

'It's true!' he shouted, crying. 'Mr Weinberg just told me! He heard it on the radio in the faculty room!'

I stared at him and felt myself slide slowly back onto my desk. Mr Weinberg taught English. He was a short, bald man, with no sense of humor, and his motto was 'Believe nothing of what you hear and only half of what you see.' If Mr Weinberg had told Davey Cantor that President Roosevelt was dead . . .

I found myself in a sudden cold sweat. Someone in the room giggled, someone else moaned, 'Oh, no!' and our faculty advisor stood up and suggested that the meeting be adjourned.

We left the building and came out onto the street. All the way down the three flights of stairs I wouldn't believe it. I couldn't believe it. It was like God dying. Davey Cantor had said something about a cerebral hemorrhage. I didn't believe it. Until I got to the street.

It was a little after five o'clock, and there was still sunlight. The late afternoon traffic was heavy. Trucks, cars and a trolley choked the street, waiting for the corner light to change. I crossed quickly, ran for the trolley, and made it just as the light changed. I found a seat next to a middle-aged lady who sat staring straight ahead, weeping silently. I looked around. No one in the trolley was talking. It was crowded, and it became more crowded as it went along, but there was only the silence inside. I saw one man put his hands over his eyes and just sit there like that for a while. I stared out the window. People stood around in small groups on the sidewalks. They didn't seem to be talking. They just stood there, together, like an animal herd bunching up for protection. An old gray-haired woman, walking with a child, held a handkerchief to her mouth. I saw the child look up at her and say something, but I couldn't hear it. I found myself crying too, and felt a gnawing emptiness, as though I had been scraped clean inside and there was nothing in me now but a terrible darkness. I was feeling as though it had been my father who had died.

The whole ride home was like that: silence in the trolley car, weeping men and women, groups of people standing about dazedly in the streets, little children looking bewildered and wondering what had happened.

Manya and my father were home. I heard the radio in the

kitchen as I opened the door, quickly put my books in my room, and joined them. Manya was cooking supper, and sobbing. My father was sitting at the table, his face ashen, his cheeks hollow, his eyes red, looking as he had when he had visited me in the hospital. I sat at the table and listened to the news announcer. He was talking in a hushed voice and giving details of President Roosevelt's death. Harry S Truman was now President of the United States. I sat there and listened and couldn't believe it. How could President Roosevelt die? I had never even thought of him as being mortal. And to die now, especially now, when the war was almost over, when there was to be a meeting soon of the new United Nations. How could a man like that die?

We ate our supper listening to the radio - something we had never done before; my father never liked to have the radio on during a meal. But it was on during that meal and every other meal we ate that entire weekend - except for the Shabbat - and it stayed on every moment either my father or Manya or I was home.

I tried calling Danny on Friday afternoon, but he was still too sick to come to the phone. My father and I spent Shabbat morning in the synagogue, where the pain of death showed itself clearly on every face, and where my friends and I just stood around aimlessly after the service, not knowing what to say. My father began to cough again, the deep, dry, racking cough that shook his frail body and frightened me terribly. On Shabbat afternoon, he talked of President Roosevelt, of the hope he had brought to the country during the Depression.

'You do not remember the Depression, Reuven,' he told me. 'Those were terrible days, black days. It is impossible to believe he is gone. It is like when -' His voice broke, and he was suddenly sobbing. I stared at him, feeling helpless and terrified. He went into his bedroom and stayed there the rest of the afternoon, and I lay on my bed, staring up at the ceiling, my hands clasped behind my head, trying to grasp what had happened. I couldn't. I saw only emptiness and fear and a kind of sudden, total end to things that I had never experienced before. I lay on my bed and thought about it a long time. It was senseless, as - I held my breath, feeling myself shiver with fear - as Billy's blindness was



senseless. That was it. It was as senseless, as empty of meaning, as Billy's blindness. I lay there and thought of Roosevelt being dead and Billy being blind, and finally I turned over and lay with my face on the pillow and felt myself crying. I cried a long time. Then I slept, fitfully. When I woke, the room was dark, and I heard the radio going again in the kitchen. I lay on the bed a while, then joined my father. We sat together in the kitchen. It was after midnight when we went to sleep.

The next day, President Roosevelt was buried. Our school was closed for the funeral, and my father and I sat in the kitchen all that day and listened to the radio.

Danny called me a few hours after the funeral. He sounded tired, and he coughed a good deal. But his temperature was down to normal, he said, and he had been normal for twenty-four hours now. Yes, Roosevelt's death was a terrible thing, he said. His parents were all right. His brother was sick, though. He was running a high fever, and coughing. Could I come over during the week? he asked me. I didn't think so. Could I come over on Saturday, then? Yes, I could, I would see him on Shabbat, I said. He sounded relieved when we hung up, and I wondered what was happening.

But on Wednesday I came home from school with a fever, and by Thursday afternoon I was running 103.6. The doctor called it the flu and warned my father to keep me in bed or there might be complications. I asked my father to call Danny and tell him. I was in bed for ten days, and when I finally got back to school I found I had missed so much work that for two weeks I dropped all my student council activities and spent every moment I had catching up. I used Shabbat afternoons for reading, and by the first week of May I had caught up enough to be able to begin attending student council meetings again. Then Reb Saunders became ill, and at the same time my father also took to his bed with the flu, a severe case that bordered on pneumonia for a while and frightened me terribly. Both Reb Saunders and my father were quite ill on the day in May when word finally came that the war in Europe was over.

I was with my father when we heard the news over the radio in his bedroom.

'Thank God!' my father said, his eyes wet with joy. 'What a price to have paid for Hitler and his madmen!' And he lay back on the pillow and closed his eyes.

And then, together with the official report of the signing of the unconditional surrender on May 7, there came the news, at first somewhat guarded, then, a few days later, clear and outspoken, of the German concentration camps. My father, recuperating slowly and looking worn and weary, sat in his bed propped on pillows, and read the newspaper stories of the horrors that had occurred in those camps. His face was grim and ashen. He seemed unable to believe what he was reading.

It was while my father read to me an account of what had happened at Teresienstadt, where the Germans had imprisoned and incinerated European Jews of culture and learning, that I saw him break down and weep like a child.

I didn't know what to say. I saw him lie back on his pillows and cover his face with his hands. Then he asked me to leave him alone, and I walked out and left him there, crying, and went to my room.

I just couldn't grasp it. The numbers of Jews slaughtered had gone from one million to three million to four million, and almost every article we read said that the last count was still incomplete, the final number would probably reach six million. I couldn't begin to imagine six million of my people murdered. I lay in my bed and asked myself what sense it made. It didn't make any sense at all. My mind couldn't hold on to it, to the death of six million people.

Danny called me a few days later, and I went over to his house the next Shabbat afternoon. We did not study Talmud. Instead, his father talked of the Jewish world in Europe, of the people he had known who were now probably dead, of the brutality of the world, of his years in Russia with the Cossack bands looting and plundering.

'The world kills us,' he said quietly. 'Ah, how the world kills us.'

We were sitting in his study, and he was in his straight-backed chair. His face was lined with suffering. His body swayed slowly back and forth, and he talked in a quiet singsong, calling



up the memories of his youth in Russia and telling us of the Jewish communities of Poland, Lithuania, Russia, Germany, and Hungary - all gone now into heaps of bones and ashes. Danny and I sat silent and listened to him talk. Danny was pale and seemed tense and distraught. He tugged constantly at an earlock, his eyes blinking nervously.

'How the world drinks our blood,' Reb Saunders said. 'How the world makes us suffer. It is the will of God. We must accept the will of God.' He was silent for a long moment. Then he raised his eyes and said softly, 'Master of the Universe, how do you permit such a thing to happen?'

The question hung in the air like a sigh of pain.

Danny could not walk me back that night, he had too much schoolwork to do, so I went home alone and found my father in his bedroom, listening to the radio. He was in pajamas, and he wore his small black skullcap. The announcer was talking about the United Nations. I sat in a chair and listened, and when the news program was over my father turned off the radio and looked at me.

'How is Reb Saunders?' he asked quietly.

I told him what Reb Saunders had talked about that afternoon.

My father nodded slowly. He was pale and gaunt, and his skin had a yellowish tint to it and was parchmentlike on his face and hands.

'Reb Saunders wanted to know how God could let something like this happen,' I told him quietly.

My father looked at me, his eyes somber.

'And did God answer him?' he asked. His voice had a strange quality of bitterness to it.

I didn't say anything.

'Did God answer him, Reuven?' my father asked again, that same bitterness in his voice.

'Reb Saunders said it was God's will. We have to accept God's will,' he said.

My father blinked his eyes. 'Reb Saunders said it was God's will,' he echoed softly.

I nodded.

'You are satisfied with that answer, Reuven?'

'No.'

He blinked his eyes again, and when he spoke his voice was soft, the bitterness gone. 'I am not satisfied with it, either, Reuven. We cannot wait for God. If there is an answer, we must make it ourselves.'

I was quiet.

'Six million of our people have been slaughtered,' he went on quietly. 'It is inconceivable. It will have meaning only if we give it meaning. We cannot wait for God.' He lay back on the pillows. 'There is only one Jewry left now in the world,' he said softly, staring up at the ceiling. 'It is here, in America. We have a terrible responsibility. We must replace the treasures we have lost.' His voice was hoarse, and he coughed. Then he was quiet for a long time. I saw him close his eyes, and I heard him say, 'Now we will need teachers and rabbis to lead our people.' He opened his eyes and looked at me. 'The Jewish world is changed,' he said, almost in a whisper. 'A madman has destroyed our treasures. If we do not rebuild Jewry in America, we will die as a people.' Then he closed his eyes again and was silent.

My father recovered slowly, and it was only at the end of May that he was able to return to his teaching.

Two days after I took my final examination, he suffered a heart attack. He was rushed by ambulance to the Brooklyn Memorial Hospital and put into a semi-private room one floor below the eye ward. Many a took care of me during the first nightmarish days of blind panic when my mind collapsed and would not function. Then Reb Saunders called me one night and invited me to live in his house while my father recovered. How could I live alone with only a housekeeper to care for me? he wanted to know. Why should I stay alone in the apartment at night? Who knew, God forbid, what could happen? It was terrible for a boy my age to be left alone. They could put another bed in Danny's room, and I could sleep there. When I told my father, he said it would be wise for me to accept the offer. And he told me to tell Reb Saunders how grateful he was to him for his kindness.

On the first day of July, I packed a bag and took a cab to Reb Saunders' house. I moved into Danny's room.



From the day I entered Reb Saunders' house to the day I left to go with my father to our cottage near Peekskill where he was to convalesce, I was a warmly accepted member of Danny's family. Danny's mother, who had some kind of heart condition and needed to rest frequently, was forever adding food to my plate. Danny's sister, I noticed for the first time, was a very pretty girl, with dark eyes and long dark hair combed back into a single braid, and vivacious hands that seemed always in motion when she spoke. She was forever teasing Danny and me and referring to us as David and Jonathan. Danny's brother, Levi, was forever poking at his food when he sat at the kitchen table, or walking ghostlike around the house, picking his nose. And Danny's father was forever silent, withdrawn, his dark eyes turned inward, brooding, as if witnessing a sea of suffering he alone could see. He walked bent forward, as though there were some kind of enormous burden on his shoulders. Dark circles had formed around his eyes, and sometimes at the kitchen table I would see him begin to cry suddenly, and he would get up and walk out of the room, then return a few minutes later and resume eating. No one in the family talked about these sudden moments of weeping. And I didn't either though they frightened and bewildered me.

Danny and I did everything together that month. We would rise a little before seven, go down to the synagogue to pray the Morning Service with the congregation, have breakfast with the family, then go out onto his porch if the day was nice, or stay in his room if it wasn't, and spend the morning studying Talmud. After lunch, we would go together to the library, where we would spend the early hours of the afternoon. Danny was reading Freud, and I was doing symbolic logic. It was in the library that we did all the talking we had been unable to do during the year. Then,

at about four o'clock, we would take the trolley together to the Brooklyn Memorial Hospital and visit my father. We would have supper together with Danny's family, then spend the evening either chatting with his sister and mother in the living room or reading quietly - Danny used the evenings to read the books on Jewish subjects I kept giving him - or, if his father was free, we would go up to the study and do battle over the Talmud. But Reb Saunders was rarely free. There seemed to be an endless number of people coming into the house and walking up the three flights of stairs to see him, and by the time we were ready for supper he was always visibly fatigued, and he would sit lost in thought, his eyes dark and brooding. And once, during a supper meal, I saw tears come slowly from his eyes and disappear into the tangle of his dark beard. He did not leave the table this time. He sat there weeping in silence, and no one said anything. And then he dried his eyes with a handkerchief, took a deep, trembling breath, and went back to his food.

During the entire month I spent in Reb Saunders' house, the only time I ever saw him talk to Danny was when we argued over the Talmud. There was never any simple, intimate, human kind of conversation between him and his son. I almost had the impression that they were physically incapable of communicating with each other about ordinary things. It troubled me, but I said nothing about it.

Danny and I talked often about his reading of Freud. We sat at our table in the third floor of the library, surrounded by the maze-like stacks, and he told me what he had read during the past year and what he was reading now. Freud had clearly upset him in a fundamental kind of way - had thrown him off balance, as he once put it. But he couldn't stop reading him, he said, because it had become increasingly obvious to him that Freud had possessed an almost uncanny insight into the nature of man. And that was what Danny found upsetting. Freud's picture of man's nature was anything but complimentary, it was anything but religious. It tore man from God, as Danny put it, and married him off to Satan.

Danny knew enough about Freud now - his method of study had been so thoroughly successful - that he was able to use



Freud's technical terminology with the same kind of natural ease that characterized our use of the technical terminology of the Talmud. For the first two weeks of July, Danny spent part of our reading time in the library patiently explaining to me some of Freud's basic concepts. We sat at our table, Danny in his dark suit - he wore a dark suit no matter how hot it was - his tieless shirt, his fringes, his skullcap, his long earlocks, and his beard, which was thick and full now, almost an adult beard, and me in my sport shirt, summer trousers, and skullcap, and we talked about Sigmund Freud. What I heard was new, so new that I couldn't grasp it at first. But Danny was patient, as patient as my father, and slowly I began to understand the system of psychological thought Freud had constructed. And I, too, became upset. Freud contradicted everything I had ever learned. What I found particularly upsetting was the fact that Danny didn't seem to have rejected what Freud taught. I began to wonder how it was possible for the ideas of the Talmud and the thinking of Freud to live side by side within one person. It seemed to me that one or the other would have to give way. When I told this to Danny, he shrugged, said nothing, and went back to his reading.

Had my father been well at that time, I would have talked to him about it, but he was in the hospital, recuperating slowly, and I didn't want to upset him with an account of Danny's reading. He was upset enough as it was with his own reading. Whenever Danny and I came to visit him, we found newspapers strewn all over his bed. He was reading everything he could find that told of the destruction of European Jewry. He talked of nothing else but European Jewry and the responsibility American Jews now carried. Occasionally he spoke of the importance of Palestine as a Jewish homeland, but mostly he was concerned about American Jewry and the need for teachers and rabbis. Once he asked Danny and me what we were reading these days, and Danny answered honestly that he was going through Freud. My father sat in his hospital bed, propped up on pillows, looked at him, and blinked. He had grown very thin - I hadn't thought he could ever get any thinner than he had been before his heart attack, but it seemed to me he had lost at least ten pounds - and he seemed to

become easily upset by little things. I was frightened for a moment, because I didn't want him to get involved in an argument with Danny about Freud. But he only shook his head and sighed. He was very tired, he said; he would talk to Danny about Freud another time. Danny shouldn't think that Freud was the final word in psychoanalysis; many great thinkers disagreed with him. He let it go at that, and went back to talking about the destruction of European Jewry. Did we know, he asked us, that on December 17, 1942, Mr Eden got up in the House of Commons and gave the complete details of the Nazi plan, already in full operation, to massacre the entire Jewish population of Europe? Did we know that Mr Eden, though he had threatened the Nazis with retribution, hadn't said a word about practical measures to save as many Jews as possible from what he knew would be their inevitable fate? There had been public meetings in England, protests, petitions, letters - the whole machinery of democratic expression had been set in motion to impress upon the British Government the need for action - and not a thing was done. Everyone was sympathetic, but no one was sympathetic enough. The British let some few Jews in, and then closed their doors. America hadn't cared enough, either. No one had cared enough. The world closed its doors, and six million Jews were slaughtered. What a world! What an insane world! 'What do we have left to us now, if not American Jewry?' he said. 'Some Jews say we should wait for God to send the Messiah. We cannot wait for God! We must make our own Messiah! We must rebuild American Jewry! And Palestine must become a Jewish homeland! We have suffered enough! How long must we wait for the Messiah?' It was bad for my father to get excited that way, but there was nothing I could do to stop him. He could talk of nothing else but the destruction of European Jewry.

One morning at breakfast Reb Saunders came out of a brooding silence, sighed, and for no apparent reason began telling us, in a soft, singsong chant, the story of an old, pious Hasid who had set out on a journey to Palestine - Eretz Yisroel, Reb Saunders called it, giving the land its traditional name and accenting the 'E' and the 'ro' - so as to be able to spend the last years of his life in the Holy Land. Finally, he reached the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem,



and three days later he died while praying at the Wall for the Messiah to come and redeem his people. Reb Saunders swayed slowly back and forth as he told the story, and when he was done I said quietly, not mentioning my father's name, that a lot of people were now saying that it was time for Palestine to become a Jewish homeland and not only a place where pious Jews went to die. The reaction on the part of the entire family was instantaneous; it was as though someone had thrown a match onto a pile of straw. I could almost feel the heat that replaced the family warmth around the table. Danny went rigid and stared down at the plate in front of him. His brother let out a little whimper, and his sister and mother seemed frozen to their chairs. Reb Saunders stared at me, his eyes suddenly wild with rage, his beard trembling. And he pointed a finger at me that looked like a weapon.

'Who are these people? Who are these people?' he shouted in Yiddish, and the words went through me like knives. 'Apikorsim! Goyim! Ben Gurion and his goyim will build Eretz Yisroel? They will build for us a Jewish land? They will bring Torah into this land? Goyshket they will bring into the land, not Torah! God will build the land, not Ben Gurion and his goyim! When the Messiah comes, we will have Eretz Yisroel, a Holy Land, not a land contaminated by Jewish goyim!'

I sat there stunned and terrified, engulfed by his rage. His reaction had caught me so completely by surprise that I had quite literally stopped breathing, and now I found myself gasping for breath. I felt as if I were being consumed by flames. The silence that followed his outburst had a fungus quality to it, as though it were breeding malignancies, and I had the uncanny feeling that I had somehow been stripped naked and violated. I didn't know what to do or say. I just sat there and gaped at him.

'The land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob should be built by Jewish goyim, by contaminated men?' Reb Saunders shouted again. 'Never! Not while I live! Who says these things? Who says we should now build Eretz Yisroel? And where is the Messiah? Tell me, we should forget completely about the Messiah? For this six million of our people were slaughtered? That we should forget completely about the Messiah, that we should forget com-

pletely about the Master of the Universe? Why do you think I brought my people from Russia to America and not to Eretz Yisroel? Because it is better to live in a land of true goyim than to live in a land of Jewish goyim! Who says we should build Eretz Yisroel, ah? I'll tell you who says it! Apikorsim say it! Jewish goyim say it! True Jews do not say such a thing!'

There was a long silence. Reb Saunders sat in his chair, breathing hard and trembling with rage.

'Please, you should not get so angry,' Danny's sister pleaded softly. 'It is bad for you.'

'I'm sorry,' I said lamely, not knowing what else to say.

'Reuven was not talking for himself,' Danny's sister said quietly to her father. 'He was only—'

But Reb Saunders cut her off with an angry wave of his hand. He went rigidly through the Grace, then left the kitchen, wearing his rage visibly.

Danny's sister stared down at the table, her eyes dark and sad.

Later, when Danny and I were alone in his room, Danny told me to think ten thousand times the next time I wanted to mention anything like that again to his father. His father was fine, he said, until he was confronted by any idea that he felt came from the contaminated world.

'How was I supposed to know that Zionism is a contaminated idea?' I said. 'My God, I feel as if I've just been through the seven gates of Hell.'

'Herzl didn't wear a catan and side curls,' Danny said. 'Neither does Ben Gurion.'

'You can't be serious.'

'I'm not talking about myself. I'm talking about my father. Just don't talk about a Jewish state anymore. My father takes God and Torah very seriously. Reuven. He would die for them both quite gladly. A secular Jewish state in my father's eyes is a sacrilege, a violation of the Torah. You touched a raw nerve. Please don't do it again.'

'I'm glad I didn't mention it was my father who said it. He might have thrown me out of the house.'

'He would have thrown you out of the house,' Danny said grimly.



'Is he - is he feeling all right?'

'How do you mean?'

'The way he cries all the time like that. Is he - is something wrong?'

Danny's hand went slowly to an earlock, and I watched him tug at it nervously. 'Six million Jews have died,' he said. 'He's - I think he's thinking of them. He's suffering for them.'

I looked at him. 'I thought he might be sick. I thought your sister said -'

'He's not sick,' Danny broke in. He lowered his hand. 'I - I really don't want to talk about it.'

'All right,' I said quietly. 'But I don't think I want to study any Talmud this morning. I'm going to take a long walk.'

He didn't say anything. But his face was sad and brooding as I went out of his room.

When I saw Reb Saunders again at lunch, he seemed to have forgotten the incident completely. But I found myself thinking carefully now before I said anything to him. And I was constantly on my guard with him from that time on.

During an afternoon in the last week of July, Danny began talking about his brother. We were sitting in the library, reading, when he suddenly looked up, rested his head in the palm of his right hand, the elbow on the table, and said his eyes were bothering him again and that he wouldn't be at all surprised if he ended up wearing glasses soon, his brother was having glasses made and he was only nine. I told him his brother didn't seem to be doing much reading, what did he need glasses for.

'It has nothing to do with reading,' Danny said. 'His eyes are just plain bad, that's all.'

'Your eyes look bloodshot,' I told him.

'They are bloodshot,' he said.

'Your eyes look as if you've been reading Freud.'

'Ha-ha,' Danny said.

'What does Freud say about an ordinary thing like bloodshot eyes?'

'He says to rest them.'

'A genius,' I said.

'You know, my brother's a good kid,' Danny said. 'His sickness is quite a handicap, but everything considered he's a good kid.'

'He's quiet, I'll say that for him. Does he study at all?'

'Oh, sure. He's bright, too. But he has to be careful. My father can't pressure him.'

'Lucky boy.'

'I don't know. I wouldn't want to be sick all my life. I'd much rather be pressured. He's a nice kid, though.'

'Your sister's pretty nice, too,' I said.

Danny didn't seem to have heard me - or if he had, he chose to ignore my words completely. He went on talking about his brother. 'It must really be hell to walk around sick all the time and have to depend upon pills. He's really a sweet kid. And bright, too.' He seemed to be rambling, and I wasn't sure I knew what he was trying to say. His next words jarred me. 'He'd probably make a fine tzaddik,' he said.

I looked at him. 'How's that again?'

'I said my brother would probably make a fine tzaddik.' Danny said quietly. 'It occurred to me recently that if I didn't take my father's place I wouldn't be breaking the dynasty after all. My brother could take over. I had talked myself into believing that if I didn't take his place I would break the dynasty. I think I had to justify to myself having to become a tzaddik.'

I was frightened and said tightly, 'Your home hasn't blown up recently, so I take it you haven't told your father.'

'No, I haven't. And I'm not going to, either. Not yet.'

'When will you tell him? Because I'm going to be out of town that day.'

'No,' he said quietly. 'I'm going to need you around that day.'

'I was only kidding,' I told him, feeling sick with dread.

'It also occurred to me recently that all my concern about my brother's health was a fake. I don't have much of a relationship with him at all. He's such a kid. I pity him a little, that's all. I was really concerned about his health because all along I've wanted him to be able to take my father's place. That was something all right, when I realized that. How am I doing? Are you bored yet?'



'I'm bored stiff,' I said. 'I can't wait until the day you tell your father.'

'You'll wait,' Danny said tightly, blinking his eyes. 'You'll wait, and you'll be around, too, because I'm going to need you.'

'Let's talk about your sister for a change,' I said.

'I heard you the first time. Let's not talk about my sister, if you don't mind. Let's talk about my father. You want to know how I feel about my father? I admire him. I don't know what he's trying to do to me with this weird silence that he's established between us, but I admire him. I think he's a great man. I respect him and trust him completely, which is why I think I can live with his silence. I don't know why I trust him, but I do. And I pity him, too. Intellectually, he's trapped. He was born trapped. I don't ever want to be trapped the way he's trapped. I want to be able to breathe, to think what I want to think, to say the things I want to say. I'm trapped now, too. Do you know what it's like to be trapped?'

I shook my head slowly.

'How could you possibly know?' Danny said. 'It's the most hellish, choking, constricting feeling in the world. I scream with every bone in my body to get out of it. My mind cries to get out of it. But I can't. Not now. One day I will, though. I'll want you around on that day, friend. I'll need you around on that day.'

I didn't say anything. We sat in silence a long time. Then Danny slowly closed the Freud book he had been reading.

'My sister's been promised,' he told me quietly.

'What?'

'My father promised my sister to the son of one of his followers when she was two years old. It's an old Hasidic custom to promise children away. She'll be married when she reaches eighteen. I think we ought to go over and visit your father now.'

That was the only time Danny and I ever talked about his sister.

A week later, I went up with my father to our cottage near Peekskill. While we were there, America destroyed Hiroshima and Nagasaki with atomic bombs, and the war with Japan came to an end.

I didn't tell my father about that last conversation I had with Danny, and I had many nightmares that year in which Reb Saunders screamed at me that I had poisoned his son's mind.

That September Danny and I entered Hirsch College. I had grown to five feet nine inches, an inch shorter than Danny, and I was shaving. Danny hadn't changed much physically during his last year in high school. The only thing different about him was that he was now wearing glasses.



Book Three

A word is worth one coin; silence is worth two.  
- The Talmud



By the end of our first week in college, Danny was feeling thoroughly miserable. He had discovered that psychology in the Samson Raphael Hirsch Seminary and College meant experimental psychology only, and that the chairman of the department, Professor Nathan Appleman, had an intense distaste for psychoanalysis in general and for Freud in particular.

Danny was quite vocal about his feelings toward Professor Appleman and experimental psychology. We would meet in the mornings in front of my synagogue and walk from there to the trolley, and for two months he did nothing during those morning trolley rides except talk about the psychological textbook he was reading – he didn't say 'studying', he said 'reading' – and the rats and mazes in the psychology laboratory. 'The next thing you know they'll stick me with a behaviorist,' he lamented. 'What do rats and mazes have to do with the mind?'

I wasn't sure I knew what a behaviorist was, and I didn't want to make him more miserable by asking him. I felt a little sorry for him, mostly because I had found college to be exciting and was thoroughly enjoying my books and my teachers, while he seemed to be going deeper and deeper into misery.

The building that housed the college stood on Bedford Avenue. It was a six-story building, and it occupied half a block of a busy store-filled street. The noise of the traffic on the street came clearly through the windows and into our classrooms. Behind the college was a massive brownstone armory, and a block away, across the street, was a Catholic church with a huge cross on its lawn upon which was the crucified figure of Jesus. In the evenings, a green spotlight shone upon the cross, and we could see it clearly from the stone stairs in front of the college.