him above the window-sign marked "<sup>Dressed</sup> Fresh Chicks Chickens -- Kosher". All along the block, during that first week, he was aware of these sudden caucuses and stealthy gatherings.

Itzhik Levin would simply look up with his pale eyes and quizzical pucker, and then return undisturbed to leafing through the fat little calendars on his lap, or perusing the brown hard-covered books on the chair beside him.

If Itzhik had been of a more curious nature, he would have put his calendar and little brown books aside for a moment; he would have stood up, walked across the street to the fruit and poultry-men, or up the block to the grocer and tailor, and he would have inquired, "Why all the intense interest centered about me?" But Itzhik ~~was~~ was not curious about what the people were whispering. He was interested ~~in~~ only in the calendar and the brown hard-covered books which he read constantly before his little shop.

In a way, the fluttering, whispering proprietors had wished that Itzhik Levin, their new neighbor, would come to them and explain himself. (They would not come to him for firstly, he was a stranger and on Lombard Street one never approaches strangers, and secondly, they hesitated to interrupt his reading). Why was he constantly leafing through the calendar and reading the brown books, some wanted to know. Others had more personal questions. Was Itzhik Levin, proprietor of the greeting-card shop, a learned man as he appeared to be from his sedulous reading? (Even in the frenetic world of pickles and chicken feathers a man's worth was measured by his "learning".) Or, phrased differently, was he operating such a simple business so that he might have more leisure in which to study? Or, then again, was he simply trying to evade strenuous labor such as ~~that~~ they were all engaged in, or was he a simpleton unable to handle more involved business affairs?



Eventually, the answers came out. But as in all questions relating to personality, the answers came out piecemeal, and with the neighbors unable to assemble a rounded and conclusive view, they broke apart and were arrayed in two conflicting camps. Those sentimentally-inclined vowed that Itzhik Levin was a man of vast erudition, massive knowledge, and profound insights. The more cynical swore that he was a simpleton, a lazy lout, irresponsible, given to false appearances, and other things cynical men usually say about <sup>those they hold in</sup> ~~men~~ of lower estate. Neither view, of course, troubled with facts, for of what worth is a gossip that is factual?

When the first Sabbath came, and Itzhik Levin made his debut in the synagogue in the basement around the corner, ~~in the middle of the next block~~, both camps were thrown into confusion. He was neither erudite nor stupid, neither ~~wise~~ shrewd nor dumb. He was, however, profoundly simple and modest - and, what subsequently became the overriding factor in the controversy, Itzhik Levin was gifted with a fathomless fund of stories and parables and legends. Those who had come prepared to mock the simpleton, found themselves laughing with delight at how the clown Hershele Ostropalier had evaded the border guards. Those who had come to sympathize or to idolize, forgot to do both. Even the shortwinded, irascible rabbi smiled with golden teeth through Itzhak's tales.

And so, in fact, Itzhik Levin was no longer a stranger. The barriers which Lombard Street had fabricated shriveled, then withered away. From all sides of the block now, the grocer, the tailor, the confectioner, the poultry-man, all began to pay regular visits to the card shop. It was not long before rumor had it that Itzhik Levin was something of a marvel. Itzhik Levin, it was

said, ran a business with only two products, holiday greeting cards and Seder plates for Passover. Moreover, it was widely added, Itzhik Levin had such foresight that he needed purchase supplies but once a year for the entire season. And as an afterthought, some commented that this small wizened man supported a wife and four children with the earnings of but two products.

In the market hierarchy, under ordinary circumstances, such inflated tributes would have immediately elicited a rash of skepticism, if not outright condemnation. But in the case of Itzhik Levin, these rumors became symbols of his simple greatness. Here this small modest man had evaded the oppressive laws of economics. He hardly took care of his shop, and yet it provided for him. With two simple products purchased once a year - ah, such foresight! - he was able to support a family. And moreover, while others were slaving away he had an abundance of time in which to read on the backs of calendars and in the brown hard-covered books the parables of Reb Hershele and the legends of Reb Levi Yitchok of Berditchev. Indeed, Itzhik Levin was more than simple and modest. He was even wise...

In time, it became known that Itzhik was also a man of virtue and moral worth. Children, after school hours and over the long weekends, would gather about his chair and listen eager-eyed to his wondrous nostalgic tales from the calendar and brown books. With the set quizzical pucker on his small face, Itzhik would tell about Jacob and Esau, or Cain and Abel, and he would add the relevant moral: one should not steal, one should not be jealous, one should always be just and honest, always honest and just.

His reputation grew and spread widely like a well-planted willow. Mothers came to him with their problem children. Fathers

weaned their sons by his example. In the synagogue around the corner where "learning" had always been the measuring rod, although hardly in use of late, exception was gladly made for Itzhik Levin. His was a "learning" of another sort, hardly Talmudic, but perhaps more useful, certainly more entertaining. It was natural, therefore, that Itzhik Levin, master of the parable and model of virtue, should be granted the exalted honor of praying before the congregation every Sabbath and on the holidays. Considering his voice, it was indeed an honor.

It was during these approaching days of ~~Passover~~ <sup>(Rosh Hashonah)</sup> that some noted a darkening look come over Itzhik's face. It was, some said, a kind of gentle brooding. "Would Itzhik be in the synagogue this Rosh Hashonah?" They no longer dared ask personal questions, such as the cause of his darkened brow. "Would he pray before the congregation?" He would.

On the night of Rosh Hashonah, the brooding gathered on his brow like a massive cloud which, suddenly, without forewarning, burst with great flashes of wrath upon the congregation. He was standing on the pulpit, waiting for the ark to be opened by the grocer and tailor. Suddenly, his brow grew thick with wrinkles, his eyes closed, and with one swift irrepressible movement he closed the mahzor and cried out: "I will not pray to an unjust God!"

Mouths dropped open, the eyes of mothers teared, and children squirmed uneasily. Finally, after much pounding on the tables and shouted pleas for order, silence came to the basement synagogue. A group of bewildered men stood before Itzhik Levin who now sagged with despair on the pulpit bench.

"Why, Itzhik, why did you do it?" the grocer pleaded.

Itzhik looked up feebly through his pale eyes. He replied as though the question had not been asked. "I will not pray to an unjust God..."

The group of men blinked at him, utterly confused. At length, the tailor commented, "Itzhik, we don't mean to be...that is, we respect your word...but what you are saying is...is blasphemous!"

Wearily, like an ancient seer, Itzhik turned his head toward the tailor and explained. "It is not blasphemous, because God was unjust; He was unjust to me..."

It was no longer the sacreligious act they were concerned about; it was now a matter of securing information. "How was He unjust?" they asked in a chorus.

Itzhik Levin placed his hands on his knees and stared toward the ark. He began slowly, in the manner of a legend, but in a manner infinitely more somber. "I am a poor man, am I not?" He paused, and in a moment his poverty swept across the entire congregation.

"I have a wife and four children," he added. "Now how do I keep their stomachs from hunger and their feet protected from the cold? From the earnings of my store. And what do I sell in my store?"

The entire congregation, straining forward on their benches, instantly saw holiday greeting cards and Seder plates.

"I sell greeting cards for the holidays and Seder plates for Passover. Now what is it that happened to me that led to my outcry?" A child fell off his bench in his eagerness to hear the answer. Itzhik Levin felt the history of the moment.



"Last Nissan," he continued, <sup>(before we celebrated the Passover.)</sup> "that is, April, all of you here, and others not among you, were kind to me as you have always been. You purchased all my cards, the little white cards with the Hebrew greetings, and all my Seder plates. ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ Now, as all of you know," he made a small gesture with upturned palms, "it is my practice year after year to purchase supplies but once for the entire season." All across the basement-synagogue heads nodded in acknowledgment of his practice. "This I do, do I not, on the first of Iyar which is one week after the Passover." In a gentle collective rhythm, the heads swayed again.

"Now this year," ~~xxxxxxx~~ said Itzhik, "I followed the very same practice. On the eve of the first of Iyar (it could not be the first itself for then it was Sabbath) which is one week after the Passover, I took in hand all my money and went uptown to purchase little white greeting cards and Seder plates for the next Passover." They clung intensely to every word; suddenly they heard his voice falter and they saw his brow darken with the tiny wrinkles. "Now, now...poor...I am totally...abjectly...poor!"

Itzhik Levin was sobbing like a brokenhearted mother. A wave of profound pity rose in the bosom of the congregants. What had happened to their Itzhik? Why were they unaware of his plight? The guilt was upon their heads, they felt. They had come to Itzhik only for his parables and his legends; they had long ceased inquiring about his personal welfare. But what could have happened? Itzhik had such foresight...

At last, the tailor plaintively phrased their question. "What ...what happened, Itzhik?"

Itzhik raised his small head, he wiped his tired pale eyes,



and he sighed a deep sigh of pain. Then he began with muffled sniveling. "Four days after that...after my purchase...the State of Israel became independent..."

It was like an impressionistic painting, the long shock-filled faces, the widened white eyes, the gaping mouths. The eve of Rosh Hashonah was always a time of peace, of silence and meditation; tonight it was all pain and shocked bewilderment. The electric mood crackled and fell with the stammered question of the poultryman. "For that you...you weep, Itzhik? From that, you have become poor, abjectly poor...?"

Itzhik nodded. It was neither a legend nor a parable. He would explain and all would understand the tragedy which had befallen him. "You have noticed, all of you, that on the little white cards and on all the Seder plates for Passover, there is a phrase in Hebrew. What is that phrase?" The entire congregation was crouched in waiting. "That phrase is: L'Shana Haba B'Yerushalayim ...Next year we shall be in Jerusalem..."

Itzhik Levin saw the stunned faces; they blinked vacantly with questions. Well? What? What has this to do with poverty? What is with this Itzhik Levin?

"Don't you see?" implored Itzhik. "Jews are already in Jerusalem...of what good now are all my cards, all my Seder plates? Who will buy, who will be so foolish to buy...?" And again Itzhik Levin sank back on the pulpit bench and fell into a soft and gentle sobbing. Beneath his tears, he murmured, "Where is justice, oh where? If God were truly just, would he not have had mercy upon me? He knows my practice as He knows all things. Why on the fifth of Iyar did He redeem Israel, why not four days earlier so that

I might have known? God has not been just to me...and I will not pray to an unjust God..." And with tears streaming ~~down~~ <sup>from</sup> his ~~eyes~~ pale eyes, he murmured over and over, "Poor...totally poor..."

From somewhere in the back of the basement synagogue a child was heard to snicker and then a mother softly remonstrated. Indeed, Itzhik Levin did not blaspheme.

[Indeed, Itzhik Levin had suffered an injustice.]



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## "DIN MISHPAT"

### Dispute With The Lord

Throughout the whole of Hebrew literature, from the Old Testament through modern Palestinian tales, few themes have recurred with such striking frequency as the classic Din Mishpat Be-Kadosh Baruch Hu, Dispute with the Lord.

The Patriarch Abraham, the Law-giver Moses, the Prophets, the pious Job, the rabbis of the Talmud, the tzaddikim (hasidic rabbis of the 18th and 19th century), all, in their tortuous odyssey of faith, are recorded as having wrangled with the Lord at one time or another. Paradoxically enough, or perhaps naturally so, the first pious Hebrew to engage in controversy with the ~~Lord~~ One God was the first who discovered Him. Abraham, in pleading that Sodom be spared the divine wrath, defiantly, almost blasphemously, cried aloud:

"Shall ~~not~~ the judge of all the earth ~~do right?~~" <sup>not exercise justice?"</sup>

Thereafter, in an almost unbroken historic sequence, prophets and kings and saints ~~humbly~~ tilted lances with Jehovah. Indignant over the unrighteousness visited upon their people by a righteous God, they summoned Him to ~~do justice~~. <sup>According to legend,</sup> Moses called forth in bitter anguish: "What hath this nation done unto Thee, that it is oppressed more than any other nation in history?" And to Micah, the Lord makes evident ~~his~~ concern, with the words: "O, my people, what have I done unto thee? and wherein have I wearied thee? Testify against me..."

As in most Biblical narratives, these dramatic conflicts were of impressive sermonic value. Pointing to the magnificent colloquies of Job as the classic example, a noted scholar declared: "Job, sure of <sup>his</sup> ~~his~~ innocence, searching his heart, can find no adequate

reason for a good and just God thus to destroy him. In the course of his quest for an answer and explanation of his wretchedness, he has moved from bewilderment to rebellion, even to blind accusations of the indiscriminate visitations of God. --- But if, in his agony, Job has bitterly questioned the just government of God, in the desolate questing of his soul he has also caught momentary glimpses of the God of his righteousness."

Instances of such rebellion are encountered among the even more temperate rabbis of the Talmudic era. ("I have done my part. Do Thou thine." SHEMOT RABBAH, 23:8. "Thou must redeem us eventually. Why delay?" MIDRASH TEHILLIM, 87). But it is among the impassioned tzaddikim of medieval and later eras that the "din mishpat be-kadosh baruch hu" reaches unparalleled dramatic intensity and didactic forcefulness. Nathan Ausubel points out that the saintly and righteous tzaddikim "took on the sublimated character of the hero-knights of chivalry." ~~It even happened that these tzaddikim~~ rose up to question God himself. This they did," he asserts, "not out of blasphemous intent or an arrogant spirit, but with the flame of truth and compassion burning within them. We have only to turn to the Kaddish of Rabbi Levi-Yitchok of Berditchev, the Eighteenth Century Hasidic tzaddik, in which he questions God's justice toward his people. Jews in all parts of the world still sing its stirring strains:

"Therefore I, Levi-Yitchok ben Sara of Berditchev say:

Lo azus mimkomi! I shall not stir from here!

And end must come to all this!

Israel's suffering must end!

Isgadal v'iskadash shmay rahbo!

Magnified and sanctified be the name of the Lord!

*broad  
overall history  
total*

In this context, the story "Dream" by the modern Palestinian author A.Z. Rabinowitz, which is here translated <sup>which is here translated</sup>, assumes deeper significance. The "din mishpat" which the broken refugee demands with his Lord is in the tradition of his biblical and rabbinic <sup>ancestors (and his)</sup> ~~forbears~~, ~~but~~ the final unshakeable faith in the ultimate righteousness of ~~his~~ God, is his legacy bequeathed him by his hasidic ~~ancestors~~ forbears.





Harold was tired of arguing with his brother about God, ~~and~~ Revelation <sup>on Sinai</sup> and Ritual <sup>pattern</sup> but that last argument Morton threw at him was too much.

~~In half-suppressed anger, Harold ~~jumped~~ to a sitting position, using one arm as a prop and wildly poking the other in the dark, ~~xxxxxx~~~~

In half-suppressed anger, Harold shoved the covers below his waistline, and jumped to a sitting position <sup>in his bed.</sup> "What <sup>the hell</sup> kind of answer is that? <sup>he sat up in bed, obviously provoked.</sup> ~~Mort~~, I'm amazed at <sup>Christ,</sup>

you. Argumentum ad hominem is the cheapest kind of argument... just say you believe because you believe, and don't ~~try to~~ <sup>try to throw</sup> give me any cock-eyed rationales...". Little sprays of saliva streaked from his mouth, and the more he became excited, the more the spit flew into the dark.

Harold clenched the pillow with his right fist and <sup>to enforce his argument</sup> his other arm he poked wildly in the night air. Mort lay quietly on his back, resting his head on one ~~a~~ hand, while ~~xxxxxx~~ the fingers of his free hand beat a tinny sound on the metal bureau which separated their beds. Mort was looking ~~at~~ in the direction of the ceiling, then at the ~~xxxxxx~~ grotesque shadows ~~of~~ his brother's gesturing arm made on the wall. <sup>Harold didn't want to be so alone</sup>

Mort thought to himself while Harold raved on. He hoped no one heard what his brother said about religion being a <sup>opiate</sup> opium, a narcotic. After all, this was his first year

is that I don't know what I'm talking about. I'm feeling from my head, look, kid, don't try to give me the business. I'm primitive; even-treated and nervous.



at the seminary, and he didn't want anyone to know he had a brother ~~was~~ an atheist. They might take away his scholarship...

Mort slammed his hand against the side-board of the bureau, and the bang reverberated like the boom from a tin bass-drum.

"Let's quit," Mort said abruptly. "Two hours of this is enough...besides, we're getting nowhere."

~~Harold felt that he had made his point~~

Harold blurted as his concluding sentence: "So your position is logically untenable...".

"Aw, shut-up!" *pleased that*

"So that's the way you treat your guests," Harold said clowningly, and then with a note of slight bitterness which tinged his mature, baritone voice, he added: "I'll be damned if I come up here to spend another week-end with you in this dormitory...there's hasn't been one trip I've made here that wasn't messed up with theological clap-trap...".

Mort was provoked. He turned on his side and was about to pour forth his vial of wrath on Harold when ~~he~~ <sup>(ing)</sup> noticed long, silver streaks coursing along the window panes, he decided to change his mind, suppress his anger, and say: "Hey, look it's raining...".

"Yeh...," Harold remarked weakly as he glanced at the pane. The milky light from the street lamp ~~which~~ shone obliquely through the dormitory window <sup>It fan-like rays</sup> pointing up the whiteness of Harold's eyes and forehead which looked like knobs jutting forth from a door panel. ~~now was mixed in the rain drops~~ <sup>the light</sup> forming a cloudy solution which poured endlessly along the frames, making a chattering sound as it struck the cooled glass.

Harold gazed reflectively for a moment, then muttered,

*It - now felt outrageous  
- Don't you understand  
condemned  
at home  
- base critics*

"Let's hit the sack..."

"G'nite."

Harold folded his hands over his flat stomach, looked at crazy reflections on the opposite wall of the rain <sup>forming silver</sup> ~~coarsing~~ <sup>rivulets</sup> ~~brokenly~~, and thought to himself how naive his kid brother was, how much more naive he was bound to be after four years of orthodox indoctrinations, and how stupid it was to confuse the kid with his <sup>own</sup> cosmopolitan evaluation of life. At this moment, he resolved never to argue with his kid brother again, because Mort, in a weaker moment at home, might tell Mom some of the things Harold said, and that would get her mad, very mad, and her blood pressure would soar to the sizzling point, and she would ~~either~~ get a stroke, or curse the pants off Harold, or both.

*Must be about*  
Mort rolled over on his side and pulled the covers over his shoulder. He tugged and patted the pillow and hoped nobody heard them hollering about God. Gosh, how could Harold say what he said. I don't think anybody heard us; it must be about four o'clock. But how could he eat a ham sandwich, how could he...and Mort pulled the window blind over his thoughts and tried to convince himself to go <sup>to</sup> sleep.

The rain drummed persistently against the window and fell against the red brick wall forming a vast sheet which shimmered in the ~~xxx~~ pale street light. A chilled breeze ran along the floor under Harold's bed and as it emerged ~~ix~~ on the other side it tickled the dangling tassels of Harold's robe, ~~which was~~ thrown across his feet <sup>They</sup> ~~and~~ seemed to giggle defiantly at the tassels of Mort's robe which hung solemnly from the younger brother's bed. And there was a knock on the door.

Harold opened his eyes, paused in the midst of thought, propped himself up on the elbows of both arms, and asked: "Who's there?" and without hesitation added, "Come in, the door's open..."

The door opened wide and Harold's eyes followed the hand on the door knob and moved over ~~the~~ to view the short, bulky form which stood framed in the doorway. Against the background of the soft, mellow hall-light the visitor looked like a drowned doll, drenched and bloated and liverish pale. Harold was about to say "hello", but Mort sat up, shielded his eyes from the mild though piercing light which streamed over the shoulder of the intruder. He blinked several times, then coarsely but familiarly greeted: "Hi, Josh...what's doin'...?"

Josh rattled the knob slightly, then moved into the center of the room, between the beds, where he took on a grave-like, waxen appearance. On the left side of his face, rain streaks reflected from the window imposed a veil-like effect. He opened his mouth, and the <sup>ensuing</sup> facial movements were not too discernable, but he coughed, that was clear, and his first words caught in his throat. Mort, Harold noticed, showed signs of anxiety. Harold looked back at Josh, summed up his build, <sup>the outline of</sup> his round face, and ~~noticed~~ watched the rain drip off the edge of his raincoat as he moved back toward the door, leaving behind him wet, muddy tracks.

"Hey, what's wrong, kid...", Mort inquired. He brushed the bedcovers off him, patted his feet against the floor as he sought his slippers, and threw his robe about his broad shoulders.

In the light-filled doorway, Mort placed his arms on Josh's wet shouldres, and saw that the wetness on his plump face

was ~~tears~~ from tears that still welled about his eyes. "What's wrong, kiddo...". Mort shook him, and the kid lost restraint and cried. He bent his head, waggling it from side to side, and as he tried to stop his tears/<sup>with his left hand</sup>from inundating the thick, fat, furrows of his face, with his right hand he shoved a crumbled slip of paper toward Mort's chest.

It was a telegram. Mort looked at whimpering Josh before opening the telegram, and said: "Take it easy...this isn't going to help anybody...".

*Less  
nature  
Covers*

He glanced at the typed strips, unconsciously said, "Ohh...", then caught himself. He looked ~~Mark~~ Josh in the face, and softly inquired, "Are you saying it in your room? ...all right...we'll be up in five minutes...take it easy...he'll be all right...".

The kid blew his nose in a handkerchief he held crumpled in his hand, and turned down the hall, making a squashing, plump-plump with his soggy rubbers.

Mort was excited, nervous as he flounderingly <sup>sought to thrust</sup> thrust his arms into the bath robe sleeves. He bolted over to Harold's bed and rapidly ordered: "Get out of bed...we're going to say Tehillim for Josh's brother, Ben...he's ill...come on get up...".

*more  
faster*

"Take it easy, cocker...don't get so excited...look how nervous you are...you can't even tie your sash...".

"Come on, Hal, this is no time for fooling around... this is serious..." and Mort's face grew gaunt, tight, and somber. He felt along the top of the bureau for his yamulka, and not finding it there, opened the top drawer, all the while thinking that being

in a coma for eighteen <sup>hours</sup> ~~days~~ is no joke, and that Tehillim <sup>prayers are</sup> ~~is~~ important at a time like this and it's not something to be dealt with lightly.

"Where are we goin'...to a Tehillim bull-session...boy, this oughta be an experience...do they tell any good, dirty jokes...?"

"HAROLD!" Morton looked <sup>like</sup> light an enraged cat that was about to pounce on an irritating sparrow.

"I'm sorry...o.k....take it easy...you certainly are the huffy one...". He smiled to himself as he fastened his slippers and thought maybe he was going too far.

Mort tossed a yamulka into Harold's lap and placed his own on his tousled hair. Together they left the room. Lean, hardened Harold towered two inches over ~~six feet~~, robust Mort. They shuffled along the corridor like two ~~stumbling~~ thieves making a jail-break, trying not to disturb the warden and his guards. Clambering up the staircase two steps at a time, they arrived in front of Josh's room.

Mort entered without knocking, followed by Harold who busily adjusted his wrinkled skull cap. Mort nodded to Moshe, Josh's older brother who had just driven in from New Rochelle and was fully attired. Harold was suddenly taken over by an overwhelming sensation as he watched the three circles of boys huddled about the candle-lights, each fondling a prayer book as he chit-chatted in whispers with his neighbor.

Harold thought of the story he read about the Polish ghettos, and he particularly remembered the scene wherein the little, emaciated kids with their long payes sat around the rebbi's table taking turns blowing out the candle while the rebbi desperately



tried to bang some bible story into their fanciful heads. He smiled within himself and mused what an idea for a short story: Middle Ages in the 20th century!

One of the boys from the group gathered about the candle on the window-sill beckoned Harold to sit with them, and he did. He ~~heard~~ bent inward to form an intimate circle, and listened to a blond-haired youth, about 20 years old or so, explain gravely that Ben was struck with spinal meningitis and has now been in a coma for eighteen hours. The reaction on the young faces was startling, and Harold keenly watched the mouths tighten, the heads shake, and the ~~candle~~ <sup>-flame</sup> flicker wildly as the muttered "tsk,tsk" criss-crossed the ~~waxx~~ pale, waxen candle.

The chair behind him ~~made~~ <sup>scraping</sup> made a raucous, noise, and he turned to gaze at the two sighing, ~~for~~ <sup>deflated</sup> ~~born~~ brothers huddled over the table, wiping the tears from their rubbed, reddened eyes.

What a sad bunch, Harold thought, you'd think somebody had already kicked off...

Moshe, the older brother, cleared his throat as though he were preparing to announce something; then he matted his damp mustache which looked straw-like in the dancing halo of the melting candle.

He dabbed his glasses with his soaked handkerchief, and after holding them up to the candle-light to see if they were clean replaced them on the bridge of his hooked nose. He cleared his throat once more, and hoarsely asked everyone to turn to page nine in their blue-covered books.

Automatically, ~~in~~ each group arose and the circle ~~in~~ nearest the door shah-shahed the other two groups, and silence hung



in the stuffy air. Harold watched his brother Mort who was visibly touched by the drama of the event. Mort was ~~am~~ bending over, like the others, turning the pages in the light of the soft, melting candle. Harold had never seen Mort like this and he blinked incredulously as he saw each of the berobed boys bending before their massive shadows lose themselves in the strange, mystic-like mood.

Moshe began chanting in Hebrew; Josh and the three circles picked up the chant and joined in, producing a muffled, garbled, eerie-like chorus. Harold thought of Christmas charoleers, and purged the picture from his mind. This was different, he found himself saying.

The chant grew in intensity and volume and every now and then a voice cracked, a sigh was uttered, and Moshe and Josh were sniffing, and then faltered in their reading because they were blubbering. The vision of the ghetto constantly recurred to Harold and he remembered how he was moved by the sincerity of the grizzly, bearded old men who were wrapped in shawls and shook from side to side as they prayed obliviously.

Harold looked out the window behind the blond-haired boy and half-realizingly noticed that the rain had slackened. He glanced at the sky, saw it was black, foreboding. Then he felt the blond-haired boy's gaze fall upon him, and embarrassingly he looked into the book and began to form Hebrew words. All around him, he felt a strong, powerful tension; a kind of emotional electricity. The chanting hit a strident pace, and the voices were loud, high-pitched.

Moshe and his brother were lost in a frenzied stupor, and their crying, and waving of arms reminded Harold of Chassidim

suspended in trance, communing with the Lord. They were crying the Hebrew verses which seemed their own expressions, their own words. "The heavens are the heavens of the Lord but the Earth hath He given to the children of men...", they wailed. Waving the blue books toward the ceiling, the brothers emotionally bellowed, "The dead praise not the Lord nor they who descend into the silent grave...".

Harold wanted to look up again, but he ~~was~~ didn't want Mort to see him wiping his eye. A lump formed in his throat, and he had trouble swallowing it...

At the chapter's end they paused for a moment, and Josh, like a beaten child, whimpered, "Oh, Ben, Ben,...don't go...don't go...Ben."

Moshe coughed nervously, loosened his tie, and then started, "L'Dovid Mizmor L'Ado...." and he paused, and everyone froze in his stance like statuettes. ~~There was a firm knock on the door.~~ <sup>they had heard</sup>

Mort dreamily moved toward the door, opened it, stretched out his hand, and returned with an envelope. The kid was shaking and nervous perspiration trickled along his brow. He tore open the envelope and looked at Moshe who was standing rigid against the table, and at Josh who was leaning against the wall, his face cupped in his hands, and at Harold who was looking <sup>through the</sup> dying candlelight.

Hoarsely, excitedly, Mort read: "Crisis is over - Ben will live - Praised be the name of the Lord - Father"

Mort looked across the room. His gaze met Harold's. They broke into a broad smile.

## THE TEHILLIM SESSION



"Oh, come now, Mort, what kind of tripe 're you handing me...?" Harold sputtered.

He sat up in bed and gestured in the dark. "After all, kid, this is the twentieth century, the age of enlightenment...all right, I can understand your believing in a supernatural force, even a personal god --- but, f'r Christ's sake, <sup>Do you mean to tell me you</sup> to believe in divine revelation at Sinai and the walls of Jericho tumbling down and the rest of that miracle guff...Why it's absurd, Mort, ridiculous! <sup>Actually</sup> Do you ~~mean to tell me~~ <sup>you</sup> gulp down the stuff this Hebe monastery still hands out...?" His deep voice caught as though he was at a loss for words.

But Harold was not at a loss for words. He was in rare dramatic form - and catching his resonant voice like that was his special way of underscoring his point. He had no real malicious <sup>intent</sup>

to make Morton feel uncomfortable. After all, the thought occurred to him but slipped by, Mort was one of my closest friends before I got into the service five years ago - and besides, this is a helluva way of showing my appreciation for his setting me up this week-end at in his dorm.

Mort fumbled for a reply: "You don't understand, Hal...uh... religion isn't just miracles...it's...it's spiritual satisfaction... like poetry it deals with the mystery of life...an' besides, you have to go back to the historic background of the miracle...an' you...uh, have to know how to interpret the biblical passage...". The attempt was feeble and had the light been on, Mort's weak, milling gestures would have emphasized his desperate fumbling for an adequate reply. The bed on the right side of the room creaked as Morton sat up. Perhaps, he thought, propping himself up would lend strength to whatever he was going to say.

Harold looked out the moon-splashed window and smirked. He was a tall, big-framed boy and the close-cropped hair ~~was~~ added to his "footballish" appearance. He was mature, confident, almost cosmopolitan. Nearly everything Morton was not. Short, plumpish Mort knew facts; he was the student. But he got all tangled up and confused when Harold pressed him. He still hadn't got over his adolescent inferiorities. When he was a kid, the neighborhood gang used to jibe at his pustulent acne and called him "nipples" because his layers of chest fat rippled like women's breasts when he ran bases. And now Harold was jibing him, too.

Harold looked toward Morton's bed and cutting off the kid's hem-hawing, said paternally: "Mort, why don't you open your eyes? For heaven's sake, can't you see that this organized faith is a commercial



~~Faith is a commercial~~ racket run by a priest corporation.

Miracles and blind obedience is part of a monopolistic scheme to subjugate the ignorant masses. . .". Harold lowered his voice and softly said: "Read any good world history, you'll understand." He suddenly changed his manner toward his pal. He told himself that he wasn't working on a barracks buddy whom he inadvertently would rip apart logically but mercilessly. Mort is a swell kid--he just hasn't been emancipated.

Harold lay on his back and puckered his lips. "Did you ever read, say, Bertrand Russell's 'Free Man's Worship'? or Freud's 'Moses and . . .'? or James' 'Varieties. . .', no, I think it's best you start with Russell. You'll get an altogether different point of view--you'll begin reasoning for yourself. . .".

Mort, lying rolled up like a wounded grizzly cub, mumbled under his breath. He didn't know what to say; he felt terribly hurt and awkward--like when the kids used to call him "Nipples", or pointed at his sores and shouted "Pimplepuss".

Harold sighed and felt strangely compassionate. He smiled and said with condescension: "Oh, I didn't mean to insult you, Mort. . .you'll forgive me."

"Aw, don't be silly. . .". For a second, Mort tried to make a forceful, strong comeback. He followed up impulsively with: "Let's get to sleep--I have to go to minyan at 8:00 t'morrow morning."

Harold's ruddy face was pleated with a broad smile. He thrust his thick arms under his head, tapped his fingers on the bedstead while he toyed with the quaint, archaic word "minyan".



"Minyan", he hummed. Hadn't been to a minyan since before he got into the infantry. Wonder whether they've changed any. Well, better get some sleep. The little rebbi over there is already nestled in the arms of his god. Probably counts prophets in his sleep. . .

As he yawned and turned on his side, the door flew open and a boy rushed in. Startingly Harold sat up. He blinked twice and in his own cool, deliberate way said: "Hey, what's the score?"

"I'm Josh. . .remember me, I met you in the cafeteria this afternoon. . .".

Harold remembered Josh all right. Josh had given him a yarmolke to wear before he sat down to eat. But something, he noticed, was wrong with Josh. This afternoon he was kid personality itself, sparking off jokes like a whole string of lighted firecrackers. But now he was fidgety, biting his nails, and what in the hell was he doing in street clothes at this hour?

"Well, what's wrong, kidde.. .?" Harold asked matter-of-factly.

Mort slowly sat up, rubbed his eyes, then started out of bed: "Josh--what's the matter!"

Josh was simpering. He took off his glasses and wiped his eyes with a crumpled handkerchief. In the light streaming in from the hallway, he looked like a stocky little schoolboy crying over lost marbles. His red hair lay mussed up under his black skull-cap and he was out of breath.

Harold hopped out of bed, walked barefooted across the cold cement floor to flick on the ceiling lamp, but suddenly remembered Mort's saying that the lights go out after 12:00 p.m. on Saturday nights. He stumbled over to Josh, put his long arm around the boy's shoulder, and said with bravado: "Take it easy, m'boy. . .what's your problem? Tell Mr. Anthony."

Josh fished in his pant's pocket, brought up a crumpled piece of paper. Harold stepped out into the hall to read the paper. It was a telegram. He glanced up and down the yellow sheet.

Josh sniffed, wiped the tears from around his mouth, and spluttered to Mort: "It's from my dad. . .mother's in the hospital. . .she's been in a coma for eighteen hours. . .it's. . .", and he broke into tears. ". . .it's spinal meningitis. . .".

He blew his nose then asked Mort would he and Harold come up to his room on the fourth floor. He needed a minyan to say Tehillim for his mother. Mort jumped out of bed, excitedly replied "Yeh, of course--we'll be right up. . .".

As Josh rushed down the hall, his rubber-soled shoes plopping along the marble floor, Mort chased fiercely about the room, gathering his bath robe, slippers, and yarmolke. "You'll come with me, won't you, Hal?"

"Oh, sure. . .". Hal sounded like a smooth, shrewd doctor on guard not to offend his patient.

They stomped down the hall, around the corner, up two flights of stairs. They blinked in the sharp light, bumped into each other like two tipsy sailors. While Mort babbled "chee, this is horrible; I hope nothing happens to her; does

he have enough Tehillim books. . .", Harold wistfully mused: "I'm lucky none of my buddies are within a hundred miles radius of this place. Boy, what if Audrey were to see me striding into a Tehillim session--'intellectual dishonesty, primitive worship, spiritual retrogression'--Christ, she'd throw the whole book at me. . .But what the hell, he consoled, it'll make the kid feel good, and it doesn't cost me anything--'cept a good, solid hour of sleep."

A twisted smile played around his mouth as he followed Mort into the room.

Josh was sitting on the edge of his chair, leaning on the bare table in the center of the room, whispering to his brother, a young rabbi, who had just driven in from New Rochelle. Between them, a candlelight flickered wildly. Milton, the thin, spare brother, rubbed his eyes, already reddened and near-bloodshot. He fingered his moustache and coughed several times as he nodded to Mort and Harold.

Mort slipped over to the far corner of the room and joined an intimate circle of three of his classmates gathered about a flashlight suspended from the arm of a chair. They were still half-asleep and looked like mannikins coming slowly to life.

Harold completed the semi-circle of four seated about the candle on the window sill. Two of the boys whose faces seemed huge and bloated before the pale, wavering candle flame, looked inquisitively at Harold, but didn't bother with formal introductions. They shook their heads in his direction, nodding.

hello. The thin, bony fellow who sat with his back to the window, broke the silence with his creaky: "Is it really serious? Spinal menin. . .". He was abruptly cut off by Rabbi Milton who bending toward the candle, held his skinny, blue-covered Tehillim book, and hoarsely announced: "Please turn to page nine. . .".

Simultaneously, the ten boys stood up, and stooped slightly toward their sources of light. Harold glanced about the room, at the stiff forms, the shifting shadows and thought of a seance. The rabbi quietly and in uneven voice started off the chanting, and the others chimed in. Harold duckled within himself as he thought of the Saturday night crap games behind the latrine and the boys calling out their bids. But he suddenly purged the thought, looked down at his own book and tried to strike familiarity with these unfamiliar words he once knew so well. He thought how much his dad would have liked to see him here, praying, even if it was a Tehillim session. He recalled his "rebbe", thick-bellied and long, black-bearded, pointing at him and saying: "I'm glad to see you are still davening; fine, keep it up, my son. . .". And he banished the visions with the inaudible comment: "Brother, that's long gone with. . .long past and long over with. . .".

The chant picked up momentum. The voices grew full and loud. The room was filled with a raucous, yet rhythmic prayer. All--except Harold--were swaying forward and backward, reading intensely. The rabbi suddenly burst into tears. At his side, Josh pushed a handkerchief under his glasses and wiped his eyes.



He placed his hand heavily on his forehead, shook from side to side; he said the Hebrew over and over until it seemed his own words, his own special plea: ". . .the Heavens are the Heavens of the Lord but the Earth hath He given to the children of men. The dead praise not the Lord, nor they who descend into the silent grave. . .". Milton added his own, "Oh, God, God, no, not momma, not momma. . .".

Twenty-five minutes passed. The brothers were tense, keyed-up. Milton fidgeted with his mustache, then shifted his weight from one foot to another; Josh's face glistened with tears. He lamented: "Momma, please don't leave us, please momma. . .".

A high-pitched tension gripped the room. A spark of extraordinary voltage shot through the shadowy atmosphere, surging even through Harold who looked up to watch Milton clutch his damp, soiled handkerchief and wave his arm limply in the air. Josh coughed nervously as he strained in Hebrew: "O, Lord, I beseech Thee, deliver the soul from death, the eyes from tears, the foot from slipping. . .". He swayed and coughed and cried again.

Harold stared intensely at the candle. He felt his mind racing, spinning like a whirring top. Unobtrusively he slid his hand up along the side of his face to wipe the sweat from his forehead. No one saw him, he was sure.

Forty minutes later, the room was stuffy and dank with perspiration. The brothers were hoarse. They wheezed and coughed repeatedly.

Harold squinted through the sides of his eyes at the



three boys around him. Perspiration trickled from their brows, but they prayed on oblivious to everyone, everything--even to each other. Harold thought absently: this is strange; haven't seen such earnestness in a long time. . .there's nothing to sell here. . .no rackets. . .what was it the kid said---spiritual satisfaction. . .? the mystery of. . .?"

There was a knock on the door. They continued to read. Another knock, and there was a halted silence in the room. The thin, bony fellow's head shot up, and the boy next to Harold let his mouth droop quizzically.

The door-knob turned and a uniformed youth stalked in. "I've got a telegram for Josh. . .Josh Berka. . .I. . .I. . .can't pronounce that last name. . .".

In one leap, Josh and Milton jumped at the skinny boy as if attacking from ambush. Josh ripped open the envelope at the wrong end, and poured over the yellow sheet.

He paused. Then listlessly he read: "Crisis is over--Momma will live--Praised be the name of the Lord--Signed, Father".

Sighs of fresh, genuine relief burst forth from the still-tense young boys. They gathered about the brothers, patting them on the shoulders, babbling, ". . .we're glad. . . really glad. . .".

Unnoticed, in the corner of the room, Harold beckoned Morton to follow him. As they passed through the doorway, Harold touched Morton's arm and said blankly, "I want to think. . .This was quite--quite an experience. . .I want to do a lot of thinking. . .".