

sycamores and moved softly through the leaves. We walked in silence until Lee Avenue, then turned left. I was walking quickly, and Danny kept pace with my steps. ^{word}

Walking along Lee Avenue, Danny said quietly, 'I know what you're thinking. You think he's a tyrant.'

I shook my head. 'I don't know what to think. One minute he's a tyrant, the next minute he's kind and gentle. I don't know what to think.'

'He's got a lot on his mind,' Danny said. 'He's a pretty complicated person.'

'Do you always go through that routine at the table?'

'Oh, sure. I don't mind it. I even enjoy it a little.'

'I've never seen anything like it in my life.'

'It's a family tradition,' Danny explained. 'My father's father used to do it with him. It goes all the way back.'

'It would scare me sick.'

'It's not that bad. The bad part is waiting until he makes the mistake. After that it's all right. But the mistakes aren't really very hard to find. He makes ones that he knows I can find. It's a kind of game almost.'

'Some game!'

'The second mistake tonight caught me off guard. But he made that one for you, really. That was very good, the way you caught it. He knew I wouldn't catch it. He just wanted to catch me, so he could tell me I wasn't listening. He was right. I wasn't listening. But I wouldn't have caught it even if I had listened. I'm no good in math. I've got a photographic memory for everything except math. You can't memorize math. You have to have a certain kind of head for it.'

'I hate to tell you what I think about that game,' I said, a little heatedly. 'What happens if you miss the mistake?'

'I haven't missed in years.'

'What happens when you do miss?'

He was silent a moment. 'It's uncomfortable for a while,' he said quietly. 'But he makes a joke or something, and we go into a Talmud discussion.'

'What a game!' I said. 'In front of all those people!'

'They love it,' Danny said. 'They're very proud to see us like

that. They love to hear the Talmud discussed like that. Did you see their faces?'

'I saw them,' I said. 'How could I not see them? Does your father always use gematria when he talks?'

'Not always. Very rarely, as a matter of fact. The people love it and always hope for it. But he does it rarely. I think he did it tonight only because you were there.'

'He's good at it, I'll say that much.'

'He wasn't too good tonight. Some of it was a little forced. He was fantastic a few months ago. He did it with Talmudic laws then. He was really great.'

'I thought it wasn't bad tonight.'

'Well, it wasn't too good. He hasn't been feeling too well. He's worried about my brother.'

'What's wrong with your brother?'

'I don't know. They don't talk about it. Something about his blood. He's been sick for a few years now.'

'I'm sorry to hear that, Danny.'

'He'll be all right. There's a pretty big doctor taking care of him now. He'll be all right.' His voice had the same strange quality it had had when he had talked about his brother on our way over to the synagogue earlier in the day - hope, wistfulness, almost an eagerness for something to take place. I thought Danny must love his little brother very much, though I didn't remember his saying a word to him all the time they had been together. 'Anyway,' Danny said, 'these contests, as you call them, are going to end as soon as I start studying with Ray Gershenson.'

'Who?'

'Ray Gershenson. He's a great scholar. He's at Hirsch College. He teaches Talmud there. My father says that when I'm old enough to study with Ray Gershenson, I'll be old enough for him not to worry whether I can catch him at mistakes or not. Then we'll just have the Talmud discussions. I'll like that.'

I was restraining my delight with considerable difficulty. The Samson Raphael Hirsch Seminary and College was the only yeshiva in the United States that offered a secular college education. It was located on Bedford Avenue, a few blocks from Eastern

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Parkway. My father had told me once that it had been built in the early twenties by a group of Orthodox Jews who wanted their sons to have both a Jewish and a secular education. Its college faculty was supposed to be excellent, and its rabbinic faculty consisted of some of the greatest Talmudists in the United States. A rabbinic ordination from its Talmud faculty was looked upon as the highest of Orthodox Jewish honors. It had been a foregone conclusion on my father's part and on mine that I would go on to there after high school for my bachelor's degree. When I told Danny that, his face burst into a smile.

'Well, that's wonderful!' he said. 'I'm happy to hear that. That's really wonderful!'

'So we'll be going to the same college,' I said. 'Will you be going for a B.A.?'

'Sure. You have to. They don't let you study just Talmud in that college. I'll be majoring in psychology.'

We had come to the corner of the synagogue in which my father and I prayed. Danny stopped.

'I have to go back,' he said. 'I've got schoolwork to do.'

'I'll call you at your house tomorrow afternoon.'

'I'll probably be in the library tomorrow afternoon, doing some reading in psychology. Why don't you come over there?'

'I won't be able to read anything.'

'That's right,' Danny smiled. 'I forgot. You didn't duck.'

'I'll come over anyway. I'll sit and think while you read.'

'Wonderful. I'd like to watch you sit and think.'

'Mingdim can think too, you know,' I said.

Danny laughed. 'I'll see you tomorrow.'

'Right,' I said, and watched him walk away, tall and lean in his black caftan and black hat.

I hurried home and came into the apartment just as my father was beginning to dial the phone. He put the phone down and looked at me.

'Do you know what time it is?' he asked.

'Is it very late?' I glanced at my watch. It was almost ten-thirty. 'I'm sorry, abba. I couldn't just walk out.'

'You were at Reb Saunders' synagogue all this time?'

'Yes.'

'Next time you are out so late you will call, yes? I was ready to telephone Reb Saunders to find out what happened. Come into the kitchen and sit down. What are you looking so excited about? Sit down. I'll make some tea. Did you eat? What happened that you were away so long?'

I sat at the kitchen table and slowly told my father everything that had taken place in Reb Saunders' synagogue. He sipped his tea and listened quietly. I saw him grimace when I began to go over the gematriyot. My father did not particularly care for gematriya. He had once referred to it as nonsense numerology and had said that anything could be proved that way, all that had to be done was to shift letters around adroitly so as to make the values come out any way you wanted. So he sat there, sipping his tea and grimacing, as I reviewed Reb Saunders' gematriyot.

When I started to tell him what had happened afterward, the grimace left his face, and he listened intently, nodding his head from time to time and sipping his tea. And when I got to the part where Reb Saunders had asked me about the wrong gematriya, his face took on a look of astonishment, and he put the glass down on the table. Then I told him what Reb Saunders had said to me after Havdalah and what Danny and I had talked about on the way home, and he smiled proudly and nodded to indicate his happiness.

'Well,' my father said, sipping his tea again, 'you had some day, Reuven.'

'It was an experience, abba. The way Danny had to answer his father's questions like that in front of everybody. I thought that was terrible.'

My father shook his head. 'It is not terrible, Reuven. Not for Danny, not for his father, and not for the people who listened. It is an old tradition, this kind of Talmudic discussion. I have seen it many times, between great rabbis. But it does not only take place between rabbis. When Kant became a professor, he had to follow an old tradition and argue in public on a philosophical subject. One day when you are a professor in a university and read a paper before your colleagues, you will also have to answer questions. It is part of Danny's training.'

'But in public like that, abba!'

'Yes, Reuven. In public like that. How else would Reb Saunders' people know that Danny has a head for Talmud?'

'It just seemed so cruel to me.'

My father nodded. 'It is a little cruel, Reuven. But that is the way the world is. If a person has a contribution to make, he must make it in public. If learning is not made public, it is a waste. But the business about the mistakes I never heard before. That is something new. That is Reb Saunders' innovation. It is clever, but I am not sure I like it very much. No, I do not think I like it at all.'

'Danny said the mistakes are always easy to find.'

'Perhaps,' my father said. 'A man can do whatever he wishes to test his son's knowledge. But there are other ways than the way of Reb Saunders. At any rate, Reuven, it is good training for Danny. He will be involved in such things all his life.'

'Reb Saunders is a very complicated man, abba. I can't make him out. One minute he's hard and angry, the next minute he's soft and gentle. I don't understand him.'

'Reb Saunders is a great man, Reuven. Great men are always difficult to understand. He carries the burden of many people on his shoulders. I do not care for his Hasidism very much, but it is not a simple task to be a leader of people. Reb Saunders is not a fraud. He would be a great man even if he had not inherited his post from his father. It is a pity he occupies his mind only with Talmud. If he were not a tzaddik he could make a great contribution to the world. But he lives only in his own world. It is a great pity. Danny will be the same way when he takes his father's place. It is a shame that a mind such as Danny's will be shut off from the world.'

My father sipped his tea again, and we sat quietly for a while.

'I am very proud of the way you handled yourself today,' my father said, looking at me over the rim of the glass. 'I am glad Reb Saunders will let you be Danny's friend. I was worried about Reb Saunders.'

'I'm awfully sorry I came back so late, abba.'

My father nodded. 'I am not angry,' he said. 'But next time you will be so late, you will call, yes?'

'Yes, abba.'

My father glanced at the clock on the shelf over the refrigerator. 'Reuven, it is late, and tomorrow you are going to school. You should go to sleep now.'

'Yes, abba.'

'Remember, you must not read. I will read to you in the evenings and we will see if we can study that way. But you must not read by yourself.'

'Yes, abba. Good night.'

'Good night, Reuven.'

I left him sitting at the kitchen table over his glass of tea and went to bed. I lay awake a long time before I was able to sleep.