

library and sometimes with your father. I want you to tell me what he reads. I could ask my son, but it is difficult for me to speak to him. I know you do not understand that. But it is true. I cannot ask my son. One day perhaps I will tell you the reason. I know the mind he has, and I know I can no longer tell him what he's to read and what not to read. I am asking you to tell me what he reads.'

I sat frozen and felt a long moment of blind panic. What my father had anticipated was now actually happening. But he hadn't anticipated it happening to me. He had thought Reb Saunders would confront *him*, not me. My father and I had acted behind Reb Saunders' back; now Reb Saunders was asking me to act behind Danny's back. I didn't know what to say.

Reb Saunders looked at me and sighed again. 'Reuven,' he said very quietly, 'I want you to hear me out. No one lives forever. My father led his people before me, and my grandfather before him, and my great-grandfather before him. For six generations now we have led our people. I will not live forever. Daniel will one day take my place - 'His voice broke, and he stopped. He put a finger to one of his eyes. Then he went on, his voice a little hoarse now. 'My son is my most precious possession. I have nothing in the world compared to my son. I must know what he is reading. And I cannot ask him.' He stopped and looked down at an open Talmud on his desk. 'How did he come to meet your father in the library?' he asked, looking down at the Talmud.

I sat very still and said nothing. I realized I was sitting on top of a possible explosion between Danny and his father. How long would Reb Saunders remain silent about his son's visits to the library? And I didn't like the way my father seemed to appear in all of this - as if he were conspiring behind Reb Saunders' back to contaminate his son. I took a deep breath and began to talk slowly, choosing my words with care. I told Reb Saunders everything, how Danny had met my father, why my father was suggesting books for him to read, what he was reading, how my father was helping him - omitting that Danny was studying German, that he planned to read Freud, and that he had read some books on Hasidism.

When I finished, Reb Saunders just sat there and stared at me.

I could see he was controlling himself with great effort. He covered his eyes and nose with his right hand and leaned forward, his elbow on the open Talmud, the upper portion of his body swaying slowly back and forth. I saw his lips move beneath the hand, and I heard the words 'Psychology. Master of the Universe, psychology. And Darwin.' They came out as a soft, whispered moan. He took the hand away from his face and let it drop to the Talmud. 'What can I do?' he asked himself softly. 'I can no longer speak to my own son. The Master of the Universe gave me a brilliant son, a phenomenon. And I cannot speak to him.' He looked at me and seemed suddenly aware again of my presence. 'The pain of raising children,' he said quietly. 'So many troubles. So many troubles. Reuven, you and your father will be a good influence on my son, yes?'

I nodded slowly, afraid now to speak.

'You will not make a goy out of my son?'

I shook my head, feeling numb at what I was hearing. His voice was an ache, a plea. I saw him stare up at the ceiling.

'Master of the Universe,' he almost chanted. 'You gave me a brilliant son, and I have thanked you for him a million times. But you had to make him so brilliant?'

I listened to his voice and felt myself go cold. There was so much pain in it, so much bewildered pain. *making*

The apartment door opened and closed. Reb Saunders sat up in his chair, his face quickly regaining its composure. Clearly, almost like an echo in a cave, I heard the tap-tap-tap of Danny's metal-capped shoes against the linoleum hallway floor. Then he was in the study, carrying a tray with three glasses of tea, sugar, spoons, and some of his mother's cookies. I pushed some book aside on the desk, and he put the tray down.

From the moment he entered the room and saw my face, I knew he was aware that something had happened during his absence. We sipped our tea in silence, and I saw him glance at me from over the rim of his glass. He knew, all right. He knew something had happened between his father and me. What was I supposed to tell him? That his father now knew he was reading forbidden books and was not going to try to stop him? Reb Saunders hadn't said anything about not telling Danny what had

gone on between us. I looked at him for a clue, but he was sipping his tea calmly. I hoped Danny wouldn't ask me today. I wanted to talk to my father first.

Reb Saunders put his glass down and folded his arms across his chest. He was acting as though nothing at all had happened.

'Tell me more about grammar in the Talmud, Reuven,' he said to me, with a gentle hint of mockery in his voice. 'All my life I have studied Talmud and paid no attention to grammar. Now you tell me a person must know grammar to know Talmud. You see what happens when you have a father who is a Misanaged? Grammar yet. Mathematics - nu, all right. Mathematics I can understand. But grammar!'

The three of us sat there and talked until it was time for the Afternoon Service. Danny found his father's deliberate mistake easily, and I was able to follow the ensuing Talmudic discussion without too much difficulty, though I did not join in.

After the Evening Service, Danny said he would walk me part of the way home, and as we turned into Lee Avenue he asked me what had happened between me and his father that afternoon.

I told him everything. He listened in silence, not seeming at all surprised that his father somehow had learned of his secret visits to the library.

'I knew he would find out about it sooner or later,' he said softly, looking very sad.

'I hope you don't mind my telling him, Danny. I had to.'

He shrugged. His eyes were moist and gloomy. 'I almost wish he had asked me instead,' he said quietly. 'But we don't talk anymore, except when we study Talmud.'

'I don't understand that.'

'It's what I told you in the hospital. My father believes in silence. When I was ten or eleven years old, I complained to him about something, and he told me to close my mouth and look into my soul. He told me to stop running to him every time I had a problem. I should look into my own soul for the answer, he said. We just don't talk, Reuven.'

'I don't understand that at all.'

'I'm not sure I understand it myself,' he said gloomily. 'But that's the way he is. I don't know how he found out I was read-

ing behind his back, but I'm glad he knows about it. At least I don't have to walk around in that library scared to death. I just feel bad having had to fool my father like that. But what else could I have done?'

I agreed with him that he couldn't have done anything else, but I told him I wished he could somehow get around to talking about it with his father.

'I can't,' he said, shaking his head. 'I just can't. You don't know what torture it was talking to him about organizing a ball team. We just don't talk, Reuven. Maybe it sounds a little crazy to you. But it's true.'

'I think you ought to at least try.'

'I can't!' he said, a little angry now. 'Don't you listen to what I'm saying? I just can't!'

'I don't understand it,' I told him.

'Well, I can't explain it to you any better than I have,' he said angrily.

When we stopped in front of the synagogue where my father and I prayed, he muttered his 'Good night,' turned, and walked slowly away.

My father seemed astonished when I told him what Danny had said to me.

'Silence? What do you mean, Danny is being brought up in silence?' His eyes were wide.

'They never talk, abba. Except when they study Talmud. That's what Danny told me.'

He stared at me for a long time. Then he seemed to remember something, and his eyes narrowed suddenly.

'Once in Russia I heard something,' he murmured softly, speaking to himself. 'But I did not believe it.'

'Heard what, abba?'

He looked at me, his eyes somber, and shook his head. 'I am happy. Reb Saunders knows now about his son's reading,' he said quietly, evading my question. 'I was concerned about all this subterfuge.'

'But why can't he talk to Danny about it?'

'Reuven, he has already talked to Danny about it. He has talked to Danny through you.'

I stared at him.
 He sighed softly. *rejuvenation*
wasn't it
 'It is never pleasant to be a buffer, Reuven,' he told me quietly.
 And he would say nothing more about the strange silence between Reb Saunders and his son.

I went straight home from school the next day and spent the afternoon and evening listening to my father read to me from my text-books. At nine o'clock on Monday morning, my father took me to Dr Snyderman's office on Eastern Parkway. We were both nervous and silent on the way over. I had taken my school books with me, because we planned to go straight from Dr Snyderman's office to the school. Dr Snyderman looked at my eye and told me I was fine, it had healed perfectly, I could read now, play ball, swim, do whatever I wanted, just so long as I didn't try to stop a fast ball anymore with my head. My father's eyes were misty when we left the office, and I cried a little during the trolley ride to school. We stood outside the school, my father kissed my forehead and said thank God that it had all ended well, and now he had to go to his class, he had already missed one class today because of the doctor's appointment and the students were probably making the substitute teacher's life miserable. I grinned, then nodded when he told me to go to my class. He went off. As I climbed the stairs to the second floor, I realized I had forgotten to ask Dr Snyderman about Billy. I decided I would call Billy later in the week after my exams, and go over to see him.

That was a busy week. The final exams began that Monday afternoon. It was wonderful to be able to read and write again, and I didn't mind it at all that my first reading and writing in fifteen days was being done over final examinations. It was a kind of wild, soaring experience to be able to hold a pen again and look into a book or at a piece of paper with writing on it, I took my exams and enjoyed them immensely.

I didn't see Danny that entire week. He called me on Wednesday night, sounding sad, and we talked for a while. I asked him

what he would be doing that summer, and he told me he always stayed home in the summer, studying Talmud. He added that he would probably also be reading Freud this summer. I said I would come over to his house that Shabbat and we could talk some more then, I was busy now studying for finals, and I hung up. His voice had been quiet, subdued, and I wondered if he had been reading any more books on Hasidism.

I took the last exam on Friday morning, and then the year was over: I was free until September. I wasn't worried about my grades: I knew I had done well.

When I came home from school early Friday afternoon, Manya asked me if I was hungry, and I said yes, I could eat a horse, a kosher horse, of course, and she quickly put a lunch on the table. My father came in a few minutes later and joined me. There had been a terrible storm in Europe that entire week, he told me, and it had hurt the invasion, but it was over now, thank God. I hadn't heard anything about it, I had been so busy with my exams.

My father left right after lunch, and I went over to the telephone to call Billy. I found his father's name in the phone book and dialed the number.

'Hello,' a man's voice said.

'Mr Merrit?'

'That's right.'

'This is Reuven Maler, sir.'

'Who?'

'Reuv - Bobby Maler. I had the bed next to Billy in the hospital.'

'Oh, yes. Yes. Bobby Maler.'

'Do you remember me, sir?'

'Of course. Of course I remember you.'

'How is Billy, sir?'

There was a pause.

'Sir?'

'Yes?'

'Is Billy all right?'

'I'm afraid not. The surgery was not successful.'

I felt myself break out into a cold sweat. The hand holding the

phone began to tremble and I had to push the phone against my face to keep it steady.

'Hello?'

'Yes, sir.'

'How is your eye, Bobby?'

'It's fine, sir. It's all healed.'

'I'm happy to hear that. No, Billy's surgery was not successful.'

'I'm awfully sorry to hear that, sir.'

There was another pause. I thought I could hear Mr Merrit breathing into the phone.

'Sir?'

'Yes?'

'May I come over to visit Billy?'

'Billy is in Albany with friends of mine. My company has transferred me to Albany. We're being moved out today.'

I didn't say anything.

'Good-bye, Bobby. I'm glad your eye is all right. Be careful with your eyes.'

'Yes, sir. Good-bye.'

I hung up the phone and stood still for a minute, trying to calm myself. It didn't do any good. I went into my room and sat by the window for a while. I opened a book, stared at it blankly, then closed it. I kept hearing Mr Savo saying, 'Crazy world, Cockeyed.' I began to wander aimlessly through the rooms of the apartment. My hands were freezing. I went out onto the porch, sat in the lounge chair, and stared across the yard at the alantus. Its leaves were bathed in sunlight, and its musky odor reached me faintly in the breeze that blew against the back of the house. Something moved faintly across the edge of the field of vision of my left eye, but I ignored it and kept staring at the sunlight on the alantus leaves. It moved again, and I heard a faint buzzing sound. I turned my head and looked at the wooden rail of the porch. A spider had spun a web across the corner of the upper rail, and there was a housefly trapped in it now, its wings spread-eagled, glued to the strands of the web, its legs flaying the air frantically. I saw its black body arching wildly, and then it managed to get its wings free, and there was the buzzing sound again as the wings struggled to free the body to

which they were attached. Then the wings were trapped again by the filmy, almost invisible strands of the web, and the black legs kicked at the air. I saw the spider, a small, gray, furry-looking spider, with long, wispy legs and black eyes, move across the web toward the fly. I rose from the chair and went over to the web. The fly's tiny black legs flayed the air fiercely, then its wings were free again, buzzing noisily, but its body remained glued fast. I bent and blew hard against the web. It swayed, but remained intact. I blew again, harder now, and the strands seemed suddenly to melt. The fly fell on its back to the wooden floor of the porch, righted itself, then flew off, buzzing loudly. The spider tumbled from the broken web, hung by a single strand a few inches above the floor, then swiftly climbed the strand, scrambled across the top front rail of the porch, and disappeared. I went back to the lounge chair, sat down, and continued to stare at the sunlight on the alantus.

Danny and I were together almost every day during the first month of that summer. It was a hot, humid month, with a fierce summer sun that left a heat shimmer over the streets and softened the asphalt. Manya was forever muttering about the streaks of black tar that clung to my shoes and sneakers and rubbed off on the floor of the apartment.

Danny spent his mornings studying Talmud, either alone or with his father, while I spent Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings playing ball with my yeshiva friends, none of whom seemed to be bothered by my friendship with Danny – they accepted it and just didn't talk about it – and Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday mornings studying Talmud with my father, either on our back porch when it was a nice day or in his study when it was not. My father and I were studying *Sanhedrin* – slowly, patiently, intensively, not leaving a passage until my father was satisfied that, at least for the present, we understood it fully. Often, we were only able to do about ten lines at a time. Danny, on the other hand, had his daily Talmud goal increased to three blat by his father. It didn't seem to affect him very much; he was still able to spend all his afternoons on the third floor of the library, reading. I joined him there every afternoon, and frequently my father came with me. He was writing another article, on a passage in *Avodah Zarah*, which, he said, he was only now beginning to understand, and he needed one of the journal collections. So the three of us sat there in the afternoons, reading or talking quietly, until it was time for supper. Once I invited Danny to come home and eat with us, but he refused the invitation with a lame excuse, looking a little embarrassed. On our way home, my father told me that Danny probably didn't eat anywhere except in his own home, or in the home of one of his father's

followers, because of kashruth, and that it would be wise for me not to embarrass him again with another invitation.

On Shabbat afternoons I would walk to Danny's house. Danny would take me up to his father's study, and we would all do battle again over the Talmud. Then would come the glass of tea, the Afternoon Service, the ritual of the contest – Danny didn't once miss finding his father's deliberate errors – the Evening Service, and the Havdalah. Reb Saunders didn't talk to me again about Danny's reading, but I knew he was bothered by it terribly. I could tell from the occasional silence that filled the study while Danny would be downstairs getting the tea. And Danny didn't talk about it, either. He just went on reading.

Only the evenings were unscheduled. We sort of played them by ear, as Mr Galanter might have said, deciding during the afternoon whether we would spend the evening walking, or in my house or his, or alone. Often, I went to the movies either with my father or with some of my school friends. Danny never went to the movies. They were forbidden by his father, he said.

My father and I followed the war news very carefully, and there were now many more *New York Times* maps on the wall of my room. From the fourth to the tenth of July there was a violent battle in the La-Haye-du-Puits area. A panzer counter-attack west of the Viré was smashed on the eleventh of July, but the American drive toward St-Lô was stopped by German parachute corps. Caen was finally captured, and then on the eighteenth of July St-Lô fell. A war correspondent triumphantly announced that the lodgements area from which the Allied Armies would soon launch their major offensive into the heart of occupied France was now adequate and secure.

My father and I listened to the news broadcasts, read the *Times*, and studied the maps. It seemed to us that, despite the many announcements of victories, the war was going very slowly. My father looked grim as he studied the war maps that showed the Allied advance between D-day and the third week of July. Then the weather in France changed, and the war seemed to have come to a complete halt, swallowed by endless rain.

In the beginning of the third week of July, my father's research for the article he was writing made it necessary for him to travel

to the library of the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan. There were manuscripts there which he needed for the purpose of checking variant readings of the Talmudic passage on which he was working. So every day that week right after lunch he took the subway to Manhattan, and I went alone to the library to be with Danny. That was the week Danny began to read Freud in German.

It was difficult for him at first, and he admitted it openly. Not only was the language still a problem but also the terminology and ideas he encountered were strange and bewildering to him. This wasn't Graetz on Jewish history, he told me, or Minkin on Hasidism, or Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Dreiser, and Dickens. It wasn't even the Ogden and Flügel psychology books he had been reading. This was primary source material, research papers based on direct experimental data, involved theoretical constructions utilizing a complex vocabulary and containing a wealth of original ideas – and he was breaking his head on it.

I listened to him talk and felt a little awed by it all. Five or so weeks ago, he had talked of the unconscious and of dreams almost as a child talks about his first tricycle. Now he was talking about direct experimental data and involved theoretical constructions.

He spent the first part of that third week in July leafing through a collection of Freud's writings – to get a taste of the material, he said – while I sat opposite him, trying to make my way through the first volume of *Principia Mathematica* and finally giving it up as too difficult and setting for a rereading of the article my math teacher had recommended in the *Journal of Symbolic Logic* – it was called 'Conditions Affecting the Application of Symbolic Logic', and I understood it a lot better this time – and for a book on logic by Susanne K. Langer. The first sections of the book were a little too easy for me, but the final chapter on logistics, in which she showed how *Principia Mathematica* provides a basis from which the concepts, operations, and relations of arithmetic and other branches of mathematics may be derived, I found to be very exciting.

By Thursday, Danny's side of the table was piled high with books, and he was looking thoroughly unhappy. He was sitting there, twisting an earlock and biting his lower lip, his face a mask

of frustration. It was impossible, he said finally. The whole thing was ridiculous and impossible; he wasn't getting anywhere. It wasn't so much the German itself anymore as the technical terminology. He wasn't making any headway at all. Not only that, but he had begun to use English translations of the German works he had been reading, and they did nothing but confuse him even more. He showed me where in one translation the German word 'Unlist' had been translated as 'pain', in quotation marks, and the word 'Schmerz' had been translated as 'pain', without quotation marks. How was he supposed to know what the translator had had in mind when he had used 'pain' with and 'pain' without quotation marks? And look at the word 'Besetzung', he said angrily. What did it mean to translate it as 'investment' or 'charge'? And what good did it do to translate it as 'cathexis'? What did 'cathexis' mean? 'Angst' was 'anxiety', 'Furcht' was 'fear', 'Schreck' was 'fright'. How was he supposed to know what the difference between 'fear' and 'fright' was? He wasn't getting anywhere, he would probably have to drop the whole thing; who did he think he was anyway trying to read Freud at the age of fifteen? He went home angry and disgusted, his face a picture of bewildered frustration.

When I got to Danny's house that Shabbat afternoon, I found him in an ugly mood. He was waiting for me outside. He greeted me with a curt nod of his head and muttered something about not really being in the mood for Talmud now but we had to go up anyway. He was very quiet during the first few minutes of the Talmud battle, and though I tried to make up for his silence by increasing the volume of my own enthusiasm, I could see that Reb Saunders was becoming more and more annoyed by his son's lack of participation. Danny was tense and edgy, his face still masked by frustration, his mind obviously not on what we were discussing. He's probably eating himself up alive over Freud, I thought, hoping his father wouldn't lose his temper. But Reb Saunders remained patient and left his son alone.

In the middle of a heated debate over an impossible passage in Kiddushin I heard Danny take a sudden loud breath, as if he had been punched in the stomach. Reb Saunders and I broke off our discussion and looked at him. He was staring down at the Talmud,

and smiling. His face had come to life, and there was a light in his eyes. He jumped up from his chair, circled the room, then sat down again, and Reb Saunders and I just sat there, staring at him. Something is the matter? Reb Saunders wanted to know. There is a joke in the Talmud we did not see? What was so funny? Danny shook his head, still smiling, bent over the Talmud, and began to give his version of the passage. His voice trembled a little. There was a pause when he finished, and I thought for a moment that Reb Saunders would again ask his son what had been so funny. Instead, I heard him sigh a little, then offer a passage from the *Baba Bathra* that contradicted Danny's explanation. We returned to the battle, and Danny more than made up for his previous silence.

He was quiet as he walked me part of the way home that night, and when we got to the synagogue where my father and I prayed he muttered something about seeing me in the library the next day, then turned and went quickly back.

When I got to the library the next afternoon, I found him seated at his table. There were three books open in front of him. He smiled broadly and waved me to a chair. He had worked out a method of doing Freud, he said, and it seemed to be going all right, so far. He pointed to the three books. One was a volume of Freud's early papers, he told me. Some of them Freud had written together with Josef Breuer, a Viennese physician; others he had written alone. Another was the Cassell's German-English Dictionary. The third was a dictionary of psychological terms edited by someone called Warren. The Freud volume was open to a paper entitled 'Ein Fall Von Hypnotischer Heilung'. Fall meant 'case', he said. The rest of the title I could figure out for myself from my Yiddish, he told me.

'I forgot what it was like to study Talmud,' he said excitedly. 'Talmud is so easy for me now, I don't remember what I used to go through when I first started it as a kid. Can you study Talmud without the commentaries? Imagine Talmud without Rashi. How far would you get?'

I agreed with him that I wouldn't get very far at all.

He had been going at it all wrong, he said, his eyes bright with excitement. He had wanted to read Freud. That had been his

mistake. Freud had to be *studied*, not read. He had to be studied like a page of Talmud. And he had to be studied with a commentary.

But Danny didn't know of any commentaries on Freud, so he had settled for the next best thing. He had needed something that would explain Freud's technical terminology, that would clarify the various shades of meaning the German words had – and he had found this dictionary of psychological terms. He was reading Freud now sentence by sentence. He didn't go on to the next sentence until the prior sentence was perfectly clear in his mind. If he came across a German word he did not know, he looked up its English meaning in the Cassell's. If the Cassell's gave him a translation he didn't understand, one that wouldn't fit the meaning of the sentence, he looked the English word up in the psychology dictionary. That psychological dictionary was his commentary. It had, for example, already explained to him the technical difference between 'fear' and 'fright'. It had also explained the term 'cathexis'. It was working. He had already studied two and half pages that afternoon.

Was Freud worth all that effort? I wanted to know.

Freud was a genius, Danny told me. Of course he was worth all that effort. Was symbolic logic worth all my effort?

I had nothing to say to that, except admit that he was probably right.

So I continued reading the Langer book, while Danny bent over the table studying Freud. He shuffled pages impatiently whenever he had to look something up in one of his dictionaries. The sounds of the shuffling pages were loud in the silence of the library.

On Thursday, I told him that my father and I would be leaving next Tuesday morning for the cottage near Peekskill where we always stayed in August, and I gave him two books I thought he might like to read. One was *The Making of the Modern Jew* by Milton Steinberg, the other was *The Thirteen Letters of Ben Uzziel* by Samson Raphael Hirsch. He thanked me and said he would read them. When my father and I left for Peekskill on Tuesday morning, Danny had completed the first paper and was started on the second, entitled '*Die Abwehr-Neuropsychose*'.

We had agreed not to write to each other – probably out of an unspoken feeling that two boys our age writing one another when we were only going to be separated for a month was a little childish – and I didn't see him again until after Labor Day.

My father and I returned home the day after Labor Day, and I called Danny immediately. His mother answered and told me she was delighted I had had a good vacation but she was sorry, Danny wasn't home, he had gone with his father to visit a family friend in Lakewood. Danny called me later that evening, happy to hear I was back. He had missed me, he said. How was the trip to Lakewood? I wanted to know. Miserable, he said. Had I ever sat in a bus with my father for hours and not exchanged a single word of conversation, except for a short discussion about a passage of Talmud? No, I told him quietly, I had never had that kind of experience. I always talked to my father. I was lucky, he said. I didn't know how really lucky I was, he added, a little bitterly.

We chatted for a while, and agreed to meet in the library the following afternoon. I found him at his table, looking a little pale, but happy. His tufts of beard had grown a bit thicker, he blinked his eyes a little too often, as if weary from all his reading, but otherwise he was the same, everything was the same, and it was as though we had not seen each other for, at most, a single night of dream-filled sleep. Yes, he had read the two books I had given him. They had been very good, and he had learned a lot from them about the problems of contemporary Judaism. His father had thrown some poisonous looks at him when he had taken them into the house, but the looks had disappeared when Danny had somehow gotten up the courage to tell him that the books had come from Reuven Malter. He would give them back to me tomorrow. He had also read a great deal of Freud, he said. He had finished almost all of the first volume, and he wanted to talk to me about a paper of Freud's called '*Die Sexualität in der Atiologie der Neurosen*'. It had been something of a shock to him to read that, he said, and he had no one else to talk to about it except me, he didn't want to discuss it with my father. I said fine, we could talk about it on Shabbat when I came over to his house.

But somehow we never got around to talking about it that

Shabbat, and on Sunday morning we were both back in school again. The year – the real year of a person going to school – began and for a long while I had no time at all to think about, let alone discuss, the writings of Sigmund Freud.

Chapter II

For the first two months of that school year, Danny and I were able to get together regularly only on Shabbat afternoons. Only once did we manage to see each other during the week. I had been elected president of my class, and I found myself suddenly involved in student politics. The evenings that I might have spent with Danny I spent instead at student council or committee meetings. We talked frequently by phone, though, and neither of us felt our friendship was suffering any. But we never got around to discussing what he was reading in Freud.

During November, I managed to go over to his house one evening in the middle of the week. I brought him half a dozen books on Jewish subjects that my father had suggested he read, and he thanked me for them gratefully. He looked a little weary, but otherwise he was fine – except for his eyes, which tired easily, he said. He had been to a doctor, but he didn't need glasses, so everything was really all right. I asked him how he was coming along with Freud, and he said, looking uncomfortable, that he was rarely in the library these days, there was too much school-work, but he did manage to read a little of Freud now and then, and it had become very upsetting.

'One of these days I want to have a long talk with you about it,' he told me, blinking his eyes.

But we had no real opportunity for any long talk. The Shabbat day grew shorter and shorter, my schoolwork seemed endless, and student politics took up every moment of my spare time.

And then, in the middle of December, just when it seemed that the war would be over very soon, the Germans launched a major offensive in the Ardennes region, and the Battle of the Bulge began. There were reports of frightful American casualties

— some newspaper said that two thousand American soldiers were being killed and wounded every day.

It was a cold, bitter winter in New York, bleak with the news of the fighting in the Ardennes, and at night, as I sat working at my desk, I could hear the radio in the kitchen where my father would be sitting with his war maps following the news.

The Battle of the Bulge ended about the middle of January, with the newspapers reporting seventy-seven thousand Allied casualties and one hundred twenty thousand German casualties.

Throughout the entire month of that battle — from the middle of December to the middle of January — I did not see Danny once. We spoke on the phone a few times; he told me his brother was sick again and might have to spend some time in a hospital. But the next time I called him his brother was all right — the doctor had changed his pills, Danny said, and that seemed to work. He sounded tired and sad, and once or twice I could barely hear his voice over the phone. The Battle of the Bulge? Yes, he said vaguely, a terrible business. When was I coming over to see him? As soon as I could breathe a little, I said. He said not to wait too long, he needed to talk to me. Was it very important? I wanted to know. No, it could wait, it wasn't very important, he said, sounding sad.

So it waited. It waited through my midyear exams and through the first two weeks of February, when I managed to get to Danny's house twice and we fought our customary Talmud battles together with his father but didn't get a chance to be alone long enough for us to talk. And then the news of the war in Europe suddenly reached a peak of feverish excitement. The Russians captured Königsberg and Breslau and came within thirty miles of Berlin, and at the end of the first week in March American troops reached the Rhine River at Remagen and discovered, to their astonishment, that the Ludendorff Bridge had, for some reason, not been destroyed by the Germans. My father almost wept with joy when we heard the news. There had been talk of bloody battles and high casualties in crossing the Rhine. Instead, American troops poured across the bridge, the Remagen beach-head was quickly enlarged and held against German counter-attacks — and everyone began to talk of the war ending in two months.

My father and I were overjoyed, and even Danny, whom I saw again in the middle of March and who generally took little interest in the details of the war, began to sound excited.

'It is the end of Hitler, may his name and memory be erased,' Reb Saunders said to me that Shabbat afternoon. 'Master of the Universe, it has taken so long, but now the end is here.'

And he trembled as he said it and was almost in tears.

Danny caught the flu in the last week of March and was in bed for more than a week. During that time, the Saar and Silesia were taken, the Ruhr was encircled by American troops, and another bridgehead was formed across the Rhine by soldiers of General Patton's army. Almost every day now there were rumors that the war had ended. But each rumor proved to be false and did nothing but add to the already intolerable anxiety and suspense my father and I were feeling as we read the papers and listened to the radio.

Danny returned to school at the end of the first week in April, apparently too soon, for he was back in bed two days later with bronchitis. I called his mother to ask if I could visit him, but she said no, he was too sick, and besides what he had was contagious, even his brother and sister weren't permitted into his room. I asked if I could speak to him, but she told me he was running a high fever and could not leave his bed to come to the phone. She sounded worried. He was coughing a great deal, she told me, and was exhausted from the sulfa he was taking. Yes, she would give him my wishes for his speedy recovery.

On the Thursday afternoon of the second week in April, I was sitting at a meeting of the student council. The meeting had started pleasantly enough with the usual reading of the minutes and committee reports, when Davey Cantor burst into the room, looking as though he was crying, and shouted breathlessly that someone had just told him President Roosevelt was dead.

He was standing by the door of the classroom, and there was a sudden movement of heads as everyone turned and gaped at him in total astonishment. I had been in the middle of a sentence, and I turned, too, remaining on my feet next to my desk, and I heard myself saying angrily that he had a hell of a nerve barging in here like that, he wasn't being one bit funny.