

'Hello,' Danny Saunders said softly. 'I'm sorry if I woke you. The nurse told me it was all right to wait here.'

I looked at him in amazement. He was the last person in the world I had expected to visit me in the hospital.

'Before you tell me how much you hate me,' he said quietly, 'let me tell you that I'm sorry about what happened.'

I stared at him and didn't know what to say. He was wearing a dark suit, a white shirt open at the collar, and a dark skullcap. I could see the earlocks hanging down alongside his sculptured face and the fringes outside the trousers below the jacket.

'I don't hate you,' I managed to say, because I thought it was time for me to say something even if what I said was a lie.

He smiled sadly. 'Can I sit down? I've been standing here about fifteen minutes waiting for you to wake up.'

I sort of nodded or did something with my head, and he took it as a sign of approval and sat down on the edge of the bed to my right. The sun streamed in from the windows behind him, and shadows lay over his face and accentuated the lines of his cheeks and jaw. I thought he looked a little like the pictures I had seen of Abraham Lincoln before he grew the beard – except for the small tufts of sand-colored hair on his chin and cheeks, the close-cropped hair on his head, and the side curls. He seemed ill at ease, and his eyes blinked nervously.

*He's doing*

'What do they say about the scar tissue?' he asked.

I was astonished all over again. 'How did you find out about that?'

'I called your father last night. He told me.'

'They don't know anything about it yet. I might be blind in that eye.'

He nodded slowly and was silent.

'How does it feel to know you've made someone blind in one eye?' I asked him. I had recovered from my surprise at his presence and was feeling the anger beginning to come back.

He looked at me, his sculptured face expressionless. 'What do you want me to say?' His voice wasn't angry, it was sad. 'You want me to say I'm miserable? Okay, I'm miserable.'

'That's all? Only miserable? How do you sleep nights?'

He looked down at his hands. 'I didn't come here to fight with you,' he said softly. 'If you want to do nothing but fight, I'm going to go home.'

'For my part,' I told him, 'you can go to hell, and take your whole snooty bunch of Hasidim along with you!'

He looked at me and sat still. He didn't seem angry, just sad. His silence made me all the angrier, and finally I said, 'What the hell are you sitting there for? I thought you said you were going home!'

'I came to talk to you,' he said quietly.

'Well, I don't want to listen,' I told him. 'Why don't you go home? Go home and be sorry over my eye!'

He stood up slowly. I could barely see his face because of the sunlight behind him. His shoulders seemed bowed.

'I am sorry,' he said quietly.

'I'll just bet you are,' I told him.

He started to say something, stopped, then turned and walked slowly away up the aisle. I lay back on the pillow, trembling a little and frightened over my own anger and hate.

'He a friend of yours?' I heard Mr Savo ask me.

I turned to him. He was lying with his head on his pillow.

'No,' I said.

'He give you a rough time or something? You don't sound so good, Bobby boy.'

'He's the one who hit me in the eye with the ball,' Mr Savo's face brightened. 'No kidding? The clopper himself. Well, well!'

'I think I'll get some more sleep,' I said. I was feeling depressed. 'He one of these real religious Jews?' Mr Savo asked.

'Yes.'

'I've seen them around. My manager had an uncle like that. Real religious guy. Fanatic. Never had anything to do with my manager, though. Small loss. Some lousy manager.'

I didn't feel like having a conversation just then, so I remained silent. I was feeling a little regretful that I had been so angry with Danny Saunders.

I saw Mr Savo sit up and take the deck of cards from his night table. He began to set up his rows on the blanket. I noticed Billy



was asleep. I lay back in my bed and closed my eyes. But I couldn't sleep.

My father came in a few minutes after supper, looking pale and worn. When I told him about my conversation with Danny Saunders, his eyes became angry behind the glasses.

'You did a foolish thing, Reuven,' he told me sternly. 'You remember what the Talmud says. If a person comes to apologize for having hurt you, you must listen and forgive him.'

'I couldn't help it, abba.'

'You hate him so much you could say those things to him?'

'I'm sorry,' I said, feeling miserable.

He looked at me and I saw his eyes were suddenly sad. 'I did not intend to scold you,' he said.

'You weren't scolding,' I defended him.

'What I tried to tell you, Reuven, is that when a person comes to talk to you, you should be patient and listen. Especially if he has hurt you in any way. Now, we will not talk anymore tonight about Reb Saunders' son. This is an important day in the history of the world. It is the beginning of the end for Hitler and his madmen. Did you hear the announcer on the boat describing the invasion?'

We talked for a while about the invasion. Finally, my father left, and I lay back in my bed, feeling depressed and angry with myself over what I had said to Danny Saunders.

Billy's father had come to see him again, and they were talking quietly. He glanced at me and smiled warmly. He was a fine-looking person, and I noticed he had a long white scar on his forehead running parallel to the line of his light blond hair.

'Billy tells me you've been very nice to him,' he said to me.

I sort of nodded my head on the pillow and tried to smile back.

'I appreciate that very much,' he said. 'Billy wonders if you would call us when he gets out of the hospital.'

'Sure,' I said.

'We're in the phone book. Roger Merritt. Billy says that after his operation, when he can see again, he would like to see what you look like.'

'Sure, I'll give you a call,' I said.

'Did you hear that, Billy?'

'Yes,' Billy said happily. 'Didn't I tell you he was nice, Daddy?'

The man smiled at me, then turned back to Billy. They went on talking quietly.

I lay in the bed and thought about all the things that had happened during the day, and felt sad and depressed.

The next morning, Mrs Carpenter told me I could get out of bed and walk around a bit. After breakfast, I went out into the hall for a while. I looked out a window and saw people outside on the street. I stood there, staring out the window a long time. Then I went back to my bed and lay down.

I saw Mr Savo sitting up in his bed, playing cards and grinning.

'How's it feel to be on your feet, Bobby boy?' he asked me.

'It feels wonderful. I'm a little tired, though.'

'Take it real slow, kid. Takes a while to get the old strength back.'

One of the patients near the radio at the other end of the ward let out a shout. I leaned over and turned on my radio. The announcer was talking about a breakthrough on one of the beaches.

'That's clobbering them!' Mr Savo said, grinning broadly.

I wondered what that beach must look like now, and I could see it filled with broken vehicles and dead soldiers.

I spent the morning listening to the radio. When Mrs Carpenter came over, I asked her how long I would be in the hospital, and she smiled and said Dr Snyderman would have to decide that.

'Dr Snyderman will see you Friday morning,' she added.

I was beginning to feel a lot less excited over the war news and a lot more annoyed that I couldn't read. In the afternoon, I listened to some of the soap operas - *Life Can Be Beautiful*, *Stella Dallas*, *Mary Noble, Ma Perkins* - and what I heard depressed me even more. I decided to turn off the radio and get some sleep.

'Do you want to hear any more of this?' I asked Billy.

He didn't answer, and I saw he was sleeping.

'Turn it off, kid,' Mr Savo said. 'How much of that junk can a guy take?'

I turned off the radio and lay back on my pillow.

'Never knew people could get clobbered so hard the way they



clap them on those soap operas,' Mr Savo said. 'Well, well, look who's here.'

'Who?' I sat up.

'Your real religious clopper.'

I saw it was Danny Saunders. He came up the aisle and stood alongside my bed, wearing the same clothes he had the day before.

'Are you going to get angry at me again?' he asked hesitantly.

'No,' I said.

'Can I sit down?'

'Yes.'

'Thanks,' he said, and sat down on the edge of the bed to my right. I saw Mr Savo stare at him for a moment, then go back to his cards.

'You were pretty rotten yesterday, you know,' Danny Saunders said.

'I'm sorry about that.' I was surprised at how happy I was to see him.

'I didn't so much mind you being angry,' he said. 'What I thought was rotten was the way you wouldn't let me talk.'

'That was rotten, all right. I'm really sorry.'

'I came up to talk to you now. Do you want to listen?'

'Sure,' I said.

'I've been thinking about that ball game. I haven't stopped thinking about it since you got hit.'

'I've been thinking about it, too,' I said.

'Whenever I do or see something I don't understand, I like to think about it until I understand it.' He talked very rapidly, and I could see he was tense. 'I've thought about it a lot, but I still don't understand it. I want to talk to you about it. Okay?'

'Sure,' I said.

'Do you know what I don't understand about that ball game? I don't understand why I wanted to kill you.'

I stared at him.

'It's really bothering me.'

'Well, I should hope so,' I said.

'Don't be so cute, Malter. I'm not being melodramatic. I really wanted to kill you.'

'Well, it was a pretty hot ball game,' I said. 'I didn't exactly love you myself there for a while.'

'I don't think you even know what I'm talking about,' he said.

'Now, wait a minute -'

'No, listen. Just listen to what I'm saying, will you? Do you remember that second curve you threw me?'

'Sure.'

'Do you remember I stood in front of the plate afterwards and looked at you?'

'Sure.' I remembered the idiot grin vividly.

'Well, that's when I wanted to walk over to you and open your head with my bat.'

I didn't know what to say.

'I don't know why I didn't. I wanted to.'

'That was some ball game,' I said, a little awed by what he was telling me.

'I had nothing to do with the ball game,' he said. 'At least I don't think it did. You weren't the first tough team we played. And we've lost before, too. But you really had me going, Malter. I can't figure it out. Anyway, I feel better telling you about it.'

'Please stop calling me Malter,' I said.

He looked at me. Then he smiled faintly. 'What do you want me to call you?'

'If you're going to call me anything, call me Reuven,' I said.

'Malter sounds as if you're a schoolteacher or something.'

'Okay,' he said, smiling again. 'Then you call me Danny.'

'Fine,' I said.

'It was the wildest feeling,' he said. 'I've never felt that way before.'

I looked at him, and suddenly I had the feeling that everything around me was out of focus. There was Danny Saunders, sitting on my bed in the hospital dressed in his Hasidic-style clothes and talking about wanting to kill me because I had pitched him some curve balls. He was dressed like a Hasid, but he didn't sound like one. Also, yesterday I had hated him; now we were calling each other by our first names. I sat and listened to him talk. I was fascinated just listening to the way perfect English came out of a



person in the clothes of a Hasid. I had always thought their English was tinged with a Yiddish accent. As a matter of fact, the few times I had ever talked with a Hasid, he had spoken only Yiddish. And here was Danny Saunders talking English, and what he was saying and the way he was saying it just didn't seem to fit in with the way he was dressed, with the side curls on his face and the fringes hanging down below his dark jacket.

'You're a pretty rough fielder and pitcher,' he said, smiling at me a little.

'You're pretty rough yourself,' I told him. 'Where did you learn to hit a ball like that?'

'I practised,' he said. 'You don't know how many hours I spent learning how to field and hit a baseball.'

'Where do you get the time? I thought you people always studied Talmud.'

He grinned at me. 'I have an agreement with my father. I study my quota of Talmud every day, and he doesn't care what I do the rest of the time.'

'What's your quota of Talmud?'

'Two blatt.'

'Two blatt?' I stared at him. That was four pages of Talmud a day. If I did one page a day, I was delighted. 'Don't you have any English work at all?'

'Of course I do. But not too much. We don't have too much English work at our yeshiva.'

'Everybody has to do two blatt of Talmud a day and his English?'

'Not everybody. Only me. My father wants it that way.'

'How do you do it? That's a fantastic amount of work.'

'I'm lucky.' He grinned at me. 'I'll show you how. What Talmud are you studying now?'

'Kiddushin,' I said.

'What page are you on?'

I told him.

'I studied that two years ago. Is that what it reads like?'

He recited about a third of the page word for word, including the commentaries and the Maimonidean legal decisions of the Talmudic disputations. He did it coldly, mechanically, and listen-

ing to him, I had the feeling I was watching some sort of human machine at work.

I sat there and gaped at him. 'Say, that's pretty good,' I managed to say, finally.

'I have a photographic mind. My father says it's a gift from God. I look at a page of Talmud, and I remember it by heart. I understand it, too. After a while, it gets a little boring, though. They repeat themselves a lot. I can do it with Ivantoe, too. Have you read Ivantoe?'

'Sure.'

'Do you want to hear it with Ivantoe?'

'You're showing off now,' I said.

He grinned. 'I'm trying to make a good impression.'

'I'm impressed,' I said. 'I have to sweat to memorize a page of Talmud. Are you going to be a rabbi?'

'Sure. I'm going to take my father's place.'

'I may become a rabbi. Not a Hasidic-type, though.'

He looked at me, an expression of surprise on his face. 'What do you want to become a rabbi for?'

'Why not?'

'There are so many other things you could be.'

'That's a funny way for you to talk. You're going to become a rabbi.'

'I have no choice. It's an inherited position.'

'You mean you wouldn't become a rabbi if you had a choice?'

'I don't think so.'

'What would you be?'

'I don't know. Probably a psychologist.'

'A psychologist?'

He nodded.

'I'm not even sure I know what it's about.'

'It helps you understand what a person is really like inside. I've read some books on it.'

'Is that like Freud and psychoanalysis and things like that?'

'Yes,' he said.

I didn't know much at all about psychoanalysis, but Danny Saunders, in his Hasidic clothes, seemed to me to be about the last person in the world who would qualify as an analyst. I



always pictured analysts as sophisticated people with short pointed beards, monocles, and German accents.

'What would you be if you didn't become a rabbi?' Danny Saunders asked.

'A mathematician,' I said. 'That's what my father wants me to be.'

'And teach in a university somewhere?'

'Yes.'

'That's a very nice thing to be,' he said. His blue eyes looked dreamy for a moment. 'I'd like that.'

'I'm not sure I want to do that, though.'

'Why not?'

'I sort of feel I could be more useful to people as a rabbi. To our own people, I mean. You know, not everyone is religious, like you or me. I could teach them, and help them when they're in trouble. I think I would get a lot of pleasure out of that.'

'I don't think I would. Anyway, I'm going to be a rabbi. Say, where did you learn to pitch like that?'

'I practised, too.' I grinned at him.

'But you don't have to do two blatt of Talmud a day.'

'Thank God!'

'You certainly have a mean way of pitching.'

'How about your hitting? Do you always hit like that, straight to the pitcher?'

'Yes.'

'How'd you ever learn to do that?'

'I can't hit any other way. It's got something to do with my eyesight, and with the way I hold the bat. I don't know.'

'That's a pretty murderous way to hit a ball. You almost killed me.'

'You were supposed to duck,' he said.

'I had no chance to duck.'

'Yes you did.'

'There wasn't enough time. You hit it so fast.'

'There was time for you to bring up your glove.'

I considered that for a moment.

'You didn't want to duck.'

'That's right,' I said, after a while.

'You didn't want to have to duck any ball that I hit. You had to try and stop it.'

'That's right.' I remembered that fraction of a second when I had brought my glove up in front of my face. I could have jumped aside and avoided the ball completely. I hadn't thought to do that, though. I hadn't wanted Danny Saunders to make me look like Schwartzie.

'Well, you stopped it,' Danny Saunders said.

I grinned at him.

'No hard feelings anymore?' he asked me.

'No hard feelings,' I said. 'I just hope the eye heals all right.'

'I hope so, too,' he said fervently. 'Believe me.'

'Say, who was that rabbi on the bench? Is he a coach or something?'

Danny Saunders laughed. 'He's one of the teachers in the yeshiva. My father sends him along to make sure we don't mix too much with the apikorsim.'

'That apikorsim thing got me angry at you. What did you have to tell your team a thing like that for?'

'I'm sorry about that. It's the only way we could have a team. I sort of convinced my father you were the best team around and that we had a duty to beat you apikorsim at what you were best at. Something like that.'

'You really had to tell your father that?'

'Yes.'

'What would have happened if you'd lost?'

'I don't like to think about that. You don't know my father.'

'So you practically had to beat us.'

He looked at me for a moment, and I saw he was thinking of something. His eyes had a kind of cold, glassy look. 'That's right,' he said, finally. He seemed to be seeing something he had been searching for a long time. 'That's right,' he said again.

'What was he reading all the time?'

'Who?'

'The rabbi.'

'I don't know. Probably a book on Jewish law or something.'

'I thought it might have been something your father wrote.'

'My father doesn't write,' Danny said. 'He reads a lot, but he



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never writes. He says that words distort what a person really feels in his heart. He doesn't like to talk too much, either. Oh, he talks plenty when we're studying Talmud together. But otherwise he doesn't say much. He told me once he wishes everyone could talk in silence.'

'Talk in silence?'

'I don't understand it, either,' Danny said, shrugging. 'But that's what he said.'

'Your father must be quite a man.'

He looked at me. 'Yes,' he said, with the same cold, glassy stare in his eyes. I saw him begin to play absent-mindedly with one of his earlocks. We were quiet for a long time. He seemed absorbed in something. Finally, he stood up. 'It's late. I had better go.'

'Thanks for coming to see me.'

'I'll see you tomorrow again.'

'Sure.'

He still seemed to be absorbed in something. I watched him walk slowly up the aisle and out of the ward.

My father came in a few minutes later, looking worse than he had the day before. His cheeks were sunken, his eyes were red, and his face was ashen. He coughed a great deal and kept telling me it was his cold. He sat down on the bed and told me he had talked to Dr Snydman on the phone. 'He will look at your eye Friday morning, and you will probably be able to come home Friday afternoon. I will come to pick you up when I am through teaching.'

'That's wonderful!' I said.

'You will not be able to read for about ten days. He told me he will know by then about the scar tissue.'

'I'll be happy to be out of this hospital,' I said. 'I walked around a little today and saw the people on the street outside.'

My father looked at me and didn't say anything.

'I wish I was outside now,' I said. 'I envy them being able to walk around like that. They don't know how lucky they are.'

'No one knows he is fortunate until he becomes unfortunate,' my father said quietly. 'That is the way the world is.'

'It'll be good to be home again. At least I won't have to spend a Shabbat here.'

'We'll have a nice Shabbat together,' my father said. 'A quiet Shabbat where we can talk and not be disturbed. We will sit and drink tea and talk.' He coughed a little and put the handkerchief to his mouth. He took off his spectacles and wiped his eyes. Then he put them back on and sat on the bed, looking at me. He seemed so tired and pale, as if all his strength had been drained from him.

'I didn't tell you yet, abba. Danny Saunders came to see me today.'

*pink said sunken - polio man  
father*



My father did not seem surprised. 'Ah,' he said. 'And?'  
'He's a very nice person. I like him.'

'So? All of a sudden you like him.' He was smiling. 'What did he say?'

I told him everything I could remember of my conversation with Danny Saunders. Once, as I talked, he began to cough, and I stopped and watched helplessly as his thin frame bent and shook. Then he wiped his lips and eyes, and told me to continue. He listened intently. When I told him that Danny Saunders had wanted to kill me, his eyes went wide, but he didn't interrupt. When I told him about Danny Saunders' photographic mind, he nodded as if he had known about that all along. When I described as best I could what we had said about our careers, he smiled indulgently. And when I explained why Danny Saunders had told his team that they would kill us apikorism, he stared at me and I could see the same look of absorption come into his eyes that I had seen earlier in the eyes of Danny Saunders. Then my father nodded. 'People are not always what they seem to be,' he said softly. 'That is the way the world is, Reuven.'

'He's going to come visit me again tomorrow, abba.'

'Ah,' my father murmured. He was silent for a moment. Then he said quietly. 'Reuven, listen to me. The Talmud says that a person should do two things for himself. One is to acquire a teacher. Do you remember the other?'

'Choose a friend,' I said.

'Yes. You know what a friend is, Reuven? A Greek philosopher said that two people who are true friends are like two bodies with one soul.'

I nodded.

'Reuven, if you can, make Danny Saunders your friend.'

'I like him a lot, abba.'

'No. Listen to me. I am not talking only about liking him. I am telling you to make him your friend and to let him make you his friend. I think -' He stopped and broke into another cough. He coughed a long time. Then he sat quietly on the bed, his hand on his chest, breathing hard. 'Make him your friend,' he said again, and cleared his throat noisily.

'Even though he's a Hasid?' I asked, smiling.

'Make him your friend,' my father repeated. 'We will see.'  
'The way he acts and talks doesn't seem to fit what he wears and the way he looks,' I said. 'It's like two different people.'

My father nodded slowly but was silent. He looked over at Billy, who was still asleep.

'How is your little neighbour?' he asked me.

'He's very nice. There's a new kind of operation they'll be doing on his eyes. He was in an auto accident, and his mother was killed.'

My father looked at Billy and shook his head. He sighed and stood up, then bent and kissed me on the forehead.

'I will be back to see you tomorrow. Is there anything you need?'

'No, abba.'

'Are you able to use your tefillin?'

'Yes. I can't read though. I pray by heart.'

He smiled at me. 'I did not think of that. My baseball player. I will see you again tomorrow, Reuven.'

'Yes, abba.'

I watched him walk quickly up the aisle.

'That your father, kid?' I heard Mr Savo ask me.

I turned to him and nodded. He was still playing his game of cards.

'Nice-looking man. Very dignified. What's he do?'

'He teaches.'

'Yeah? Well, that's real nice, kid. My old man worked a pushcart. Down near Norfolk Street, it was. Worked like a dog. You're a lucky kid. What's he teach?'

'Talmud,' I said. 'Jewish law.'

'No kidding? He in a Jewish school?'

'Yes,' I said. 'A high school.'

Mr Savo frowned at a card he had just pulled from the deck. 'Damn,' he muttered. 'No luck nowhere. Story of my life.' He tucked the card into a row on the blanket. 'You looked kind of chummy there with your dopper, boy. You making friends with him?'

'He's a nice person,' I said.

'Yeah? Well, you watch guys like that, kid. You watch them

*damn - how nice!*



real good, you hear? Anyone claps you, he's got a thing going. Old Tony knows. You watch them.'

'It was really an accident,' I said.

'Yeah?'

'I could have ducked the ball.'

Mr Savo looked at me. His face was dark with the growth of beard, and his left eye seemed a little swollen and bloodshot. The black patch that covered his right eye looked like a huge skin mole. 'Anyone out to clop you doesn't want you to duck, kid. I know.'

'It wasn't really like that, Mr Savo.'

'Sure, kid. Sure. Old Tony doesn't like fanatics, that's all.'

'I don't think he's a fanatic.'

'No? What's he go around in those clothes for?'

'They all wear those clothes. It's part of their religion.'

'Sure, kid. But listen. You're a good kid. So I'm telling you, watch out for those fanatics. They're the worst cloppers around.' He looked at a card in his hands, then threw it down. 'Lousy game. No luck.' He scooped up the cards, patted them into a deck, and put them on the night table. He lay back on his pillow. 'Long day,' he said, talking almost to himself. 'Like waiting for a big fight.' He closed his left eye.

I woke during the night and lay still a long time, trying to remember where I was. I saw the dim blue night light at the other end of the ward, and took a deep breath. I heard a movement next to me and turned my head. The curtain had been drawn around Mr Savo's bed, and I could hear people moving around. I sat up. A nurse came over to me from somewhere. 'You go right back to sleep, young man,' she ordered. 'Do you hear?' She seemed angry and tense. I lay back on my bed. In a little while, I was asleep.

When I woke in the morning, the curtain was still drawn around Mr Savo's bed. I stared at it. It was light brown, and it enclosed the area of the bed completely so that not even the metal legs of the bed could be seen. I remembered Monday afternoon when I had awakened with the curtain around my bed and Mrs Carpenter bending over me, and I wondered what had happened to Mr Savo. I saw Mrs Carpenter coming quickly up the aisle,

carrying a metal tray in her hands. There were instruments and bandages on the tray. I sat up and asked her what was wrong with Mr Savo. She looked at me sternly, her round, fleshy face grim. 'Mr Savo will be all right, young man. Now you just go about your own business and let Mr Savo be.' She disappeared behind the curtain. I heard a soft moan. At the other end of the ward, the radio had been turned on and the announcer was talking about the war. I didn't want to turn my radio on for fear of disturbing Mr Savo. I heard another moan, and then I couldn't stand it anymore. I got out of my bed and went to the bathroom. Then I walked around in the hall outside the ward and stared at the people on the street. When I came back, the curtain was still drawn around Mr Savo's bed, and Billy was awake.

I sat down on my bed and saw him turn his head in my direction.

'Is that you, Bobby?' he asked me.

'Sure,' I said.

'Is something wrong with Mr Savo?'

I wondered how he knew about that.

'I think so,' I told him. 'They've got the curtain around his bed, and Mrs Carpenter is in there with him.'

'No,' Billy said. 'She just went away. I was calling him, and she told me not to disturb him. Is it something very bad?'

'I don't know. I think we ought to talk a little quieter, Billy. So we don't bother him.'

'That's right,' Billy said, lowering his voice.

'Also, I think we'll stop listening to the radio today. We don't want to wake him if he's sleeping.'

Billy nodded fervently.

I got my tellin from the night table and sat on my bed and prayed for a long time. Mostly, I prayed for Mr Savo.

I was eating breakfast when I saw Dr Snyderman hurrying up the aisle with Mrs Carpenter. He didn't even notice me as he passed my bed. He was wearing a dark suit, and he wasn't smiling. He went behind the curtain around Mr Savo's bed, and Mrs Carpenter followed. I heard them talking softly, and I heard Mr Savo moan a few times. They were there quite a while. Then they came out and went back up the aisle.



I was really frightened now about Mr Savo. I found I missed him and the way he talked and played cards. After breakfast, I lay in my bed and began to think about my left eye. I remembered tomorrow was Friday and that in the morning Dr Snyderman was supposed to examine it. I felt cold with fright. That whole morning and afternoon I lay in the bed and thought about my eye and became more and more frightened.

All that day the curtain remained around Mr Savo's bed. Every few minutes, a nurse would go behind the curtain, stay there for a while, then come out and walk back up the aisle. In the afternoon, the radio at the other end of the ward was turned off. I tried to fall asleep, but couldn't. I kept watching nurses go in and out of the curtain around Mr Savo's bed. By suppertime I was feeling so frightened and miserable that I could hardly eat. I nibbled at the food and sent the tray back almost untouched.

Then I saw Danny come up the aisle and stop at my bed. He was wearing the dark suit, the dark skullcap, the white shirt open at the collar, and the fringes showing below his jacket. My face must have mirrored my happiness at seeing him because he broke into a warm smile and said, 'You look like I'm the Messiah. I must have made some impression yesterday.'

I grinned at him. 'It's just good to see you,' I told him. 'How are you?'

'How are you? You're the one in the hospital.'

'I'm fed up being cooped up like this. I want to get out and go home. Say, it's really good to see you, you sonofagun!'

He laughed. 'I must be the Messiah. No mere Hasid would get a greeting like that from an apikoros.'

He stood at the foot of the bed, his hands in his trouser pockets, his face relaxed. 'When do you go home?' he asked.

I told him. Then I remembered Mr Savo lying in his bed behind the curtain. 'Listen,' I said, motioning with my head at the curtain. 'Let's talk outside in the hall. I don't want to disturb him.'

I got out of bed, put on my bathrobe, and we walked together out of the ward. We sat down on a bench in the hallway next to a window. The hallway was long and wide. Nurses, doctors, pati-

*Logi... ..*

ents, orderlies, and visitors went in and out of the wards. It was still light outside. Danny put his hands in his pockets and stared out the window. 'I was born in this hospital,' he said quietly. 'The day before yesterday was the first time I'd been in it since I was born.'

'I was born here, too,' I said. 'It never occurred to me.'

'I thought of it yesterday in the elevator coming up.'

'I was back here to have my tonsils out, though. Didn't you ever have your tonsils out?'

'No. They never bothered me.' He sat there with his hands in his pockets, staring out the window. 'Look at that. Look at all those people. They look like ants. Sometimes I get the feeling that's all we are - ants. Do you ever feel that way?'

His voice was quiet, and there was an edge of sadness to it.

'Sometimes,' I said.

'I told it to my father once.'

'What did he say?'

'He didn't say anything. I told you, he never talks to me except when we study. But a few days later, while we were studying, he said that man was created by God, and Jews had a mission in life.'

'What mission is that?'

'To obey God.'

'Don't you believe that?'

He looked slowly away from the window. I saw his deep blue eyes stare at me, then blink a few times. 'Sure I believe it,' he said quietly. His shoulders were bowed. 'Sometimes I'm not sure I know what God wants, though.'

'That's a funny thing for you to say.'

'Isn't it?' he said. He looked at me but didn't seem to be seeing me at all. 'I've never said that to anyone before.' He seemed to be in a strange, brooding mood. I was beginning to feel uneasy.

'I read a lot,' he said. 'I read about seven or eight books a week outside of my schoolwork. Have you ever read Darwin or Huxley?'

'I've read a little of Darwin,' I said.

'I read in the library so my father won't know. He's very strict about what I read.'

'You read books about evolution and things like that?'



'I read anything good that I can get my hands on. I'm reading Hemingway now. You've heard of Hemingway.'

'Sure.'

'Have you read any of his works?'

'I read some of his short stories.'

'I finished A Farewell to Arms last week. He's a great writer. It's about the First World War. There's this American in the Italian Army. He marries an English nurse. Only he doesn't really marry her. They live together and she becomes pregnant, and he deserts. They run away to Switzerland, and she dies in childbirth.'

'I didn't read it.'

'He's a great writer. But you wonder about a lot of things when you read him. He's got a passage in the book about ants on a burning log. The hero, this American, is watching the ants, and instead of taking the log out of the fire and saving the ants, he throws water into the fire. The water turns into steam and that roasts some of the ants, the others just burn to death on the log or fall off into the fire. It's a great passage. It shows how cruel people can be.'

All the time he talked he kept staring out the window. I almost had the feeling he wasn't talking so much to me as to himself.

'I just get so tired of studying only Talmud all the time. I know the stuff cold, and it gets a little boring after a while. So I read whatever I can get my hands on. But I only read what the librarian says is worthwhile. I met a man there, and he keeps suggesting books for me to read. That librarian is funny. She's a nice person, but she keeps staring at me all the time. She's probably wondering what a person like me is doing reading all those books.'

'I'm wondering a little myself,' I said.

'I told you. I get bored studying just Talmud. And the English work in school isn't too exciting. I think the English teachers are afraid of my father. They're afraid they'll lose their jobs if they say something too exciting or challenging. I don't know. But it's exciting being able to read all those books.' He began to play with the earlock on the right side of his face. He rubbed it

gently with his right hand, twirled it around his forefinger, released it, then twirled it around the finger again. 'I've never told this to anyone before,' he said. 'All the time I kept wondering who I would tell it to one day.' He was staring down at the floor. Then he looked at me and smiled. It was a sad smile, but it seemed to break the mood he was in. 'If you'd've ducked that ball I would still be wondering,' he said, and put his hands back into his pockets.

I didn't say anything. I was still a little overwhelmed by what he had told me. I couldn't get over the fact that this was Danny Saunders, the son of Reb Saunders, the tzaddik.

'Can I be honest with you?' I asked him.

'Sure,' he said.

'I'm all mixed up about you. I'm not trying to be funny or anything. I really am mixed up about you. You look like a Hasid, but you don't sound like one. You don't sound like what my father says Jasdim are supposed to sound like. You sound almost as if you don't believe in God.'

He looked at me but didn't respond.

'Are you really going to become a rabbi and take your father's place?'

'Yes,' he said quietly.

'How can you do that if you don't believe in God?'

'I believe in God. I never said I didn't believe in God.'

'You don't sound like a Hasid, though,' I told him.

'What do I sound like?'

'Like a - an apikoros.'

He smiled but said nothing. It was a sad smile, and his blue eyes seemed sad, too. He looked back out the window, and we sat in silence a long time. It was a warm silence, though, not in the least bit awkward. Finally, he said very quietly, 'I have to take my father's place. I have no choice. It's an inherited position. I'll work it out - somehow. It won't be that bad, being a rabbi. Once I'm a rabbi my people won't care what I read. I'll be sort of like God to them. They won't ask any questions.'

'Are you going to like being a rabbi?'

'No,' he said.

'How can you spend your life doing what you don't like?'