

The batter swung wildly at the first two pitches and missed each time. The next one was low, and he let it go by, then hit a grounder to the first baseman, who dropped it, flailed about for it wildly, and recovered it in time to see Danny Saunders cross the plate. The first baseman stood there for a moment, drenched in shame, then tossed the ball to Schwartz. I saw Mr Galanter standing near third base, wiping his forehead. The yeshiva team had gone wild again, and they were all trying to get to Danny Saunders and shake his hand. I saw the rabbi smile broadly, then look down at his book and resume reading. <sup>20/11/11</sup> Sidney Goldberg came over to me. 'What did Saunders tell you?' he asked.

'He said they were going to kill us apikorsim this afternoon.'

He stared at me. 'Those are nice people, those yeshiva people,' he said, and walked slowly back to his position.

The next batter hit a long fly ball to right field. It was caught on the run.

'Hooray for us,' Sidney Goldberg said grimly as we headed off the field. 'Any longer and they'd be asking us to join them for the Mincha Service.'

'Not us,' I said. 'We're not holy enough.'

'Where did they learn to hit like that?'

'Who knows?' I said.

We were standing near the wire screen, forming a tight circle around Mr Galanter.

'Only two runs,' Mr Galanter said, smashing his right fist into his left hand. 'And they hit us with all they had. Now we give them our heavy artillery. Now we barrage them!' I saw that he looked relieved but that he was still sweating. His skull-cap seemed pasted to his head with sweat. 'Okay!' he said. 'Fire away!'

The circle broke up, and Sidney Goldberg walked to the plate, carrying a bat. I saw the rabbi was still sitting on the bench, reading. I started to walk around behind him to see what book it was, when Davey Cantor came over, his hands in his pockets, his eyes still gloomy.

'Well?' he asked.

'Well what?' I said.

'I told you they could hit.'

'So you told me. So what?' I was in no mood for his feelings of doom, and I let my voice show it. <sup>ok, he's + re</sup> He sensed my annoyance. 'I wasn't bragging or anything,' he said, looking hurt. 'I just wanted to know what you thought.'

'They can hit,' I said. <sup>uh-huh</sup>

'They're murderers,' he said.

I watched Sidney Goldberg let a strike go by and said nothing.

'How's your hand?' Davey Cantor asked.

'I scraped it.'

'He ran into you real hard.'

'Who is he?'

'Dov Shlomowitz,' Davey Cantor said. 'Like his name, that's what he is,' he added in Hebrew. 'Dov' is the Hebrew word for bear.'

'Was I blocking him?'

Davey Cantor shrugged. 'You were and you weren't. The ump could've called it either way.'

'He felt like a truck,' I said, watching Sidney Goldberg step back from a close pitch.

'You should see his father. He's one of Reb Saunders' shama-shim. Some bodyguard he makes.'

'Reb Saunders has bodyguards?'

'Sure he has bodyguards,' Davey Cantor said. 'They protect him from his own popularity. Where've you been living all these years?'

'I don't have anything to do with them.'

'You're not missing a thing, Reuven.'

'How do you know so much about Reb Saunders?'

'My father gives him contributions.'

'Well, good for your father,' I said.

'He doesn't pray there or anything. He just gives him contributions.'

'You're on the wrong team.'

'No, I'm not, Reuven. Don't be like that.' He was looking very hurt. 'My father isn't a Hasid or anything. He just gives them some money a couple times a year.'

'I was only kidding, Davey.' I grinned at him. 'Don't be so serious about everything.'

I saw his face break into a happy smile, and just then Sidney Goldberg hit a fast, low grounder and raced off to first. The ball went right through the legs of the shortstop and into center field.

'Hold it at first!' Mr Galanter screamed at him, and Sidney stopped at first and stood on the base.

The ball had been tossed quickly to second base. The second baseman looked over toward first, then threw the ball to the pitcher. The rabbi glanced up from the book for a moment, then went back to his reading.

'Matter, coach him at first!' Mr Galanter shouted, and I ran up the base line.

'They can hit, but they can't field,' Sidney Goldberg said, grinning at me as I came to a stop alongside the base.

'Davey Cantor says they're murderers,' I said.

'Old gloom-and-gloom Davey,' Sidney Goldberg said, grinning. Danny Saunders was standing away from the base, making a point of ignoring us both.

The next batter hit a high fly to the second baseman, who caught it, dropped it, retrieved it, and made a wild attempt at tagging Sidney Goldberg as he raced past him to second.

'Safe all around!' the umpire called, and our team burst out with shouts of joy. Mr Galanter was smiling. The rabbi continued reading, and I saw that he was now slowly moving the upper part of his body back and forth.

'Keep your eyes open, Sidney!' I shouted from alongside first base. I saw Danny Saunders look at me, then look away. Some murderers, I thought. Shleppers is more like it.

'If it's on the ground run like hell,' I said to the batter who had just come onto first base, and he nodded at me. He was our third baseman, and he was about my size.

'If they keep fielding like that we'll be here till tomorrow,' he said, and I grinned at him.

I saw Mr Galanter talking to the next batter, who was nodding his head vigorously. He stepped to the plate, hit a hard grounder to the pitcher, who fumbled it for a moment then threw it to first. I saw Danny Saunders stretch for it and stop it.

'Out!' the umpire called. 'Safe on second and third!'

As I ran up to the plate to bat, I almost laughed aloud at the

pitcher's stupidity. He had thrown it to first rather than third, and now we had Sidney Goldberg on third, and a man on second. I hit a grounder to the shortstop and instead of throwing it to second he threw it to first, wildly, and again Danny Saunders stretched and stopped the ball. But I beat the throw and heard the umpire call out, 'Safe all around! One in!' And everyone on our team was patting Sidney Goldberg on the back. Mr Galanter smiled broadly.

'Hello again,' I said to Danny Saunders, who was standing near me, guarding his base. 'Been rubbing your tzitzit lately?'

He looked at me, then looked slowly away, his face expressionless.

Schwartzie was at the plate, swinging his bat.

'Keep you eyes open!' I shouted to the runner on third. He looked too eager to head for home. 'It's only one out!'

He waved a hand at me.

Schwartzie took two balls and a strike, then I saw him begin to pivot on the fourth pitch. The runner on third started for home. He was almost halfway down the base line when the bat sent the ball in a hard line drive straight to the third baseman, the short, thin boy with the spectacles and the old man's face, who had stood hugging the base and who now caught the ball more with his stomach than with his glove, managed somehow to hold on to it, and stood there, looking bewildered and astonished.

I returned to first and saw our player who had been on third and who was now halfway to home plate turn sharply and start a panicky race back.

'Step on the base!' Danny Saunders screamed in Yiddish across the field, and more out of obedience than awareness the third baseman put a foot on the base.

The yeshiva team howled its happiness and raced off the field. Danny Saunders looked at me, started to say something, stopped, then walked quickly away.

I saw Mr Galanter going back up the third-base line, his face grim. The rabbi was looking up from his book and smiling.

I took up my position near second base, and Sidney Goldberg came over to me.

'Why'd he have to take off like that?' he asked.

I glared over at our third baseman, who was standing near Mr Galanter and looking very dejected.

'He was in a hurry to win the war,' I said bitterly.

'What a jerk,' Sidney Goldberg said.

'Goldberg, get over to your place!' Mr Galanter called out. There was an angry edge to his voice. 'Let's keep that infield solid!'

Sidney Goldberg went quickly to his position. I stood still and waited.

It was hot, and I was sweating beneath my clothes. I felt the ear-pieces of my glasses cutting into the skin over my ears, and I took the glasses off for a moment and ran a finger over the pinched ridges of skin, then put them back on quickly because Schwartz was going into a windup. I crouched down, waiting, remembering Danny Saunders' promise to his team that they would kill us apikorsim. The word had meant, originally, a Jew educated in Judaism who denied basic tenets of his faith, like the existence of God, the revelation, the resurrection of the dead. To people like Reb Saunders, it also meant any educated Jew who might be reading, say, Darwin, and who was not wearing side curls and fringes outside his trousers. I was an apikoros to Danny Saunders, despite my belief in God and Torah, because I did not have side curls and was attending a parochial school where too many English subjects were offered and where Jewish subjects were taught in Hebrew instead of Yiddish, both unheard-of sins, the former because it took time away from the study of Torah, the latter because Hebrew was the Holy Tongue and to use it in ordinary classroom discourse was a desecration of God's Name. I had never really had any personal contact with this kind of Jew before. My father had told me he didn't mind their beliefs. What annoyed him was their fanatic sense of righteousness, their absolute certainty that they and they alone had God's ear, and every other Jew was wrong, totally wrong, a sinner, a hypocrite, an apikoros, and doomed, therefore, to burn in hell. I found myself wondering again how they had learned to hit a ball like that if time for the study of Torah was so precious to them and why they had sent a rabbi along to waste his time sitting on a bench during a ball game.

Standing on the field and watching the boy at the plate swing at a high ball and miss, I felt myself suddenly very angry, and it was at that point that for me the game stopped being merely a game and became a war. The fun and excitement was out of it now. Somehow the yeshiva team had translated this afternoon's baseball game into a conflict between what they regarded as their righteousness and our sinfulness. I found myself growing more and more angry, and I felt the anger begin to focus itself upon Danny Saunders, and suddenly it was not at all difficult for me to hate him.

Schwartzie let five of their men come up to the plate that half inning and let one of those five score. Sometime during that half inning, one of the members of the yeshiva team had shouted at us in Yiddish, 'Burn in hell, you apikorsim!' and by the time that half inning was over and we were standing around Mr Galanter near the wire screen, all of us knew that this was not just another ball game.

Mr Galanter was sweating heavily, and his face was grim. All he said was, 'We fight it careful from now on. No more mistakes.' He said it very quietly, and we were all quiet, too, as the batter stepped up to the plate.

We proceeded to play a slow, careful game, obeying Mr Galanter's instructions. I noticed that no matter where the runners were on the bases, the yeshiva team always threw to Danny Saunders, and I realized that they did this because he was the only infielder who could be relied upon to stop their wild throws. Sometime during the inning, I walked over behind the rabbi and looked over his shoulder at the book he was reading. I saw the words were Yiddish. I walked back to the wire screen. Davey Cantor came over and stood next to me, but he remained silent.

We scored only one run that inning, and we walked onto the field for the first half of the third inning with a sense of doom.

Dov Shlomowitz came up to the plate. He stood there like a bear, the bat looking like a matchstick in his beery hands. Schwartzie pitched, and he sliced one neatly over the head of the third baseman for a single. The yeshiva team howled, and again one of them called out to us in Yiddish, 'Burn, you apikorsim!'

and Sidney Goldberg and I looked at each other without saying a word.

Mr Galanter was standing alongside third base, wiping his forehead. The rabbi was sitting quietly, reading his book.

I took off my glasses and rubbed the tops of my ears. I felt a sudden momentary sense of unreality, as if the play yard, with its black asphalt floor and its white base lines, were my entire world now, as if all the previous years of my life had led me somehow to this one ball game, and all the future years of my life would depend upon its outcome. I stood there for a moment, holding the glasses in my hand and feeling frightened. Then I took a deep breath, and the feeling passed. It's only a ball game, I told myself. What's a ball game?

Mr Galanter was shouting at us to move back. I was standing a few feet to the left of second, and I took two steps back. I saw Danny Saunders walk up to the plate, swinging a bat. The yeshiva team was shouting at him in Yiddish to kill us apikorsim.

Schwarzzi turned around to check the field. He looked nervous and was taking his time. Sidney Goldberg was standing up straight, waiting. We looked at each other, then looked away. Mr Galanter stood very still alongside third base, looking at Schwarzzi.

The first pitch was low, and Danny Saunders ignored it. The second one started to come in shoulder-high, and before it was two thirds of the way to the plate, I was already standing on second base. My glove was going up as the bat cracked against the ball, and I saw the ball move in a straight line directly over Schwarzzi's head, high over his head, moving so fast he hadn't even had time to regain his balance from the pitch before it went past him. I saw Dov Shlomowitz heading toward me and Danny Saunders racing to first, and I heard the yeshiva team shouting and Sidney Goldberg screaming, and I jumped, pushing myself upward off the ground with all the strength I had in my legs and stretching my glove hand till I thought it would pull out of my shoulder. The ball hit the pocket of my glove with an impact that numbed my hand and went through me like an electric shock, and I felt the force pull me backward and throw me off balance, and I came down hard on my left hip and elbow. I saw Dov

Shlomowitz whirl and start back to first, and I pushed myself up into a sitting position and threw the ball awkwardly to Sidney Goldberg, who caught it and whipped it to first. I heard the umpire scream 'Out!' and Sidney Goldberg ran over to help me to my feet, a look of disbelief and ecstatic joy on his face. Mr Galanter shouted 'Time!' and came racing onto the field. Schwarzzi was standing in his pitcher's position with his mouth open. Danny Saunders stood on the base line a few feet from first, where he had stopped after I had caught the ball, starting out at me, too, and the yeshiva team was deathly silent.

'That was a great catch, Reuven!' Sidney Goldberg said, thumping my back. 'That was sensational!'

I saw the rest of our team had suddenly come back to life and was throwing the ball around and talking up the game.

Mr Galanter came over. 'You all right, Malter?' he asked.

'Let me see that elbow.'

I showed him the elbow. I had scraped it, but the skin had not been broken.

'That was a good play,' Mr Galanter said, beaming at me. I saw his face was still covered with sweat, but he was smiling broadly now.

'Thanks, Mr Galanter.'

'How's the hand?'

'It hurts a little.'

'Let me see it.'

I took off the glove, and Mr Galanter poked and bent the wrist and fingers of the hand.

'Does that hurt?' he asked.

'No,' I lied.

'You want to go on playing?'

'Sure, Mr Galanter.'

'Okay,' he said, smiling at me and patting my back. 'We'll put you in for a Purple Heart on that one, Malter.'

I grinned at him.

'Okay,' Mr Galanter said. 'Let's keep this infield solid!'

He walked away, smiling.

'I can't get over that catch,' Sidney Goldberg said.

'You threw it real good to first,' I told him.

'Yeah,' he said. 'While you were sitting on your tail,'  
We grinned at each other, and went to our positions.

Two more of the yeshiva team got to bat that inning. The first one hit a single, and the second one sent a high fly to short, which Sidney Goldberg caught without having to move a step. We scored two runs that inning and one run the next, and by the top half of the fifth inning we were leading five to three. Four of their men had stood up to bat during the top half of the fourth inning, and they had got only a single on an error to first. When we took to the field in the top half of the fifth inning, Mr Galanter was walking back and forth alongside third on the balls of his feet, sweating, smiling, grinning, wiping his head nervously; the rabbi was no longer reading; the yeshiva team was silent as death. Davey Cantor was playing second, and I stood in the pitcher's position. Schwartzie had pleaded exhaustion, and since this was the final inning - our parochial school schedules only permitted us time for five-inning games - and the yeshiva team's last chance at bat, Mr Galanter was taking no chances and told me to pitch. Davey Cantor was a poor fielder, but Mr Galanter was counting on my pitching to finish off the game. My left hand was still sore from the catch, and the wrist hurt whenever I caught a ball, but the right hand was fine, and the pitches went in fast and dropped into the curve just when I wanted them to. Dov Shlomowitz stood at the plate, swung three times at what looked to him to be perfect pitches, and hit nothing but air. He stood there looking bewildered after the third swing, then slowly walked away. We threw the ball around the infield, and Danny Saunders came up to the plate.

The members of the yeshiva team stood near the wire fence, watching Danny Saunders. They were very quiet. The rabbi was sitting on the bench, his book closed. Mr Galanter was shouting at everyone to move back. Danny Saunders swung his bat a few times, then fixed himself into position and looked out at me.

Here's a present from an apikoros. I thought, and let go the ball. It went in fast and straight, and I saw Danny Saunders' left foot move out and his bat go up and his body begin to pivot. He swung just as the ball slid into its curve, and the bat cut savagely through empty air, twisting him around and sending him off bal-

ance. His black skullcap fell off his head, and he regained his balance and bent quickly to retrieve it. He stood there for a moment, very still, staring out at me. Then he resumed his position at the plate. The ball came back to me from the catcher, and my wrist hurt as I caught it.

The yeshiva team was very quiet, and the rabbi had begun to chew his lip.

I lost control of the next pitch, and it was wide. On the third pitch, I went into a long, elaborate wind-up and sent him a slow, curving blooper, the kind a batter always wants to hit and always misses. He ignored it completely, and the umpire called it a ball.

I felt my wrist begin to throb as I caught the throw from the catcher. I was hot and sweaty, and the earpieces of my glasses were cutting deeply into the flesh above my ears as a result of the head movements that went with my pitching.

Danny Saunders stood very still at the plate, waiting.

Okay, I thought, hating him bitterly. Here's another present. The ball went to the plate fast and straight, and dropped just below his swing. He checked himself with difficulty so as not to spin around, but he went off his balance again and took two or three staggering steps forward before he was able to stand up straight. <sup>שלוש פעמים</sup>

The catcher threw the ball back, and I winced at the pain in my wrist. I took the ball out of the glove, held it in my right hand and turned around for a moment to look out at the field and let the pain in my wrist subside. When I turned back I saw that Danny Saunders hadn't moved. He was holding his bat in his left hand, standing very still and staring at me. His eyes were dark, and his lips were parted in a crazy, idiotic grin. I heard the umpire yell 'Play ball!' but Danny Saunders stood there, staring at me and grinning. I turned and looked out at the field again, and when I turned back he was still standing there, staring at me and grinning. I could see his teeth between his parted lips. I took a deep breath and felt myself wet with sweat. I wiped my right hand on my pants and saw Danny Saunders step slowly to the plate and set his legs in position. He was no longer grinning. He stood looking at me over his left shoulder, waiting.

I wanted to finish it quickly because of the pain in my wrist,

and I sent in another fast ball. I watched it head straight for the plate. I saw him go into a sudden crouch, and in the fraction of a second before he hit the ball I realized that he had anticipated the curve and was deliberately swinging low. I was still a little off balance from the pitch, but I managed to bring my glove hand up in front of my face just as he hit the ball. I saw it coming at me, and there was nothing I could do. It hit the finger section of my glove, deflected off, smashed into the upper rim of the left lens of my glasses, glanced off my forehead, and knocked me down. I scrambled around for it wildly, but by the time I got my hand on it Danny Saunders was standing safely on first.

I heard Mr Galanter call time, and everyone on the field came racing over to me. My glasses lay shattered on the asphalt floor, and I felt a sharp pain in my left eye when I blinked. My wrist throbbled, and I could feel the bump coming up on my forehead. I looked over at first, but without my glasses Danny Saunders was only a blur. I imagined I could still see him grinning.

I saw Mr Galanter put his face next to mine. It was sweaty and full of concern. I wondered what all the fuss was about. I had only lost a pair of glasses, and we had at least two more good pitchers on the team.

'Are you all right, boy?' Mr Galanter was saying. He looked at my face and forehead. 'Somebody wet a handkerchief with cold water!' he shouted. I wondered why he was shouting. His voice hurt my head and rang in my ears. I saw Davey Cantor run off, looking frightened. I heard Sidney Goldberg say something, but I couldn't make out his words. Mr Galanter put his arm around my shoulders and walked me off the field. He sat me down on the bench next to the rabbi. Without my glasses everything more than about ten feet away from me was blurred. I blinked and wondered about the pain in my left eye. I heard voices and shouts and then Mr Galanter was putting a wet handkerchief on my head.

'You feel dizzy, boy?' he said.

I shook my head.

'You're sure now?'

'I'm all right,' I said, and wondered why my voice sounded husky and why talking hurt my head.

'You sit quiet now,' Mr Galanter said. 'You begin to feel dizzy, you let me know right away.'

'Yes, sir,' I said.

He went away. I sat on the bench next to the rabbi, who looked at me once, then looked away. I heard shouts in Yiddish. The pain in my left eye was so intense I could feel it in the base of my spine. I sat on the bench a long time, long enough to see us lose the game by a score of eight to seven, long enough to hear the yeshiva team shout with joy, long enough to begin to cry at the pain in my left eye, long enough for Mr Galanter to come over to me at the end of the game, take one look at my face and go running out of the yard to call a cab.

We rode to the Brooklyn Memorial Hospital, which was a few blocks away, and Mr Galanter paid the cab fare. He helped me out, put his arm around my shoulders, and walked me into the emergency ward.

'Keep that handkerchief over the eye,' he said. 'And try not to blink.' He was very nervous, and his face was covered with sweat. He had taken off his skullcap, and I could see him sweating beneath the hairs on his balding head.

'Yes, sir,' I said. I was frightened and was beginning to feel dizzy and nauseated. The pain in my left eye was fierce. I could feel it all along the left side of my body and in my groin.

The nurse at the desk wanted to know what was wrong.

'He was hit in the eye by a baseball,' Mr Galanter said.

She asked us to sit down and pressed a button on her desk. We sat down next to a middle-aged man with a blood-soaked bandage around a finger on his right hand. He sat there in obvious pain, resting his finger on his lap and nervously smoking a cigarette despite the sign on the wall that said NO SMOKING.

He looked at us. 'Ball game?' he asked.

Mr Galanter nodded. I kept my head straight, because it didn't hurt so much when I didn't move it.

The man held up his finger. 'Car door,' he said. 'My kid slammed it on me.' He grimaced and put his hand back on his lap.

A nurse came out of a door at the far end of the room and nodded to the man. He stood up. 'Take care,' he said, and went out.

'How're you doing?' Mr Galanter asked me.

'My eye hurts,' I told him.

'How's the head?'

'I feel dizzy.'

'Are you nauseous?'

'A little.'

'You'll be okay,' Mr Galanter said, trying to sound encouraging. 'You get a Purple Heart for today's work, trooper.' But his voice was tense, and he looked frightened.

'I'm sorry about all this, Mr Galanter,' I said.

'What are you sorry about, boy?' he said. 'You played a great game.'

'I'm sorry to be putting you to so much trouble.'

'What trouble? Don't be silly. I'm glad to help one of my

troopers.'

'I'm also sorry we lost.'

'So you lost. So what? There's next year, isn't there?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Don't talk so much. Just take it easy.'

'They're a tough team,' I said.

'That Saunders boy,' Mr Galanter said, 'the one who hit you.

You know anything about him?'

'No, sir.'

'I never saw a boy hit a ball like that.'

'Mr Galanter?'

'Yes?'

'My eye really hurts.'

'We'll be going in in a minute, boy. Hold on. Would your father be home now?'

'Yes, sir.'

'What's your phone number?'

I gave it to him.

A nurse came out the door and nodded to us. Mr Galanter helped me get to my feet. We walked through a corridor and followed the nurse into an examination room. It had white walls, a white chair, a white, glass-enclosed cabinet, and a tall metal table with a white sheet over the mattress. Mr Galanter helped me onto the table, and I lay there and stared up at the white ceiling out of my right eye.

'The doctor will be here in a moment,' the nurse said, and went out.

'Feel any better?' Mr Galanter asked me.

'No,' I said.

A young doctor came in. He had on a white gown and was wearing a stethoscope around his neck. He looked at us and smiled pleasantly.

'Stopped a ball with your eye, I hear,' he said, smiling at me. 'Let's have a look at it.'

I took off the wet handkerchief, opened my left eye, and gasped with the pain. He looked down at the eye, went to the cabinet, came back, and looked at the eye again through an instrument with a light attached to it. He straightened up and looked at Mr Galanter.

'Was he wearing glasses?' he asked.

'Yes.'

The doctor put the instrument over the eye again. 'Can you see the light?' he asked me.

'It's a little blurred,' I told him.

'I think I'll go call your father,' Mr Galanter said.

The doctor looked at him. 'You're not the boy's father?'

'I'm his gym teacher.'

'You had better call his father, then. We'll probably be moving him upstairs.'

'You're going to keep him here?'

'For a little while,' the doctor said pleasantly. 'Just as a precaution.' *prediccia o pastova*

'Oh,' Mr Galanter said.

'Could you ask my father to bring my other pair of glasses?' I said.

'You won't be able to wear glasses for a while, son,' the doctor told me. 'We'll have to put a bandage over that eye.'

'I'll be right back,' Mr Galanter said, and went out.

'How does your head feel?' the doctor asked me.

'It hurts.'

'Does that hurt?' he asked, moving my head from side to side.

I felt myself break out into a cold sweat. 'Yes, sir,' I said.

'Do you feel nauseous at all?'

'A little,' I said. 'My left wrist hurts, too.'

'Let's take a look at it. Does that hurt?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Well, you really put in a full day. Who won?'

'They did.'

'Too bad. Now look, you lie as quiet as you can and try not to blink your eyes. I'll be right back.'

He went out quickly.

I lay very still on the table. Except for the time I had had my tonsils out I had never been overnight in a hospital. I was frightened, and I wondered what was causing the pain in my eye. Some of the glass from the lens must have scratched it, I thought. I wondered why I hadn't anticipated Danny Saunders' going for the curve, and, thinking of Danny Saunders, I found myself hating him again and all the other side-curved fringe wearers on his yeshiva team. I thought of my father receiving the phone call from Mr Galanter and rushing over to the hospital, and I had to hold myself back from crying. He was probably sitting at his desk, writing. The call would frighten him terribly. I found I could not keep back my tears, and I blinked a few times and winced with the pain.

The young doctor returned, and this time he had another doctor with him. The second doctor looked a little older and had blond hair. He came over to me without a word and looked at my eye with the instrument.

I thought I saw him go tense. 'Is Snyderman around?' he said, looking through the instrument.

'I passed him a few minutes ago,' the first doctor said.

'He had better have a look at it,' the second doctor said. He straightened slowly.

'You lie still now, son,' the first doctor said. 'A nurse will be in in a minute.'

They went out. A nurse came in and smiled at me. 'This won't hurt a bit,' she said, and put some drops into my left eye. 'Now keep it closed and put this bit of cotton over it. That's a good boy.' She went out.

Mr Galanter came back. 'He's on his way over,' he said.

'How did he sound?'

'I don't know. He said he'd be right over.'  
'It's not good for him to be worried. He's not too well.'  
'You'll be okay, boy. This is a fine hospital. How's the eye?'  
'It feels better. They put some drops in it.'  
'Good. Good. I told you this is a fine hospital. Had my appendix out here.'

Three men came into the room, the two doctors and a short, middle-aged man with a round face and a graying mustache. He had dark hair and was not wearing a gown.

'This is Dr Snyderman, son,' the first doctor said to me. 'He wants to have a look at your eye.'

Dr Snyderman came over to me and smiled. 'I hear you had quite a ball game there, young man. Let's have a look.' He had a warm smile, and I liked him immediately. He took the cotton off the eye and looked through the instrument. He looked at the eye a long time. Then he straightened slowly and turned to Mr Galanter.

'Are you the boy's father?'

'I called his father,' Mr Galanter said. 'He's coming over right away.'

'Well, need his signature,' Dr Snyderman said. He turned to the other two doctors. 'I don't think so,' he said. 'I think it's right on the edge. I'll have to have a better look at it upstairs.' He turned to me and smiled warmly.

'An eye is not a thing to stop a ball with, young man.'

'He hit it real fast,' I said.

'I'm sure he did. We're going to have you brought upstairs so we can have a better look at it.'

The three doctors went out.

'What's upstairs?' I asked Mr Galanter.

'The eye ward, I guess. They have all the big instruments up there.'

'What do they want to look at it up there for?'

'I don't know, boy. They didn't tell me anything.'

Two hospital orderlies came into the room, wheeling a stretcher table. When they lifted me off the examination table, the pain rained through my head and sent flashes of black, red and white colors into my eyes. I cried out.

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orderly [i] - oh [i] nurse

'Sorry, kid,' one of the orderlies said sympathetically. 'They put me down carefully on the stretcher table and wheeled me out of the room and along the corridor. Mr Galanter followed.'

'Here's the elevator,' the other orderly said. 'They were both young and looked almost alike in their white jackets, white trousers, and white shoes.'

The elevator took a long time going up. I lay on the stretcher table, staring up out of my right eye at the fluorescent light on the ceiling. It looked blurred, and I saw it change color, going from white to red to black, then back to white.

'I never saw a light like that,' I said.

'Which light is that?' one of the orderlies asked.

'The fluorescent. How do they get it to change colours like that?'

The orderlies looked at each other.

'Just take it easy, kid,' one of them said. 'Just relax.'

'I never saw a light change colors like that,' I said.

'Jesus,' Mr Galanter said under his breath.

He was standing alongside the stretcher table with his back to the rear of the elevator. I tried turning my head to look at him, but the pain was too much and I lay still. I had never heard him use that word before, and I wondered what had made him use it now. I lay there, staring up at the light and wondering why Mr Galanter had used that word, when I saw one of the orderlies glance down at me with a reassuring grin. I remembered Danny Saunders standing in front of the plate and staring at me with that idiotic grin on his lips. I closed my right eye and lay still, listening to the noise of the elevator. This is a slow elevator, I thought. But how do they get the light to change colors like that? Then the light was bad all over and everyone crowded around me. Someone was wiping my forehead, and the light was suddenly gone.

I opened my right eye. A nurse in a white uniform said, 'Well, now, how are we doing, young man?' and for a long moment I stared up at her and didn't know what was happening. Then I remembered everything - and I couldn't say a word.

I saw the nurse standing over my bed and smiling down at

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me. She was heavily built and had a round, fleshy face and short, dark hair.

'Well, now, let's see,' she said. 'Move your head a little, just a little, and tell me how it feels.'

I moved my head from side to side on the pillow.

'It feels fine,' I said.

'That's good. Are you at all hungry?'

'Yes, ma'am.'

'That's very good.' She smiled. 'You won't need this now.'

She pushed aside the curtain that enclosed the bed. I blinked in the sudden sunlight.

'Isn't that better?'

'Yes ma'am. Thank you. Is my father here?'

'He'll be in shortly. You lie still now and rest. They'll be bringing supper in soon. You're going to be just fine.'

She went away.

I lay still for a moment, looking at the sunlight. It was coming in through tall windows in the wall opposite my bed. I could see the windows only through my right eye, and they looked blurred.

I moved my head slowly to the left, not taking it off the pillow and moving it carefully so as not to disturb the thick bandage that covered my left eye. There was no pain at all in my head, and I wondered how they had got the pain to leave so quickly. That's pretty good, I thought, remembering what Mr Galanter had said about this hospital. For a moment I wondered where he was and where my father was; then I forgot them both as I watched the man who was in the bed to my left.

He looked to be in his middle thirties, and he had broad shoulders and a lean face with a square jaw and a dark stubble. His hair was black, combed flat on top of his head and parted in the middle. There were dark curls of hair on the backs of his long hands, and he wore a black patch over his right eye. His nose was flat, and a half-inch scar beneath his lower lip stood out white beneath the dark stubble. He was sitting up in the bed, playing a game of cards with himself and smiling broadly. Some cards were arranged in rows on the blanket, and he was drawing other cards from the deck he held in his hands and adding them to the rows.

lay laid laid

He saw me looking at him.

'Hello, there,' he said, smiling. 'How's the old punching bag?'

I didn't understand what he meant.

'The old noggin. The head.'

'Oh. It feels good.'

'Lucky boy. A clop in the head is a rough business. I went four once and got clopped in the head, and it took me a month to get off my back. Lucky boy?' He held a card in his hands and looked down at the rows of cards on the blanket. 'Ah, so I cheat a little. So what?' He tucked the card into a row. 'I hit the canvas so hard I rattled my toenails. That was some clop.' He drew another card and inspected it. 'Caught me with that right and clopped me real good. A whole month on my back.' He was looking at the rows of cards on the blanket. 'Here we go,' he smiled broadly, and added the card to one of the rows.

I couldn't understand most of what he was talking about, but I didn't want to be disrespectful and turn away, so I kept my head turned toward him. I looked at the black patch on his right eye. It covered the eye as well as the upper part of his cheekbone, and it was held in place by a black band that went diagonally under his right ear, around his head and across his forehead. After a few minutes of looking at him, I realized he had completely forgotten about me, and I turned my head slowly away from him and to the right.

I saw a boy of about ten or eleven. He was lying in the bed with his head on the pillow, his palms flat under his head and his elbows jutting upward. He had light blond hair and a fine face, a beautiful face. He lay there with his eyes open, staring up at the ceiling and not noticing me looking at him. Once or twice I saw his eyes blink. I turned my head away.

The people beyond the beds immediately to my right and left were blurs, and I could not make them out. Nor could I make out much of the rest of the room, except to see that it had two long rows of beds and a wide middle aisle, and that it was clearly a hospital ward. I touched the bump on my forehead. It had receded considerably but was still very sore. I looked at the sun coming through the windows. All up and down the ward people were talking to each other, but I was not interested in what they were

Swank