

Please Contact:

Sidney Goldberg
20 West Palisade Avenue #3120
Englewood, NJ 07631
201-567-6533
Sidneyg6@gmail.com
www.sidneygoldbergwriter.com

Dedication

This book is dedicated to the memories of my mother Anna, (Gitel in the book) my father Abie, (Harry) my sister Rebecca (Rhoda) and my brother Lenny (Benny) who I will love and miss forever. May, they rest in peace.
Sidney Goldberg.

Chapter 1

Worming his little tongue over his toothless, mushy gums while daydreaming about mean-old Miss Conklin, anxiety-ridden, five-year old Eli Greenwald sat making doody. Taking a deep breath, the boy held it until his face turned red and just as he was about to burst, fast as he could, he blinked his left eye four times and his right eye twice and no matter what time of day, he'd hear the Brown Bomber, Joe Louis, the best friend a kid ever had faintly rap on his bathroom door. Masking his excitement, Eli casually responded, "Who is it?"

"Who's your best buddy?" Joe whispered through the closed door in his deep voice, making certain not to awaken the rest of Eli's family. "Ready or not, here I is." Entering the olive-green, 5'x6' sink-less bathroom that felt like the steam baths in Coney Island, Joe Louis, duplicating Eli's secret blinking-Morse code, blinked his left eye four times and his right eye twice. Tossing his towel and battered boxing gloves to Eli, Joe stepped from the small, white-tiled bathroom floor into its undersized tub.

A red Chinese paper lantern hung from the ceiling, sweating as though it were a fashionable thing to do. Its light, softening Eli's secret meeting place with a warm incandescence, accented the Brown Bomber's rugged face. When the greatest heavyweight champ that ever lived took Eli's sitting left jab to the belly and landed against the tiled bathtub wall, Eli grinned. Momentarily stunned, Joe recovered and

threw a powerful right cross which Eli blocked effortlessly. Nodding his approval, when Joe smiled the brilliance of his magnificent white teeth made Eli's face light up.

"Don't worry Joe, they won't find out that you're my very best friend," the boy shouted.

"Shhh," the mighty Joe Louis whispered as he placed his long, dark index finger over his full lips. "Remember, we don't want anyone to find out 'bout our secret meeting place, do we?"

"I know you're in training champ, but I just had to talk to you," groaned the wide-eyed Eli. "Ya see, starting kindergarten today, I think it's a big waste and besides, do you know who I got? I got mean old Miss Conklin. She hits kids that talk too much with a gigantic wooden ruler on the tush. And just look at my teeth. How am I going to be able to face an audience with no teeth?" he whispered dejectedly... And, I heard about that shot you once gave Schmelling. I bet that was the hardest punch ever thrown Joe. I wish I was just like you," the boy sighed.

Suddenly, he realized that the perennial drip from the overhead water tank had just about drenched his best shirt. Having been distracted, little Eli had forgotten to lean to the left as he was making doody. Wearing his best friend's boxing gloves, Eli shifted quickly.

"Nice move Greenwald" the Brown Bomber noted his approval.

Eli stared at the overhead water-tank with disgust. Wiping the droplets from his head

on his already wet sleeve, the boy sang, "Though April show-ers, may come your w-a-a-y. They bring the flow-ers, that bloom in M-a-a-y"...

"You can move and you can sure sing and you sure got talent Eli," Joe Louis whispered. "Don't you worry 'bout mean old Miss Conklin or anything else. Ev'rything's gonna turn out fine. One day, you'll be as famous as Frank Sinatra."

"Gee, do you really think so?"

Grinning, the Brown Bomber nodded yes.

"I knew I could count on you," Eli whispered. "I know you have to get going and so do I. I think it's time I met old Miss Conklin." Returning the battered boxing gloves and towel, Eli saddened.

"Listen big fella, I have to go to Chicago tomorrow morning, but if you need me, you know what to do," he said grinning. Stepping from the bathtub, the Brown Bomber patted Eli on the head and continued, "I know you think the world is resting on your shoulders, but take it from your good buddy, things could be much worse. Why I still can hear my mammy saying, 'just imagine a gigantic flea market where everybody gets the chance to swap their troubles for somebody else's. You know what? After seeing everyone else's problems, no one wanted to trade.'" Now, as far as mean old Conklin is concerned, just be yourself and she will love you just as much as I do."

Ready to face the day, Eli blinked his left eye four times and right eye twice, took a deep breath and just as he was about to burst, the greatest heavy weight champion that

ever lived was gone.

Through the tiny window that faced a soot-filled airshaft, Eli saw the sun ablaze, reminding him that the bathroom was stifling hot. After wiping himself and then the perspiration on his brow, he stood on the toilet seat and pulled the not-so-long chain. A moment later, he entered the kitchen and proceeded to wash in its white porcelain sink.

His multi-talented father Harry had recently painted the kitchen canary yellow, complimenting the white cotton curtains with tiny red roses that were hanging in its solitary window. On the opposite wall, beneath a large kitchen clock, the word *'Shalom'* was embossed in gold leaf upon a small wooden mounting. Plus a brass Jewish star and a ceramic wall hanging stuffed with artificial daisies acted as its focal point.

Ever-so-pregnant Gitel was preparing oatmeal as Eli continued to wash up in the sink that had more chips in it than Monte Carlo had. Hurriedly opening the faded refrigerator door, Gitel removed a bottle of milk and some lightly salted butter. Seeing that her son had finished washing, she greeted him. "Eli, you look so handsome. 'Oy,' I see you forgot to lean. You're all wet again," she woefully observed. Don't worry, I'll get your other shirt in a second." Racing back to the four-burner stove that was wedged in a corner, stirring the oatmeal, Gitel gazed at her beloved son.

"Good morning Mama," Eli responded, taking his customary seat upon one of four red-and-black folding chairs that surrounded a cream colored enamel table, protected by a red-and-white table cloth, that was edged in a black, curlicue border.

"Good morning my sweet *'buhbala,'* my darling," Gitel continued enthusiastically. I heard you singing. Just like Jolson, I'm telling you. Just like Jolson. Here, start with your toast and cocoa," she said hurrying off! "Aren't you glad papa got you another shirt last week? I'll give you your oatmeal in a second."

Nibbling on the slice of toast, Eli thoughts turned to the words of his best pal, the Brown Bomber. Seeing how lucky he was having a spare shirt to face mean old Miss Conklin, he would not change places with any of his friends, except the ones that had all their teeth.

Gitel trudged back with Eli's other shirt just as the boy had finished his slice of well-buttered toast. Because it was hot and humid, with his left arm sticking to the red-and-white-checkered plastic tablecloth, Eli whined, "Mama, they made a mistake."

"Tell me my darling," she said sympathetically, "Who made a mistake again?"

"Doesn't it feel like it's a 100 degrees Mama?"

"I'm sorry it is so hot sweetheart."

"Doesn't it feel like its still summer? Well, school's supposed to start after summer Mama."

"I know, but what can we do? Here, change your shirt and eat your oatmeal. It's not lumpy. Just the way you like it. Finish eating. I don't want my Eli to be late on the first day of kindergarten."

Sprinkling brown sugar on his dish of oatmeal, Eli ate quickly as he watched his

mother try to wedge a brown paper-bag over-flowing with garbage into the dumbwaiter that was located above the kitchen table.

Having finished eating, he kissed his mother and also the '*mezuzah*' that was nailed to the doorpost. Running off, Eli said, "Goodbye mama, see you later."

Sitting on two over-stuffed garbage cans outside his red-brick tenement the boy met Jimmy Ryan, whom he knew went to Our Lady of Victory church every Sunday and Michael Margarian, the oily skinned Armenian. Jimmy Ryan had thin red hair, green eyes, and lots of freckles and was about four inches taller than Eli. Michael the Armenian had thick black wavy hair, dark brown eyes, and besides his oily skin, thin lips that complimented his amazing ethnic attribute, his enormous nose. Although they were not Jewish and were entering the first grade, they were the only two kids on the block with whom Eli played.

All the way to P.S. 42, the three of them ignored the sweltering heat and skipped over the cobblestone streets, kicking bottle tops, empty beer cans and anything kickable. Coming to Webster Avenue they stopped kicking to wave to a passing trolley. Seeing a trolley had always made Eli want to sing, but he was wise enough not to do so in front of his two '*goyishe*' friends because they would probably blackmail him sometime in the near future.

Gitel had secretly given Jimmy Ryan two cents to escort her beloved son Eli to his kindergarten classroom that morning. Having entered P.S. 42, freckles and the Armenian

deemed their two cents obligation fulfilled. Starting to depart as Eli readied to open the door to his classroom and face the teacher that hit kids across their tush with a huge wooden ruler, Jimmy jeered, "Hey mocky, want to play 'Kick the Can' with us after school?"

"I told you," the broken-hearted boy responded, "I won't play with you if you keep calling me mocky. My name is Eli Greenwald and even if I do decide to play 'Kick the Can,' I'm not going to be 'IT' all the time!"

"Never happen shrimp," Michael joined in, "You're always 'IT.'"

"Oh yeah? Didn't I just beat you in marbles, Oily?"

"Just like all the Kikes, you were lucky," the Armenian quipped.

"Says who?"

"We do midget," they growled. "Ya playing?"

"Maybe."

Ryan and Margarian stared at Eli, who in turn defiantly returned their gaze. Hating the only two boys he played with more than anything else in the whole world, Eli wanted to tell them to go-fly-a-kite, because his best friend was the heavyweight champion of the world. But sworn to secrecy, the boy remained silent as his 'Kick the Can' compatriots departed.

Gathering his composure, Eli entered his classroom, which he noticed was painted an institutional gray. On its walls were pictures of Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and

Jack and Jill, and letters of the alphabet were printed on oak-tag placards. Sitting around five wooden tables with their arms folded, Eli spied twenty or so unknown and frightened little classmates. He assumed they too had heard about mean-old Miss Conklin.

The blackboard had letters written on it which he assumed were his teacher's name. After pretending to read this, he faced the graying, bespectacled mean-old Miss Conklin and said, "Good morning Miss Conklin. My name is Eli Greenwald and just as soon as I'm old enough, I'm going to sing at the Copacabana."

Smiling, mean-old Miss Conklin responded, "Nice to meet you too Eli Greenwald. And until you become a famous singer, you may sit in front of my desk."

In less than two weeks, mean old Miss Conklin, a veteran of 31 years of teaching was happily astonished to discover that Eli had the most extensive vocabulary she had ever come across in a five year old.

After listening to his incessant verbalizations for an additional month, mean old Conklin informed Eli that, come Monday, he was going to be skipped to the first grade. Eli was ecstatic. He was anxious to hear his parents say how proud they were of him when he told them of his good fortune. He couldn't wait to tell the only two kids he played with on his block that since he was also in the first grade, just like them, he definitely wasn't going to be 'IT' all the time. But most of all he wanted to see the look on his sister, Rhoda's face. She'd finally have to admit that he was smarter. He had never understood her thinking in the first place. He was older, wasn't he?

The day Eli transferred to Jimmy Ryan and Michael Margarian's first grade class was the last day they ever asked Eli to play 'Kick the Can,' 'Ringalevio,' 'Potsy,' or anything else. When it became apparent that Eli had become the class favorite, Freckles and Oily swallowed their pride asked Eli to join them in a game of 'Kick the Can,' with Jimmy volunteering to be 'IT' the first game. It was an offer Eli couldn't refuse. Relying on all his pent-up anger, Eli started the game by kicking the can as hard as he could.

Unfortunately, he slipped as he kicked-the-can and it barely went five feet. Ryan laughed as he casually picked it up and tagged a disgusted Eli who had forgotten to run after his apparent failure. Angered by Ryan's cackling, Eli ran and kicked the can out of Jimmy's hand. The can flew, bounced off the cobblestone street and under a parked car. Eli had ascertained that Jimmy was 'IT' for nearly six minutes, before Jimmy tagged him. The boy was even more amazed when Margarian volunteered to be 'IT' the next game.

Quicker than Ryan, Oily tagged Eli in thirty-nine seconds.

"Okay smart boy," Ryan taunted. "Now, you're 'IT!'"

"And you're gonna be 'IT' 'til it gets dark," the Armenian added.

"I don't want to play," Eli announced to their astonishment.

"What do you mean you don't want to play? It's your turn to be 'IT,'" Michael roared.

"Play without me," Eli said departing. "I have to go."

"Where ya going Jew boy? Gonna play with those other Heebz in our class?" taunted Jimmy Ryan.

"They're not all Jewish," Eli shouted as he walked a way. "But they are all nice. Much nicer than you, so there!"

Passing old toothless Tony's newsstand on the way home from school, Eli stopped to skim through a Captain Marvel comic book. Before he was halfway through his comic book, it hit him: he'd have no use for "See Jack Run and See Jane Walk" as a famous singer.

Noticing little star-struck Eli turning the pages of his comic-book rather listlessly, toothless Tony hawked the headline plastered across the Daily News: "HITLER MURDERS JEWS!"

Eli shuddered as toothless Tony's epithet took hold. He thanked God that his family was still alive and that he was fortunate enough to live in the Bronx. After thanking Tony for the free look-see, the boy continued home.

Spotting a lonely beer can lying in the gutter, he proceeded to kick it to Webster Avenue where he stopped and waited for a trolley to pass. Having learned from the best pal a kid ever had how to look at the brighter side of things, Eli was elated that his two '*Goyishe*' friends no longer accompanied him to and from school, because when the trolley sped by he waved and sang, "Toot, Toot, Toot-sie, Good-bye. Toot, Toot, Toot-sie, Don't cry."

Upon entering his red brick tenement, besides being overwhelmed by the smell of garlic emanating from Garcia's ground floor apartment, walking up to the second floor

Eli detected a strange urgency in his father's yell. Papa must have heard about Hitler, the boy surmised. "Maybe we're the only Jews left," he thought with breathless apprehension. "5,000 years ago, when Abraham, the father of our people walked across the burning sands in the ancient city of Ur, preaching there's only one God to a village of idol worshipers, Abraham didn't seem to mind the responsibility or the heat given to him," Eli thought, "I bet that Abraham was the kind-of-guy that liked all that responsibility. And when God entrusted the Ten Commandments to Moses, even Moses never said, 'Sorry God, too much responsibility Big Fella.' Between 'See Jack Run and See Jane Walk', my up-and-coming singing career and now that Hitler-guy, I really don't need anything else to worry about. And just my luck, it looks like mama, papa, my sister Rhoda and me are-- The Chosen. Chosen, for what? He wondered, holding his breath. "Too bad I'm not making doody," he thought as he entered his apartment that Friday afternoon. "I wish my best friend was here. He'd know how to handle that Hitler."

With a child due any moment, albeit *'Ehrev Shabbos,'* Gitel was on her hands and knees, *'shushkering'* and scrubbing her faded orange-and-green linoleum kitchen floor. Whenever she prayed to God, she did it through her muffled, moaning sounds. According to Gitel, a prayer had to be offered for everything one received, and *'shushkering'* was her way of saying thank you to her Savior.

Her baby, wanting her to know that it was eager to show its face, gave her a quick kick in the ribs, making all 4'9" of her see stars. Struggling to her feet because her

kidneys had been activated, she *'shushkered'* and waddled as fast as she could to that 5'x6' bathroom. Later, she was seen smiling through her *'shushker'* as she resumed scrubbing the worn kitchen floor.

"What the hell were you thanking him for in the toilet?" Harry howled. "What did he give you in there that I don't know about?"

5'3" Harry was dressed in his infamous lounge wear: black anklet socks, size 34 black pants, a torn undershirt and a black fedora with its brim turned down. Impatiently waiting to resume his work, he was standing on one of those shaky folding chairs. "You missed by the refrigerator," he said pointing. "And you have to scrub a little harder in front of the door."

"Since you have such good eyes" declared Gitel, "Why don't you wash the floor?"

"All right. Stop *'kvetching.'* You're giving me a headache," he moaned. Deeming himself to be a considerate Elixihente, inserting his index and middle fingers into his mouth, he whistled three short blasts, which denoted his approval. In turn, Gitel gratefully struggled to her feet.

Upon completion of his deft appraisal, again Harry realized that he was trapped in the middle of the wet kitchen floor. Although he spied Eli looking at him from his bedroom, Harry yelled, "RHODA!" demanding that his skinny little daughter appear. The girl possessed a fair complexion, a cute nose, full lips that exposed her slightly bucked-teeth when she smiled and a pixie haircut that looked like it always needed "pixying." Wiping

the tears from her dark-brown-terrified eyes, she looked up at her father who roared,

"What are you doing in there?"

"I was reading papa," she timidly responded.

"Reading? You're not supposed to be able to read yet. You're not even in kindergarten like Eli. Stop reading and help your poor pregnant mother spread the newspaper on the wet floor, or I'll be stuck here for the rest of my life."

Although everyone on the Greenwald reserve knew that men never did housework, aware that his father would not stop *'kvetching'* until the entire floor was bedecked with newspaper, Eli, who felt he was at least, if not more considerate than his father, pitched-in and helped Rhoda spread the newspaper.

With his vivid imagination suddenly focusing on toothless Tony's stirring rendition of "Hitler Murders Jews," upon completion of their spreading the newspaper over the freshly mopped floor, Eli invited his cry-baby sister to play a game of pick-up sticks in his room. Wiping her reddened eyes, she half-heartedly exposed her slightly bucked-teeth and followed him to where she had rarely ventured: Eli's bedroom.

Despite the fact that all kid brothers hate all kid sisters, especially ones that can read, and since his know-it-all sister didn't know that Hitler had just about killed every Jew, and that they were now the CHOSEN, it was up to him to make her as happy as he could for as long as they had to live.

The week before his last 'Kick the Can' game, using his Black-Beauty, Eli had

miraculously won 57 marbles from greasy Margarian. Determined to keep his Black-Beauty safe, he had kept it hidden since that blessed event. Since it was his all-time-lucky-shooter, he had never intended to let anyone even, look at it much less hold it.

Exposing his secret hiding place, which was in the bottom drawer of his wooden dresser. He determined it was just one more sacrifice he would have to make for his sister.

"Here, you can hold my Black-Beauty, but you better not rub it too hard and don't stare at it too long! Staring can throw it off!"

"That's the nicest thing you've ever done," Rhoda swooned. "You are so sweet."

Noticing how appreciative she had suddenly become, the boy went all out. "Hey smarty-pants, you can go first if you want," he said handing her the pick-up sticks.

Clutching them, the frail girl closed her eyes and did a Gitel. She *'shushkered'* to slaughter her unknowing brother and then hopefully for her father to finally get a job like all the other fathers. Opening her little hand, she coaxed the pick-up sticks to spread across Eli's worn, dark-blue linoleum floor.

"It was one of those lucky throws that skinny kid sisters get when they are out to show-up their one and only sympathetic brother," rued Eli.

The only stick that one could use to manipulate the others was the elusive black, which was worth 50 points. As *'shushkering'* would have it, blackie was lying all by it's

lonesome. Defiantly, Rhoda picked it up and proceeded to remove 33 multicolored sticks in a row. 17 more and she would have them all.

Certain that no one had ever gotten all in one shot, and even though he was a year older, Eli worried that his ungrateful kid sister was ready to do it to him. To make things even worse, she could read and he couldn't.

Rhoda had that getting-him-back look and Eli didn't know why. The thought of his new-found friends in the first grade finding out about Rhoda's new world pick-up stick record began to torment him. He remembered when Moses prayed for a miracle and how Pharaoh had freed his people as the Dead Sea parted. He too prayed for one last miracle-- a power failure, a volcanic eruption, anything that would prevent his snot-nosed sister from setting a new pick-up stick world record, when Gitel cried out in her little voice for all to hear, "Excuse the expression, but I just broke my water."

Instantly, Harry shrieked, "The both of you better get in here right a way! MAMA BROKE HER WATER!"

Jumping to her feet, a frightened Rhoda asked, "You think mama peed and papa wants me to get the mop?"

"Maybe," Eli replied as they started to run. "And where am I going to find more newspaper?"

"I hope it's nothing serious," gasped Rhoda.

Beside, being scared for his mother's well being, Eli was thankful, for he was

confident that mama's broken water had signaled the end of the misery his sister had been putting him through.

"She'll just have to find another brother to set the world record against," he thought, grinning.

In two seconds flat, Gitel was at the door waiting to say goodbye to her beloved children without the suitcase she had so carefully packed in anticipation of that very moment.

Harry, an old pro at having children, urged Gitel, "Come on, say goodbye and let's get going!"

Kissing and hugging her children in half-time Gitel whispered, "Don't worry my sweet darlings, with God's help, everything will be fine."

"Come on, come on," Harry said, grasping her arm. "Have you forgotten already, you broke your water. We have to get to the hospital!" Racing down the two flights of steps, he was heard yelling, "Take two steps at a time damn it!"

No sooner were they gone when Rhoda started crying again.

"Stop crying dummy! Can't you see you're wetting the floor again?" he warned, as he shifted some of the newly placed newspaper.

"Mama broke her water before she had the baby," cried Rhoda. "I hope nothing's wrong."

"You better stop crying," Eli again reminded. "I don't want to spend the rest of my

life spreading newspapers! It's not as though she broke her leg, God forbid... I used to pee in my pants too, but don't tell anybody," he whispered to his amazed sister. "So Mama had a little accident. I'm sure it's nothing."

"I hope so," pleaded the frightened little girl.

"Me too," Eli murmured. "So, ya still think you're smarter now?"

Uncertain what her response should be, grabbed her brother's hand and she tried to kiss him.

Miraculously eluding her puckered lips and slightly bucked teeth, he ran back into his room and came face to face once again with his impending disaster, the pick-up sticks. Just as Hitler had intended, he was certain it was going to be a slow death because he could feel her gloating as she stood behind him. Much to his surprise, Rhoda broke the deadly silence that had enveloped his private domain: the same one where Black Beauty had been safe for so long.

"I hope you don't mind Eli, but I don't feel like playing anymore," she said. "I'd rather finish reading Jack and Jill."

"I generally hate people who don't finish the games they go first in," Eli taunted. "But, being Mama broke her water, and with the baby coming, I'll forgive you this time, crybaby."

Before she could change her mind, he gathered the proof as quickly as his little hands would allow, and his thoughts turned to his mother with the broken water and the new

baby. "Sure I'd like to have a baby brother, but I better root for a girl 'cause if it's a boy, some day soon it will be sharing my room and my bed."

Since it had been the third time Harry was present when Gitel's dam had burst and since the Bronx Hospital was only ten blocks a way, taking the same steps that had worked so well earlier, Harry and his ever-pregnant wife ran all the way. Aware of Gitel's urgency, Harry was so intent on getting to the Hospital that he was two blocks a head of her before he noticed she was no where to be seen.

Twice before Gitel had been able to keep up with her speeding husband, but because her broken water made her legs stick together so unmercifully, she was slowed down greatly when she had raced back for the forgotten suitcase.

It must have taken her a good ten minutes to catch up with the father of her children, who greeted her with, "What took you so long? I've been waiting almost an hour."

Gasping for breath, Gitel didn't have the strength to explain her sticky legs or the suitcase she had gone back for. Apparently, Harry's noted concern for Gitel, the love of his life had little, if no effect on her.

Born on April 21, 1907, Gitel's feelings had been well worn by her father Mendel, who we will refer to as '*Zeyda*,' which in Yiddish means grandfather. He was six feet tall, thin, with an angular face that was completely submerged in a river of long, silvery-white hair. In the midst of this wiry glade were his little red lips, which always had one of his roll-your-own cigarettes, dangling. A long thin ash hung on, attached by

some miracle he alone performed. Upon his oversized nose rested small wire glasses.

Including her mother Pessie, who will be called '*Booba*' meaning grandmother, and her two older sisters, Rose and Dora, Gitel also worshipped the ground her holy father, '*Zeyda*' walked on.

In Poland they had lived in three rooms above the saloon '*Zeyda*' once owned. Lit by candle-light, the saloon contained several small, round oak tables and high-back chairs. All had been given by Loyke the carpenter. A small oil painting of the '*Torah*' hung above a highly polished mahogany bar where beer, wine and cognac flowed like milk and honey.

With most necessities hard to come by during that period, milk was impossible to get. Thus, '*Zeyda*' and '*Booba's*' children were weaned on beer. At night they cried because they were cold, because they wanted to be held by their holy father who was always talking to God; having the ability to converse with God at will, '*Zeyda*' had little need to converse with ordinary people; his children. Hungry and thirsty, his three daughters turned to their ever-satisfying bottle of beer.

'*Booba*,' who resembled a small, bosomy angel with kissable lips, thinly-etched wrinkles and sympathetic gray eyes that always twinkled, knew her three daughters were cold and hungry, but, like God, she too revered her husband who demanded absolute obedience.

So, '*Booba*' tended bar as '*Zeyda*' the '*Tsadik*,' the most revered, holy man in eastern

Europe, gave his daily discourse on what it means to be a good Jew. Beards from near and far came for their daily dose of beer and religion. Including 'Zeyda's' brilliant interpretations of the '*Talmud*,' his oversized nose was included in many a whisper heard in that small '*shtetl*' known as Bendine.

Eventually, even the most respected rabbis, from as far as Warsaw and Minsk came seeking advice. The more revered he became, the more beer '*Booba*' and her daughters sold. Besides being a fantastic '*Balaboste*,' meaning dinner was always waiting, her children were always clean and she washed the kitchen floor every Friday - learning that beer and religion mix well; she was referred to as the Bernard Baruch of Bendine.

Reading '*Torah*' from sunrise to sunset, pausing only to eat or light one of his dangling miracles, 'Zeyda' became a wealthy man.

Using most of the money '*Booba*' had secretly saved, 'Zeyda' managed to bribe a few guards and a sympathetic captain and departed for America. He promised that soon as he found a job and a place for them to live, he would summon his family.

His travel accommodations, meager by most standards, included no sunlight. On the other hand, it did offer the all-too-recognizable esters of his '*goyishe*' cabin mates: twelve sheep and eight pigs who paid little if no attention to his constant, religious chanting for the 27 days he had hid in the bilge of a dilapidated old freighter.

Two days following his departure, 'Zeyda' was accused of trying to overthrow the Polish government and he was found guilty in absentia. The saloon and all their

belongings were confiscated, except for the clothes they wore and a beautiful, white-lace wedding dress, which *'Booba'* had hidden under her large apron.

Unfortunately, Sam-the-butcher was more than just a bearded zealot who had frequented *'Zeyda's'* illustrious saloon. He was also more than just benevolent when he offered the room above his butcher shop as refuge for the family of the most respected Jew.

The large room, once painted gray, now had flecks of dark, little islands engulfed in a sea of ashen, mustard colored walls. A lone, bare, small, filthy window allowed slivers of light to filter through, discretely illuminating an old, dirt-wedded floor. In contrast, wedged in the corner of all that *'schmutz,'* stood a magnificent bed. Made of the finest mahogany by Loyke the carpenter, it gleamed because someone had spent a lifetime caressing it with polish.

Sam-the-butcher's mother, Bella Pinsky, had given her son the very dowry once given to her. In addition an oversized oak table stood beneath that window.

Unfortunately, his first cousin, Celia Moskowitz, a buxomy, pimply-faced, sickly asthmatic, had died two weeks before their wedding.

Now, 22 years later, at the tender age of 43, Sam-the-butcher's eyes had that old, horny twinkle again. He was always there, watching *'Booba'* and her beautiful brown-eyed daughters wash and scrub the floor as they *'shushkered'* along. Working in his butcher shop, it was apparent to all that Sam-the-butcher got a hardon every time *'Booba'* flicked

his chickens. 42,027 chickens later, including *'Booba'* and her three daughters, he too prayed for deliverance.

While all that praying was going on, *'Zeyda'* was on Delancey Street doing a little praying himself and feeling no pain. Having displayed his astounding knowledge of *'Torah,'* within six weeks of his arrival, *'Zeyda'* was The Belle of the lower east side *'Hassids.'*

Jews of great stature and wealth befriended him. Avremel Chalavitch, a Russian real estate tycoon, gave *'Zeyda'* an entire brownstone and store rent-free. Harvey Straus and Bernard Levi, two enterprising manufacturers and supposed antagonists, wanting to insure his presence created a used clothing business for him. They and many other clothing manufactures gave *'Zeyda'* free of charge their latest fashions.

Bearded zealots from Washington Heights to as far as Long Island gathered to hear the *'Tsadik.'* Trying to ingratiate themselves, brand new expensive clothing was given to him as *'schmates,'* rags. He turned those brand new *'schmates,'* which more times than not still had the price tag attached, into a small fortune.

Two years later he bought 127 Rivington Street, a two-story attached house. It contained room for a good size store, with a two-bedroom apartment above.

Assured that his family would find their new accommodations satisfactory, with the help of an influential banker, Max Morgan, his family was on the way.

It was dark and cold. The rain was relentless as they trudged through the mud. Holding Gitel's hand, *'Booba'* and Dora followed Rose to All Souls, a church on the outskirts of Bendine.

"We have to Mama!" Rose said, running ahead. "It is our only chance. God will forgive us."

"But what will *'Zeyda'* think?" thought *'Booba,'* trying to still hide her once-worn wedding dress 'neath her apron.

Despite the harsh wintery elements, *'Booba'* hesitated before entering All Souls.

"Come in" whispered Father Uhrmaniwicz. "Your driver has been delayed. I have prepared tea and bread for you and your children. Come with me," he said walking through the old, stone church.

Not wanting her children to see the sign of the cross and Jesus Christ, *'Booba shushkered'* in Yiddish, "Let it be my sin." Then she bade her children to take her hand and to close their eyes as they followed the kindly Father.

When the benevolent Father Uhrmaniwicz gave *'Booba'* a black-habit and urged her to put it on, *'Booba'* questioned whether death would have been preferable? Her children, wrapped in blankets, *'shushkered'* for their salvation.

The driver was to take them, using back roads to the outskirts of Warsaw where they would wait for another car, which would take them to the railroad in Gadansk. The rain soon turned to sleet as *'Booba'* and her three daughters huddled behind a deserted barn.

As well as for *'Zeyda's'* well being, they *'shushkered,'* for their own. Arriving three hours late, an eighteen-year old driver was startled to find that it was a nun and three girls he was to take to Gadansk. Avoiding notice, they drove fifteen miles without headlights. They hurried on the train and departed from Gadansk. When the train seemed to stop for no apparent reason, a nun and three young girls manage to depart the train unnoticed.

Soon they were hidden beneath stacks of hay in a horse-drawn-wagon. They were then transported to Nowy Port, arriving at 4 A.M. The sleet turned to snow and became a blizzard. With the dock appearing deserted they were so frightened that their *'shushkering'* sounded like a Greek Chorus. Suddenly, a huge net made of rope was seen. The nun and her three girls were placed on it and a crane lifted them to the upper deck.

Once upon the luxurious steamer that Max Morgan had purchased that morning, its Captain, Ivan Bonolski, greeted them.

Treated as royalty, they were given the best of accommodations: a double stateroom, adjoining the Captain's quarters.

'Booba' and her daughters had never enjoyed such opulence; teak walls, cedar closets, brass fittings, a toilet that flushed, embroidered linen, goose-down blankets and pillows and all the milk they desired.

Born in Krakow, Ivan Bonolski was a forty-eight year old romantic salt. He had loved the sea since he was a child. Widowed, he was soon attracted to *'Booba'* and her family. He admired their oneness. Their devotion to Judaism. Their determination to be with

their father, her husband, whom they had often described as being omnipotent.

Being they would eat only fish and vegetables, Captain Bonolski allowed *'Booba'* to cook their meals and he insisted on dining with them every evening. All except Rose felt his remorse and loneliness. She was attracted to the large diamond ring he fingered, whenever he spoke of his deceased wife Magda.

Sailing through the Gulf of Danzig, the sea had been calm. Entering the Baltic Sea they encountered one storm after another. After eight days of *'shushkering'* their little hearts out, the Captain's assurances finally paid off. They had skirted Germany and were headed for the English Channel.

"You will be in America in six weeks," the Captain vowed as he stared at Rose who had joined him in his cabin after being certain that all were sleeping. As the old salt fingered his diamond in the moonlight he removed her clothing. She would join the captain almost nightly.

"There is the Statue of Liberty," said the Captain pointing 'neath a star lit night. "Have some more wine. Tomorrow morning we will enter Ellis Island. I shall miss you Rose," he said touching the diamond ring.

"And I, you," she said, caressing his weather-beaten face.

He made love to her, or she made love to the old salt. In any event, when they landed in Ellis Island, Rose had the diamond ring.

For the past twenty-seven months, *'Booba,'* not wanting to further burden the man she

so adored, had never explained in her letters about him being convicted of treason in absentia, nor Sam-the-butcher's erection, or for that matter anything else.

When *'Booba'* and her three daughters settled in America, besides no more flickin' chickens she found nothing had changed. She ran the used clothing business and from sunrise to sunset, pausing only to eat or light one of his roll-your-own-miracles, *'Zeyda'* studied the Talmud.

And so life went on. His daughters became beautiful young girls and as tradition would have it, *'Zeyda'* played matchmaker following the morning-prayer, *'Mincha.'* For one hour only he was open for business. Rich merchants, bankers, doctors, even a few ballsy peddlers presented their sons to him for consideration. While all that presenting was going on, *'Zeyda'* continued his correspondence with his brother Mordicai, a wealthy jeweler who fortunately resided in Amsterdam.

When Mordicai had discovered his handsome son had impregnated three girls, more than embarrassed, he was outraged. He immediately wrote his brother *'Zeyda'* and offered the equivalent of \$10,000 to the bride and groom to be, providing Rose would be the bride and his son Isaac the groom.

Once Isaac would be on the other side of the ocean, under the aegis of *'Zeyda'* and his brilliant daughter Rose, Mordicai was confident that once and for all he would rid himself of his disgraceful son Isaac.

With \$10,000 firmly embedded in his mind, *'Zeyda'* chose his own nephew, Isaac

Jacobs. The handsome young man arrived from Amsterdam with several valuable diamonds hidden in the hollowed heels of his shoes. Besides portraying himself as being religious, Isaac had dark curly hair that came to an abrupt stop as it became enmeshed in his very attractive pearl-blond beard.

Women were taken aback by his stunning appearance and his ever-so charming personality.

When *'Booba'* gave her eldest and wisest daughter an old, white lace wedding dress, tears of joy swelled her all-knowing, sympathetic gray eyes. She remembered when she too stood next to a tall, handsome young man that had a magnificent black beard under the *'Chupah,'* wearing the same wedding gown. She also remembered a little girl named Rose leading the way through the cold darkness to an old stone church as they were fleeing for their lives. And now humming "God Bless America" *'Booba'* smiled, "Bendine lives," which was where she was born.

The four diamonds were turned to cash the same day of his arrival. Days after \$10,000 had been deposited in *'Zeyda's'* account, all rejoiced when Rose, the eldest and wisest daughter of the most revered of all men on the Lower East Side married handsome Isaac Jacob, her first cousin.

Within two months Rose was pregnant, and for the next nine, there was much joy in the home of *'Zeyda'* the *'Tsadik.'* Nightly, in his dimly lit bedroom, rocking on his throne-like chair, *'Zeyda'* told Isaac what was expected of a Jewish husband when his

wife is pregnant.

In her pristine kitchen, to the delight of her daughters, nightly, '*Booba*' would inspect Rose's growing stomach.

When Isaac came to inform his in-laws that Rose had just given birth to a son, Joshua, he found beautiful, 12 year old Gitel alone.

Hearing the wonderful news, Gitel jumped for joy, shouting, "It is a boy and I'm an aunt. '*Mazel tov,*' Isaac," she said, kissing him.

Gitel was stunned when Isaac responded by sticking his tongue where no tongue had ever ventured. Determining that her lack of response meant, "Go right to it-- he undid her blouse as Gitel cried.

Crying is the worst thing a 12-year-old girl can do to a brother in-law that is intent on seducing you. Since she had initiated the kiss, she deemed it her fault. Feeling guilty as hell, Gitel never mentioned what happened on the day her oldest sister Rose gave birth.

Two years later, when Dora, who was next in-line, turned seventeen, she was assigned Moishe Abramowitz; second cousin, who at twenty-nine was still a virgin. Arrogant and rich, he was a man of God that came gift-wrapped in a curly black beard that did little to enhance his dry, itching, acnied face.

His family had been influential enough to, have had him educated in the finest university in Berlin. Able to pray in six languages, '*Zeyda*' was almost as delighted with

his *'dahvening,'* praying as his dowry.

When *'Booba'* saw her daughter Dora 'neath the *'Chupah'* in that same wedding dress, again her beautiful sympathetic gray-eyes teared.

Besides the substantial wealth associated with Moishe, *'Zeyda's'* heart took flight, for he had fulfilled one more of God's determinations: two of his daughters had married religious, wealthy Jews. "One more to go," he sighed. "In a few more years I will be through playing match-maker. Then I will spend the hour after *'Mincha'* on more important things."

Five years later, when Gitel turned eighteen, she was introduced to Harry Greenwald, the attractive twenty year-old singer, she had seen perform at the Essex theater. Enamored by his outrageous personality, she went back to the Yiddish vaudeville show three Sundays in a row with her best friend, Yetta Smilowitz. Fortunately, Yetta was dating Mickey Youngman, the piano player in the show who happened to be the best friend of Gitel's, handsome young singer.

"Gitel, this is Harry Greenwald" Yetta said standing backstage.

Tipping his black, turned-down fedora, Harry stared at beautiful Gitel. "Haven't I seen you somewhere before?" he asked smiling. "I could never forget such a beautiful face."

She wanted to tell him, "Yes! Every night in my dreams," but smiled instead.

Resembling Edward G. Robinson, he was unlike anyone she had ever met. He was so confident, so outspoken and he had opinions about everything, which generally shocked

her. He wasn't religious, rich or even educated. Harry was an aspiring young singer who barely earned enough performing in the few small Yiddish theaters that were scattered throughout the Lower East Side.

Following her nightly '*shushker*' she would ask God, "How could I fall in love with someone like him?"

Walking her home after his performance, he would sing and tell her of his past. "You know how I got the name Greenwald?" he asked an ever-attentive Gitel. "When my father, may he rot in hell, landed in Ellis Island, he asked a tall man with a big black beard, what's a good Jewish name? I bet it was your father. If Black-beard would have said Dewey, my name would be Harry Dewey," he said laughing. "Watch out for that big rat over there!" he reminded her nightly and she in turn would always jump into his arms. And when he kissed her under the same unlit lamppost, she knew why she loved him. He was so unpredictable, so exciting, and he alone could make her cry, laughing.

For two years she tossed and turned. Through her nightly '*shushker*' she'd ask God, "What will my father say? How could I fall in love with an actor?"

One night, having finished the dishes, '*Booba*' asked Gitel, her youngest and most beautiful daughter to try on a faded, white-lace wedding gown. Knowing what was to follow, Gitel broke down and sobbed. "I don't want to try it on. I can't-- I love someone else," she cried. "Help me Mama. I don't know how to tell Papa."

But it was too late, for '*Zeyda*' appeared not a moment later, looking more excited than

Gitel had ever seen him to be.

"Gitel, I want you to say hello to your new husband, Hymie Zaslofsky."

Trying to contain his excitement, taking *'Booba'* aside, *'Zeyda'* whispered, "Can you imagine? Hymie's the son of a bonafide millionaire. What do you think, my own Gittel married to a millionaire?" he said, happy as a father could be on such a momentous occasion. At last he would no longer have to waste that hour after *'Mincha'* on such foolishness.

Hymie was tall, with dark-bushy eyebrows, prematurely bald and nearly deaf. Seeing how beautiful his young bride-to-be was, exposing his three very expensive gold teeth, Hymie licked his lips.

"No!" Gittel cried, running into her room and slamming the door.

To say that *'Zeyda'* was shocked would be an understatement for no daughter had ever refused his beckoning-- much less to the son of a bonafide millionaire.

To his dismay, Gittel fell further in love with Harry.

Landing a two-week engagement at the Second Avenue Theater, one night Harry leapt from the stage and lifted an embarrassed Gittel into his arms as Yetta and the audience applauded. He carried her on stage and sang, *"Bie Mir Bist Du Shoen."*

Aware of their love, Yetta Smilowitz and then the audience rose and again applauded.

Seated in the audience was a dear friend of the family, Max Morgan. The Second Avenue Theater had announced it was closing and he was there as a potential buyer.

When Harry kissed Gitel after his serenade, that kiss would seal her fate. Before Harry had escorted Gitel home, 'Zeyda' had been well advised of his daughter's indecent exposure.

"Everyone knows what you are and what you did. You have disgraced us," 'Zeyda' said, turning to his opened 'Torah.'

When Gitel married Harry, it was two years to the day her father had introduced her to a bonafide millionaire. He hated Harry for not being religious, for not working, for being a low-class, uneducated Litvak, but mostly for not being a bonafide millionaire. He forecast that his daughter would lead a life of poverty and despair.

'Zeyda' said 'Kaddish,' the prayer for the dead. Although he did not send out a formal announcement of his daughter's excommunication, he would never speak to her again.

And now, like the time she ran for her life when she was driven from her home in the middle of the night to the All Souls church in that small 'Shetl' known as Bendine, 'Shushkering' to God, Gitel begged for the strength to continue. Taking Harry by the arm, sticky legs and all, again, it was a race to see who would get to the hospital first.

No matter how composed Harry may appear, when he gets nervous, he always has to pee. Unfortunately, the receptionist checking in Gitel at the Bronx Hospital was more concerned with her chipped nail polish than either Gitel or Harry's condition.

"Name. Address. Phone number. Insurance, employer," she asked

unenthusiastically.

"Listen you! What the hell are you asking me all these questions for? I didn't come here for a job!" Harry roared. "Can't you see? My wife's going to have a baby any minute. I hate every damn hospital!" he yelled pacing furiously. And I hate all those doctors too. They're all a bunch of *'gonifs'* that make a fortune cutting poor people open."

By the sound of his voice and the look in his left eye, Gitel knew her outraged husband really had to go. Before she was heard saying, "Go already," he was off and running, desperately searching for a bathroom.

Cursing because he was confused by the arrows which pointed in opposite directions; one to the LAVATORY and the other to the LABORATORY, plus the thought of Gitel's water breaking made Harry run faster. Frantic, his thoughts turned to Russia, Czar Nicholai and a little *'shetl'* known as Bobroisk where his father, an unemployed actor-peddler thought it best that his son pick the potatoes and cabbage that were planted behind their one-room, wooden house than his attending school. "You can't eat books," he used to say to me, "You can't eat books."

Harry was grateful to America where he had finished the sixth grade and learned how to read, because he had finally found the LABORATORY. Feeling a drop trickle down his leg, Harry zipped down his fly, opened the door and with his emergency in hand ran in to pee.

To his utter amazement, making his auspicious appearance, he was greeted by about

20 male- and-female-interns, who were studying a rather small male penis that had been immersed in a jar of formaldehyde. At that precise moment in time, Harry, who loved being the center of attention, found his cup runneth over. Responding to the various hoots and howls, with his unrelieved '*schmeckle*' in hand, he made an abrupt about-face and ran out of the laboratory and smack into the arms of an old disgruntled nurse who had been looking for him. She must have seen it all, because all she said was, "You better put that thing away, it's a boy and you can see him with the rest of the fathers over there."

Harry was beaming, certain his virility was as obvious as the nose on his face. As he zipped his fly, racing to view his newborn son he came to an abrupt stop. Not because he still had to pee so badly and that he was standing in front of the lavatory which he was certain had to be the toilet, but because he had inadvertently caught a small piece of his pride and joy in his zipper. With so many newborns side by side, Harry couldn't differentiate. The experience was still overwhelming because there were tears in his eyes. Noticing all the fathers waving to their babies, he too waved, all the way to Gitel's room.

Gitel, still sleeping, also had not seen her son. Grateful that she had given him another son, touching her brow, Harry kissed her tenderly.

Groggy, she opened her tired eyes and whispered, "Did you go yet?"

Sparing Gitel the gory details regarding his having to go, Harry shouted, "It's a boy. A

wonderful boy named Benny," as the same disgruntled nurse, handed Gitel her baby. Before she even looked at him, with eyes closed she *'shushkered.'* "Thank you dear God for giving me a healthy baby and thank you for such an easy delivery again."

With eyes still remaining closed, knowing how hungry her baby must be, she offered her ripened breast and started nurturing. With teat in mouth, Gitel's ravenous new son suckled away.

When she had breast fed Eli and Rhoda, she remembered it as being the most fulfilling experience she had ever had. This time, the experience was so overwhelming, so enjoyable, that through her *'shushker'* she almost felt guilty. How could she be entitled to such unadulterated bliss?

After what seemed like an eternity of passive wonder, a smile of tranquility spread across her lovely face as she slowly opened her eyes to see her baby. Seeing a yellow infant suckling her kosher teat, Gitel, turning a sickly-white screamed, "*OY VEY!*" Instantly removing her breast from the unwanted alien's little mouth, pushing the yellow baby away she cried. "This is not my son!" she chanted hysterically. "This is not my little baby."

Roared Harry, "Even a blind man could see! This is not my baby! All my children are Jewish! THIS ONE IS YELLOW!"

"If you can read, the baby's bracelet has her last name on it," assured the disgruntled nurse."

"I don't care if it has her first name on it! I want a new baby!" screamed Harry at the top of his voice.

At that very moment, in the adjoining room, the same movie dubbed in Japanese was playing. Mrs. Yamada, crying while refusing to touch the white baby, was as expected also in a state of shock. Sounding like a broken record, her small, and yellow-skinned husband had been pleading Hari Kari as being the only solution.

"Unless you give me my real son in five minutes, I'll call the Daily News and tell them just what kind of rotten hospital you're running here!" screamed Harry.

Across the border, besides Hari Kari, Bon Zai had become the people's choice. Moments before the two Japs were going to cut their rubbery throats and join their ancestors, their take-out order had been revised.

And the moment Gitel stuck her swollen breast into Benny's mouth; all was well except for Harry's impatient kidneys, which urgently reminded him that he still had not peed.

With that look in his left eye he said, "Gitel, I have to tell the children the good news."

Another drop trickled down his leg as he neared St. Paul's Place. An intelligent man, Harry knew he wouldn't make it home, but luck was on his side. He was standing in front of his older sister Bertha's apartment building.

Despite legs pressed together, he ascertained that he climbed those three flights of stairs in record time. Praying she was home, he rang the doorbell.

Bertha was sitting in the living room listening to an Aaron Leberdeff version of "Rumania," which was Harry's favorite song. Hard of hearing, she had turned up the volume.

Placing his ear to the door, when Harry heard his favorite song blasting away, he too blasted away. "I know you're in there you deaf bastard! Open up! I have to go!"

Convinced his deaf bastard sister didn't know or give a damn about his having to go, Harry hastily departed.

Trickling all the way home, he cursed his deaf sister, the Bronx hospital for having laboratories and those Japs in the next room.

Hearing the key in the door, Eli and Rhoda raced to greet their father who never said a word as he raced into Eli's ex-club house, the toilet. Because of his contorted face Rhoda was certain something had gone wrong. Relieved, Harry entered the kitchen and started with his episode about the lavatory.

"I'm sorry you couldn't go Papa, but how is Mama and what'd she have?" asked an anxiety ridden Rhoda.

"They tried to give me a yellow baby, but I'm nobody's fool. Only when I threatened to call the Daily News did they--"

"Tell us what it is," said Eli hoping it was a girl.

"Mama is fine and your brother's name is Benny."

Simultaneously, they jumped for joy. On the way down, Eli was depressed at the

thought of having to share his small bedroom with someone he would probably hate for the rest of his life.

That night, turning the light off and on he caught a slow cockroach climbing over some cracks in the wall closest to his bed. Discovering a new crack not three inches from his all-time favorite crevice, Eli realized he had paid little if no attention to it the past couple of years. And now it was too late. Tears swelled his eyes, for no longer would they alone bask in the splendor and mystery of them-thar-walls. More tears arrived; tomorrow morning Mama was bringing home Benny the intruder.

The following morning, Eli and Rhoda, sat at the kitchen table aimlessly playing with the Dominos. Usually, when the pressure of being almost six had been too unbearable, Eli would take a stroll around his 8'x10' bedroom. With the addition of Benny's crib and all the crap that came with it, Eli sensed it was time to hang up his walking shoes and look for something else to do with his spare time.

In their hearts, Rhoda and Eli knew there was only one wonderful person in the whole world that would always stop whatever they were doing to give them each a big hug and kiss: Mama, to whom nothing or no one was more important than her beloved children.

When Harry whistled to announce that they had entered the building, their young hearts skipped a beat.

Entering with babe in arm, their mother appeared to be more beautiful than they had

remembered. Closing their eyes the two children waited for what they had so hungered, her customary hug and kiss. She hardly looked their way, explaining that immediately after she fed and diapered their new baby brother she would return and scampered into Eli's bedroom.

Eli only knew Benny two seconds and he already hated him.

Coming face to face with her emotionally starved children, all was forgiven when she gave them each an extra big hug and kisses and then took their hands. "Come" said Gitel happily, "I want you to meet your new brother."

"He is so small and so cute," Rhoda cooed. "Look how pink and chubby he is." And when she touched his little hand the baby smiled.

Eli knew that one-week-old babies don't smile, they have gas, but Rhoda seemed so happy making Benny smile, despite Hitler's omnipresence and even though he hadn't forgotten the pick-up sticks, he didn't have the heart to tell her the truth.

Daring him to make Benny smile, Eli realized that Rhoda was still trying to show him up. To his surprise, touching his brother's tiny foot Benny responded by laughing aloud, which in turn caused Gitel and Rhoda to laugh. Eli could see he was good, better than his sister who still wouldn't admit it. Touching Benny's other little foot, the baby laughed even louder. To his surprise, soon Eli found himself laughing. And when all had stopped tickling his feet, Benny continued to laugh on his own. His laughter, so contagious, started all laughing hysterically.

When Harry entered and discovered that his new baby boy was leading his family in laughter, he knew he had shown the Bronx Hospital and those Japs who's the boss. Joining in, Harry laughed the loudest.

Eli had to admit Benny was adorable, but after two months of gagging on the smell of his diapers, he didn't think of Benny as being cute.

Rhoda, who didn't have to share her room or smell him night and day, loved Benny with great fervor. Thinking he was the cutest thing, she played with him every chance she had.

For the remainder of the war, Rhoda became a permanent fixture in Eli's overcrowded bedroom.

Chapter II

Declaring he was a fervent Jew, Harry would take his entire family to '*dahvin*' at a '*shul*' in the YMHA on Fulton Avenue, simply because it only cost two dollars for his entire horde. Come the High Holidays, mainly '*Yom Kippur*,' every Jew in the Bronx and in those days there were quite a few who would trek across Crotona Park to Indian Lake, where all the religious Jews would congregate and throw their '*Nivehras*,' or sins into the

Eli's Coming

polluted water, thus hopefully absolving themselves of their sins for the coming New Year. Harry, a character if there ever was one, possessed a magnetic, enthusiastic voice. Despite not being religious he would '*dahvin*' louder and with more elan than the greatest '*chazin*,' Cantor. Naturally all the women would ooh and ahh at Eli's exuberant father, much to the consternation of his mother, who for some reason didn't appreciate his outlandish attributes.

As fate would have it, a mangy, straggly dog started barking just as Harry was really laying it on. Al Jolson look out. He nonchalantly picked up the mutt, threw it in Indian Lake, saying "I need this '*nivehra*,' like a hole in the head" and continued, much to the delight of all who were applauding him.

Anxiously awaiting to hear the three gongs from Our Lady of Victory, which at times had denoted Benny's daily, breath taking three o'clock dump, the sun was in its full glory as two battered old garbage cans and two unsteady, brass-and-black, ornate iron railings ushered four large concrete steps to a marble landing where Rhoda was playing, 'Jacks.'

Prior to starting foursies, the girl looked to Mama's open bedroom window in hope of seeing of her give the all-clear sign: flailing arms that Benny had made. Turning towards the heavens, closing her large, dark-brown eyes while squeezing the little pink ball, Rhoda '*shushkered*,' "Please help Papa get a job. We can't take it any more, that's why Mama worries so much and why does she have to wash the floors...? And since I lost my

dolly Susie's only eye I just can't look at her anymore. Do you think I could have a dolly like my friend Augustine's?"

Having skimmed through the latest Captain Marvel comic book, Eli was fairly confident that enough time had elapsed since hearing the church bells. "Just because you're Italian," the boy said with broken heart, "It's not fair."

"Whatsa nota fair again Eli?" asked toothless Tony.

"You know? You have the same kind of newsstand that Freddie Freeman has. And you know? When he says 'Shazam,' just like that" he explained snapping his little fingers, "He becomes Captain Marvel."

"Tella you datruth," slosed Tony, exposing his barren gums, "Ima morea concerna with thata Hitler anda whatsa he doing witha mya country." Sighing, toothless Tony wormed his big tongue over his vast wasteland and hawked, "NAZIS GAS JEWS!"

"I'm Jewish," the boy confessed. "Me and my best friend are going to get that Hitler one day and we will help your country too."

"Thanka you very much. I knewa Ia coulda count ona you. See youa tomorrow Eli."

Walking towards Webster Avenue, Eli envisioned old men and women, but most vividly, children dying from the deadly gas that spewed from all those enormous shower-heads he had heard about. He never sang "Toot, Toot, Tootsie," when the trolley departed.

Kicking a Pepsi cap under a parked, light-blue '43 Packard, Eli lamented, "I'm going

to fail 'Jack and Jane.' I can't concentrate. Whenever I try to do my homework, Benny either laughs or shits," he groaned. I can't even get a good nights sleep anymore. More than once I caught him laying there all nice and comfy in his crib. I saw how he waits until he is dead-certain that everyone was fast a sleep and then he shits and starts laughing like a wild hyena. That's when I want to kill him," he rued nearing his sister.

"Hi Eli. Want to play 'Jacks' with me?" Rhoda asked hopefully.

"How much time 'til the all-clear?"

"I don't know. Mama still hasn't come to the window Eli. Want to play with me?"

"Okay, but remember what I said about quitting" he warned.

"I swear I won't quit anymore Eli and you can go first, if you want."

Gathering the little pink ball and 'Jacks' he smiled confidently. In one swift motion he threw the ball in the air and the 'Jacks' onto the ground. Again the boy tossed the little pink ball in the air. Hurriedly snatching a lone Jack' he lunged for the little ball and missed.

"If you ask me nicely, I won't tell anyone that you missed onesies" his happy sister, chided. "Want another chance? Okay, you can go again. I won't tell."

"Nah, I never liked this stupid game anyway. The ball is too small. Want to play baseball?" he dared.

"The ball is too big and it hurts," Rhoda shamefully concluded, while their mother, flailed excitedly from her window. "Eli, Rhoda come up! Papa wants to tell you

something very important."

"We'll have a catch some other time" Eli warned, gathering the pink little ball and 'Jacks.' "We'd better go." Racing up the two flights of stairs they hopefully pondered, "Maybe Papa got a job, or at least Benny made?"

Entering the kitchen they sat upon the rickety folding-chairs and rested their little heads on the sticky plastic tablecloth and waited. On cue, Gitel placed two slices of well buttered rye bread and a two glasses of warmed cocoa. "First a kiss for my Eli, and a kiss for my Rhoda. Now eat... Wait until you see papa. You won't believe it," she said loudly as Harry stepped forth.

To their amazement, he was wearing a gas-mask, a white helmet and arm-band with a red emblazoned C.D. across its center. In addition to the megaphone that he was fondling in his right hand, there was a flashlight in his other. Standing at attention Harry removed his gas-mask, stepped onto his trusty folding-chair and broadcast into his brand-new megaphone, "Ladies and gentlemen. Introducing the first Jewish Commander and Chief of the Civil Defense in the Bronx." A round of thundering applause followed by "Papa has a job. Papa has a job."

Although his true-blue, all-America job was an all night affair, he never mentioned a word that it was non-paying as he proudly bowed.

Breathing freely for the first time in her young life, a happy Rhoda smiled widely.

"That's great Papa. I hear commanders make a fortune. Even more than General

Eisenhower. How much are they paying you?" Eli excitedly asked.

"I don't know who you take after?" Harry disdainfully asked. "You're always thinking of money. Where did you learn to be so selfish? What's more important, supporting your own family, or protecting a 150-million sleeping Americans?"

The Bronx had been divided into 38 sectors, each having its own proud Commander and Chief. Harry's volunteer brigade boasted 14 neighborhood rejects. Upon receiving a white arm-band and helmet, a flashlight and a magical whistle that turned all into instant "Satchmos." Denoting Harry's authority, he was issued a hand-held siren in addition to that megaphone.

"Let them have their whistles. I got a loud-speaker!" Roared Harry through his trusty megaphone. "Eli! You're in the toilet long enough! What the hell are you doing in there?"

Prior to Harry's outburst, Eli had described in great detail the gas-mask, white helmet and arm-band in addition to the hand-held siren to his best friend. Shifted to the left, Eli was thinking about the megaphone when Harry's glaring statement brought him to his senses. "Eli, you're in the toilet long enough. What the hell are you doing in there? What the hell are you doing in there?" After pulling the not-so-long chain, Eli hastily departed; unaware the Brown Bomber had exited.

"I'm the only one who will decide on what street and what time me and my men will march," he blared through his megaphone, greeting Eli. "I am the Commander and Chief

around here. So, don't think it's Benny's *faschtunkeneh*' stomach that keeps me awake," he continued trumpeting. "It's Hitler and his rotten Luftwaffe. That's the only reason why I can't get a decent night's sleep anymore."

And in his own inimitable way, Harry made sure that no one else did either. Regardless of the hour or how many people were in the state of REM, if Harry thought the Nazis were going to attack, look out! Catching even the most innocent of victims with lights on, he would order his men to blow their whistles in 15 second intervals, which he highlighted by soloing on his trusty megaphone. "Hey you on the third floor," his voiced boomed as hundreds of bedroom windows were raised. "What are you trying to do? Get us all killed?" More window were raised. Shouting soon followed. "Shut those damn lights, you Nazi collaborating, deaf bastard!" roared Harry aided by at least another thousand or so angry, sleepless, innocent victims who also were convinced they did not want to be bombed by Hitler's notorious Luftwaffe.

Shortly after dinner, although pork was strictly forbidden even in mention, impatiently resting his little hands on the sticky tablecloth, Eli the ham, vying to be heard and hopefully recognized for his superior intelligence, waited for his moment.

With the Greenwalds savoring Gitel's scrumptious chopped liver Eli stood. Speaking quickly, he believed someone was always interrupting him. Especially when he had something important to say. For lack of a trusty megaphone he cupped his hands and announced, "The Bible is all wrong. I heard about a scientist named Darwin who once

proved that we all come from monkeys-- not Adam and Eve!"

Harry's eyes widened, as a shocked Gitel gagged, then choked.

Despite feeling sorry that he had made his mother choke a little, Eli knew that sometimes it's hard to swallow the truth.

With Gitel slowly recovering, Harry exploded, "Don't be a damn fool! Don't believe a thing they teach you in school because some of the biggest ignoramuses in the world, besides the 'Who's Who' are teachers. '*Goyim*' have all the money and power, but they never had the brains to recognize me and all my talent. And who taught all those rich '*Goyishe*' bastards? Teachers! Just like the one that told you we come from monkeys." Harry ended his argument with, "Who do you think you resemble more? Tarzan or his monkey, Cheetah?"

With his face turning Mackintosh-red, Eli tried to explain the undeniable similarities of man and ape. Using such examples as caring for their offspring, being inherently territorial, hunger and thirst, the young Daniel Webster paused... Thinking of all the dogs he had come across in his young life, he hated to admit it but, he never saw a dog go into a bathroom and close the door so that God forbid anyone see their dingleberry when they secretly relieve themselves. Dogs do it right out in the open. Lassie even did it in the movies. I never met a dog that got embarrassed like me, he deemed. For he had unequivocally been embarrassed when his own father had compared him to Cheetah. I bet the reason Adam and Eve covered their genitals with fig leaves was because they

were embarrassed? Unwillingly, Eli concurred that his father was probably right about Cheetah.

After two months of being in the first grade, Eli had found it to be a little noisy, but not half as bad as his father had predicted. Having never built a house with blocks before, the boy found the results to be far more impressive than the now insignificant little houses he had erected with the family dominos.

Fueled that he would soon out-read his show-off sister, because he was learning to read and write, he enjoyed school immensely. Eli was sorry that one day it would come to an end, for certainly some big Hollywood agent was going to barge into his classroom and whisk him off to make movies, much to the amazement of Irish, Oily and all those other rotten little brats.

When Mrs. Lacativa informed Eli that it was his turn to be tested, it was the first time his vision was to be put on trial. Fortunately, his boisterous classmates were busying making silly little clay animals while gossiping about Popeye and Olive Oyl. "Why shouldn't they be so carefree," he pondered as each one of those blabbermouths was tested. Wanting to be one of the guys, despite knowing it was impossible, he prayed for twenty-twenty vision.

Inching to the starting line, he noticed that the overwhelming din was gone. In its place, silence. Disregarding the gaze of his staring classmates, he placed a small, yellow slip of paper over his left eye, squinted at the eye-chart, gulped and read aloud, "E."...

Unable to face the whoops and cackling that had suddenly abounded, Eli's face reddened as he desperately tried squinting past the E. If only I was making doody, Joe would help.

"You may continue," prodded Mrs. Lacativa.

Red-faced and sweating, he hesitantly approached his teacher and whispered, "I can't see the other letters Mrs. Lacativa."

"Do not let it bother you Eli," she responded loudly. "I am certain your left eye is much better."

Squirming up to the dreaded starting line, placing the yellow slip of paper over his right eye he found he could not see the eye chart at all.

Leaving school, Jimmy Ryan offered to lend Eli his deceased, blind Grandfather's seeing-eye cane.

Upon receiving the necessary funds from the Home Relief, it was the only time he had gotten something that no other kid had or wanted. Thick horned-rim glasses.

During one of Harry's 4:30 A. M. treks through the Bronx, he unwittingly caused another near-riot. Someone had inadvertently left a bathroom light on for longer than the prescribed two minutes. The tormented, crazed mob, ready to kill, was at the door of an old deaf mute, about to break it down.

"You must stop them!" Mrs. Cuchinella, with her right withered breast peeking through her terry cloth robe, implored. "They will kill old man Gideon if you don't stop them. And if you do not stop them, it will be your fault, because Gideon is totally deaf."

Despite not believing her, Harry ordered his merry men to protect that deaf Nazi bastard and in doing so, Harry risked the lives of his own whistling platoon.

"So what if they don't sleep," he roared through his trusty megaphone as he climbed into his darkened bed. "They're still alive ain't they," he continued thundering.

"What do you want, a thank you letter?" Gitel responded angrily. "*Gott tsen dahnk,*' God in heaven," she pleaded silently through her shusker, "Why did you have to make him a Commander and Chief?"

When Harry had roused Gitel, she was having the same nightmare she had been having since she wed, where '*Zeyda*' was both judge and jury.

That morning, having signed up for Home Relief, which today is called Welfare, Harry deemed it a magnanimous gesture. Aware the amount of money he was to receive would be based on the size of his family, envisioning a wind-fall, tired and weary, Harry fell asleep.

The investigator "social-worker" assigned to their case was Shultz. He was thirty-nine years old, 6'4" and weighed 240 lbs. Were it not for his missing index finger and a large brown mole that resembled a small grape located slightly off center on his forehead, Eli had decided Shultz was the quintessential specimen of the super-human Aryan race.

Under its proviso, Home Relief provided for the barest of essentials and Shultz was its enforcer. Despite Shultz never having spotted the Greenwalds wear the star of David, Eli was convinced he knew they were Jewish. Rummaging through their refrigerator at 6 A.

M. in hopes of finding a stick of butter, sour cream or anything they were not entitled to have, Shultz was relentless. And he clicked his shiny black boots while he interrogated Mama and Papa: "Where are you working? If it is the last thing I do, I will find where you are hiding the money!" Aided by toothless Tony's marketing ploy, the boy was totally convinced that Shultz had to be a first cousin of Adolph Eichmann.

Being he was the leading authority of the S.S. movements in the Bronx, Eli was well aware of what Shultz had been doing. He was using an age-old method of Japanese torture. Sleep deprivation.

Six months later, try as he may Eli could not hide the bags beneath his bloodshot eyes. Seeing Shultz foam at the mouth with delight, Eli knew his bags were Shultz' vitamin B12. When Shultz stopped foaming, even Nazis tire of a good thing, the boy panicked, certain his bloodshot eyes no longer satisfied Shultz' ever-growing Aryan-appetite. With his bi-weekly onslaughts becoming an everyday occurrence and being it was written in Das Kapital; "Shultz must prepare for the big kill," Eli deemed his elimination was foremost in Shultz' warped mind.

It was obviously taking longer than Shultz had expected, pondered a making Eli. Having shifted to the left, blinking his left eye four times and his right eye twice, a feint rap supported by a deep voice was heard. "Ready or not, here I is," said the Brown Bomber, smiling as he entered. Tossing his monogrammed towel and battered boxing gloves to Eli, he sprung into the bathtub. "What's the problem this time big fella?" he

asked leaning against the tiled wall.

"Shultz called Mengele in Berlin for new instructions. Now Shultz seems more determined than ever to get us thrown off of Home Relief. When he told Papa that no matter how large the holes in our shoes were, we were only entitled to one pair of shoes per year, you should have seen how red his grape got. Then he told Mama that we might enjoy stepping on rusty nails. And you know what he said about Mama's broken glasses? Use one eye."

"Don't you worry 'bout your little mammy. Why she sees more out of one eye than most people see out of two. Far as that Shultz character is concerned, one of these days your father is gonna get a real high-payin' job and that's when that Shultz will get his. Give him the one-two; you'll knock his block off! Now you keep your eye on things around here for me. I'm counting on you."

When Eli opened his eyes, his best friend in the whole world was gone.

Despite knowing any unreported income meant automatic expulsion from the Home Relief, Harry bared his true colors. Hustling the few dollars needed to fix Gitel's glasses, Harry would risk his lifelong profession.

Having promised to paint his sister Ennie's kitchen, he called and let it be known, ready or not he was going to paint her kitchen the following morning. Ennie was everyone's favorite aunt. She was short and stocky, wearing her dark-brown hair in a bun, she left little doubt she was Harry's sister. As always, Harry would live up to his

reputation for being the cheapest, fastest, and sloppiest painter this side of the Grand Concourse. Whenever Harry painted, Eli was there to paint under the sink and other tight spots.

His reputation preceding him by fifty minutes, 7:10 A. M., Sunday, Harry was enthusiastically ringing Ennie's doorbell. Prepared, she opened her door, stepped aside as Harry marched in '*shlepping*' a ladder, two gallons of paint, a drop-cloth and over-alls. Tagging behind, Eli entered carrying three horse-hair paintbrushes and a gallon of benzine.

Before Ennie had poured her baby brother a cup of coffee, the drop cloth was spread and he was stirring the paint. By the time she brought him his coffee, standing on the ladder, Harry had painted half the ceiling. Despite having painted her kitchen for as long as she could remember, she was still bedazzled by her brother's speed and agility. Looking up to him, she oohed and aahed.

Turning to acknowledge his beloved sister's reverence, without interrupting the rhythmic movements of his brush strokes, Harry inadvertently tipped over the gallon of ceiling paint on to her head and into her gaping mouth. Seeing her in a state of shock, bedecked with paint, Harry yelled, "It's all your fault! If you were out of the kitchen as I told you this whole damn thing wouldn't have happened."

With everybody's favorite aunt and Eli cleaning up the mess, Harry resumed painting. "You missed by the window," he said to his son, splashing paint. "And over there, by

the dumbwaiter!"

Interruption and all, they were on their way by ten o'clock.

Painting was a dangerous profession for it left telltale signs. Unfortunately, in addition to having painted everything in sight, he too was covered with flecks of paint. For fear of Shultz' watchful eyes, Gitel, Rhoda and Eli, using rags soaked with benzine, nervously scoured Harry from head to toe.

Eli understood why Shultz appeared to be so euphoric; it was in anticipation of seeing his mother struggle with her cracked glasses. Spotting Gitel's no-longer-broken glasses, Eli detected the other half of Shultz' schizophrenic personality come to pass: A Nazi prosecutor out for the kill. "Sit down!" Shultz ordered Harry.

"He's putting Papa on trial without giving him time to prepare his defense," whispered Eli to Rhoda.

"And look at his grape. It's turned fire red," Rhoda, short of breath winced and coughed.

Accusingly pointing his missing finger, Shultz commenced with his barrage. "Where are you hiding all your money?" he demanded. "Where are you working?"

Seizing the moment, Harry removed his torn undershirt. Baring his benign tumor on his armpit, he paraded around the kitchen. About the size of a large strawberry it was located above his left armpit. "You see? I can't even scratch my own back," Harry demonstrated.

"That was a good one," Rhoda mouthed, spying her frantic mother *'shushkering.'*

"I hope Mama doesn't *'shushker'* too loud," cautioned Eli, "Or we will be in worse trouble."

Rubbing his smoldering mole, Shultz continued, "I know all about your phony tumor," he roared, eyeing it suspiciously. "I was hoping it was cancer or something worse. Then you would no longer be eligible for public assistance. And since you will never get a job, you and your family would starve."

Having ogled Harry's benign license for almost an hour, Shultz departed, mumbling something about glasses, tumors and how the hell were those Greenwalds still managing to survive?

Eli had determined second grade was going to be a snap. He just would not go to school on the day of the eye test. Certain that the eye test was over, the following day he returned to school. When Mrs. Porilles informed him that he would have to be tested immediately. Disheartened, he realized that his triumphant plan had turned to disaster.

Most of the kids, including Ryan and Margarian, were still in his class and they were waiting. With not a sound to be heard, placing the little slip of yellow paper over his left and right eyes, to the disappointment of his fellow classmates Eli read to the 20-20 line.

"Now try it without your glasses" beckoned Mrs. Porilles.

"Oh, I never go anywhere without them," he pleaded.

"I am not asking you to go anywhere without your glasses Eli. Now please," she insisted, "Without your glasses.

It was so quiet, even the cockroaches were giving him a headache. Removing his glasses, Eli again placed the little yellow slip of paper over his naked left eye and read, "E."

"Okay" said Mrs. Porilles, "No sense trying your left eye, right?"

"Right," the boy concurred gratefully.

Having endured being called everything a blind bat was ever associated with, although his second grade class was not in Aushvitz, Eli swore, "Never again." That's what he thought.

"Rhoda! Get me a soup spoon, or else how the hell am I supposed to get Eli's feet into his shoes?" the frustrated Harry asked.

As it was May and shoes would not be issued until September, in desperation, Harry gave Eli one final shove. Uhhh! With pain and in horror Eli saw and felt his misbegotten shoes split at the seams. While Harry continued to stare in disgust, Benny crawled into the kitchen, coming to rest at his father's feet. Impulsively, Harry lifted his baby boy into his arms. Feeling warm and secure, laughing, Benny shit.

Knowing what was to follow when Benny had laughed, Eli and Rhoda also laughed.

"Take him away," demanded a perturbed Harry. "He did it to me again!"

Harry would not dream of making his eldest son play Barefoot Contessa in the Bronx.

The following morning he sprung into action. Renting a pushcart he went directly to the produce market on Washington Avenue. There he selected from the millions of tons of fruit offered a few crates of the sweetest, most delicious fruit imaginable.

Although he did not peddle often, due to the memorable tastes associated with the savoring of his fruit, Harry had developed a dedicated cult of not-only Jewish women. More than his melons, they adored his spiel enough to have followed him and his pushcart around Bathgate Avenue as if he were the Pied piper himself.

With his pushcart laden with strawberries and cantaloupe, Harry appeared at his favorite spot and within five minutes, like wild-fire, word of his coming was throughout the neighborhood. His entire following, not to mention all their friends who had heard about his amazing fruit, besieged him.

After making a quick stop at Tony's, while only intending to say hello and nosh on whatever his father was selling, seeing how busy he was Eli dropped his books and started helping as he marveled at his father's infectious chants.

"Ladies, ladies, taste my strawberries," he said through his all-purpose megaphone. "They're almost as sweet as you are... If you like cantaloupes? Wait until you eat mine."

Harry had an old trick. Soon as there were sixteen or seventeen hungry women waiting on line, Harry would raise the prices five cents. "No one complains, he has them eating out of his hand," Eli thought to himself. "Papa is going to make a fortune, but he's running out of strawberries. I wonder what he is going to do?"

"Ladies, ladies," he graciously bellowed. "My son Eli will be taking over temporarily. I promise you're in very good hands-- before you know it," he said departing, "I will be back with even bigger and sweeter strawberries, because you gorgeous women deserve it."

Instead of the line getting smaller, Eli noticed more growling stomachs had joined the forces. Feeling their stare, the boy wanted to use a couple of his father's chants, but he was afraid to do so. To make things even worse, he spotted Jimmy Ryan and Michael the Armenian headed his way. Red faced, he panicked. Just as they were about to pass him, to the amazement of Harry's fan club, Eli got on the end of the line of hungry growlers. As his two rotten friends passed, Eli waved gratuitously. And soon as they were out of sight, the boy resumed his peddling as the line grew and grew.

When Mike, the big Irish cop on the beat appeared out of nowhere, towering over the intimidated boy, in his thick Irish brogue he demanded, "You better get that pushcart out of here sonny, or else!"

"I'm only watching it for somebody," the terrified boy explained.

"Well, tell your somebody he got five minutes to move it!"

There was no way Eli could move the pushcart. Even if he could, he did not know where to take it. Being a man of his word, five minutes later, Mike the cop reappeared.

"I thought I told you to move it buster?"

"I can't officer," Eli pleaded. "I'm not strong enough."

"How do I know you're really waiting for someone else?" he growled. "Maybe this is your pushcart?"

"It isn't mine," pleaded Eli again. "Please don't give him a ticket."

"I'll be back in fifteen minutes and you better not be here, or else!" the big Irish cop warned.

In addition to those thirty or so restless, hungry women, Eli also applauded when his father returned with a new supply of the sweetest, most delicious strawberries. Soon after Harry's following had dispersed, Eli informed his father of Big Mike's threats.

"Papa, a big Irish cop wanted to give us a ticket," whimpered Eli.

"They don't give kids a ticket when they are caught peddling anymore," Harry grinned. "They just put them in jail and throw the key a way." Waiting until Eli had finished gulping, winking, Harry gave his son a big hug. Having made more than enough money to buy his growing son a new pair of shoes, they closed up shop.

Climbing aboard the empty pushcart, Eli assumed his normal position at the helm. With the soft summer breeze blowing in his face, to Eli, the Jewish Ben Hur, it was the best part of the day.

Chapter III

Harry boasted he could fix anything despite having gone to school only 'til the

Eli's Coming

sixth grade. Maybe that's why Eli felt his father was the most mechanically oriented man in the world.

In 1948, they used to go to visit Ennie's house every Sunday to watch television. To Eli's family it was a happening. To them it was enthralling watching "The Big Top," a circus-like show. Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, sometimes Tom Mix and wrestling. Harry loved wrestling. In addition to Ennie giving them the most delicious '*noshes*' and after feeding them a scrumptious meal, she and her brother would sing a duet. It was apparent to all that they both were frustrated entertainers. As the Greenwalds departed, Ennie would always give Eli and his two siblings a mushy kiss and quarter.

Ennie lived on Weeks Avenue, which was across Claremont Park. Knowing that they always had a wonderful time, anxious, they'd literally run to get there. One day when they arrived, a normally ebullient Ennie looked forlorn.

"*Vous iz de mer?*" "What's wrong?" Gitel asked.

"It doesn't work Gitel, Ennie sadly said.

Their chins hit the floor when they found out that the television was on the blink.

"What are you standing there like a dope?" Harry screamed at his sister. "Get me a Screwdriver and let me take a look."

"Absolutely not. What the hell do you know about televisions, Harry? You don't

have one!"

"Shut up and get me a Goddamn screwdriver," Harry annoyedly responded.

Not in the mood to absorb his wrath, begrudgingly, Ennie got him a screwdriver.

"Here, but don't break anything," she said.

"It's already broke dope. What am I going to break?"

Not only Gitel, but they all *'oyed'* and oohed, in fear that Harry would destroy the television, they so loved and needed. They soon were mesmerized as he disassembled the entire T.V. and then singing, *'My Yiddish Mama,'* put it back together.

Eli screamed! "Turn it on! Let's see what the hell we got here."

Naturally, they all applauded as the television went on. Before Eli learned better, even though his father never had a job, to him there was no one as talented, whether as a singer or a mechanic, than his unemployed father.

Just before his birthday, Eli saw his father hammering and sawing, so he asked him, "What are you making, Papa?"

"It's your birthday next week isn't it? So, I'm making you a shoe shine box for your present," he said. "It's about time you made a living, don't you think?"

"But, I don't know how to shine shoes Papa."

"You don't have to be a genius," Harry responded. "I'll teach you. Leave it up to me and I'll teach you to give the best shine, because I know," he said. "I know everything."

Because it was Eli's very own, the boy thought it was the best shoeshine box ever. Emblazoned on the front of it, in big, black numerals his father had painted 10 cents.

"Now put your foot on it and watch me carefully," Harry ordered. You see this bottle, it's cleaner. First you pour a little on this brush, then you rub it on the shoes like this," he said, rubbing it in a circular motion. After you wipe it off, you brush the shoes nice and easy like this. Don't waste too much time, it's only for show. Then you take the polish and you rub it in real good. After you rub it in, you start to brush the shoes back and forth like this and I mean brush. Did you see how I brushed Eli?" After he brushed, he took a chamois cloth and wiped Eli's shoes rhythmically. Snapping it back and forth, Harry actually made the cloth sing. "And you rub the shoe until it shines like a mirror. You see how your *'facockte'* shoes shine? It's easy, any dope can do it, even you."

"Wow, they're really shiny Papa. You did it, you really did it."

"After you finish, you smile at the man, stick your hand out and hope he gives you a tip. Now, I want you to give me a shine, *'boichic.'*"

Eli proceeded to follow his father's instructions and he couldn't believe how shiny his shoes came out. "How's that, Papa?" the boy asked, beaming.

"Never mind me," he said. "Go out there and make a living."

"Where should I go?" Eli asked.

"Come on, I'll show you," Harry responded.

He took his son to Claremont Parkway and Washington Avenue, right outside

their favorite kosher deli.

"Now I want you to yell, 'Shine'em up, shine'em up! Ten cents a shine. Shine'em up!"

Harry stood a few feet away and watched his son. When no one asked Eli for a shine, Harry sat and told his son to shine his shoes. He said, "Once people saw him get a shine, invariably they'd get a shine." Sure enough he was right. Soon as he sat down, a nice old man stood and watched. When Harry was finished, he looked at his shoes and said, "Nice job kid. Here's a dollar. You deserve it," he smiled and pretended to walk away.

The man sat down and Eli was about to give his first paying customer a shoeshine. With his father watching, he gave the man a fabulous shine. The elderly gentleman said it was the best shine he ever had and gave Eli two quarters. Soon as he left, Harry came over and asked Eli how much he gave him. The boy beamed when he showed his father two shiny quarters.

"Very good," he roared "and if you sang. You know how to sing like Jolson, don't you Eli? Maybe some dope will give you a dollar." For the rest of the day, every time Eli did a shine he sang and one man actually gave him a dollar. At the end of his first day on the job he had amassed \$2.50.

"It's fun working, isn't it Eli," Harry said, counting the money. "Tomorrow I want you to start working right in the morning."

For as long as Eli would shine shoes, his father took every penny he made.

Rhoda had always found dreaming to be a source of attainable pleasure: Her father never hollered at her and he was gainfully employed. But with Shultz having invaded her ecstasy, dancing on her throat as he readied her grave, breathing became more and more difficult for the little girl.

It was six in the morning and Shultz had been banging on their door for five minutes. "Open up! Investigator!" he boisterously echoed for their neighbors to hear. "Open up!"

With her awakened family lining up for inspection, rubbing the sleep from her eyes, Gitel opened the door.

"Why did it take you so long to answer?" Shultz said, clicking his heels. "Perhaps you were busy hiding your money?"

Eli prayed that Shultz hadn't found out about the money he made shining shoes.

"I demand you give me a key!" the Nazi bellowed.

Gasping for air, Rhoda wanted to run away, but she could not breathe nor move. She was turning blue. Running to aid her panic stricken daughter, Gitel hyperventilated. Compounding the felony, Eli noticed that Shultz was all smiles.

"Open the window!" Harry shouted. "Can't you see she can't breathe?" But it was he who then raced to the window and opened it, accidentally tearing down the white cotton curtains with the little red flowers in doing so. Holding his daughter, he pained as she

gaspd and gaspd in the opened window.

After what seemed like an eternity to those concerned, the frightened little girl managed to catch her breath. Despite it being six in the morning, Harry, aided and abetted by Gitel and Eli began to sing a Jewish song; *'Ich Fuhr Ah Heim'* "I'm going home." Although Rhoda did not feel like singing at the moment, knowing how much it meant to Shultz, Eli urged her to do so.

Without even bidding them adieu, Shultz departed, mumbling something about, "Almost getting one of them and if it is the last thing he did," he vowed.

'Blinda bestids,' was Harry's endearing reference to his family being blind bastards. "My luck," he would effusively bemoan, "There must be millions of dollars laying in the streets of the Bronx and I had to have four *'blinda bestids'* for a family. Why, *'Gott,'* what did I do to deserve them and that rotten Shultz? I could have been rich like Rockefeller," he cried, wiping his crocodile tears. "I should have been rich. I escaped the *'pogrom,'* didn't I? I deserve to be rich."

As always, his darling mother Gitel, his kid sister Rhoda, his baby brother Benny and Eli prayed they'd disappear into oblivion, for once again they were reminded how blind and incompetent they all were. Rhoda would immediately start to cry, telling her mother that she really didn't want to be blind, because none of her friends were.

"You're not blind, *'mommaleh,'* you just don't see that good. It seems we all don't

see that good," Gitel sobbed. "Only Papa sees that good."

On the way to their monthly, three-mile safari to the Bronx Zoo, as always, Gitel '*shlepped*' their chopped eggs and fried onion sandwiches on '*challah*' and a thermos with lemonade.

Walking along Bathgate Avenue, a mecca of mainly immigrant Jewish shopkeepers, where everybody and anybody shopped, they'd always stop at '*Moishes*,' the most famous appetizing store in the Bronx. '*Moishe*' liked Harry so he would take a dozen half sour pickles from his enormous wooden barrel and give them to him and say, "You'll pay me, you'll pay me Harry. One way or another, you'll pay me." They all liked '*Moishe*,' simply because they loved the price of his pickles.

It took Eli awhile, but at the tender age of eight he finally figured out why most people laughed, pointed and stared at them. He thought it was because, whenever and wherever they traversed, at his father's behest, if they knew what was good for them they better have their nose and eyes to the ground like moles and ant-eaters.

Searching the cobblestone streets for lost treasure; squinting and stooped over, Eli thought they must have looked more like Quasimodo's hunchbacked cousins rather than the team of misbegotten scavengers they had become. As expected, they all cowered as once again they heard Harry's familiar '*g'shrai*,' shriek, "I did it, I did it. Can you believe I did it again!" he boasted.

They all turned around and saw Harry smiling as he pointed to a wrinkled dollar bill lying on the ground. He picked it up and rubbed it for good luck. "Only me, only I give a damn if we have any money!"

Despite the fact that Harry never worked or had a job, he still yelled, "I'm the only one that works around here and my *'fahstunkeneh'* family, you think they help me make a living? Never! They walk and talk, because they know I'll take care of everything, like I always do," he said, moaning.

"Talk about being lucky. He found a dollar again. In the past two months, he must have found five or six dollars and none of us even found a quarter," Eli sighed. "I can't believe it," the boy said to himself. "Why can't I be so lucky? Why can't I have such good eyes?"

Normally, they'd all be euphoric, for having found a dollar would mean they were rich, if only momentarily. It meant that Harry would buy them ice cream and popcorn. He was a sport and despite that 'he' found the dollar, he would always share his newfound riches with his beleaguered family. Eli didn't know why he felt suspicious of him, after all he was his father, but he had a feeling.

All the Greenwald's had bad eyes. Eli wore thick, horn-rimmed glasses because his was the worst. When the school nurse had tested his eyes, with his glasses on, he almost saw 30-30. So why didn't he find a dollar once in awhile? He just didn't understand.

The Bronx Zoo was their favorite haunt, because in those days it was free. As always, the four of them were walking ahead of Harry, because they were in a rush to say hello to the chimps, their favorite animals who for some reason, like his father, always reminded Eli of his mother's family. He noticed one of his laces had become undone, so he stopped to tie his shoe and just happened to peek back at his father, who did not see him staring at him. He flipped and couldn't believe what he saw. There he was, smiling devilishly as he casually placed a dollar on the pavement before him and then proceeded to shriek, "I did it, I did it again. Can you believe it, I found another dollar while you *'blinda bestids,'* I know what you're doing. You're counting pigeons while I'm killing myself trying to make a living! I could have been rich, filthy rich!"

Stopping at the Carvel on Fordham Road, Harry bought one vanilla cone dipped in sprinkles for his children to share. Lining up in size-places, Eli hated size-places more than anything because he was always the shortest in school. Watching him take the first big lick, Benny said, "Why do I always have to go last?"

"Because you're a fat Jap, Benny and you better not take a bite this time, or I'll kill you," threatened Eli.

Kicking anything they saw over the cobblestone streets while systematically licking away, the siblings raced on. Cringing with each opposing lick, nearing the end of their vanilla orgy, those three Jewish kids were ready to kill. Graciously intervening, when Harry took the last lick, bloodshed had been stilled. In its place was disappointment

leading to anger.

"How could he do that?" thought Gitel, staring at Harry. With added reason she said, "Come children, let's go."

Walking, Rhoda sobbed, "It was my turn for a lick Mama."

"Next week you'll go first," Gitel said, embracing her disappointed daughter.

Entering the Bronx Zoo, Harry greeted the fat old walrus with, "Good morning '*Zeyda. Dahven'* much today? And why don't you take a shave already?"

Despite seeing their mother grimace, her three devoted children could not help but laugh.

"Nice day we're having '*Booba,*' he shouted to the grazing giraffe. "Why don't you tell your husband to take shave? He looks terrible."

Having labeled the rhino Mendel; about to christen Gitel's last remaining relative, Harry was rudely interrupted by his laughing son. "I HAVE TO GO!" announced Benny searching for a rest room.

"He has to go!" repeated Harry. "Why didn't you make him go before we left?"

"They all made before we left" defended Gitel. "Some people have to go more than others, that's all," she said, starting to catch Benny.

"Which way is the bathroom?" Harry asked.

When no one answered, pissed-off, and '*schlepping'* Benny, they were off. Scurrying past Gitel's unnamed relatives, Harry prayed there were no lavatory or laboratory signs to

contend with, because he had forgotten which was which. "There it is!" sighed Harry pointing to the left of the monkey house, "MEN!"

"I made Papa," Benny proudly announced, reappearing.

"For how long?" wondered Harry. "For how long?"

"I think the walrus looks more like Shultz," Eli whispered to Rhoda. "Papa just likes to tease Mama."

"I made Mama" Benny announced, returning.

"What do you want, a medal?" Eli asked. "You always make!"

"I saw Eli making, I saw Eli making," Benny said, running to his catching mother.

"I'm going to kill him," threatened Eli. "Joe's gone," he sadly whispered.

"Who's Joe, Eli?" Rhoda asked.

"You wouldn't understand Rhoda," Eli saddened.

"Come on, let's go!" Harry ordered. "I had enough of this place. We'll come back next week."

During that summer, prior to his entering the third grade, Eli had devised a plan to bypass his impending disaster: the eye test. Except for the Armenian, whose family had moved to Jersey City, the same rotten kids encompassed his class. He was sorry Oily wasn't there when Mrs. Stern announced the eye test. Raising his hand, he asked, "May I be tested first Mrs. Stern?"

With the class urging her to do so, she acquiesced. Ignoring the cockroach marathon, Eli confidently neared the starting line. Returning the gaze of his wide-eyed, giggling classmates, the boy commenced. After placing a little slip of yellow paper over his left and right eyes, he read to the twenty-twenty line. Without being prompted to do so, when he removed his glasses, his face did not redden nor did he start to sweat. Duplicating the yellow slip of paper routine, milking each letter as if it were an aria, Eli slowly read to the twenty-twenty line without the obvious aid of his thick, horn-rimmed glasses.

Besides the fact that monkeys do not get red faces like he once had and how difficult it had been to memorize the eye chart (even Cheetah couldn't do it.) Eli remembered when his father had tried to convince him that Darwin was wrong; a realist, Eli was almost certain, Adam and Eve might be a Greenwald.

Since settling in the Bronx, Harry and his two sisters Ennie and Bertha had spent every Saturday night at one of their respective apartments. Being *'Litvaks'* they savored *'schmaltz'* herring, potato *'kugle,'* cabbage soup and the likes; then they would top off those evenings in song.

Knowing her chubby baby boy had not been forthcoming since six o'clock, sitting on one side of her worn couch with babe in lap, Gitel cutchied her time bomb. On the far end, sitting on aunt Ennie's warm lap, in addition to all that cutchyng, Rhoda was being inundated with big, juicy kisses. Breathing easier, Rhoda was certain she would love Aunt Ennie forever. Propped between all that humanity, Bertha and her very impatient

husband Murray waited. Murray had this unnerving habit of shaking his legs rapidly whenever he sat. Harry often asked him, "If you have to go, why the hell don't you go?" And Murray's constant burping did not help matters either. Except for Benny and Rhoda and Eli who was in the bathroom getting made up by his father Harry, no one seemed too thrilled being there.

Having burnt the cork from a bottle of Manisewitz wine, Harry hastily finished blackening his son's beaming face. "Not only do I sound like Jolson, I bet I look exactly like him when he was my age Papa," marveled Eli, looking in the mirror.

Entering the darkened living room and seeing the ceramic lamp that Harry had so ingeniously used to illuminate center stage, Eli imagined it to be the Copacabana. Using the white handkerchief that his father had strategically placed in his back pocket, Eli dramatically wiped his sweating brow, got down on one knee and gave them "Mammy." Just as the applause was to end, he began "The Anniversary Waltz."

Adjusting her girdle, Aunt Ennie, who always followed Eli to the podium, sang an old Yiddish song called "*My Shteleh Bell*," "My Beautiful Town." Ending the deafening applause that followed, Rhoda cheered the loudest. Bertha, jealous of her sister since they were children - Ennie could hear and she could not - was all the more upset seeing Rhoda's obvious preference. Rising from the sagging couch, she too implored her nervous husband to stop shaking his leg and pee. Bertha did not want anyone, especially her beloved brother Harry's, attention to be diverted when it was her time 'neath the

spotlight to sing. Just as she was belting out a rollicking rendition of "*Ich Vil Zach Shpielen*," "I want to play," Gitel, with babe in arms rushed across center stage.

Despite being overwhelmed by Benny's distinctive effervescence, gasping, Aunt Bertha finished her performance. Waiting for his family to be seated, having tilted his black fedora over his demonstrative left eye, Harry tucked his black turtleneck sweater into his black trousers. Taking his place beneath the ever-sought-after spotlight, readjusting its light to illuminate his face only, Harry sang in Yiddish, "*In America there is a style, where every stoop looks like a chicken coop. Do you know why?*" And just as the applause was dying down he ended his evening's performance with his all time favorite, "Rumania."

Meeting backstage, in addition to the refreshments to be had, arguments were forthcoming. Sampling a slice of bobka, Bertha '*kvetched*,' "I don't think it is fair! That's the second time in the last two weeks that Benny did it! From now on, I'm going second!"

Disregarding her jealous sister's outburst, everyone's favorite aunt resumed cutchying Rhoda while assuring her favorite nephew. "Eli, one day you will be so rich and famous, we'll sing in your brownstone on Fifth Avenue. Amen," she added, giving her favorite niece and nephew a quarter.

"We better hide it from Shultz, Rhoda," Eli warned.

"I wish you could hide me instead Eli," Rhoda revealed. "I hate him."

The following Monday, frustrated, Shultz decided on a new plan of attack. Pointing his missing finger at Rhoda, Shultz ordered her to take the stand. "Tell me where you have hidden the money." She would have told him about the quarter but she could not breathe. "Tell me where you have hidden it!" he demanded, his grape, fire-red.

Despite all he had done for her, when Rhoda opened her mouth, Eli was sure she was going to betray him. But, the girl with the open mouth did not say a word. Seeing her turn blue, Gitel rushed to the aid of her frightened daughter. Taking her arm, Gitel fled.

Taking two steps at a time, retracing the very steps that she and Harry had taken when her water had broken, mother and child ran all the way to Bronx Hospital. Coming face to face with its emergency doors, they came to an abrupt stop. Too frightened to enter, they 'shushkered' instead. Fortunately, an observant policeman escorted them to the emergency room.

"Take a seat before there are none left." he advised. "Soon as someone is free, they will be with you."

Rhoda had never had the pleasure of being in a hospital before. Hearing all the moans and groans that seemed to be coming from every direction, she imagined it to be a facsimile of those scary movies that had frightened her so. Certain there were people dying all over the place; she wanted to go home before they came to get her.

"Oy,'s look how that man is bleeding," Gitel cried.

"And his fingers are in that bag of ice," Rhoda gasped. "Maybe what I have is contagious Mama? I'm sorry."

"Don't you worry about me. Mamas never catch anything from their children," she assured.

Spotting Dolores Johnson, a huge black nurse hurriedly wheeling a woman on stretcher, Gitel began to hyperventilate.

"You should be home with Benny and Eli, Mama. Papa should be here with me."

The ten-inch knife that was protruding from speeding Johnson's victim was the "*Pias de Resistance*." Gitel began to whoop like a lovesick crane. Thinking Gitel was having cardiac arrest; Johnson left the woman with the knife sticking out of her back and proceeded to give Gitel mouth-to-mouth resuscitation.

Since, Gitel had always been intimidated by authority, with God-Harry, Harry-God, Home Relief, police and doctors, listed in order of reverence. Frightened and confused, Gitel never dared to complain when one of the big five in her life, (nurses, doctors. To her they were all the same) kissed her on her kosher lips, blew in her mouth, sat her in a chair and wheeled her away.

Two hours later, holding Gitel's hands, four of the most concerned young interns returned. Seeing her mother safe and sound, her breathing restored, Rhoda and Gitel, retracing the very steps they had taken to the Bronx Hospital, ran all the way home '*shushkering*.'

"I don't believe you can not work! And as much as I would like to believe your frail little daughter cannot breathe, because she is still breathing. Unfortunately I am not that lucky. If you need a doctor? Walk in the snow. And absolutely no telephone!"

Mouthing something about getting closer, the disappointed Nazi departed.

"All of our friends have a phone Eli," Rhoda said, her difficulty with breathing having eased. "Why are we so different?"

"I hate that Shultz more than you Rhoda. I need a telephone too. I have friends you know," said Eli fondling his Black Beauty. It's Papa's fault. If, he got a job? We wouldn't have to ask Shultz permission to get a telephone or anything. I am never going to be like, Papa. I am always going to have a job."

More important than when he had revealed his secret hiding place and let her touch his Black Beauty, Rhoda admired her brother's candor: "Like the time he said they came from monkeys. Even though Papa proved he was wrong, Eli said it because he thought it was true."

With their friends having no alternative, wanting to play with the two most popular kids on the block, to Harry's consternation Eli and Rhoda caused their doorbell to be rung and rung and rung.

"How the hell will I be wide-awake for Hitler's one-of-these-nights, surprise-bombing-attacks if my own children will not let me sleep? Tell them to stop

ringing the damn doorbell!"

Moments after Eli had convinced Rhoda to get rid of those pick-up sticks (Once you are in the third grade you're supposed to move on to "Kick the Can.") Looking to their opened window, Gitel's short, flailing arms were acknowledged.

"First a kiss for my Eli and now a kiss for my Rhoda. Don't go anywhere, I'll be right back," she said opening the refrigerator.

Seated in assigned places, Eli announced, "I hate this tablecloth. It's always so sticky."

"I know Eli. But what can we do?" his mother empathized. "Jewish people must eat on a tablecloth."

"But why does it have to be plastic Ma?"

"Because all Jewish people eat on a plastic tablecloth," said Gitel, serving her children a slice of well-buttered rye. "Come," she said, her eyes a twinkle; "Papa has a surprise for you."

"Did he get me a new doll?" Rhoda asked.

"You are so selfish" Eli chided. "Mama said it's for the both of us!"

Entering Mama's bedroom, with the blinds drawn, propped upon all the pillows in the house, a shiny-black new telephone beckoned.

"Look at it Eli, our very own telephone," said Rhoda, jumping for joy. In addition to the better scheduling of her playtime, she hoped her father would have one less thing to

holler about.

This happiest of moments on the Greenwald preserve, this wonderful feeling of elation, soon became reality: Life and death. If Shultz caught wind of the shiny-black new telephone, regardless of Rhoda's difficulties or Harry's status as the only Commander and Chief with a tumor in the Bronx, they would be thrown off of Home Relief. One wonders why Harry was so daring. Was it his concern for his daughter's wellbeing, or the taunting doorbell and his lack of sleep?

"I'm sure some inconsiderate bastard will call us when Shultz is here," Harry forecasted. "Eli, turn the dial on the bottom of the telephone to low! Rhoda, pile all the pillows on top!"

In time, bells stopped ringing and Harry finally got a good days sleep. Awakening at dawn before even peeing, Gitel would go into their survival drill: Without waking them, having wrestled her children's unfluffy pillows, Gitel piled them upon the telephone. Responding, Harry would conveniently roll back upon all those pillows and resume sleeping.

Every time the Aryan saw Harry sleeping peacefully on all those pillows, departing, he would mumble something about there being too many Jews and pillows in this world.

Chapter IV

Mrs. Saunders, Eli's wonderful fourth grade teacher, possessing dark-brown skin, sported a short Afro haircut and a smile that always brought one in response. But it was her sensitivity and exuberant personality that Eli found so endearing.

"Since there are no objections," a smiling Mrs. Saunders agreed, "You may go first, Eli."

Nearing the starting line, he glared at Jimmy Ryan, who being the only remaining witness of his prior disasters had considerately forewarned Eli's new classmates.

Mouthing "Blind Kike," Freckles returned Eli's glare.

Fueled by knowing he was going to succeed, there were no more noisy cockroaches to contend with, nor did he hear the silence that had enveloped his fragile domain. Placing a small yellow slip of paper over his left eye, Eli confidently zipped to the twenty-twenty line. Angrily, twenty sets of disappointed eyes turned to Jimmy Ryan. "It's his other eye," Jimmy promised. "He can't even see the chart. I'm telling you-- he's blind."

In the midst of switching eyes, Eli, Harry's double decided he too wanted to set a world record. In machine gun-like fashion Eli rattled off every letter on the eye chart in six and a half seconds. Slumping in his seat, Jimmy Ryan crossed his heart and swore, "On my blind, dead grand father's grave, when that smart-ass Jew takes off his coke bottles, he won't even know where he is. Too bad my friend Michael's not here, he'd tell ya."

Taking his cue, Eli removed his thick horn-rimmed glasses and paused. Puffing on his imaginary stogie, little Edward G. Robinson took them to the twenty-twenty line in style.

Hearing her class razz Jimmy Ryan, "Freckle-blind," at that moment, Mrs. Saunders and Eli were one and the same. Having been called Sugar baby and nigger-girl, she too had been the brunt of all those vicious remarks fourth graders are known to bestow. Thus, she knew why Eli had memorized the eye chart.

Having stopped off at toothless Tony's, singing his way home, Eli was unaware that Mrs. Saunders hadn't been more than a few steps behind. "Toot, Toot, Tootsyng" the passing trolley, he continued on his one-man show. Kicking an orange peel for almost two sewers, he finished with "My Blushing Rosie." Waiting for the imaginary applause, he paused on a 170th Street. To his astonishment, he felt a hand touch his shoulder. "Maybe its Joe?" his little heart longed. "It can't be Joe," he argued. "I'm not making doody." Turning to see who had touched him ever so gently, he was surprised to see it

was Mrs. Saunders.

"You have a pretty good voice Eli," she aired, hugging him warmly.

"Thanks. Thanks a lot" he said, moved by her warmth.

"Do you always sing walking home?"

"Not when I have to walk my sister. But she went to her friend's house," said Eli.

"See you Monday handsome and have a happy Rosh Hashana." Crossing 170th Street, humming "My Blushing Rosie," she waved.

The following morning, a day before *'Rosh Hashana'* no less, Shultz was heard blaring, "Investigator! Open up! I demand a key!"

Gitel was serving oatmeal to her three children, although startled before, it was the first time she ever dropped the unlumpy oatmeal. Entering, Shultz stood at attention and leered. Seeing the Jewess on her hands and knees, he clicked his heels enthusiastically as a faint ring was heard forthcoming from beneath all those pillows and the feeling of terror engulfed all their being.

When his coughing, frightened sister heard Eli whisper, "I hope Benny comes in and shits on him," her admiration for his having the gumption to speak his mind swelled.

As the nearly inaudible ringing continued, seeing his *'shushkering'* wife wipe the cold sweat from her brow, Harry sprung into action. Hoping to distract the Nazi, Harry removed his torn undershirt and flaunted the same tumor that Shultz so despised. When Harry went down on one knee, Shultz thought Harry was going to reveal where he had

hidden the money. Adding much to Shultz' neurosis, Harry sang "Rumania." Joined by his entire entourage, sans Benny, who was getting ready to shit.

Having endured so much joy at six in the morning, a forlorn Shultz was heard muttering something about all those singing Jews as he walked down the two flights of steps.

The moment his parents had departed for '*shul*,' standing upon the rickety folding chair, tilting his father's fedora over his left eye and then menacingly pointing his middle finger, Eli warned "Benny, you fat pig! Get away from the candles! You want to burn your nose again dummy?"

"He's not standing that close," Rhoda defended Benny as she cutchied him. "My brother's too smart to make the same mistake twice, so there!"

"Oh yeah?" said Eli pointing to a glob of stewed prunes that Benny had stored for safe-keeping on Eli's hand-me-down shirt.

Putting the glob in his mouth, Benny laughed. "You know how I always get hungry Eli. Well, I was saving it for later.

"That's right," confirmed Rhoda. "Benny always gets hungry after dinner."

"Help me," Benny asked, climbing on his father's chair. With his beloved sister holding the trusty megaphone for him, unable to control his laughter, Benny shouted, "Two against one Eli! Two against one!"

Hitching his pants and squinting his eyes, Eli turned Cagney. "It looks like its time for

a game of 'Knucks.' Get the cards Rhoda! Nobody says I'm wrong and gets away with it!"

"We can't play Mr. Cagney," Rhoda mocked. "The ace and queen of spades are missing. Right Benny?"

"Since when?" Eli asked.

"Since we found out," answered Rhoda confidently.

Changing from Cagney to Peter Lorrie his voice lowered. "If I were in your shoes, I'd get those missing cards before someone winds up dead around here. Benny, did you hear what I said? Go get them!"

Begrudgingly, Benny lifted his shirt and produced the missing ace and queen of spades.

"I hate knucks," Benny whined.

"I knew you were responsible. You know that story Papa tells about that mix up when you were born? Well, I think it is about time you know the truth. You're adopted. Your real name is Hatachi and you're a fat Jap!" he said shuffling the cards. "Now let's get started! You deal Rhoda!"

"I'm not playing," Benny replied scampering off. "I have to make."

Eli tried to grab him, but like the little pink ball he had missed playing onesies, Benny eluded his lunging grasp. With his fat kid brother safely nestled in his secret meeting

place, Eli turned to Rhoda who asked, "Since its '*Rosh Hashana*' Eli, do you think Papa will get a job this year?"

About to say, "I wouldn't count on it," seeing the sadness in his sister's eyes he answered, "I hope so Rhoda. I really do Benny! You better get out of the toilet right now! What the hell are you doing in there?" he roared through the megaphone.

"I can't," Benny pleaded through the door.

"Why not"

"Because I haven't finished making."

"I don't care! You better come out this second, or it's double hard Knucks!" Brushing aside Benny who was trying to pick his pants up, Eli entered his clubhouse and slammed the door. Quickly dropping his pants, he shifted to the left and blinking his left eye four times and his right eye twice, just as he was about to burst, a familiar rap on the door was heard. "Who ever it is, come in quickly. I really have to talk to you."

When Benny opened the door to Eli's secret meeting place and saw that Eli was still making, Benny laughed, mocking, "I saw Eli making. I saw Eli making."

"When Eli screamed, "What the hell are you doing in here?" unfortunately he made doody. The leading authority on S.S. movements in the Bronx had never done so before. He had always waited until the best friend a kid ever had come and gone.

"I only knocked to tell you I haven't finished making yet. YOU told me to come in," Benny hawed. "I saw Eli making, I saw Eli making."

"Shut the door before I kill you, you fat Jap!" threatened the disturbed Eli. He was too sad to have moved, when a drop from the overhead water tank hit him on the head. And, no matter how hard he would try, Eli would never hear the best friend a kid ever had say, "Here I is," again.

"I'll get you for that Benny," Eli vowed, pulling the not-so-long-chain.

With Eli going to sleep rather early, Rhoda and Benny awaited Mama and Papa's return from the *'Rosh Hashana'* service.

During the night, all were awaked to the sound of Benny's nightly ritual: *'Schlepping'* his feet to the refrigerator to get his midnight *'nosh.'*

From his darkened bedroom, through his trusty megaphone, Harry roared, "Hey Mr. *'Schlepper,'* when are you going to learn how to walk like a normal human being? And stop eating every God-damn minute!"

"It's not his fault that he's a growing boy," defended an annoyed Gitel. *'Zeyda'* was about to chastise her when she had been so rudely awakened. "Stop picking on everybody," she said closing her eyes.

Returning to his bed, when Benny had climbed over Eli in total darkness, he had assumed his brother, whose arm was dangling over the side of the bed, was fast a sleep. Coming to rest against the wall with all those cracks in it, Benny closed his eyes.

Having had to tolerate the ever-growing population of mice that shared their apartment, Benny swore he heard one. "Eli, are you up?" the once happy child asked

with trepidation.

Still trying to overcome what had not transpired in his secret meeting place that afternoon, heartbroken Eli didn't respond. Trying to get into position, Eli's dangling hand inadvertently scratched the floor.

Hearing the scratch, Benny immediately tensed. "Are you up?" he asked hopefully. "If you don't answer, I swear I'm going to lay one. I think there's another mouse in our room!"

Laughing to himself while feigning sleep, Eli scratched his worn floor a little louder.

Squirming up against the cracks, more frightened than ever, Benny cried, "I think it's under the bed. It's under the bed! I can tell!"

Barely able to control his laughter, Eli scratched the floor even harder.

Sitting erect, Benny cried to his unresponsive brother, "Eli! It's under our bed!"

Rolling over as if asleep, the nail on Eli's big toe accidentally scratched Benny's leg. Jumping over his sleeping brother, running for his life, Benny made it safely to his mother's bedside. "There is a big mouse in our bed," he screamed. "And Eli is still in it fast asleep!"

Jumping out of bed, Gitel ran to save her sleeping son. Lighting a Chesterfield as he followed close behind, Harry roared, "I don't believe it. They don't go into bedrooms anymore."

Lying there, shaking with laughter, Eli was too weak to dry his tears. "Even though I

didn't do it on purpose, I got him for you Joe. I got the fat Jap."

"Don't cry my sweet *'bubala,* '" pleaded Gitel, hugging her almost eaten-up alive son. "Everything's all right." Turning to Harry, she vented her long-contained anger. "It's your fault they were almost eaten alive! Why didn't you set the mousetrap in their bedroom instead of the living room? Who sleeps in the living room?" she asked, drying Eli's crocodile tears on her faded-pink flannel nightgown.

"Don't you remember how many nights I've caught a mouse in the living room? Nine days in-a-row, right? I'm telling you it has to be a world record," Harry vowed.

"Let Al Jolson make records!" Gitel replied. "Better you should concentrate on your children's well-being for a change."

With Harry departing to the living room, Rhoda entered holding Benny's hand. Rubbing the sleep from her eyes she asked, "What happened Mama?" Hearing her almost certain world record setting father rushing back, she turned to face him.

Brandishing his catch-of-the-day-at-night, record-setting mousetrap, the Great white hunter announced through his trusted megaphone, "You see? I got another one and it's really big."

Narrowly escaping his outstretched offering, the petrified Greenwalds slammed shut Eli's bedroom door.

"You have to see it," Harry pleaded, rattling Eli's locked door. "It looks like the biggest one yet. You should see its eyes," he coaxed, rattling the door with added vigor.

Seeing the hinges loosen scared as never before, Harry's family put their weight against the door. "We believe you," Gitel screamed. "The children don't want to see it. Please Harry, they saw enough already."

"We know you set a world record Papa," Eli acknowledged. "Now please throw it down the dumbwaiter." Recalling how his snot-nosed sister had gloated when she almost set a new world record on him, he knew just how his father felt regaling. Emanating from the 8'x10' bedroom, shrill '*shushkering*' interrupted Harry's shining moment. With the fear of having to live the rest of his life with the '*Shushkering*' Tabernacle Choir foremost in his mind, Harry acquiesced, "All right, I just threw it in the garbage."

Harry was unaware that Eli had opened the door a crack and spied him still admiring what he thought was the biggest mouse with the most disgusting eyes he ever caught: meaning no disrespect, just as his father was about to pounce, Eli slammed the door shut.

With all of them snuggling in Eli's single bed, Gitel recalled the time above Sam the butcher's butcher shop when she too had slept in one bed with her mother and her two sisters.

With '*Rosh Hashana*' over, returning to school, Eli was elated when Mrs. Saunders had insisted that he play "Doc" in their fourth grade production of "Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs." Recalling his favorite teacher saying, "You have a pretty good voice Eli, " the boy had a sneaking suspicion that at long last his time had come.

"Rehearsal begins tomorrow," Mrs. Saunders reminded her departing class.

"Come on Rhoda, I'm in a hurry. I have to go home and rehearse. I'm going to be 'Doc,' so hurry up and what do you need so many friends for? There's your teacher. Say goodbye and let's go!"

Rehearsal fixed in his mind, certain that toothless Tony's hawking would be a distraction to his pending musical, he bypassed his fix of Captain Marvel and the trolley cars.

The excited boy sang during and after bread and butter, up to pot-roast, then to milk and homemade cookies and ultimately to sleep as a voice echoed, "You sound just like Jolson."

The following morning, staring at his beloved Mrs. Saunders, Eli waited for the rehearsal to begin. Disaster struck soon after. His dream of fame and fortune vanished. "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" was not a musical.

Being the trooper that he had been weaned to be, Eli rehearsed his four lines with his Mother, Rhoda, Benny and anyone else he could corner. "She is so beautiful. We must not wake her. Ribit, Ribit." He was also second Froggy.

"Ribitted out of his mind, Harry soon acquired a strong distaste for frogs.

Assured that he knew his part inside out, Eli began to learn all the others.

The opening performance was given to a packed auditorium. "Wait until you hear my son "Ribit," Harry said turning to Mrs. Katz, who had more than adored his melons the

last few summers.

"I'm sure," she flirted. "Like father, like son."

Except for Jimmy Ryan the Prince muffing one of his lines, in addition to Mrs. Saunders, Eli was also proud of his entire class. The following day, the fourth, fifth and sixth graders noisily filled the auditorium. Backstage, Mrs. Saunders was pacing nervously. Two minutes before curtain and no prince. Eli ascertained that the cackles he started hearing were coming from those wise-ass sixth graders. Fortunately, Eli was a method actor. Into being "Doc," all that noise had little effect.

When Mrs. Saunders asked him to play the Prince in addition to his other roles, Eli graciously agreed. Beaming, she hugged him. Assuming the posture of a prince, he hurriedly mouthed his four lines; "I was once a frog. Now I am a prince. A prince, a prince."

As the dark-green curtains parted, Mrs. Saunders squeezed his hand and said, "Show them what you're made of Eli. Break a leg."

Knowing it was the moment everyone had been waiting for, Eli waited a moment longer for those loud mouths to reach the edge of their seats. Making his long-awaited appearance, a la Cagney, he gazed at Sleeping Beauty who was supposed to have been sleeping. Shocked to see her giggling nervously, he pondered, "Why is the idiot showing me her braces? When he tried to say, "I was once a frog," nothing came out. For the first time in his young life, Eli had drawn a blank. Red-faced and sweating, he recalled

hearing the great Lawrence Olivier describe how foolish he had felt whenever he forgot his lines.

"Hearing the wise-ass sixth graders yell, "What are you waiting for dummy? Spit it out!" Despite his unblackened face, figuring, "What the heck, it always worked before." Sword and all, Eli got down on one knee and gave them "Mammy."

With Gitel and Harry leading the way, Eli received his long-awaited standing ovation. During intermission, telling him that she loved his performance and imploring him to do it again, Mrs. Saunders gave the boy a very warm, congratulatory hug.

Long before Eli had turned "Sleeping Beauty" into an Al Jolson revue, it had been determined they would take the show to P.S. 4, an enemy school. The following week, it was to be performed at Our Lady of Victory, the same school where Eli had spied all those nuns enter, but none ever came out. Enemy schools he could live with, but a Gentile Parochial School was a whole other ball game.

They did two shows that day at P.S. 4 and the response was overwhelming. Some first and second graders actually asked Eli for his autograph. "Two cents," the boy said. As the line grew, Eli raised the price to three cents.

After school, walking arm-in-arm with Mrs. Saunders, Eli thought she never looked more radiant. Nearing 170th Street she gushed excitedly, "Eli, that was the greatest piece of show business I have ever witnessed. I love it. When you open at the Copa, I would like to be sitting in the first row."

"I promise," Eli vowed. "Right next to my mother and father."

"Now, you have a good Yom Kippur Eli. And don't forget, next week it's Our Lady of Victory."

Chapter V

Euphorically awed when *'Yom Kippur'* falls on the Sabbath, there are those that consider it to be the holiest of days. Given the opportunity to beg absolution for all past sins, Jews have been likened to residing in the state of religious wellbeing, nirvana is theirs.

On the wings of *'Shma Yisrael,'* washing the slate they are reborn. Soaring, they vow repeatedly, "Dear Lord forgive me. I am truly sorry. I will never do it again." Then their souls sigh the sigh of sighs."

"You look beautiful Mama," Rhoda said touching Gitel's attractive, hand-tailored suit. "Wait until Aunt Ennie and Aunt Bertha see you in *'shul.'* I'm glad Aunt Rose has all

her clothes made, Mama. They look better on you," she whispered.

"Thank you my sweet darling" Gitel said embracing Rhoda. "It is a beautiful suit."

Rose lived in a twelve-room mansion she had built in the Rockaways. A creature of the finer things, in addition to other luxuries she enjoyed, her clothes were made to order.

Worn but once, occasionally she gave them to Gitel gift-wrapped in her timely speech for all to hear. "At least

When my poor sister goes to *'shul,'* she should look like a *'mensch'.*" Rose deemed her *'mitzvah,'* good deed, to be sanctimonious.

Gathered in the living room above Zeyda's used clothing business, three days prior to *'Yom Kippur,'* which was to fall on the sacred Sabbath, Rose again displayed her benevolent altruism. "Here Gitel, I have another present for you" she said presenting her once worn, hand tailored, English tweed suit.

Embarrassed, Gitel hesitated.

"Take it Gitel" *'Booba'* quietly urged. "Your sister is giving you something you need."

Try it on," begged Dora. "She only wore it once. I wish I could wear it."

Knowing her mother's downtrodden wardrobe, Rhoda pleaded, "Try it on Mama. Please. It looks beautiful."

Wanting to please her daughter, she entered her mother's pristine bathroom to try it on.

Eli and Benny were awed as they watched their mysterious grandfather rock back and forth with that ash about to fall, "But it never falls," they pondered.

"Does he ever talk?" Benny asked a little too loudly. "I THINK I HAVE TO MAKE?"

Deserting Gitel as if Roosevelt was about to announce the war had ended, *'Booba,'* Rose and Dora rushed to Benny's side. With *'Booba'* having failed to lift the boy who had announced 'that he had to make,' desperation clouded her all-knowing, sympathetic gray eyes. Coming to the aid of their frustrated mother, Rose and Dora, huffing and puffing managed to scoop up Benny. Brushing Gitel aside, the three of them ushered Benny into that clean bathroom and waited.

"What kind of cigarettes does he smoke?" pondered Eli, staring through the open door. "He once asked me if I eat ham? And they never ask about my father. I'd never tell Mama, but I think they stink."

"Don't you have to make?" Rose asked impatiently. "We haven't all day, Benny. Your mother doesn't come to visit very often. So, make already."

"He won't make unless the door is locked because Eli was really mad when Benny saw him making so, I guess you all better leave if you want him to make," Rhoda said grinning.

"Let's see how Gitel looks," Dora suggested. "When he has to make, I'm sure he'll make." Taking *'Booba's'* arm she closed the door.

"Doesn't she look beautiful, *'Booba?'*" Rhoda beckoned.

Due to Rose's magnanimous gesture of giving to her needy sister, the consensus was

overwhelming, that Gitel never looked better. Rocking away to the tune in anticipation of the holiest of holy days, sharp-eared '*Zeyda*' made note of his eldest and wisest daughter's benevolent generosity which he called '*tsdorka*.'

'*Zeyda*' was certain Rose had become everything he had prayed for. Once tending bar and now running his used clothing business, she had become the Howard Hughes of the lower-East- Side. Her first enterprise was manufacturing belts. Soon realizing that the leather traders she had to deal with were robbing her blind, Rose traveled to South America. Importing the very best leather, she then sold her fine belts at considerably lower prices. Before the years end she had three factories working two shifts. With the profits she purchased the factories she was renting and two more. Using the new rent roll she now received from the hard working '*Hassids*' who had deemed it the in thing to work in a building that belonged to the daughter of the '*Tsadik*,' she purchased two other buildings. In turn, a long list of prospective '*Hassid*' manufactures beckoned at Rose's door.

Rose's gorgeous husband Issac's profession, was in addition to getting laid as much as possible, overseeing his wife's ever-growing fortune. Handsome as ever, while Rose was playing Santa Claus to Gitel on the day before '*Yom Kippur*,' he thought it was time to introduce his acnied brother-in-law Moishe to his favorite pastime, 'Madam Bart and her den of iniquity.'

"You mean all I have to do is give the madam \$20 and she'll do it?" asked Moishe as

his little weener stiffened.

"That's right and for an extra twenty-five, I think I can also arrange to get you a blow job," Issac teased.

Be it that Madam Bart's fee was \$20 for "Round the World;" Half blow job, half '*schtup*,' besides introducing his orthodox brother-in-law to the world of blow jobs and getting it for nothing that afternoon, Issac had made a couple of dollars to boot. What are you going to do? Money goes to money.

On the Day-of-Atonement, wearing his very best wrinkled boxer-shorts and torn undershirt, Harry entered the kitchen. "You're dressed already?"

"Rhoda and I are going to '*shul*,'" answered Gitel.

"What's the rush? You'll be there 'til six-thirty, seven o'clock," reminded Harry. "It's only seven-thirty in the morning."

"You know I'm always in '*shul*' by eight o'clock on '*Yom Kippur*.' Neither you, nor Shultz will stop me from going," Gitel brazenly retorted. "It's one of the few pleasures I have."

"You call paying to hear that crook Rabbi Klopman a pleasure? Like your father, he charges poor people to pray and your father doesn't even talk to his own daughter!" lambasted, Harry. "And don't forget about Klopman's '*fahschtunkeneh*' congregation! All year long they lie and cheat and for the two days '*Rosh Hashanah*' and '*Yom Kippur*'

fall on, they suddenly become angels. Better those bastards should give me a square deal all year long and the two days of '*Rosh Hashanah*' and '*Yom Kippur*,' they can lie and cheat as much as they want!"

"You can say what you want and you can do what you want," said a heavy-hearted Gitel. "Come Rhoda, we're going to '*shul*.' Papa will bring your brothers later."

"Reynolds shakes off Berra's sign, nods his head and goes into his windup. Strike three!" Mel Allen announces excitedly. "The Yankees win! The Yankees beat the Dodgers!" With his sons staring dejectedly at the Philco radio, Harry casually made his way to the refrigerator. Sure that the coast was clear, he quickly ate an apple and secretly removed something wrapped in waxed-paper and put it in his suit jacket. "Eli! Benny! Let's go!" Harry shouted from the kitchen. "You want us to be late? Mama will get mad."

Two hours before the long fast would end, Harry and his two sons made their long-awaited grand appearance. The '*Besmedresh Hagodol*' was a small, European flavored '*shul*.' Upon its hard wooden benches, old prayer books waited to be held. Above its treasured ark, a lone stained glass window illuminated the heavy, dark maroon curtains that separated the boys from the girls. The ark, containing the seared '*Torah*' that Cantor Chorlavitch had rescued from his burning shul in Rumania, and another '*Torah*' from Poland and having a similar history, the '*Torahs*' were the '*shul's*' pride-and-joy.

"Look at them. They're all so crazy," Harry said to his uncomfortably seated sons.

"Those crazy bastards don't even brush their teeth."

"I can't see Mama," Benny said.

"She's behind the curtain dummy," Eli whispered. "Don't you remember anything I tell you?"

"Women are not allowed to sit with men," informed Harry. "Do you know why? The bible says they're not good enough and maybe it's right. And why your mother is so religious I'll never understand."

After twenty-four hours of begging for absolution, most of the praying, fasting Jews are near faint.

Fueled by the fact that he was sinless (that's why he didn't have to fast) while all else prayed, Harry questioned his two sons. "Ya know why they're all fasting? Because they're all *'gonifs,'* rotten inside-out, but I'll fix them. Wait here. I'll be right back," said Harry departing.

Spotting Shwartz, the Kosher butcher who had always raised his prices before all Jewish holidays, Harry feigned tying his shoes as he strategically planted a piece of herring 'neath the hard-wooden bench Shwartz was seated on. Slowly walking through the *'shul'* Harry spied Cohen praying feverishly. Stopping to tie his shoes again, in addition to the herring, he secretly placed a clove of garlic.

Grinning, he continued on, stopping four more times as he noticed a few starved heads

remove their eyes from their prayer books in disbelief of the aroma that suddenly began to emanate. The more heads turned, the more elated Harry became.

The effect of the pungent smell of herring and garlic on an old starving Jew has been likened to Marilyn Monroe and a young man's fancy.

"That's the sixth time Papa tied his shoes Eli."

"Papa must really hate their guts this year," Eli whispered, managing momentarily to contain his laughter. "Wait until you see what happens."

Vindictively, Harry returned to his seat, resenting the fact that he had to pay for it. "I'll get them," Harry said waiting patiently.

With less than half an hour remaining before the '*shofar*' would sound, which signifies that the fast would be over, his strategically placed implants began to have a profound effect.

Throughout, the initial sign of victory was heard, '*Oy, vey iz meir,*' was echoed encores.

Sitting behind the Mason-Dixon line, with the smell of garlic overwhelming her, Mrs. Ida Kaplan, who had witnessed her father being taken away by the '*pogrom*' in Russia rationalized that her Almighty God was again testing her.

Cohen's aroused passion for a '*schtickle*' piece of herring was too much. Lifting his eyes from his beloved prayer book, he looked to the heavens and asked, "Hadn't my belief in God been tested enough in Aushvitz?"

Two rows down, Kaplan pleaded his own question. "Why is this aromatic torture necessary."

While Harry and his two boys did everything they could from laughing, people continued to faint all over the little European flavored '*shul*.' Moments before the '*shofar*' would sound, panicking, the congregation fled. What had once been over-flowing with humanity was almost deserted. When Rabbi Klopman summoned the Greenwalds to the pulpit, praising them for being such devout Jews, Harry was never prouder. "Too bad '*Zeyda*' isn't here," wished Harry. "I'd like to see that '*alte cocker*' run."

The day before his dreaded performance, Mrs. Saunders announced that she would be taking her class to visit Our Lady of Victory. In addition to having the opportunity to view a new form of education, her intent was to familiarize her class with its stage. Instead of sleeping that night, Eli '*oyed*.' The following morning, having eaten his oatmeal as if nothing extraordinary was to occur, he kissed his mother goodbye. With trepidation the boy left for school. Entering his classroom as the late bell sounded, Eli noticed that Mrs. Saunders was obviously in a hurry, because his class had formed a double line and it looked like he was stuck with Princess Maureen. On one hand, he was sort of grateful it was she; He'd enjoy seeing the look on her face when he would say; "When I accept my first academy award, I'm going to tell them how it all started. Were it not for Princess Maureen's braces, I would have never forgotten my lines in 'Snow White

and the Seven Dwarfs' and perhaps never be discovered. On the other hand, the one that she was squeezing, he hated her. Saying, "What are you waiting for dummy?" was due to her childish absent-mindedness.

"Now repeat after me," Mrs. Saunders chanted. "We will hold our partners hand until we are all safely inside of Our Lady of Victory."

Eli couldn't do it. He couldn't say Our Lady of Victory. Mouthing the words, he wondered just how safe he would be and how would he ever face his mother and father again.

Arriving at the Gothic styled church, a tall nun dressed in black habit affectionately greeted Mrs. Saunders and her children with a big smile and a warm hello. The class responded in kind. Except for Eli who just mouthed "Hello."

"Ready?" Mrs. Saunders asked. "Let's go."

The boy had a plan. He would keep his eyes and ears shut. Holding on to Princess Maureen for dear life he entered. "It doesn't smell any different," he thought tripping over the poor box. Hearing the coins jingle upon the hallowed marble floor presented a great temptation, but the boy had principles. He wouldn't open his eyes, not even for all that money.

"What's wrong with your eyes Eli?" the embarrassed Princess Maureen asked, helping him to his feet.

"I got something in them and you're going to have to be my eyes and ears. Okay,

Sleeping Beauty?"

"For you my prince, anything," she said pinching his touchie. "Promise you'll carry my books home after school?"

"Yes, now lead on," he urged.

Tickling his ear she whispered, "Two steps to the left. You're in a classroom that's painted light-green and is very neat. Everyone is sitting in size places. The boys are wearing gray pants with white shirts and blue ties. The girls are wearing red and green plaid skirts and white cotton blouses.

"Forget about the clothes," he said. "Just keep up the good work. One day you'll win a Pulitzer and you'll have me to thank."

"Do you like to play pick-up sticks," she asked flirtatiously.

"Sometimes," he hesitantly replied.

"Good. Be at my house at three-thirty or else I'm telling."

Having begun to appreciate the tickling sensation in his ear, Eli was anticipating more of her directions. With her lips now touching his ear, she whispered, "Now take six steps up. Good. Now you're standing on a beautiful stage." As long as she kept whispering, the pick-up sticks didn't seem too bad of an idea. "There's two spot lights to your left," she whispered when a familiar hand came to rest upon his shoulder.

"Once they see you Eli," Mrs. Saunders gushed. "They're gonna love you."

Bracing himself, the boy opened his eyes. Seeing her smile, Eli forgot where he was and

inadvertently looked up. Staring at him, nailed to a crucifix was the life-like body of... Despite being unable to say HIS name he knew who HE was. The boy was amazed to see how sensitive His face was; so peaceful, so pained. Eli felt sorry for Him. He looked like such a nice man; very much like his *'Zeyda.'*

Chapter VI

Gitel had not seen her mother since Rose had given her that hand-me-down hand-made suit. Missing her, she had hoped to take the children to visit but it was too hot.

No one on their impoverished block had the money to go to the Catskill Mountains, or anywhere else to escape the intolerable heat, but they did the best they could to survive. Often the Greenwalds would pack a lunch and go to Orchard Beach, Pelham Park, the big pool on Fulton Avenue or sometimes even Coney Island. When the heat became unbearable, Harry would get his huge monkey wrench and to a standing ovation open the water hydrant. Because Eli was so small and skinny, he couldn't even lift that monstrous wrench because he felt it weighed more than he did. All the kids including the Greenwalds idolized Harry, for not only did he own a wrench, he had the '*chutzpa*' to open the water main even though it was forbidden by the police department.

When Eli's handsome, short father, an Edward G. look-alike, opened the water hydrant one sweltering July day, to the kids on the block the icy cold water felt better

than Niagara Falls. Gushing profusely from the Johnny pump, the water was a delicious, poor boys savior. Despite shivering, all the kids jumped with glee, laughed and frolicked as they all cooled their little *'touches.'* The two smallest kids were always assigned to play chickie, one on each corner to watch for the cops, so they'd be prepared if they heard a roaring police siren when an unwanted foot patrolman appeared. He angrily turned the water off and a chorus of disappointed boos naturally would ensue. "You guys know it's against the law to turn on the fire hydrant," the policeman roared. "What happens if there's a fire and we need the water? Who did it? Tell me who did it and I'll send him to Alcatraz!" They all cowered and fortunately no one dared to look at Eli's father. Annoyed, the policeman got in his car. Immediately, all the sweat filled eyes turned to Harry, beseeching him to please turn on the water hydrant. Harry graciously clicked his heels ala Chaplin and slowly walked to the garbage can where he had stashed his monkey wrench. He retrieved it and proceeded to turn the hydrant on. To most of the kids on Park Avenue in the Bronx, Harry was as big a hero as Joe Louis, Joe Dimaggio and Superman combined. At that moment in time Eli felt so lucky that Harry was his very own Papa.

Another ingenious way they escaped the sweltering heat was to place a folding chair across the opening on their fire escape and sleep on it. Once they got over the fear of falling and hitting the pavement, sleeping on the fire escape became the three kids

choice retreat from the inundating heat. Eli, Rhoda, and Benny would literally fight over who would sleep on the folding chair. Gitel smiled as she placed a blanket and some pillows on the rusted fire escape and ultimately they would all fall asleep. At night they'd stare at the moon and play for baseball cards to see who could count the most stars. Naturally Eli always won, because Rhoda and Benny would fall asleep, while he was busy counting the Little and Big Dipper. Many a morning they awoke to find that luckily the pigeons had decided to drop everything on their brother Benny and not them. Laughing, Eli told Rhoda that the pigeons dropped everything on Benny because he was so fat. So, if she knew what was good for her, she better remain a skinny malink.

Like his sister Rhoda, he too was a skinny malink, and also like her, he was blessed with asthma. For he and Gitel, breathing during those hot summer months became a death-defying feat. Soon Harry became sick-and-tired of *'shlepping'* Eli to the Bronx Hospital for oxygen, *'alle Montik n' Dunishtik,'* every Monday and Thursday. To get him out of his hair, his father decided that Eli had to spend at least a couple of weeks with *'Booba,'* and *'Zeyda,'* who rented a summer home in Woodbridge, New Jersey.

To Eli, getting there took longer than going to the moon. Leon was driving the brand new Packard that his mother-in-law Rose had secretly given to him for marrying her daughter Shirley, Eli's oldest cousin. It was rumored that Rose feared that her daughter would never get married and become an old maid like Eli's Aunt Monya. Harry always said she used the Packard to bribe Leon and Eli thought, maybe his father was

right.

It seemed like forever, but in reality the drive only took about an hour-and-a-half.

Getting carsick as expected, every time Eli threw up he could tell by the looks on their faces how disgusted Leon and 'Zeyda' were with him. Like clockwork, the boy made sure they were disgruntled every 15 minutes. "*Fa vous hus de gehnemt em?*" Why did you take him? 'Booba'?" 'Zeyda' asked. "*Vous iz dehmer mit em?* What's the matter with him?" Leon bitched in his broken Yiddish. 'Booba' responded, "There's nothing the matter with my Eli, because Eli's my grandson. He's your grandson too mister and just because this is your car, don't you but in Leon. Besides, how many grandchildren do we have? 18? Even though Eli's only a little boy, he's the only grandchild I have that speaks such a beautiful 'Yiddish,' including you Leon."

"*Gotsen dank Booba az ich ken rhedden ve ah alte greeneh.*" Thank God Grandma that I can talk like an old greenhorn," Eli said beaming. He loved when 'Booba' kissed him and fortunately he knew how to get her to kiss him. All he had to do was speak 'Yiddish' and the boy was relentless.

"You want something to eat, a little chicken soup, some chopped liver Eli,' Booba' constantly asked him. "You never eat. Why don't you eat something?"

"I ate 'Booba,'" he said. "I ate."

"I know. That's why you're so fat," she sighed.

They finally arrived at a small two-bedroom farmhouse, which 'Booba' kept

immaculate. Eli was amazed when he noticed dozens of chickens and a few enormous cows walking aimlessly in the front yard. Instantly he was overwhelmed by a cacophony of sounds. Because of their enormity, Eli was afraid of the cows and the chickens, since he never saw one that wasn't boiled, but he thought they were cute.

Because Eli was so skinny, *'Booba'* immediately sat him down and gave him a bowl of chicken soup with *'luchen,'* noodles. "Eat Eli, maybe you'll gain a few pounds?"

Because his grandmother made the best chicken soup he ever ate, Eli savored it.

"You want a little more *'buhbala?'*" she asked hopefully.

"No thank you *'Booba.'* I think I'll go outside and play with the chickens."

He really didn't know how to play with chickens, but because he was so smart he knew he would learn. The funny thing, is when he approached them they'd scatter. Thinking it was funny, he spent the better part of an hour making them cluck and run away. Watching Eli, *'Booba'* smiled as she heard him laugh. Loving her even more when she smiled, the boy made sure to laugh as hard as he could. There was one chicken that he took a liking to. It wasn't because it was bigger than the rest. It was because it was the only one that didn't run when he approached it. Instead of petting a puppy, he found himself petting Chippy. That's the name he gave it because that was the way it walked. *'Booba'* was very proud of him because it was the first time she ever saw a chicken let someone pet it. For the next few days, Eli and that chicken became inseparable. Mary had a little lamb and Eli had Chippy. "Boy, if the guys on the block

could see me now," he thought.

Right after breakfast, Leon looked at Eli and said, "No more vomiting right, Eli? Right, Eli? Well, come with us," he said taking him by the hand. Unwillingly, Eli accompanied him and *'Zeyda.'*

'Zeyda' and Leon immediately started *'shuckling and dahvening;'* Moving back and forth religiously and praying. Leon stopped momentarily and ordered Eli to pick the fattest chicken, which he well knew was Choppy and bring it to him immediately. Eli didn't know why, but one thing he did know was he didn't like him. Being protective of Choppy, Eli didn't want too want to, but he knew he better. Naturally, Choppy came waddling up to him. He picked him up and started petting him. When he got to Leon and *'Zeyda,'* remorsefully he had to give Choppy to Leon. Without even saying thank you, brandishing a sharp knife, in one fell swoop, Leon held it up, said a prayer and cut poor Choppy's neck. Tears came to the boy's eyes and he thought he would faint.

It was the most hurtful, disgusting and revolting thing that had ever happened to him. Taking great aim, he forced himself and threw up all over Leon. As expected, the look of disgust overwhelmed Leon's pimply and homely face. Beside, not liking Leon, Eli felt guilty having sent Choppy to his death.

"What is it with you Eli? You're not in a car. How come you threw up all over me? Don't you ever stop? I can't take you anywhere and I never will!

"I'm so glad I vomited on him," Eli said to himself," as he ran away crying.

Needless to say, for the duration of his stay, despite *'Booba's'* prodding, because of Choppy Eli couldn't even look at her chicken soup.

The following morning, it was very early as *'Zeyda'* took Eli to the barn to visit his prize cows. A religious pro, he milked those cows judiciously as he *'dahvened,'* thanking God for the milk he received. "Here Eli, taste the milk. It's fresh and it's the most delicious milk you ever drank. Although he always had an Oreo or a fig Newton when he drank milk, Eli acquiesced and tasted the warm milk. Finding it disgusting, as preordained, the boy threw up on *'Zeyda,'* who once again had that familiar disgusted look.

Leon and Shirley slept downstairs and Eli slept on a cot next to *'Booba'* and *'Zeyda's'* bed, which was upstairs. Rose was so concerned about his wellbeing and kept a wary on him because he was so frail and wheezed constantly, even when he slept. *'Zeyda'* bemoaned the fact that Eli woke him up every time he went down stairs to pee, which was quite often. Being a genius *'Booba'* got a small pot and placed it next to his bed. "When you have to pee Eli, you should make in this little *'teple,'* pot. This way you won't wake *'Zeyda, mamaleh.'*"

"All right," Eli said to himself, "but nobody better look."

Like a good trooper, he peed in the little pot every night and *'Zeyda'* soon settled in to a good night's sleep.

One morning as they were all having breakfast, *'Booba'* started laughing. "*Fa*

vous lachs du Booba? Why are you laughing Grandma?" Eli asked.

"Because of you *'tateleh,'*" she said. "Because of you."

"Why don't you tell him *'Booba,'*" Shirley said laughing.

"Alright, I'll tell my little *'pisher.'* You know what happened to your *'Booba'* this morning? I almost drowned because of you my darling Eli."

"Because of me? What did I do?" Eli whined.

"I bet you thought you peed in that little pot I left you. Well, guess again *'Tateleh.'* You know when I went to put on my high, black shoes with the laces I always wear? When I put them on this morning I had the surprise of my life and you know what, I almost drowned. Seems in the dark you missed the little pot I left you and peed in my shoe by mistake Mr. *'Pisher.'* But, it's alright Eli; *'Booba'* said kissing one of the loves of her life. "I love you, I'll always love you."

Two days before Passover, Gitel and Rhoda were changing the dishes and silverware from those that were used daily from *'Humitz'* to *'Passidic,'* which are the dishes used exclusively during Passover.

"I got it," said the Great White Hunter brandishing a ten-pound monster carp.

Harry had this thing about making the traditional *'gefilte'* fish from a live carp. Insuring the carp's well-being until the very moment it would be cooked, Harry filled the same bathtub where Joe Louis, the greatest friend a kid ever had, once stood with water

and threw the unwaring fish in.

In the past, drinking the very sweet Kosher wine, scavenging for the hidden matzo after the '*Seder*,' singing and dancing and those delicious '*matzo bries*,' all had looked forward to celebrating Passover, but with that fish...

Despite never having had a pet before, because of the Great White Hunter's carp ogling their every move with its big black eyes, now they just wanted to get Passover over with as soon as possible. Making doody had become very uncomfortable for a certain bunch of Greenwalds.

The following morning Shultz again was heard, "Investigator! Open up and I demand a key!"

Eli noticed that Shultz' shoulders were beginning to sag as he stood at attention, trying to click his heels.

According to Toothless Tony, "Thata Hitler isa justabouta through." Eli was certain that Shultz was going to make one last stand.

Spying eggs boiling, those that Gitel would use for the chopped liver, as if it were a federal offense Shultz said, "I see you are boiling eggs."

Managing to whisper through her cough, Rhoda asked, "We're allowed to eat eggs, aren't we Eli?"

"I think he found out that it's almost Passover Rhoda. So be very careful and try not to cough. You know how that Nazi likes it."

Trying to find their hidden booty, in the past, Shultz had searched their empty refrigerator, the closets, under the beds. He had searched just about every place imaginable except, he suddenly realized the bathroom. With eyes aghast, the Greenwalds watched him enter it with complete abandon.

"Oh, no! He went into the bathroom," Rhoda cried. "What about Papa's big fish?"

"If he tries to take it? Me and Papa will jump him, right Papa?"

"I hope he *'pishes'* all over himself," laughed Harry, joined by Benny.

Grinning as if he was going to win the World War II, with his mole pulsating, Shultz reappeared. With eyes gleaming he hurriedly exited, but this time he wasn't heard mumbling, he was singing.

The following evening, after Gitel *'shushkered'* over the holiday candles, Benny asked the traditional four questions that have been asked throughout the ages. Rhoda then found the hidden *'matzo,'* much to Eli's dismay. They sang many songs including "*Had Gad Yor.*" The kosher wine had made them all a little dizzy. Going to sleep, they agreed that the Seder was a success and the bathroom, thank God, minus those two big-black eyes was theirs again.

In the wee hours following the first *'Seder,'* it appeared that the entire Welfare Department had amassed outside of Harry's door.

"Open up in the name of the Welfare Department!" Shultz roared.

Urged on by his dedicated cohorts, they amassed in the kitchen. Little attention was paid to Rhoda gasping for breath, nor Benny announcing that he had to make.

Shultz' eyes were blazing. All three of them, when he pointed his ominous missing finger and proudly read article 237 of the Home Relief by-laws: "Any recipient found housing, or feeding a pet will be automatically disqualified." Clicking his heels uncontrollably Shultz exhorted, "I finally have the evidence! Follow me!"

Escorting the entire Welfare Department, including the head supervisor into Harry's 6'x8' bathroom, Shultz turned on the red papiermache Chinese lantern that hung from its sweaty ceiling. When he had done so, he was unaware that his evidence at that moment was merely a delicious memory.

"I saw it here yesterday!" he screamed. "Ask them! It had big black eyes!"

With Shultz having an epileptic fit, Harry offered the head supervisor the same spoon he had used when Eli's shoes split apart for the Nazi that was suffocating. Noticeably embarrassed, the head supervisor graciously refused Harry's offer. Forcibly restraining the Aryan, the entire Welfare Department sadly departed.

Gitel sighed; Rhoda's breathing eased and Benny ate an apple. With Harry about to sing, Eli cooed, "At last Shultz is defeated and Hitler was through because they had to be the Chosen."

Shortly after D Day, upon his leaving the sanatorium it had been rumored that Shultz retired to the hills of South Carolina.

Taking refuge from their five-room steam bath during the unusually hot summer that followed Hitler's demise, the Greenwalds frequented their country club, Crotona Park. Strategically located, the park was a mecca for over-heated immigrant families in search of a summer breeze and, if the arguing that usually erupted ended at a reasonable hour, perhaps some entertainment.

Poles, Italians, Armenians, the Irish, Blacks, Puerto Ricans, Jews and even a few Hungarians made their presence felt. Each ethnic group occupied its own section where they partied. Despite the heat, Harry insisted his *'schvitzing'* family follow as he exchanged greetings with the various ambassadors-at-large. When all the ambassadors assembled, a heated argument always followed. After the Air Raid Wardens had been disbanded, although his family had hoped he would discard that megaphone, Harry had refused to do so. Convinced that his secret idea would work, he shouted through his unretired megaphone, "Let's pitch pennies! The five closest pennies to this crack in the pavement will make up this week's entertainment committee. The winner gets the ice cream!"

Although most of the audience did not understand the songs, containing native lyrics, embraced by the infectious and alluring rhythms of distant shores, music was the catalyst,

the camaraderie that was shared by all.

Because being chosen "Entertainer of the Year for one week only" meant free ice cream for one's entire family, compliments of Bungalow Meyer, each ambassador sang his foreign heart out.

49 year-old, Angelo, having dreamed of singing in the Met, was the Italian Ambassador. Befriending Harry during one of his surprise attacks, he was one of the men that wanted to kill that deaf bastard Gideon and he had also introduced Harry to pizza.

Harry's other best friend Moses, who happened to be the new superintendent in his tenement, was the Black ambassador. For reasons known only to him self, Harry, only showed Moses how to discretely chew a wad of tobacco for ten minutes without spitting. Then, he showed him how to secretly remove the saliva onto his hand, and where to place it on the penny. For this thought Harry, Moses would be forever indebted to him.

Practicing night and day, Moses tried holding it in for the necessary ten minutes. After two weeks of sloshing his mouth full of tobacco juice, his nausea finally got to him. "Here," Moses apologized, returning the gnawed chaw to his best friend. "I can't do it."

"What do you mean, you can't do it?" challenged Harry. "Think of your six kids. Think of that delicious ice cream... There comes a time when a man has to think of what's best for his family, not only what's good for him," Harry preached. "Show me exactly what you've been doing with my tobacco."

Just about when Moses started turning purple, Harry checked his watch and detected what he had been doing wrong. Along with holding his mouth full of tobacco juice for nearly three-and-a-half minutes, Moses had been holding his breath.

"Breathe through your nose, but keep your mouth shut, Goddamnit!" Harry shouted. "You can breathe as much as you want."

"Thanks," Moses gasped. "And thanks for thinking about my kids. And don't you worry Harry. Now that I can breathe, I'm gonna really practice."

Having won the first shoot-out, walking home Harry was elated. "Want a bite?" Harry asked, offering the toasted-almond pop he won. "Keep practicing Moses and soon you'll be offering me a bite."

Awakening to the sweltering heat, his children had assumed that they would be going to Orchard Beach, but Harry had other ideas. "We're going to the Zoo and that's final!" he said.

Stopping off at Carvel's, Eli offered Rhoda the first lick. "What about me? I want to go first some time," Benny said.

"Never" Eli rued. "Not until the best friend a kid ever had comes back."

In the heat of their licking orgy, with his family moving on, Harry paused to tie his laces. "Look what I found," he bellowed. "How could you have missed it? It was right here," he said pointing to the dollar bill at his feet.

"If Papa went to the zoo a hundred times a week, he wouldn't have to get a job,"

Benny noted.

Walking home, despite his concern for his family's poor eyesight, Harry's rhetoric drifted. "Tomorrow's the finals. I hope it's a nice day, because you know how I hate to sing in the rain."

"It's supposed to be the same as today Papa," Eli said. "Don't worry. You're gonna win, because you have the best voice Papa."

"And if you don't win? It's not the end of the world," surmised Gitel. "We survived Hitler, we'll survive this."

Taking his hand, Eli understood his father's desire. "It's in the bag Papa," Eli assured. Spotting a mangled beer can, releasing his father's hand, the boy proceeded to kick it. Rhoda and Benny, racing ahead, soon joined in. Seeing her children near their street corner, leaving Harry, Gitel quickened her pace. "I don't believe it! Look what I found, you '*Blinda bestids!*'"

Turning slowly, it was obvious the '*Blinda bestids!*' were not in a hurry to see what Harry had found again or hear how blind they were.

"It was right here," Harry said pointing.

"How can we all be so blind, right Papa?" Eli asked smiling.

"In some ways" Rhoda thought, "I wish I was like Eli."

"I HAVE TO MAKE!" Benny shouted running into his building. Trailing close behind, with key in hand Gitel raced up the two flights of steps. Lighting a cigarette,

Harry was thinking of his acceptance speech.

It was hot and muggy that Labor Day night and Crotona Park hummed with excitement, for, "the Entertainer of the Night for the Year Award" had come to its conclusion.

The score after eight grueling weeks was as follows: Harry had three wins; Moses, who after finally getting the hang of the chewing tobacco, two weeks later had come on strong and won the last two matches; And some Hungarian, simply because he had sung "Ochinchonia" three times and won, was christened a communist by Harry.

Try as Buster may have, not having share Harry's secret formula, Angelo never got close enough to the crack in the pavement to sing.

Hoping his best friend Angelo would swallow his pride, wish him good luck and share a beer, with his family close behind, Harry pulled up at the Italian feast. Best friend to best friend. Singer to singer, with the very best of intentions, Angelo was unaware that he was about to hit Harry below the belt. Shaking his ex-commander in Chief's hand, he smiled and said, "Break a leg Harry you old son-of-a-gun! Do it for me!"

"And you go to hell!" Harry bounced back. For as long as one can remember, Harry had always been touchy about his short legs. He blamed them for his being only 5'3". "If they were nine inches longer? I would've been a good six-footer like my father. Not only was he tall, he was smart and he didn't have to read signs either, that said lavatory and laboratory. He peed when ever and where ever he wanted to."

Using the rage that his best friend had unwittingly instilled to his advantage, with tears in his eyes, standing upon a lamppost lit, 4'x6' plywood stage, Harry on one knee sang "Rumania." Receiving a standing ovation, Harry had given his greatest performance.

Moses must have been even more upset about something, because his rendition of "Bess" brought tears to everyone's eyes, including the Greenwalds.

Obviously moved by his stirring performance, the International Smorgasbord of Ambassadors selected Moses. His win had created the first three-way tie in Crotona Park's history.

After a much-heated discussion, it was agreed upon that all three would share the coveted "Entertainer of the Week for the Rest of the Year Award." In addition to four free passes to the Paradise Theater, there was the once around the park victory lap, to an unforgettable round of applause.

Having won three matches first, Harry was to lead off, the Communist went second and Moses last. Sensing that every eye in the park was focused on him alone, Harry slowly made his way to the starting line. In anticipation of the thunderous round of applause that he and only he deserved, he paused.

Harry let fall from his back pocket a string that was attached to a piece of steel-wool, which he had shaped to resemble a large rat. Mary had a little lamb and Harry had...? Through the shadows cast by the dimly lit lampposts, Harry began his victory march. His cat-like movements, subtly highlighted by a myriad of stars, the crowd, less than fifty feet

away, started its rhythmic applause.

The closer he came, the more aware the crowd became that something small, black and ominous was stalking Harry. Wanting to thank his fans personally, as he approached each man, woman and child, hysteria took hold. Trying to escape the rabid rat that was about to attack, they ran in every direction. By the time Harry had personally thanked every sect, except for his family that had tagged along, Crotona Park was nearly deserted.

When Moses and that "Ochinchonia" freak took their victory lap, being they were the only ones that had remained, eating ice cream, Harry and his family graciously applauded.

Chapter VII

According to Harry, with Shultz off the scene, things could not have been better. A

Eli's Coming

little warmer maybe, because the cold-spell they had been enduring was murder.

It was nineteen degrees that frigid morning and in response, the radiators hissed weakly while the steam struggled hopelessly to fill its bowels. Huddled at the kitchen table, Gitel's shivering children awaited their oatmeal and hot cocoa. Because she was to accompany Harry on his bi-annual visit to the Home Relief where six or seven doctors would reappraise his infamous growth, Gitel hurriedly served breakfast.

Having paraded around his huddling children twenty-seven times, wearing his Navy pea coat, Harry said "Nu" what's taking you so long? Your mother won't go until you've finished eating."

Sticking his cold hands into his coat pocket, Harry was, reminded painfully of the two perfectly good darts he had found the day before. Inadvertently, he had forgotten to give them to his toyless children. "Ow! Son-of-a-bitch!" he screamed. Sucking his pricked finger, he turned to his eldest son for compassion. Rhoda and Benny were fortunate their father did not see nor hear them giggle, but he did catch Eli in the act. "So, you think it is funny?" Harry said angrily. "I'll show you what's funny. Here," he said, giving Rhoda and a gleeful Benny the darts. "And that's not all wise guy. Go get me your key. I'm giving it to Benny! I'll teach you to laugh at your father!"

With his seniority threatened, his ego nearly shattered, the apparent heir to the megaphone asked, "Why papa? I'm older and besides, the fat Jap will probably lose it."

"Don't you worry about the fat Jap losing it. Just go get it!" ordered, Harry.

"I'm supposed to get the key next," Rhoda pined. Overlooked again, tears she always tried to hide clouded her dark-brown eyes. Clutching the dart, she wanted to throw it as hard as her frail body would allow. When Eli turned in his badge of honor, the key and a supposed fat Jap, euphoric chubby boy became one.

Retrieving a shoelace from the junk-drawer, having put it through the key, Harry tied it around his proud young son's neck. "Now, there's only one thing you have to remember Benny. No matter what happens, DO NOT TAKE THE KEY OFF!"

"That means, even if they torture you Blimpie! And if you do lose it, Death! Remember the double knucks?" Eli threatened. "Triple!"

"Not even if they pull my eyes out," promised the proud boy rubbing his key. "I'll let you look at it Eli, but don't touch it. You might throw it off," Benny laughed, turning to Rhoda who immediately *cutchied* him.

Ready to exit, pulling his navy-blue cap over his large ears Harry warned, "Now, don't forget what I told you Benny. DO NOT TAKE THE KEY OFF!"

"We'll be home whenever," beckoned Gitel hurrying off. "And be careful crossing the street."

Harry flew down the marble steps, "What's the matter?" he asked angrily. "You forgot already?"

Taking the steps two-at-a-time, Gitel asked, "What's the rush? We'll probably be there all day."

Located on Arthur and Tremont Avenues, the main office of the Home Relief was in the general direction of the Bronx Zoo. As he was uncertain who he would meet there, Harry thought it best not to take his turned-down hat or anything that might label him Jewish.

Staring at their perfectly good darts, Rhoda and Benny appeared forlorn. Sarcastically, Eli quipped, "What's the matter dummies, no target?"

"We would ask you to play, but as you already know," moped Rhoda, "Papa forgot the target." And for reasons unknown, Benny started to laugh.

Swaggering, Eli entered his old clubhouse. Despite realizing how much he missed the best friend a kid ever had and how he hated his fat Jap brother, Eli removed a bar of soap from the Joeless tub, and returned to the kitchen.

No sooner had he placed it in the center of the floor, when, Benny's dart came flying by.

"Sorry Eli," he whooped. Benny laughed even harder when Rhoda's dart, just missing Eli's eager hand whizzed by.

"Are you trying to kill me?" Eli asked as he quickly retrieved the two errant darts. He reared back, narrowly missing Rhoda's bony leg and the outstretched hand of his chubby brother, and firing both darts in succession. Benny was a step slower, so Rhoda wound up with both darts.

"That's not fair!" Benny claimed. "I thought we made a deal Rhoda?"

"Tough noogies," chimed Eli. "Go ahead Rhoda! What the hell are you waiting for? We have to go to school in a little while.

"Okay, watch me," she bragged. "Here goes." Taking aim at the elusive bar of soap, she let it fly.

"You missed!" shouted Benny jumping up and down. Before his crash-landing, Eli had the darts. "Hey, that's not fair," moaned Benny. "When do I go?"

"Never," taunted his older brother taking aim. "In my picture, Japs never go, they hold it in.

"Oh, yeah?" responded Benny. "You'll see."

Determined to have a hand in their William Tell soiree, just as Eli let lose with his best throw of the morning, Benny dove. Whap! When the perfectly pointy dart pierced his pudgy little hand, Benny and Rhoda screamed. To their amazement, with the dart firmly imbedded, not a drop of blood came forth.

With all three of them staring at the dart, grabbing that megaphone, Eli cockily announced, and "Don't you think it's a miracle that you're not bleeding Benny? I just gave you the perfect puncture wound. So give me five," he concluded, extending his hand. "Bet you never saw that before. I am the greatest. A perfect puncture wound."

Raising his picture-perfect punctured hand ala the Statue of Liberty, Benny chanted, "Wait 'til Papa sees it. Wait 'til Papa sees it. He's gonna kill you."

"You can't leave it in stupid! How are you going to go to school?"

Having placed the remaining dishes in the sink with all those Monte Carlo chips in it, Rhoda jumped in. "He did it because, Papa gave you the key Benny. Leave it in," she pleaded, "Leave it in."

Doing the victory dance around the kitchen table, Benny taunted, "Remember the time when Papa really gave it to you? When he sees how you tried to kill me, you'll think Shultz was a pussycat."

"Keep it in as long as you can," Rhoda cheered. "This time we have the proof."

Believing they were vindictive enough to leave it in for his father to see, a determined Eli started inching toward his jeering, fat Jap brother. "We better leave or we'll be late for school."

"Run!" shouted Rhoda. "He's trying to get it!"

Grabbing an apple from the table, Benny ran into his room and locked the door. Again, he cackled, "I'm leaving it in, so you're definitely gonna get it this time. It's getting late, so, you better leave Eli," Benny taunted.

Rattling the same door that once had almost come off its hinges, a desperate Eli promised, "I'll give you anything you want, even my Black Beauty."

Casually munching on his delicious Mackintosh, through the rattling door Benny presented his ultimatum, "You have to sleep next to the cracks for one year. And you have to swear to God, you'll get out of bed every time you lay one, or else it's no deal," he laughed.

"What about the knucks?" asked Rhoda. "Make him swear that he won't give them so hard."

"This is no time to make a deal. We'll be late!" said Eli, angrily. "We'll talk about it when we come home from school," he blared, swapping the megaphone for his books.

"Swear to God?" asked Rhoda.

"Swear to God?" echoed Benny, coming through the door.

"I swear, we'll talk about it later. Now, let's go and button your coat Benny. It's freezing outside."

In the unheated assembly hall, beneath the main offices of the Home Relief, Harry and Gitel, besides 500 or so other recipients, awaited their names to be called.

"Pizziola! Room 206. Wilatsky! Room 206. Glantz! Room 206" blared the public address system.

"It's almost one o'clock," Harry noted. "How long are they going to keep me waiting?"

"Stettner! Room 206. Harrison! Room 206. Evans! Room 206."

"206 must be some big room?" Gitel said, hoping to distract her very edgy husband.

"Do you have to go?"

"I went already, I went already. How many times should I go? What do you think my name is Benny?"

"Schiavone! Room 206. Amberger! Room 206. Gideon! Room 206."

"I know that name," Harry said rising to see who Gideon was. "You see that guy?" he pointed. "I saved that deaf bastard's life one time."

"Why else do you think I married you?" said Gitel smiling.

"Hoffman! Room 206. Marshall! Room 206. Greenwald! Room 409."

"I guess they're out of room," Gitel said. "I hope we won't have to wait much longer? The children will be coming home from school soon."

"What are you worried about? Don't you remember that I tied the key around Benny's neck?

And didn't I tell him? Don't take it off!"

Arriving home from school, Eli and Rhoda found their jovial baby brother staring at the locked door. "Ya still got it?" Eli asked rubbing his freezing hands.

Unbuttoning his coat, Benny proudly displayed the key was still fastened securely around his chubby neck. "First, you have to swear," the fat Jap reminded, stepping back.

"I'm freezing!" shouted Eli. "Open the door or I'll kill you!"

"If you don't swear, he'll stick the dart back in," cautioned his confident sister.

"Benny wouldn't do that, would you Benny?" Eli asked.

"And you have to swear that we're gonna change sides of our bed and that you won't keep stinking me out, or else, soon as we get inside, I am gonna stick it back in. I can still see the hole."

"I guarantee it'll hurt like hell, but if you want to get blood poisoning for such a silly thing as which side of the bed you sleep on, it's okay with me. Go ahead, stick it back in. See if I care. Now open the door!" shrieked the freezing Eli.

"When Papa sees the dart sticking out, he'll kill him," promised Rhoda. "Open the door Benny, don't worry, Eli will be sorry for trying to kill you."

Looking up at the keyhole that was eighteen inches above his head, frustrated, Benny stared.

"What are you looking at? My feet are almost numb!" bellowed Eli. "Open it!"

"I can't," sighed Benny. "It's too high."

"Well, take off the key and I'll open it dummy," demanded Eli.

"Remember what Papa said?" cautioned Rhoda. "Maybe we should give him a boost?"

"I was just going to say that myself. Let's get down on our hands and knees, and the blimp will stand on our backs. Get on dummy!" Eli commanded.

"It's still about two inches away," panicked Benny.

"Well, think of something. My back's killing me," moaned Eli.

"I can't take it much longer," their weak-kneed sister cried. "You better hurry, I'm going to cave in!"

Standing on his tippy-toes, Benny had just managed to insert the key when their backs gave out. The key, firmly attached to his neck was now wedged in the lock and he was

suspended in mid-air. With Benny's lips pressed to the metal door, flailing like Harry's carp out of water, his face turned beet-red.

Staring helplessly, through her *'shushker,'* Rhoda cried, "Eli! We have to get Benny down or he'll choke!"

At long last, the girl's *'shusker'* had apparently paid off, because the key broke and Benny plopped harmlessly to the marble floor.

Entering room 409, seven doctors, rubbing their hands with obvious anticipation, greeted Harry. "Mr. Greenwald, we've been waiting to meet you."

Harry became even more uncomfortable when he saw that two of the doctors were Japs. Eyeing the other five butchers, despite being unable to identify the origins of their birth, he was hopeful that they were not related to the sojourner Shultz.

While Gitel eyed the magazines the assault began.

"How long do you have that growth?" asked Jap doctor number one, while unidentified doctor number three, using, his thin pointed index finger probed Harry's infamous tumor.

"I've had it a long time," Harry answered. He was ready to give that number three unidentified doctor a piece of his mind, but it was too late. They all swapped positions. For the next three hours, unidentified butchers, two, four and five systematically probed him like there was no tomorrow.

With their tired fingers obviously hurting, they sighed, telling Harry he could put his torn undershirt on. He would be notified as to when his next probe would be scheduled.

"I always told you they were a bunch of dopes," the exhilarated Harry said, fighting the frigid, blustery wind. "Three of those *'meshugenehs'* want to take my tumor out. And those two Japs, they're probably still mad at me because they lost the war, want to take my whole arm off, right from my shoulder. And that other son-of-a-bitch wants to open me up and explore. Let him work in the coalmines, that's where he should explore. That gold digger! Button up Gitel," said Harry running ahead. "I hope Benny didn't lose the key."

About to enter his building, wearing no gloves, Harry's fingers were so cold that he cursed the frigid doorknob to his ever-so needed heated apartment building.

"Hurry up," Harry said, taking two steps at a time. Seeing her frozen children huddled around Benny, examining his pudgy neck, Gitel, assuming the worst shrieked, "What happened to my Benny?"

"I'll tell you what happened," said Harry seeing the wedged, broken key stuck in the lock. "That's the last time I'll give you the key, mister!" Harry blared, turning to his half-strangled son. "The key's stuck God damn it!" he said to a grinning Eli. "Go down to the basement and tell Moses I need a plier. I have to get this God-damn door open before I freeze to death!"

"Eli's going to the basement," Rhoda said defiantly. "I told you he'd get it, Benny and

wait 'til papa sees the dart you're gonna stick back in," Rhoda said *'cutchyng'* him evermore. Even though it appeared Benny was enjoying Rhoda's *'cutchyng'* as much as his brother had once enjoyed princess Maureen's whispers, for some reason he still wasn't ready to stick the dart back in.

"Why do I have to get the pliers, Papa?" the forlorn, dethroned heir to his throne asked.

"I told you to get the pliers, because I'm freezing, God damn it, I'm freezing!"

Using all his skill, Harry managed to push the broken key into the lock. Then, holding the nib of it with the plier, he miraculously opened the door to his heated abode. To their dismay there was no heat. Moments later, a winded Moses appeared and told them that the boiler had just gone on the fritz.

"Thanks for telling me," said Harry to his best friend. "Without you, I would have never known."

While Harry struck up a conversation with Moses, Gitel lit the oven and then filled two empty soda bottles with boiling water, which she would place at the foot of her children's beds.

"Who knows what lurks in the hearts of men?" a mysterious voice coming from the radio asked.

"The Shadow knows," said Eli beating the mysterious voice.

Moving the kitchen table nearer to the heated stove, the huddling Greenwalds played

dominos. As the night wore on they, no longer were disturbed by the toes they could not feel, their frozen ears that tingled, or their noses that dripped. Nothing mattered. In their inauspicious young lives they had to beat their obnoxious father one time at Dominos.

Being a gracious winner, Harry had never let Gitel, Eli, Rhoda, nor, Benny forget when he blared, "I win. Domino! That makes every game we ever played!" Convinced he was still the best, he gave into his children's frigid yawns. Through his soon to be retired megaphone, (that's right, Harry really swore) he let it be known, he was going to retire it and his shivering children were to do the same. They did not move because despite the hot water bottles warming their beds, they knew their bedrooms would be much colder than the heated kitchen. They also knew why their father was in such a hurry. The heating-pad he used to heat his tumor had been warming his side of the bed the entire evening.

Having determined his side of the bed must be steaming, again, through you know what, Harry announced, "Now hear this! For tonight only! The one who gets the heating pad first can sleep with it! Remember, that's only for tonight!"

Tired, frozen, bundled in their winter coats, they approached the starting line; the sink with all those chips it.

"On your mark! Get set! Go!" Harry roared.

The race was on. Rhoda had a half-step on Eli as they neared his ex-secret meeting place. Seeing the futility of it all, the daring Benny, hoping to distract his fleeting

siblings, picked up the you-know-what and shouted, "STOP, TIME OUT. I REALLY HAVE TO MAKE!"

Ignoring the fat Jap, at great speed Eli raced through the living room. Side-stepping the coffee table, without breaking stride he marveled at his agility. Yes, he would have to win the heating pad even though his skinny sister had no fat Jap to keep her warm on the coldest night of their life.

Entering Harry's bedroom, Rhoda and Eli were neck-in-neck. Coming into the back-stretch, they spotted the heating pad and dove. Eli barely got hold of its cord, when, using every ounce of strength she could muster, Rhoda astounded Eli by jerking it out of his hands.

Laughing in his face, Rhoda pranced into her room, snuggling the steaming heating pad.

As Eli climbed into his darkened bed for the first time in his life he readily admitted that he was happy to share his igloo with the fat Jap. Hearing his sneaky, rotten sister cooing away all nice and toasty, Eli tossed and turned until he fell asleep.

Awakened to the smell of smoke, Eli instinctively grabbed his then-cold hot water bottle and ran to see from whence the smoke smoked. Following his nose through the darkened living room he met his disgruntled father. Exchanging formal greetings, (Harry was an Ambassador remember?) they entered Rhoda's bedroom.

Turning on the light, Eli immediately spotted smoke coming from the heating pad's

electric cord. "I had it first, so it serves her right," he thought. "If she didn't pull it out of my hands, she wouldn't have ripped the cord and there'd be no fire."

Staring at his warm, ungrateful, sleeping sister, Eli decided it would be up to his father to save her, since Rhoda was his daughter, which took precedence over being his snott-nosed sister.

Unscrewing its cap, Eli handed the cold-hot water bottle to his father and waited. When Harry raised it above her head, despite his mother and Benny being fast-a-sleep, the boy cheered, "Let her have it Papa! Let 'er rip before the whole house burns down!"

Chapter VIII

Staring at *'Zeyda,'* who was rocking away and *'dahvening,'* praying, Gitel's three children nibbled on her orange-rind *'kichels,'* cookies. "If I had my pea-shooter? I bet I could knock *'Zeyda's'* ash off and he wouldn't even know it," whispered Eli. "When he's praying, *'Zeyda's'* oblivious to everything."

"You shouldn't say that Eli," Rhoda whispered, continuing to ogle her grandfather. "It would hurt Mama's feelings."

"Hurt Mama's feelings? I haven't seen him talk to her since I was born. In fact," he said, "The only one he seems to care about is Aunt Rose. And you know why he talks to her."

"Because Aunt Rose is rich and we're poor, right Eli?" Benny, deduced.

"I guess we're the black sheep Benny," Eli moaned. "But don't you worry. One day *'Zeyda's'* ash will fall and that's the day he'll see how wrong he was about Mama and Papa and us."

When Rose and Dora had retreated to *'Booba's'* bedroom, Gitel, with tears beginning to swell her dark brown eyes, turned to her mother. "Mama, if she gives me another thing I'll scream. She makes me feel like I'm an orphan in front of my own family. My own father doesn't talk to me," she sobbed, quivering. "And why? Because I didn't marry his bonafide millionaire."

"She doesn't mean anything bad Gitel," *'Booba'* consoled. "Rose is your sister. She's a businesswoman. She always was. You are different."

"Gitel," Rose said returning. "It's been so hot this summer, I thought you could use this. Here, I have a present for you."

"It's a beautiful, one-piece bathing suit," Dora said. "I wish it would fit me. Three children and she still has the figure of a young girl."

"How is Moishe?" Gitel asked, knowing Dora's supposed compliment was really jealousy. Besides being fifty pounds overweight, what could she possess that could make her sister Dora jealous of her?

"He went to the football game, or the baseball game? He goes almost every night," Dora sighed. "Issac took him to one game and since then, they've been running like a bunch of *'meshugenehs.'*"

"And how is your gorgeous son, Joshua?" Gitel prodded, turning to Rose.

"Like father like son. My Joshua has a wife and three daughters and he runs with them every chance he gets. When he's not working? And God only knows what my son

is selling now?" sighed Rose. "He's at some ball game."

8:00 A.M. The humidity was unbearable; it was another scorcher. Waiting for the bus that would take them to Orchard Beach, wearing bathing suits beneath their clothes, the Greenwalds paced. Although unconfirmed, Eli was certain, somewhere along the line his father and Mrs. Saunders' paths had crossed. Why else would his brother and sister be holding his sweating hands? Unless they had been instructed to do so? Eli was going crazy. He couldn't scratch the God-awful itch he had gotten in his groin. Despite Benny's pleading, "Slow down Eli!" the boy continued to pace nervously.

Keeping up with his son's frenetic pace, Harry warned, "Don't forget! Soon as you get on the bus, run to the back! And when that nosey bus driver asks you your age? Tell him, you're only six, but because you're so tall, most people think you're much older."

Holding two overstuffed shopping bags, Gitel *'shushkered'* for her son's unchallenged passage. Too embarrassed to scratch his genitals in front of his eye-wary family, Eli agonized. Fortunately, when the bus came to a screeching halt, those three kids jumped, allowing the tormented, itch-crazed boy, doing a half-twist in mid-air, to discretely scratch his personals.

Boarding the vacant bus, a clean-shaven young man, dressed in freshly pressed gray pants with a gray Eisenhower jacket to match, excitedly greeted Harry, who was struggling with a colorful beach umbrella.

"Good morning. This is my first day and you are my first fares," he boasted.

Nudging a startled Eli to the back, Harry engaged the young, eager-to-please bus driver. "Keep your eyes on the road and watch where you're going!" demanded Harry.

"There are lots of crazy people driving these days."

"Thanks. Thanks for the tip," the clean-shaven young man courteously responded.

(Believe it. In those days bus drivers were clean-shaven.)

While his always get carsick family struggled to raise their chariot's stuck windows, for some needed air, Harry continued to impress the young man. "You're doing a hell of a job," Harry ended. Harry retreated to his seated family and Mr. Enthusiasm, the new bus driver, stepped on the excellerator and jerked away. Falling awkwardly on his already nauseous wife, Harry reacted. "What are you doing in my seat?"

Acidically vile, Gitel's vomit crept past her throat and into her tightly sealed mouth. Gitel did not mean to push the man that had caused a most religious father to disown his ever-loving daughter to the floor, but she had to get to the opened window. Knowing they were to be next, sympathetically, her three children watched their little mother heave her guts out.

Relieved, staring at her departed breakfast splatter on the cobble-stoned street below, Gitel noticed a brand new Lincoln stop not more than ten feet away. She could not clearly see the acnied face of the driver who was talking to a young, Spanish girl wearing too much lipstick, a very short, tight fitting skirt and blouse that revealed her large

breasts. Gitel thought her to be a prostitute.

She saw the man who appeared to be on the far side, scratch his curly black beard, when he leaned to open the passenger-side door. Upon entering, the girl's head immediately disappeared beneath the dashboard as Moishe Abramowitz, a man that could translate the *'Torah'* into six languages, sped away.

For all concerned, Harry's orders and Gitel's *'shushkering'* had obviously paid off. Anticipating an uneventful day of surf-and-sun at Orchard Beach, they were on their way.

During the forty-five minutes it took to get there, Benny, Eli and Rhoda, each regurgitated as they pulled into the Orchard Beach parking lot. Exiting, Harry lauded, "It was a pleasure driving with such a competent bus driver. I hope I see you again," Harry said, introducing his amazed son. "This is my six year old son Eli. Big, ain't he?"

In addition to the weighted shopping bags and colorful beach umbrella that Harry had recently found and fixed, they *'schlepped'* an old army blanket and towels over the hot sand to their favorite spot and landmark; directly: in front of the Life Guard stanchion on Beach 10.

While his family hurriedly undressed, positioning the colorful umbrella and spreading the blanket over the hot, bleached sand, Harry scanned the terrain and excitedly called out, "I told you we should get here early. No competition, except for those two people we saw sleeping on the other end of the beach we're the only ones here. There has to be a small fortune just waiting for us." Confirming his theory, taking two steps to the right,

Harry nonchalantly picked up two empty beer bottles laden with sand. "You see what I mean about a fortune?"

Eli was amazed. His own father had found four cents in less than a minute. Good in math, he knew that four cents times sixty minutes, equaled \$2.40. If they had the same type of dumb luck for seven or eight hours, they could be rich and there was no reason why not? Since he had walked to and from the Bronx Zoo with his very lucky father often, there was no telling how much money they could make.

Seeing gold in them thar sands, Harry divided his family into teams. Rhoda and Eli would scavenge Beach 9 and he and Benny would cover Beach 10. "Now, the moment you find 25 bottles turn them in for deposit and run back to Mama, who had been put in charge of guarding their perishables.

"Mama really looks beautiful in that bathing suit, doesn't she Eli?" Rhoda asked, rubbing her burning feet.

"Mama looked just as beautiful in her old bathing suit" Eli said, kicking the hot sand. "Don't you see how embarrassed she gets, every time her rotten sister Rose gives her something? Except for *'Booba,'* I don't like any of them Rhoda."

"Neither do I, Eli," thought Rhoda, spotting the neck of a beer bottle protruding from the hot sand.

Despite having picked an occasional seashell, within two hours, racing over the heated sand, Rhoda and Eli returned with all the loot. "Boy, is the sand hot?" said Eli standing

on the army blanket. "But, we did it!"

"What took you so long?" Harry asked, brandishing two-dollar bills.

"They are beautiful," Gitel responded, fondling the seashells her dark-eyed daughter had given her.

"I'll get you some more," promised Rhoda.

"Now is not the time to look for sea shells! We have more important things to do!" said the annoyed Harry. "Let me see those shells!"

Handing them to her father, wincing, Rhoda coughed. "Here they are Papa. I'm sorry."

"What do you mean you're sorry? They're beautiful," he said, smiling. "They will make perfect ashtrays," he added, pushing the hair from her eyes. "Tomorrow, I'll give you a haircut. Such a pretty face needs a haircut once in awhile. Now, it's time to go back to work."

"Never mind," said Gitel pouring lemonade from a thermos. "Eat a sandwich. It's chopped eggs and the onions are just the way you like them Eli. Well done."

Putting his family business on hold, topping off their 9:00 A.M. lunch, (You see why Gitel *'schlepped'* all that food? They ate lunch at 9:00 o'clock) using his newfound fortune, Harry bought ice cream dixie-cups for all.

While the sun secretly burned his pale body, listening to the surf, enjoying his very own dixie cup, certain only the Rockefellers ate ice cream at 9:00 in the morning:

compounded by the fact there was no more Hitler, no Japs or Shultz to cloud his every thought, Eli had found Nirvana.

"It's time for a swim," Eli announced, wishing he had his father's retired megaphone. "Put your glasses in your sneakers and let's go!"

Since they were not more than ten feet from the water, they did as Eli had beckoned and entered the Atlantic. "Come on Papa!" they urged, frolicking in the salty ocean waves.

"It's too cold," Harry answered, waving. It was always too cold for Harry. He had been content watching his children cavort in the frigid waters of Orchard Beach and as far as Eli was concerned he was happy his father always kept an eye on him, because without his glasses, everything was one big blur. Assured that if he ever strayed too far his father would be there to lead him safely back to their blanket, Eli felt free to roam.

While those carefree children playfully drifted away, 127,063 more, colorful umbrellas and army blankets had taken every square inch of sand around that lifeguard stanchion on Beach 10.

Surrounded by all that humanity, the tide, moving quickly, was planning to ruin all of Gitel's chopped egg sandwiches.

"What are you blind?" Harry yelled to a dozing Gitel. "Pick up everything! We have to move!"

Quickly gathering their belongings, she placed them on the blanket. Cursing over the

burning sands of Orchard Beach, ten feet away Harry squeezed in between those 127,063 colorful umbrellas. Having remounted their colorful umbrella and spread the blanket, he checked to see if his children's glasses were still in their sneakers, as Gitel headed for the water.

Entering the surf in her beautiful one-piece bathing suit, Gitel heard someone whistle. "Must be some pretty girl he's whistling at," she mused. Spotting her happy children she waded over. "You are going too far. Do you see where we are sitting now?" she asked.

Having never fully understood his mother's sense of humor; "What do you mean, where we are sitting now? We always sit in the same place," supposing she was acting witty again, splashing his blurry-eyed siblings, Eli joyfully responded, "Sure Mama. Don't worry, we know."

Hours later, exhausted and sunburned, holding hands, Rhoda, Eli and Benny headed for their retreat. Having drifted too far without glasses, it took them twenty minutes to spot the lifeguard stanchion and when they got there it was immersed in water.

"Where is Mama and Papa?" Benny panicked.

"This never happened before, Eli. Something must have happened to Mama," Rhoda cried.

Fighting back his tears, Eli knew that eventually they would be found. "Homerun! Snider hit a homerun," Harry's excited voice was heard above the din. Now, all they had to do was follow his voice. Unfortunately, Harry did not say another word until Furillo

hit one fifteen minutes later.

"Look how sunburned you are! Thank God you're alive," Gitel cried, hugging them.

"Eat something," she said. "Papa went to look for more bottles."

Seeing Rhoda, who moments ago was so frightened, now so content in the arms of his mother and Benny, who had fallen asleep on her lap again, Eli determined, since it had been substantiated that he was a Chosen, it was up to him to save his family's business.

With glasses in place, in search of discarded treasure, like Abraham, Eli marched over the burning sand. "It looks like Papa is not the only one that is lucky around here." He wanted to scream, happening upon a large group of Puerto Rican partyers, mamboing to Tito Puente and drinking beer like there was no tomorrow. I love that music, he thought. Having counted 43 bottles lying all by their lonesome, the boy's eyes lit up. And by the looks of things, there was no telling how many more would soon be coming. There was no doubt he was euphoric. Mamboing over the burning sand, Eli had 27 bottles safely stored in the shopping bag, but being Harry's protege he could not bring himself to leave all that additional loot lying there. "I will guard it until Papa gets here," he vowed.

When Harry had found him, their buried treasure had grown to such proportions that he too was confronted with the age old adage, "Too much, too soon." Having gathered as many beer bottles as they could '*schlep,*' walking off into the sunset to Beach 10, with tears in their eyes, father and son had chosen not to look back. Looking ahead, starting Junior High in the fall, Eli was apprehensive. Having graduated P.S. 42 with honors,

come September, Eli knew that because he was smart he was in for it big-time.

Chapter IX

The past summer despite all his bravado Eli had been scared shit, because come

Eli's Coming

September, Eli knew he would have to attend P.S. 55, a Junior High School with a reputation synonymous to a movie called "The Blackboard Jungle." The past summer, all Eli thought about was P.S. 42.

The rumor was, if one had the misfortune of having to wear thick, horn-rimmed glasses, besides being short, there was a strong probability that one would be killed on one's first day. And if one happened to be one of the lucky ones that survived, one would surely be maimed on one's way home from school. One, Eli was also informed one must never act too smart in class. Being smart guaranteed one a few extra shots to the ribs during lunch.

It was the day before school started and having eaten 257 carrots during the past summer, Eli could still not find his way to his ex-secret clubhouse without the aid of his thick peepers. He also knew that he could not grow ten inches, sport a handlebar mustache or look mean and tough by the morning.

Staring in the mirror, he recalled toothless Tony hawking Hitler's assaults, Moses and Abraham and how it had been determined that he was one of the Chosen. Eli shuddered for again, he would have to survive on his own.

"You're up?" asked Benny, seeing the light on. "We have to get rid of Papa's megaphone right?" he asked climbing over Eli.

"How do I look?" asked Eli, jumping from beneath the army blanket. Over his T-shirt he had put on his heavy-wool dark-blue sweater, upon which his flannel shirt and

light-blue sweater rested.

"You look like you gained 15 pounds Eli," Benny gawked.

"But, do I look any tougher?" Eli sneered. "Do I look any tougher?"

"A little," Benny said snuggling to the cracks. "Shut the light Eli. I have to go to school in the morning and so do you."

In the morning, Eli's eyes had the same bloodshot look that Shultz had once found so invigorating. An added burden had been placed on the boy's plan. It was 90 degrees.

Eli did not kick any beer cans, nor did he sing when he slowly sweated his way to P.S. 55.

The school was enormous compared to P.S. 42. Finding his way to his home-room, taking a seat next to three kids that looked somewhat familiar; two of them were wearing their winter coats and were sopping wet, Eli soon discovered those over dressed kid's names were, Natie and Aaron. Without divulging his fears, Eli discovered they too had been having similar nightmares the past summer.

Bruno was the other kid's name. With light-brown wavy hair and a few odd freckles on his high Slavic cheekbones, he too was no Wilt Chamberlain. The obvious difference being, Bruno had real muscles and he was built like a miniature Mr. Universe.

Having arrived from Poland two months before, despite his accent, Bruno spoke English pretty good.

Confident that Bruno knew how to fight because of the enormous muscles and fists he

bared, Eli, Natie and Aaron befriended him immediately. The fact that Bruno came from Poland like Eli's mother and that he spoke Yiddish better than he Eli, really liked him.

With their newfound protector sitting at their side, carefully, one at a time, Eli, Natie and Aaron surveyed the rest of their class. To their dismay, kids were at least a head taller. Too bad they were so smart and too bad they were realists because, despite Bruno's enormous strength, he would be no match for all those tall, mean, '*Goyishe*' kids.

This time Eli who normally sweats a lot was certain that he was slowly roasting to death. Sweating in triple time, the three of them had become a regular Niagara Falls and soon found them selves sitting in a small, sweat-filled lake. And except for Bruno, there was not a Tarzan among them.

Eli envisioned toothless Tony hawking the headlines plastered across the Daily News: "THREE SMART JEWISH BOYS DROWN IN P.S. 55 ON FIRST DAY!"

Harry's son wanted to be famous, but not that famous. Thinking it wise, he discarded his sweat-filled armor. By the end of their first day in P.S. 55, it was understood: with his three new best friends standing behind him, ready to back him up, it would be Bruno against the world.

"Come on! We'll be late," Harry said, crossing Webster Avenue.

"We want to wait for the trolley," Benny yelled across the street.

"Gitel, what is he making such a big deal about the trolley?" asked Harry, walking on.

"You would think Benny never saw one before."

"We'll walk slowly," said Gitel waving to her children. "It's natural. Young brothers copy older brothers but, unfortunately it doesn't stop there," she said facing Harry. "They want to be like their fathers too. But not my children. My children will have good professions and they will never be on Home Relief. Not over my dead body!"

"Get ready Benny," Rhoda gushed. "I can see it."

"Toot, Toot, Toot-sie Goodbye," Benny sang.

"Not yet!" Eli said. "When it passes us you wave and then you sing."

I know Eli, I was just rehearsing," said Benny laughing. "Rhoda, you said you wanted to try it too."

"No I didn't. I said maybe? And that was a secret Benny!" Rhoda said, no longer *'cutchyng'* him. Liking the feel of her newly cut pixie haircut she thought. "Papa could be a great, great hairdresser. He could be great at anything, if he wanted to." If he only had a job."

It was Saturday night and they were going to Aunt Ennie's new apartment. Located on 173rd Street and Bathgate Avenue, it was Harry's pushcart territory. Nearing his sister's tenement, Harry was greeted and ogled by some of the same women that had once waited patiently for him to return with a new supply of even sweeter strawberries.

"Do you know why all those woman said hello to me?" Harry asked Gitel, climbing

the three flights of steps. "They love me," he mocked.

"They love you because they don't have to live with you," she thought, entering her favorite sister in-law's apartment.

"How are you?" Ennie asked, embracing Gitel.

"Hello Ennie," said Gitel unresponsively. "Hello, Bertha, Murray. *'Vus machst du?'*"

"How can I be?" answered Bertha, poking her thin, nervous-kneed husband to move over on Ennie's maroon, crushed-velvet couch. "I love your dress. When did you go to...?"

"We went to see *'Booba'* last week. Eli was going to do his *'Bar Mitzvah broches'* for *'Zeyda'*, but he never came out of his bedroom," said Benny rushing to her.

"Hello Benny," Bertha said, smothering him with a big, juicy wet kiss. Despite knowing what was to come, struggling, she lifted him upon her lap. Affectionately hugging and squeezing her chubby nephew, wetting her full lips, Bertha readied to plant another one on Benny.

Cupping his hands Benny announced, "I HAVE TO MAKE!"

Pulling her speeding wet lips away, the alarmed Bertha stood and Benny fell to the floor. Trying to pull him to his feet Bertha shrieked. "Benny! Come with me to the bathroom!"

With his knees knocking, Murray urged, "If you have to make? Go with your aunt."

"Then why the hell don't you go?" Harry asked.

"Because I don't have to go!" Murray responded, silencing his hyperactive extremities.

"Neither do I," Benny said laughing. "I was only testing." His laugh contagious, got knock-kneed Murray to laugh.

Eli recalled once hearing his know-it-all sister dare, "Let's see you make the baby laugh," And his igloo partner was at it again, laughing and shitting his fat Jap heart out. Eli loved to laugh just about more than anything else. Warmed by it all, he was glad that his Aunt Ennie and Aunt Bertha had enjoyed a good laugh as well. "They were so different from his mother's family. They were warm and had a sense of humor and they give wet, juicy kisses," he rued.

"I guess being very religious and rich doesn't necessarily make one a nicer person?" he determined. "I guess it's that time," Eli thought, joining his father who had readied the burnt cork.

"Come Gitel," Ennie said rising. "Help me set the table. Bertha will sit with Rhoda and that son of yours. I love that Benny. When did he become such a joker?"

Having no children of her own, Ennie truly loved her brother's children and they knew it.

"Who will eat all this herring?" Gitel asked, having placed the pickled herring, tomato herring, fried herring and matjes herring on Ennie's kitchen table.

"I made it all for you," Ennie said hugging Gitel. "What's the matter? You're not important? You don't count? Taste the fried herring... You look wonderful, but I can tell

something is bothering you. Would you like to talk about it?" she said, taking Gitel's hand. "Tell me what he did again."

Except for those moments when nature had thoughtlessly beckoned, Eli and his survival cohorts were inseparable. Because Eli was T.V.-less, it was understood that they would meet at Bruno, Natie or Aaron's home. Playing monopoly, chess, Boom, discussing baseball, girls that had sprouted boobies the past week and other various parts of their mysterious bodies. (Two girls, one in English and one in Spanish had grown thin mustaches.)

Laughing when Eli had mortgaged his four railroads to build two houses on Boardwalk and Park Place and then having to declare bankruptcy when Aaron landed on it, his changing, high-pitched voice squeaked, "Doesn't your father ever work?"

"He works at night," answered Eli.

The few times he had convinced his pals to play at his house, besides having to contend with Benny's false alarms, to Eli's embarrassment his father was always there, parading around in his torn undershirt.

Fierce competitors, they would flip for sides.

"Call it," Natie bade as the Indian-head nickel spun in the air.

"Tails," Eli shouted. "And tails it is. I pick Bruno and since I won the toss, we serve.

"Baloney!" Natie shouted with Aaron agreeing. "We always flip for serve! You toss it and this time I'll call it."

"Suit yourself," Eli said tossing the coin in the air.

Natie called "Tails!"

"You lose Natie," Bruno cheered. "We serve first Eli!"

Handball was the one sport they could all compete in, for one doesn't need be big and strong to win. Hitting the pink Spalding where your opponent was not called for cunning and some agility.

As Eli approached the short-line ready to serve, Natie shouted. "What does your father do for money?"

"He has a small inheritance," Eli answered, staring at Natie. "Are we playing? Or do you want to play Twenty-Questions?"

"Let's stop all this bullshit and let's play handball!" Bruno demanded in '*Yiddish*'.

Playing Chess at Natie's house, he screamed, "Check! Who does your father work for?"

"He works for my uncle and when he doesn't feel like working he doesn't have to. So, there! It's your move."

The one Eli had liked best was the one he came up with during a torrid game of ping pong at the YMWHA, where he also took his Bar Mitzvah lessons from Rabbi Klopman. "My father is a secret agent and he's paid directly by the Federal Government. My

serve."

Each day, Eli would transmit the new secret password his father was supposedly using. During the next three months, '*Schmutzic*,' '*chorlehrya*' and '*Wallyo*' had become their favorites. After much bickering, Eli had given the guys permission to use those secret words, but only during lunch and gym.

Feeling somewhat responsible for the way his three best pals had begun putting-down their hard working fathers and their boring jobs, Eli plotted.

Having become obsessed with '*Chorlehrya*,' interspersed between nibbling on their peanut butter and jelly sandwiches and Aaron's sardine sandwich, their disappointment with their innocent, hard working fathers heightened. Moments after the lunch bell had sounded, the best part of two P.B. and J's. and Aaron's sardine sandwich remained uneaten.

"The Federal Government wanted to send your father on a secret mission to Alaska, but just because he can't take the cold he had to retire?" repeated an envious Aaron.

Walking off with Natie, Aaron whispered, "I wonder what kind of lie he's going make-up next?"

"I don't know if he's really lying? What about "*Chorlehrya* and *Wallyo*?"

"And what about '*Schmutzic*?' You're right Natie," Aaron admitted. "He couldn't know all those secret words unless his father was really a secret agent. Come on. We're going to be late for Spanish."

Stepping to the foul line in gym, about to shoot a free throw, despite always whispering, '*schmutzic*,' Natie missed most of the time.

Loving the sound of '*Chorlehrya*,' Aaron mouthed it during all science tests. And they used '*Wallyo*' to buffer the cold winter winds that had battered the Bronx that winter. '*Wallyo*,' they yelled, doing belly whoppers down the snowy hills of Crotona Park. His snow-covered friends did not know why Eli was smiling. He was standing directly where his father had once walked, oblivious to the rabid rat that was stalking him. '*Wallyo*,' they screamed throwing snowballs at each other.

As expected, they sighed when Eli excitedly told them that his illustrious father had just accepted the position of Chief Lifeguard at Orchard Beach. Since it was only December, he was confident his slight exaggeration would be good for at least six months.

Unlike his son, Harry lauded the fact that he did not have to contend with bosses, nor the crowded subways that had risen to ten cents. He was smart giving his family more than he had ever received from his father: food and shelter. "I don't understand why anyone bothers to work in this country?" he bragged. "All you have to do is fill-out a couple of forms and show them your lucky tumor and the Home Relief gives you everything want."

Whenever Eli's pals came to play, wearing his torn undershirt, Harry's credit card was readily available for viewing. Despising all board games, Harry directed their

conversation to the Dodgers and his tumor.

The only way to make him stop was to get Harry to sing. Eli, having tutored his best friends, those four boys would hum "Rumania" and inevitably, Harry, would soon be transformed.

When he sang, Eli thought he was the perfect father.

Over lunch, when his chastising friends had added to their growing list of dissatisfactions that none of their father ever sing, he felt even more responsible.

Chapter X

"Here it is. Just like I promised, a Motorola, console T.V." Moses said, bringing it in.

"I, I don't know how to thank you!" beamed Harry.

"Do you want me to wheel it in the living room for you Harry?"

Eli's Coming

"Don't bother. Eli and I will do it," said Harry shaking Moses' hand vigorously. "I knew there was a reason why I gave you my secret formula."

"Hey, be careful. That's my pitching penny hand, remember?" Moses grinned, "I have to be ready for next summer. Thanks to you, my kids got used to ice cream and so did I."

Arriving home from school, there was pandemonium. Parading around the huge console, three Jewish children chanted, "We have our own T.V. We have our own T.V. Yeaaa!"

Struggling, Harry and Eli pushed the huge console over the wooden saddle that separated the kitchen and living room. With hearts pounding, they quickly rearranged the furniture.

"Put on wrestling," said Harry sitting in his favorite chair.

"Boo," his children shouted. "Boo!"

Becoming more and more sophisticated, Benny opted, "I want Howdy Doody."

Eli pleaded, "I'm going to have a science test tomorrow, so I have to watch 'Captain Video'."

Knowing her mother had enjoyed watching the "Cisco Kid" at Aunt Ennie's; Rhoda urged all to do as well.

Because a screaming match followed, no one bothered to turn it on.

"Instead of arguing," laughed Benny through his father's megaphone, "Why don't we vote?"

Much to their surprise, Harry agreed. "If that's what you want? Then that's what you'll get. Retrieving his megaphone, he announced woefully, "First of all, I'm sorry to say, the three of you *'momzas'* are not eligible to participate in the upcoming election. According to the laws of our wonderful country, you are not old enough to legally vote. And as far as Mama is concerned, not only has she never voted, she never even bothered to register."

Within weeks, those simple people had become wrestling fanatics. Soon, Gorgeous George and Antonino Argentina Rocca's names were added to Gitel's nightly *'shushkering.'* When Moses gave Harry the television, he told him it was hot. He had received two of them for allowing Potato Mickey to fence his wares from his ground floor apartment, but that was not the reason they would totter on becoming prematurely gray.

Possessing a television was a Home Relief no-no. Article 867: All televisions will be confiscated and sold at public auction. Funds shall be used to reduce monthly allotment.

They never watched an entire program together. One would always be looking out of the bedroom window, playing 'Chickie' for Señor Estevez, who replaced Shultz.

Señor Estevez was tall, with black, slicked back greasy hair, penetrating dark beady eyes and a pencil mustache. His discourses were long and drawn-out. "My family made many mistakes during the Spanish Inquisition," he would sadly embark. "But, if I was there? Things would have been different!"

Eli was disheartened. Estevez had opened an old war-wound. Undoubtedly enormous rewards were being offered for exposing families that were not eligible to watch Uncle Miltie. Fortunately, having the advantage of being two stories up, they were able to spot the Inquisitor's unexpected arrival from two blocks away. Enough time to have pushed the T.V. over Mt. Rushmore, the name given to Rhoda's bedroom saddle, and into her closet where every *'schmate,'* rag found would be hurriedly placed upon it. Talk about *'schmates.'*

It was 11:30 A.M. Sunday morning when Gitel and her three children boarded the Third Avenue El at the Claremont Parkway station.

"Why are we going to *'Booba'* Mama?" asked Benny, looking out the window of the rickety old train taking them to 149th Street where they would change for the I.R.T. "We were there last week."

"Mama wants *'Zeyda'* to hear how well Eli knows his *'Bar Mitzvah bruches,'*" answered Rhoda. Sensing the all-too-recognizable vile taste from within wanting to get out, delaying the inevitable, the, dark-eyed girl with Harry's pixie haircut sealed her lips.

Pulling into the 161st station the elevated train came to a screeching halt. As a few unknowing people were hastily departing and entering, Benny thought it might be fun to announce he had to make, but like his sister, he wanted to throw up. Recognizing the agonized looks on her beloved children's faces, empathizing, Gitel joined the ranks of

sealed lips. She too wanted to regurgitate.

As the train doors opened on 149th Street, with Eli leading the way those four Greenwalds raced to the end of the elevated station. Sticking their heads over the raised elevator tracks they heaved their guts out.

Directly below, two horny men, one bearded, had been waiting.

"Holy shit! It looks like the whole fucking Bronx just threw up on my car!" said a startled Isaac. "I always hated the Bronx and now I know why. Do you have a handkerchief Moishe?"

"Yeah," said Moishe removing one from his suit jacket. "Here."

"You better wipe that shit off before those Spanish chicks get here."

"You better clean it," his little wiener urged. Stepping from Issac's Caddie, Moishe wanted to tell his brother inlaw to shove it, but his lust made him think otherwise.

Looking through the tracks, Benny spotted the brand new Caddie below that had been splattered with their oatmeal, cocoa and well-buttered toast. Laughing, Benny pointed, "Doesn't that look like uncle Moishe trying to wipe up the mess on, hey, that looks like Uncle Issac's new car?"

"It's all over his windshield. A perfect shot," Eli gloated. "But you better shut up Benny! Do you want them to know we threw up on his new car? It's funny. They never came to see us. I wonder what they're doing in the Bronx?"

"Come children. *'Booba'* is waiting," said Gitel escorting her children to the I.R.T.

Feeling relieved, the rest of the ride to their grandmother's was uneventful.

When his three best friends agreed to watch the World Series at his house, Eli was elated. Having a T.V., at last he had become an equal.

'Noshing' on buttered rye bread and milk, they watched intently. It was the ninth inning and the score was tied. Formerly, when the pressure had been too difficult to handle, Harry had simply lowered the volume on the radio. This time he left to join Gitel who was playing 'Chickie.'

Robinson was dancing off third as Gill Hedges stepped to the plate.

"Betcha he steals home," Aaron squealed.

"What for?" argued Eli, "There's only one out."

Just as Robinson broke for the plate, Eli heard Harry whistling, giving the dreaded signal that the Inquisitor was coming, as he came scurrying in. Please, not now. Not when Robinson was planning to steal home plate, but what could the boy do?

Traumatized at the thought of telling his friends that they had to leave, he prayed that his father had been mistaken. How would he explain his father wheeling the T.V. into Rhoda's closet?

"We have to leave!" Eli said rising suddenly. "Hurry! Let's go!"

Having survived Eli's father being a secret agent, Chief Lifeguard, and not to mention his revolting tumor, prepared for the unexpected, Eli's three bewildered friends, departed.

On the way to Bruno's house Eli explained, "My father is about to have an important meeting with some very influential bankers who wish to remain anonymous.

"You mean the Rockefellers?" marveled Natie.

"I am not at liberty to say."

"Why not? You told us about '*Chorlehrya* and *schmutzie*' and we didn't tell anybody, did we?" Aaron whined.

"And don't forget about 'Wallyo.' Come on Eli. Is it Rockefeller?" Natie asked, "If you don't tell us we're not going to your '*Bar Mitzvah*' next Saturday."

Turning the corner, Eli spied Estez walking to Washington Avenue. "SHIT! He wasn't coming to visit us after all," thought Eli. "You just can't trust those investigators these days."

Because Harry and his family had persevered on many a '*Yom Kippur*,' Rabbi Klopman had great admiration for him. Teaching Harry's son his '*Bar Mitzvah*' lessons, Rabbi Klopman gave Eli his undivided attention and Eli hated it.

"Why do I have to come four days a week Rabbi Klopman? Natie only went two."

"Because you are special Eli," the Rabbi said. "You are the son of a great, dedicated Jew."

Eli wanted to laugh, but thought otherwise.

Begrudgingly, he had been going to Hebrew School for the last seven years. Come his

'*Bar Mitzvah*,' Eli swore never to return to Hebrew School or '*shul*.'

When the proud Harry vowed two days before the blessed event that the heir to his throne would have a new suit and new shoes, Eli was never more grateful. "Why should I be any different?" he thought; my friends got new suits for their '*Bar Mitzvah*.' Papa means well, but how's he going to get the money?"

Chancing that Estevez would not be coming; Harry tossed the mound of pillows aside and called Bertha. "It's Me! Harry! Your brother, Harry!" he screamed into the phone. "I'm going to paint your kitchen tomorrow morning, so get ready!"

Knowing that once he had made up his mind, it was impossible to change it. Tearfully she '*kvetched*,' "You said you were going to paint the week after Eli's '*Bar Mitzvah*,' not two days before. I'm just not ready. I haven't taken one thing out of the closets and besides, I'm not in the mood."

"I'll tell you what you can do with your moods, God damn it! If I don't paint tomorrow? Get somebody else!"

Because he charged less than half of the going rate to paint, begrudgingly Bertha agreed.

Harry was livid, because Eli was in school and he had to '*schlep*' everything himself. Making matters worse, he was sure that besides being deaf his sister had forgotten. Doing a Shultz, he banged on her door screaming, "Open up Goddamnit, open up!"

Ten minutes later, always happy to see her baby brother, Bertha greeted him. "I

thought I heard you banging. I'm sorry. I was listening to Jolson. So how come you're late, after you made me rush?" she asked her speeding brother.

"Late? You think I'm late?" he roared, spreading the drop-cloth. "Why the hell don't you get a hearing aid Goddamnit? What are you afraid of? Someone will think you're deaf? Let them ask your brother. I'll tell 'em how deaf you are!"

Talking to her imaginary cohort, Bertha moaned, "You think he cares why I'm so nervous? Up all night preparing the kitchen for him and you think he appreciates it? My husband stuffs mattresses eight months a year, so I had to beg and borrow to pay him for painting his own sister's kitchen."

Harry, who had hated her *'kvetching'* almost as much as Gitel's *'shushkering'* had stormed into his beloved sister's kitchen and without giving her a good morning kiss, was on the ladder painting like there was no tomorrow.

"Don't you want to eat something before you start?" she asked, pouring coffee.

"Stop bothering me. I have to get out of here and buy the *'Bar Mitzvah'* boy a new suit and new shoes," he boasted as he painted the ceiling.

"How can you work and not eat? At least have coffee and a danish. And I want canary-yellow," she moaned.

"Canary-yellow? What are you crazy? Nobody paints a kitchen canary-yellow anymore. How about a beautiful rosy-pink? Now that's a color."

"Rosy-pink is nice, but I'm in the 'mood' for canary-yellow," she insisted, beguiled by

the speed of her brother's dazzling brush-strokes.

"Just my luck I had to have a sister with so many rotten moods," thought Harry. "All right," he said. "Even though I hate that color, next year I promise I'll paint it canary-yellow. Now, get out of here before you get in my way."

Being she had not heard the part about next year, Bertha was more than pleasantly surprised that she had been able to sway her brother so easily, because she was really in the mood for canary-yellow.

"Why don't you take a nap? I'll wake you when I finish," Harry said, having almost finished the ceiling. "But just in case I can't wake you, pay me now."

Harry did not interrupt his determined brush-strokes as she handed her swaying brother, ten dollars and went off to nap, dreaming of canary-yellow.

Harry had finished when Murray returned. "'Nu?' What do think?" asked Harry, cleaning himself with benzine.

"I love the color. It's like a rosy-pink," Murray said, noticing a spot Harry had missed.

"You missed a spot by the dumbwaiter Harry."

"I haven't got time to touch up now. I have to buy Eli a new suit and shoes," Harry said as Bertha appeared.

"I couldn't fall asleep" she *'kvetched.'* "I never sleep," she moaned, "As if someone cares."

"Who sleeps during the day? 'Nu?' What do you think?" Harry asked his sleepless

sister.

"The way I feel right now who cares? As long as it's clean, I'm happy."

"I'm glad I made the both of you happy. I'll get my '*chazerai*,' junk next week," Harry said leaving his mess behind.

Anticipating his brand new equalizer, the suit, the excited boy, with his sister hanging on, raced home from school.

"Where is it? Where's my brand new suit?" Eli shouted opening the door.

"Here it is," beamed Harry. "I picked it out myself."

The man-to-be screamed, "I love it. It's perfect. It's gorgeous."

"Try it on," Rhoda urged. "I bet it looks even better on."

"I like it," Benny said, touching it.

"Forget it Benny. Don't even think about it. It's mine. All mine," sang Eli, dancing round the plastic tablecloth.

"Light-blue is my all-time favorite color and doesn't it fit like a glove?" he said kissing his father and mother. "I've never been so happy."

"What are you waiting for? Go get him the shoes," demanded his proud father.

Returning, Gitel happily presented the '*Bar Mitzvah*' boy with his new shoes, white bucks.

Seeing them, Eli wanted to throw up. "Bucks? I hate bucks! I always hated bucks!"

"What's wrong with them? Try them on. They're very strong shoes," Harry pleaded.

"What's wrong with them?" asked his mother.

Despite not wanting to appear ungrateful, for he knew the risk his father had taken, to get the money to buy those white bucks, Eli lamented, "I wouldn't be caught dead in them, because only rich '*Goys*,' Gentiles wear white-and-brown bucks. What are my friends gonna say? The party's off! I'm not getting '*Bar Mitzvahed!*'"

In spite of becoming a man in two days, Eli did not understand why he still felt like crying?

"Papa, Bruno wore black shoes to his '*Bar Mitzvah*' and he made more money than Natie."

The kid was a street fighter. When he mentioned the part about the money, he knew he hit his father below the belt. Low blow and all, Harry smiled. His son was a fighter and it was all because of his father's outstanding tutelage, but this time the teacher would not be out-foxed by the student.

"What are you standing there and looking like a bunch of dopes? Get me some ink!" Harry roared.

When Harry says some ink? You better jump. Racing to her room, Rhoda found a bottle of Waterman's blue-black ink. "I found it," she said, running to her father. "Here."

Opening the bottle of blue-black ink, dollar signs appeared before his eyes. "Now find some newspaper!"

Hopping to it, they were off. Winded, each reported that there was not a sheet of newspaper to be found in the entire kingdom. At that moment in history, it was not a horse the frustrated Harry would have given his kingdom for. "Look how they can't find one rotten piece of newspaper. What kind of children did I raise?"

Remembering he had saved the sports section the day Snider hit three homers in a double header against the Giants, dejectedly, Eli gave it to his father; hoping that the Duke would do it again.

Seeing his father place the Gentile shoes on Snider's three homers, Eli cringed. While Harry's children gawked in amazement, he gave those Gentile shoes a heavy dose of blue-black ink.

"He made them black Eli," said Benny, wide-eyed.

"Of course he made them black. You like them? You can wear them," said Eli.

"Now get me the black shoe polish! Hurry!" Having added the finishing touches to his masterpiece, Harry said, '*Nu?*' What do you think about your '*Goyishe*' shoes now?"

Talk about the "Miracle on 34th Street;" to Eli, despite being a little further uptown, his shoes were truly a miracle. 34th Street was merely hearsay. Strutting in his uptown miracle, Eli, using the megaphone announced, "Now Hear This. My Bar Mitzvah is back on."

"What about the money? Think they're black enough? I could give them another coat."

"They're perfect Pop. Thanks. We are really going to clean up," said Eli hugging his omnipotent father.

As Benny climbed over him that evening, the soon-to-be man was all smiles as he thought, "What would I do without Papa?"

Again tossing and turning, that night silence engulfed the courtroom when a teary-eyed Gitel approached the shiny mahogany bar. "Why?" she cried to the bearded judge with the little red lips, where a roll-your-own-cigarette with an unusually long ash miraculously protruded. With his eyes affixed on the *'Torah,'* the judge raised his gavel. "Stop! Eli is your grandson Papa," she weeped aloud. "Can't you come?"

"Gitel, Gitel what's the matter?" Harry said, embracing his dream-worn wife. "You were having a bad dream again Gitel. It was only a dream."

Wearing his new suit and shiny black miracles, Eli was dressed to kill. Acknowledging the oohs and ahhs, the *'Bar Mitzvah'* boy exchanged formalities with the various ambassadors at large.

"Thanks Mama," he said kissing her. "I feel great too, but you're the real beauty in this family."

She thought, "Some beauty." Wearing the finely tailored beige suit and pillbox hat that Rose had given her, despite her apparent radiance, Gitel was disheartened. Her heart ached, "Even though they have never visited me, it's my Eli's *'Bar Mitzvah.'*"

Rounding out a perfect morning, Eli thought his family looked almost as good as he

did, save Rhoda, whose bony body appeared lost in a pink taffeta dress with oversized crinoline attached.

"You look beautiful," he said to his sister.

"I have to hand it to you Papa. My shoes look terrific," he beamed, shaking his father's hand. Moving on, he rued, "What can I say Duke? Papa was right."

Benny, having eaten his third banana, was smiling and burping. Wearing blue pants and a white shirt, Harry had firmly secured one of his very colorful ties around his chubby son's neck. "Do I have to wear it?" Benny asked, recalling when his father had once tied a key around his neck. "Do I?"

"Stop asking me so many questions! I'm trying to figure out how much money we're gonna make."

Eli personally thanked Mrs. Rosenberg for giving his father the gray sharkskin suit and matching fedora after her husband had passed away. It pleased Eli that his dear friends would at long last see his father in something other than a torn undershirt.

"Just this once dear God, help my father see how important he still is to me. Make my family come to Eli's *'Bar Mitzvah'*," *'shushkered'* Gitel, serving breakfast.

Just once, she wished *'Booba'* and her sisters would do something other than gratuitously give her the hand-me-downs.

Eating breakfast in quickly, they arrived at the *'Besmedresh Hagodol'* an hour early. Harry had allowed ample time to review his plan. "All right, tell me again," Harry,

demanded.

"I better not lose any envelopes," Eli repeated as he daydreamed. "I look so good, maybe I should have invited some girls?"

Colors of the spectrum, filtering through the stained glass window that was high above the ark warmed Eli's glowing face as he made his way to the pulpit. Despite sitting behind the drape, Ennie stuck her head out and blew him a kiss. Aunt Bertha repeated the gesture.

Removing the treasured *'Torah'* from its ark, he spied Bruno, Natie and Aaron struggle to contain their laughter. He had made it. He was one of the boys, I mean men.

Smiling, Eli nodded to his father sitting in the first row with Benny and his nervous kneed uncle and the rest of Harry's family.

"Gitel" whispered Ennie, "Don't let them make you depressed. You don't need them. We're here and Eli will be *'Bar Mitzvahed'* with or with out them."

Squeezing her hand, Gitel smiled, "Thank you Ennie. Thank you very much."

Adjusting her creeping girdle, Bertha added, "They may be rich and religious, but they're not half the *'Mensch'* you are Gitel and who looks more beautiful than you?"

Despite Harry's whole family being there, he turned to Benny, who was fidgeting with his tie. "Too bad Mama's whole *'meschpucha'* didn't come. I wanted to show them that we're just as good as *'Zeyda'* and his rich, rotten family."

In affirmation, Eli made certain to sing those *'bruches'* as Jolson had, when he too was

'*Bar Mitzvahed.*' It appeared the young man had wanted to show his '*Zeyda*' a thing or two himself.

Walking from the pulpit, Eli determined that his father had used considerable restraint in not applauding his performance. Rabbi Klopman beamed as he congratulated Eli.

Harry was watching like a hawk when friends and family gave Eli their envelopes. When the count had reached ten, eyes gleaming, Harry raced to his readied son. Extending his open hand Eli filled it.

"Ten?"

"Every one of them Pop."

Walking home after much debate, it was almost agreed that Eli had given one of the best performances. The '*Bar Mitzvah*' boy felt ten feet tall. Crossing Claremont Parkway, Aaron, who was going to be '*Bar Mitzvahed*' in two weeks, squealed, "I'm sorry Eli, I can't come to your party, because I have to visit my Uncle Morris. He's very sick. And my mother forgot to buy you a card, so here's five bucks."

"The card really doesn't matter Aaron. It's the thought that counts," Eli said, putting the five in his back-pocket.

Knowing that his mother had cooked up a storm and the record player would be blasting, Eli was anxious to get home but, wanting to make a grand appearance, setting the pace, he walked slowly. They were three blocks away when it started to drizzle. It was a warm day so despite his new suit and shoes getting a little wet, Eli didn't seem to

mind. Besides, he remembered his mother always saying, "It's lucky when it rains on your parade," and he could not have agreed more, because he never felt so grateful in his life.

With the rain's increasing intensity, they started to trot. Less than a block away it started to pour and the lucky new-man panicked. His uptown miracles were washing away. Racing ahead he cried, "Mama's wrong about the parade. I hate parades."

With the rain coming down in buckets, luckily his tears went unobserved. By the time those rain-soaked boys arrived, Eli's miracle had been reduced to a pair of washed-out inky Gentiles. Fortunately, it was so crowded, Eli was hopeful no one would notice his off-colored disasters.

They all sang and danced. The food was plentiful and delicious and somehow Eli had managed to retard his tears until all his guests had departed. And then, making up for lost time the dam burst when he explained how rotten he felt taking his first steps as a man.

"Don't worry, it's not the last walk you'll take," promised Harry. "Rhoda, go lock the door and let's see how much money we made."

When Harry said, "How much we made," he really meant he made, because that is the way it was, if anyone received something, it was always shared or you were made to feel guilty. On his *'Bar Mitzvah'* day, Eli was grateful that there was nothing to feel guilty about.

Via his withered megaphone, with great fanfare Harry announced the following, "My

sister Ennie, \$30! My sister Bertha, \$25! My Uncle Yunyeh, \$20! Tante Muraleh, \$20! Eli's friends, \$5! Now, let's see what your mother's family sent," he said opening their envelopes. "They got so much money, I bet they sent at least a \$100 each."

Devout students of the *'Torah,'* they were aware that the number 18 in Jewish folklore was symbolic of life. As though by some demonical plan, they had decided, starting with *'Zeyda'* the walrus to her last remaining unchristened relative, other than Joshua who had given \$100, Harry had cursed each one for sending only \$18.

Her children were sorry for their mother. They knew how much her family meant to her, but \$18? Having counted \$354, Harry's disappointment turned to smiles. "354 bucks ain't bad for half-a-days work," he said.

Eli could not remember his family ever having more than \$200 at any one time. With 354 big ones in the till, they acted like a bunch of star-struck millionaires.

Harry left and soon returned with a quart of vanilla ice cream and two bottles of grape soda. "Two parties in one day. What man could ask for more?" thought Eli, "Not even Rockefeller."

Despite winning his first game of dominos that evening, it was evident Eli was getting on in age, for he was exhausted. Thanking his parents for giving him such a memorable day, he went to bed.

Removing those shoes, he thought of all the years he had wasted in Hebrew School but obviously it had paid off. "Almost 400 bucks. Unbelievable. Too bad I can't tell the

guys how much I made."

Taking off his pants, the guiltless young man discovered the five Aaron gave him. His first reaction was to turn it in but suddenly he realized that he had become a man and a man has to look out for himself. Great logic right? Wrong! "Should I, or shouldn't I?" That was the question.

The thought of feeling guilty for the rest of his life raced through Eli's tormented mind. "I could buy a new pair of sneakers and maybe even have enough left for a bleacher seat. What should I do? When I was trying to find a five like my father when we went to the Bronx Zoo that was a problem. Now that I finally found one, that's a problem." With his problem safely hidden in his new hiding place, his socks, Eli thought as he closed his eyes, "What the hell. What's one more log in the fire?"

Chapter XI

Although his 5'2", 110 lb. body belied the fact, it had been decreed by God and his

Eli's Coming

'*Bar Mitzvah*' that for almost a year Eli had been a man. Men were supposed to be fearless, leaders of the world and able to 'Knock up' every girl they met within two minutes.

Because he walked behind every kid that was taller, it was a pretty good bet that Eli would not make leader. (Maybe the reason he became an '*ass-man*' in later life was because of all those pretty little rear-ends he viewed during puberty.)

What disturbed him most about being a man was having to impregnate all those girls he had befriended at P.S. 55. According to his latest count, seventy-eight girls were unfettered and he held himself personally accountable.

When circumstance permitted, he vowed to make it up to his ever-growing list of prospective candidates that included Brenda Starr, Elizabeth Taylor, Daisy Mae and, most recently, Ava Gardner.

The fact that Bruno, Natie, Aaron and he happened to be Jewish, short, bright and lived in the same impoverished neighborhood was not the only similarity they shared: They were four oversexed boys in quest of their first orgasm. To say that is all they thought about during and after school would be a gross understatement.

In Science, English and Art, Shelly Tanzer sat next to them. She was a pleasant girl, with lots of pimples and the most tantalizing set of boobs they ever saw in person.

Love-struck Eli ran home from school and right into his old clubhouse. Shutting the door quickly, he closed his eyes. Fantasizing about Shelly's amazing, bouncing

'knockers,' Eli tried stroking his way to adolescence.

During lunch, they would file their progress reports. After two months, they regretfully concurred: Shelly Tanzer had been a fruitless exercise. She had given them many, "I think I did? I know I did. I was just about to, but my father knocked on the door."

Things had deteriorated to where they stopped having lunch together that is until the day Judy Brown walked into class. Those four sex-crazed boys could not believe their eyes. Yesterday, Judy Brown had been homely and flat as a board. Overnight she had grown a pair, although not as big and bouncy as Shelly's, they sure were appealing and so was her once-homely face.

Resuming their luncheons after school, they ran home with the same abandon and exuberance. It appeared the adage about falling in love the second time around was true.

23 days later, adage or no adage, it was like pulling teeth. No one volunteered. They had grown tired of, "At last, I'm sure, but not a hundred percent. I must have, because I got so tired I couldn't finish my Science."

In between bites of his sardine sandwich, appearing confident, Aaron squealed, "When I get home I'm gonna see what happens with the lights on."

About to add his fruitless attempt, Eli realized that besides not handing in his progress report, Bruno had been grinning sheepishly throughout their confessional without saying a word. "How can he smile when his best friends are so unhappy?" thought Eli and then

it hit him like a ton of bricks.

Unable to contain himself, Eli stood and pointed to the foreigner. And not having his father's trusty megaphone, cupped his hands and exalted for all to hear, "I'm telling you, Bruno did it! Bruno did it! Bruno did it!"

Responding in chorus, the entire lunchroom wanted to know exactly what had Bruno done? Planning to elaborate on his as-of-yet unsubstantiated theory; Eli noticed Bruno staring at him with his dark beady eyes, baring his powerful clenched "Dukes." The boy sat down. Bruno was right. He did not need Eli to do his talking.

Having taken bites of their egg salad and sardine sandwiches, with mouths agape, Aaron and Natie stared. Eli had to get Bruno to spill the beans quickly. Seeing the sardine tail protruding from Aaron's mouth, Eli was nauseous.

Blinking four times with his left eye and twice with his right and then, holding his breath, Bruno had saved the day.

Despite his beady eyes, his three best friends stood and pointed. Overjoyed, they too exalted, "Bruno did it! Bruno did it! Bruno did it!"

Again, he bared his clenched "Dukes," but it was useless, since the late bell had sounded and they were the only ones left in the lunchroom.

Running to class, there was no time to hear the details or to fully congratulate him. Instilled with new hope, they were unimpressed when Mr. Meyerwitz, their Social Studies teacher, had determined that after two hundred years the achievements of Thomas

Jefferson and Ben Franklin still influenced their lives. At that moment, the only influence that mattered was Bruno's.

After school, pacing nervously in 55's schoolyard, they spotted Bruno moving quickly. Running by, he passed each a slip of paper. In great detail, Bruno had written the exact procedure he used prior to blast-off. Obviously, he was in a hurry and they were envious.

Despite his terrible handwriting, they managed to decipher his message:

1. It must be very quiet.
2. Forget about all book reports due.
3. Never switch hands before the full ten minutes are up.
4. Always think it's Judy's hand.
5. Have vanilla milk shake to regain lost strength.

Tightly clutching the slip of paper, they ran to their respective clubhouses.

The following day, eating his P. B. and J., Bruno wondered where his friends were dining. "Maybe they couldn't read my handwriting?" he pondered, as the schoolyard filled with all those unpregnant girls.

After school, buying four vanilla milk shakes, three eager boys accompanied Bruno home. He had promised to show them how to "Do it."

"Hey Aaron, you can't drink the milk shake now! Right, Bruno?" Eli said.

"Didn't you read my instructions?" Bruno asked, zipping down his fly. Envisioning Ester William's voluptuous rear-end; (having accompanied Eli, he too had been

influenced by those lovely little buttocks,) Bruno's large penis stiffened. Using his powerful hands, he demonstrated his successful technique.

"He's not doing anything different," thought Aaron.

"Boy, does he have a big one," thought Natie.

Seeing Bruno ejaculate, Eli got nauseous. Natie thought it was disgusting and Aaron wanted to go home.

Despite it all, they drank the milk shakes.

"What the hell are you doing in there?" Harry bellowed.

"I'm gonna break that fucking megaphone, if it is the last thing I do!" vowed Eli, stroking away.

"Aaron! You'll be late for school," his forgetful mother said for the umpteenth time.

"Natie! It's time to go to sleep," his mother pleaded. "It's twelve o'clock."

How ironic, all those boys had ever talked about was coming. The moment they had become potent, raging bulls, the subject was dropped from their agenda.

"Gitel, don't you think it is time you visited Mama?" Rose said into her ornate telephone. "We haven't seen you since..."

"...Before Eli's *'Bar Mitzvah.'* Did you ever receive our thank-you card?" Gitel asked, knowing she had never sent one.

"A long time ago. Why don't you bring the children this Sunday? I would love to see

them and I have some beautiful clothes for you."

"Thank you, but I think you should give them to Papa? He is the one with the used clothing business."

"Papa hasn't been feeling well, Gitel."

Forever concerned, she asked, "What's the matter with Papa?"

"He has pneumonia. Two weeks."

Shortly after Eli's bout with pimples had ended, Rhoda's was in full bloom. Eli was certain she was walking around just as anxious and frustrated as he had been. Warm, bright, coughing, compassionate, besides possessing a fantastic sense of humor, she had everything he could ask for in a sister, except two small things: tits. "Tits? She doesn't even have bumps yet."

Having a sister with no tits made life unbearable. All the girls she played with had them except Shirley, her best friend. Eli calculated that was their bond of friendship.

Being the new man about town, Eli could not chance being seen in public with such a flat-chested, pimply faced sister-especially his own.

Besides wanting to be rich and famous, thoughtfully he added Rhoda's boobs to his prayers.

"Three months of *'shushkering'* my heart out and nothing! Not even a trace of bumps," he sadly concluded. "The only things that are blooming around here is her acne

and her relationship with Shirley. She's always here!"

When Shirley appeared one day sporting her brand new boobs, although Eli may have appeared distant, his heart ached. Being the only girl in her class without them, he knew his sister's ego was shattered.

It was Sunday and the heat of summer was upon them. Crotona Park's public swimming pool was crowded. Lying on his army blanket, Eli and his raring-to-go friends made note of all the available unpregnant girls that were frolicking and sunning.

Ogling his potential twenty-seventh dick-mate, Natie said, "I'd love to dick that blonde." "I'd rather dick that red-head! Look at those jugs. She's sitting to the right of the lifeguard," Aaron's voice cracked, with his pink penis agreeing.

"Me too," said Eli, "She really has some pair. I'd like to stick it right between them!"

Swooned Natie, I love tits more than anything."

"I nominate tits for president," laughed Eli. "Who seconds the motion?"

"I second the motion," pledged Aaron, placing his hand on his heart.

"And I third it!" grinned Bruno.

"Sorry Bruno," consoled Eli placing his hand on his best friend's shoulder. "According to the laws of our wonderful country, because you're not a legal citizen yet, I can't permit you to vote, but being you can speak Yiddish so well, I think I'll make an exception."

"There's Rhoda and Shirley," Bruno said happily.

"Hi," she said, nearing her chagrined brother. "Mind if we join you? Shirley has a

blanket."

Rising, Bruno smiled, "Let's go for a swim Rhoda. The water's great."

Baring her slightly bucked teeth she ventured, "Okay. Race you across the pool."

Tantalized by Shirley's new projections, little attention was afforded Rhoda and Bruno who seemed to be having one-hell-of-a-time on their own.

Falling head over heels, love-struck Eli thought, "I never realized how beautiful Shirley was." Despite not being half the woman her best friend was, Eli was glad that it didn't prevent skinny Rhoda or Bruno from having a good time.

When Shirley rose and approached poolside, Eli gawked. Planning to swan-dive, she arched her arms, exaggerating her desirable boobs. As she dove, Eli fantasized kissing her tender young breasts. Before his friends had finished commenting on Shirley's lure, doing a belly whopper he dove after her.

One can imagine how he felt when his three best friends and his own sister laughed at his reddened-stomach. Eli did not know which hurt more, his stomach or his ego? Noticing that Shirley had not laughed eased the pain. He thought, "Maybe she likes me?"

Seeing his reddened stomach, as he neared the blanket Shirley said, "If you want? I'll rub some suntan lotion on your stomach, Eli?"

"I know why Eli all of a sudden likes Shirley," determined Rhoda. Rising, she pulled Bruno, Natie and Aaron to their feet and dared, "Last one in's a rotten egg!"

Fidgeting on the blanket, Eli waited to see if Shirley would really rub his stomach.

Shirley always liked Eli. Rubbing lotion in her hands, she looked dreamily into his eyes and said, "Are you ready Eli?"

Luckily, he was wearing a supporter or else she would have known how ready he was. Having waited an eternity, the love of his life began massaging Eli's reddened stomach.

After fifteen seconds, Eli got so hot, he jumped into the pool. In hot pursuit, she followed.

Staring, into each other's water soaked eyes, they laughed nervously. Beneath the water, her boobs were even more tantalizing. Gathering all the nerve he could muster, Eli pulled Shirley under and awkwardly kissed her. The moment they surfaced, Shirley pulled him under and returned the compliment. Kissing him until he could no longer breath, gasping, Eli shot to the surface.

Holding her hand while casually eyeing her wonderful boobs, Eli had never been so happy when a white wool sock came floating up between their young, horny bodies. Before he could grab it, frolicking, Shirley splashed water in his eyes. After wiping them, the mysterious white sock was gone. Who cared about the sock anyway? As far as he was concerned it had been an unnecessary interruption.

Wanting more of his underwater action, again Eli pulled Shirley under. Holding his breath beneath the chlorinated waters of Crotona Park, anxious as he was, he still paused to ogle her magnified gorgeous boobs when he spied the same woolen white sock where

he had imagined her young succulent breast to be.

"She fooled me," he despaired. "Who the hell wants white socks? Too bad my poor sister doesn't know that she's not the only one with out them. Falsies. How disgusting!"

Surfacing, he recalled Shelly Tanzer and Judy Brown and wondered. "I hope they're real when I get to high school."

Chapter XII

The Bronx was in the midst of a heat wave as some war was coming to a close. Walking on the Grand Concourse in his royal-blue cap and gown, Eli was really '*schvitzing*' when he innocently stopped to tie his shoe as his best friends, fiddling with their tassels continued on.

"Look what I just found!" cried Eli.

Coming to an abrupt stop, they turned and faced him.

"I don't know how you guys missed it?" he yelled, waving a five-dollar bill. "You all must be blind. You're nothing but a bunch of '*Blinda bestids!*'"

Once again, his dejected perspiring friends came, a running. Using the sleeve of his gown to wipe his perspiration, Aaron whined petulantly, "I can't believe it! He found another five."

Twirling his tired tassel, Natie grabbed Eli's hand and quipped emphatically, "From now on, where ever we go, I'm holding your hand, Eli."

"I'm going to hold it too," mocked Aaron, grabbing Eli's other hand.

With Bruno trailing behind, Eli, with Natie and Aaron arm-in-arm, they still managed to twirl their tassels as they entered the darkened Paradise theater.

Struck by it's magnificent artificial sky looming above, lanky Natie swooned, "Look at the way those clouds move. Don't they look real?"

"Forget about those dumb clouds. You can see clouds any day. Just look at those stars. There's the Little Dipper. I l-o-v-e the Little Dipper," Pudgy Aaron's squeaky voice pierced the darkness.

"I got your Little Dipper!" several frocked seniors echoed passing in the darkness, with some unseen girls giggling loudly.

"I don't think this is the time or place to discuss your Little Dipper," the now wiry, 5'6" Eli concluded. "Don't you think it's time to think of something other than your pecker?" he said cleaning his horn-rimmed glasses.

Catching the hazel eyes of his best friend, in '*Yiddish*,' Bruno whispered, "All those dopes ever think about is their '*schmucks*.'"

Giving him a friendly shot to the ribs, Eli replied, "I told you I'd get those wise guys for you Bruno. Go on. You don't have to wait for me. I'll see you in a minute."

While the remaining body of students found their way backstage, Eli stared at the huge proscenium and the lush, red-velvet curtain that spanned it. "One day I will be up there singing," he vowed. "One day, if it's the last thing I do."

Fingering the plush seats as he walked down the aisle, Eli heard his father's loud "Ahem."

Beneath the magnificent star-studded sky, Natie and Aaron, fingering their dampened,

slightly shredded, gold tassels, desperately tried to memorize the acceptance speeches they would be giving. Ambling backstage in the darkness, Eli found Bruno staring aimlessly at the twinkling stars.

"Are you through counting yet...? So what if we're getting a couple of stupid awards. Big deal," he whispered putting his arm on Bruno's shoulder, "Tomorrow, our awards and fifteen cents will get us on the bus to Orchard Beach... Tell you what, if you give me a quarter? I'll give you my English award... Is your mother bugging you again?"

"I'm all right Eli," said Bruno, faking a smile. "Ya think Rhoda and your family are out there yet?"

"Didn't you here that loud 'Ahem?' That was my father. Knowing him, they've been in their seats for hours and I'm telling you dummy, you're much smarter than Aaron."

Having turned his speech into a sopping wet, deadly spit-ball, cocking his chubby arm, Aaron bayed, "Don't you feel stupid wearing this cap and gown," hurling his saliva ridden projectile towards Mr. Brandwin, the principal.

"I believe it's been written somewhere, that you are what you feel like Aaron. Since you've admitted that you're stupid, I think in all honesty you should refuse the math award and give it to Bruno."

Having finished reading his speech beneath the red exit light, Natie turned it into a sleek, dart-like, jet airplane. "I'll get him for you Aaron," he said launching it.

Soaring gracefully, it struck Mr. Brandwin in the head. Brandishing the evidence for

his 227 over-anxious seniors, he angrily demanded, "Who is responsible for this, this very immature deed?"

Above the din, Eli warned, "I think we'd better tell him, or this graduation may take forever."

On cue, 227 zealous seniors stepped forward to accept their punishment.

"I will soon address your family and friends and I believe there are a few things that I have discovered during the four years we have spent together that they should be made aware of. As far as I am concerned, when graduation is over, you will no longer be welcomed at Roosevelt High. Unless you are stopping by to say hello, for which I will be most appreciative," he said, trying to find the opening in the lush, red velvet curtains. "Good luck to all of you," he said disappearing.

Standing backstage, Eli did not hear the polite round of applause Mr. Brandwin had received nor, when he said, "Thank you for coming. Before I start handing out the special awards and diplomas to these very deserving students, please refrain from applauding until all the graduates have received their diplomas. Otherwise, this graduation may take longer than the allotted time the Paradise theatre has so graciously given us."

Within the caverns of Eli's complicated mind, the voice of his father resounded, "You can't eat books!" Pacing in his cap and gown, Eli was certain that he had made the correct decision when he refused the many scholarships he had been offered. To him,

getting a job and making money was of greater importance.

Eli never saw or heard Aaron receive his Math award, for he was still ruing his last four years at Roosevelt High. Smiling, he recalled when his skinny sister developed the most beautiful set of jugs the week before she entered high school, where she turned out to be the most popular girl on the planet.

He had never told her how grateful he was for fixing him up with her very sexy girl friends; with whom he had learned to French-kiss, pet, and even get an occasional hand-job, which he admitted to being his favorite. It was no doubt that she had tried to pay him back for Bruno, whom she had been going steady with since that sox-falsey incident at Crotona Pool.

"And now ladies and gentlemen, for outstanding achievement in Science, Nathaniel Shwartzman." When Natie went to receive his award, not a peep was heard from the restrained audience, or from Eli who was recalling when he had received his first free lunch pass.

Having noticed that a frail freshman had beaten every student, including seniors to the lunchroom everyday, Mr. Marsden, who was the coach of the track team had asked Eli to join. The coach never understood why Eli was so fast getting to the lunchroom and so slow running track.

"I never won a race because I wasn't embarrassed. If they put a free lunch pass in my

hand? I'd have won every race," smiled Eli.

"For outstanding achievement in English, Eli Greenwald."

Startled by the mention of his name, gathering his composure, Eli walked across the vast stage. The silence that followed was noticeable. Just as Mr. Brandwin had concluded congratulating Eli, Harry placed two fingers in his mouth and whistled. Nudging Gitel, who in turn nudged Rhoda, who pinched Benny, the Greenwalds, beside Aunt Ennie who had given Eli ten dollars the previous Saturday for graduation and Aunt Bertha, stood and vigorously applauded. Pointing, Harry shouted, "That's my son! That's my boy!"

Including a shocked Mr. Brandwin, the entire audience laughed and joined in the applause.

Once backstage, Eli's flushed face paled. "Thank God it's over."

Having a recurring nightmare, Gitel cried, "Papa, it's me your daughter."

"Tell her that I have no daughter named Gitel," *'Zeyda'* said to Rose.

Suffering from acute pneumonia, it soon would take its toll. Despite knowing he was near death, the once most revered Jew in all of Eastern Europe, still would not speak to his most beloved daughter.

"Papa, before it's too late, talk to me. Please, Papa, forgive me."

"Gitel! Gitel!" Harry said, sans the megaphone, "You're having another one of those

dreams God damn it! I told you to stop dreaming!"

Aware that her husband Issac had been cavorting with other women, but unable to do anything about it, for fear of her father, a bonafide millionairess, Rose's appetite for business, became an obsession.

Mortgaging her holdings, she purchased eight tenements on Second Avenue and Thirty-Eighth Street where she would build a forty-story apartment building.

She became associated with Vito Luzzi, a builder with ties to the Mafia. Wanted for questioning by the D.A., Vito absconded with Rose's money. He was soon found floating in the East River. With his ash finally falling, *'Zeyda'* soon died, never knowing that his bonafide millionairess daughter was to declare bankruptcy.

"I've never been to a funeral, Eli. It's so quiet. It's, it's spooky." Benny whispered, fidgeting with his colorful tie. "When do we go home?"

"You're not supposed to talk," Eli said. "*Zeyda's* sleeping and we have to stay here for two weeks. But don't worry you fat Jap, they bring you rice twice a day."

"Don't make me laugh Eli. We're not supposed to laugh," said Rhoda trying to hold back her mirth.

"Hey Rhoda, you think *'Zeyda's'* ash is in there? It looks like every beard in the world's here. I wonder what they'd do if Benny laid one? Yeah, come on Benny, you can do it. Let 'er rip! Let 'em have it! Bombs away!"

After *'Yiskor,'* the prayer for the departed, Gitel trembled as she shoveled a spade full of earth on the wooden casket. "No more Papa. No more papa," she cried.

Embracing his distraught wife, Harry thought, "For what he did to my Gitel, that phony bastard he should rot in hell!" Holding her hand, he escorted Gitel and his children to the waiting limousine.

"All right, let's go Moses!" Harry said loudly.

Being very fond of Gitel, and since his brother drove the limousine for Limos Delite, Moses persuaded him to let him use it for *'Zeyda's'* funeral.

"I bet they're all wondering where I got the money for a stretch limo," Harry said. "One day, you'll see, I'll show all those phonies!"

Within weeks, Gitel's nightmares had ceased, while Eli's had just begun. With Natie and Aaron holding his hands, he spent the better part of July, playing handball and trying to pick-up as many unpregnant girls as possible. Occasionally, Rhoda and Bruno would place their blanket next to theirs.

Because of Rhoda's popularity, it appeared that every girl wanted to befriend her. Because of her, there were always more chicks sitting at or near their blanket and that is why those horny teenagers hearts were over-flowing.

Discussing the Dodgers, Yankees, Giants and the rest of their lives, they all decided to beach-it 'til Labor Day. Then, Eli and Bruno would look for a job while Natie and Aaron would start City College.

Hey, isn't that the same redhead we saw at the pool that time? It has to be. Look at those knockers!" said Natie, flexing his muscleless muscles.

Dramatically trying to shake the sand from his light-brown curly hair, Eli sang, "I Dream of Ge-nie with the Light Re-ed Hair."

Standing in his striped, purple bathing trunks, Aaron sighed, "Oh, Frankie. What are you wasting your time singing on the beach? Why don't you go up to the Borsht Belt and get a job singing at one of the hotels?"

"I will, but first I want to make a lot of money. Then I'll make a record," Eli promised, again singing, "I Dream of Ge-nie With the Light Re-ed Hair."

"What are you trying to do Eli, make her think you're the only one around here that loves red-heads?" Despite having a rotten voice, louder than Eli, falsetto and all, Aaron sang, "I Dream of Ge-nie With he Light Re-ed Hair."

"When the hell are you going to get a job?" Harry roared, finishing Gitel's delicious stuffed cabbage. "What are you waiting for? Until I starve? You think this is what I raised you for? To go to Orchard Beach? You don't even collect bottles when you go!"

"Why don't YOU get a job?" Eli fired back. "It's not my responsibility to support our family, it's yours! I'm going Mama. I don't feel like eating," he said fuming, as he left the table.

"And don't come back until you get a job," Harry screamed, as he slammed the door.

Confused, hurting and suddenly feeling helpless, Eli quickly rounded up his best friends and played a couple of games of handball.

"The ball was short!" argued Natie, "You're out! I serve!"

"You're blind! The ball was fair by a mile," Eli angrily responded.

"I'm Blind? You're the one wearing coke bottles, remember? The ball was short, or I quit!" Natie threatened.

"You know how I hate a quitter, Natie! But don't worry, your not quitting, because the game is over. Now give me the quarter I won."

"All right. Let's ask Aaron," Natie demanded. "What was it, Aaron?"

Having spotted the same redhead from the previous week peering through the wire fence, Aaron was into his Mr. America pose. With Natie flexing his pectoral muscles and Eli singing, "I Dream of Ge-nie With the Light Re-ed Hair," their handball game was soon forgotten.

With their innocent penises reacting to her supple body, the red-head entered the handball court. Sauntering ever so sexily to Eli, ala Mae West she said, "Hi. How'd you know my nick-name was Genie?"

"I'm a mind reader" he grinned, shielding his red alert with his nervous hands.

Brushing her right breast against Eli's twitching arm she asked, "Aren't you Rhoda's brother?"

"Yes we are," they all responded, with eyes affixed on her succulent chest.

"They're kidding," Eli smiled. I'm her brother. Why'd you ask?"

With her bouncing boobs pressed against his nervous arm, she whispered into his sensitive ears, "How's about taking a walk with me? There's something I'd like to give you."

Watching them leave, envious, Natie said, "Boy, is she stacked."

"And don't forget about the ten bucks he found yesterday," added a remorseful Aaron. "Some guys are just born lucky!"

Kissing and feeling-up Genie in the bushes, hot as a firecracker, Eli pleaded for the umpteenth time, "No one can see us. Why not? Just the head."

"I'm only sixteen. I can't do it, but I can do something else she said, zipping his fly down. "Swear to God you won't tell?"

"I swear," He groaned, "I swear on my grandfathers grave."

Nearing the end of August, eager to escape his father's constant harangue, Eli took the easy way out. He enlisted in the Army. When Bruno, who also had been having a trying time with his screaming mother, also enlisted, Rhoda's heart was broken.

To round out the party, for reasons unknown, Natie and Aaron changed their minds about City College and made it a foursome.

Within two weeks, all had received their papers, which instructed them to report to the induction center on Whitehall Street. They were to take their physicals and sent to Fort

Dix the same day.

A day prior to his son's departure, thinking it wise to throw a going-away-party, Harry hurriedly organized one. Since he was going to paint his own kitchen the following week anyway, removing the brass Jewish star, the wall hanging with the artificial flowers and the rest of the knick-knacks on one of it's canary colored walls, using some left over rosy pink paint he wrote, "Good Luck Eli and all of your friends too."

Gitel made chopped liver, stuffed cabbage and coleslaw. Ennie baked two of her delicious apple cakes and Bertha promised to bring the ice cream and soda.

Hanging the balloons and colorful streamers she had made for the occasion, Rhoda sobbed.

Sitting on the same bed where they had shared many a moment, Eli looked at his brother, who was almost as tall and said, "Benny, I'm sorry, but I guess you won't be able to borrow these black pants any more?"

"I know you're taking them with you Eli. I understand," Benny said as his plan began to unfold. Stroking Eli's black corduroy pants, he pretended to count its rows. Trying not to laugh he continued, "They cheated you Eli! I counted ninety-seven rows of corduroy. There's suppose to be a hundred. If you don't believe me? Count them yourself," he exalted and burst into his magical laugh.

Hugging his chubby brother, Eli looked into his laughing eyes and said, "You know Benny? There's more to you than your farts, because I know, you know, I'll have to wear

khakis for the next two years. So, I'm going to give these pants on one condition. You can roll up the cuffs, but you have to swear to God that you won't eat in them. I don't want them ruined. Do you understand?"

"Oh, I'll be very careful Eli. You can count on me."

"You look great," Bruno said to a broken-hearted Rhoda, who was carrying the garbage to the dumbwaiter. "Let me do it for you."

"I can do it myself, thank you."

"Come on Rhoda, I'm leaving in the morning. Is this the way you're going to say goodbye?" he asked, taking her hand. "I know you don't believe me, but I really love you. I swear."

"Then why did you enlist? And don't say it was your mother," she said, as tears came to her eyes.

"I'll write you twice a day," he said, as the doorbell rang.

"Hi," said Rhoda kissing her aunts and uncles. "Everybody's waiting for you."

"Look at what Harry did, Bertha said poking her nervous husband. "He painted 'Good Luck Eli and all your friends too,' on the walls. Isn't that just like my brother?"

"So, what's the big deal?" said Murray, his knees momentarily stilled by his jealousy of Harry, who always got all the attention, not to mention how many times he had embarrassed him.

"Don't you even recognize the color? Bertha asked. That paint's left from our kitchen, so what are you giving him all the credit for? I paid for it, didn't I?"

Having placed the apple-cakes on the table, hugging Rhoda, Ennie whispered, "Don't cry my sweet darling. I'm sure Bruno will write you everyday and before you know it, he'll be home. He's such a fine young man. And what's meant to be will be, I promise. I'll wait for you inside," she ended with her patented wet, juicy kiss.

Benny, wanting one of the balloons that was hanging from the ceiling had straightened a wire hanger. Standing on one of the kitchen folding chairs that been brought into the living room, he wavered trepidously.

Seeing his dilemma, Angelo stood on the adjoining chair and retrieved one. "Here, he smiled, handing the red balloon to a grateful Benny.

"Thanks Angelo. Did you taste the stuffed cabbage?" asked Benny, rubbing the balloon. "And wait until you taste the apple cake. My Aunt Ennie makes the best."

"Your television looks exactly like the one Moses has," Angelo said innocently.

"It is. Moses gave it to Papa."

Having been trained by the Commander and Chief, Angelo deduced, "So that's why Harry only gave Moses his secret formula. Graft."

"Here," Harry offered Moses a slice of '*challah*' embellished with some chopped liver that one dreams of eating when one's in the mood. "Don't say I never gave you anything," he laughed, seeing Angelo near.

"It looks like Sinatra has replaced you Harry? No more Rumania, huh?" he responded to Frankie blasting away on the Victrola.

Placing his arms on their shoulders, platonically, Angelo said, "At least you guys got a chance to sing last summer."

"I don't know who Eli takes after? We sing a hundred times better than that Sinatra, and he's so skinny," Harry demeaned. I'll tell you, no matter how much ice cream you give your children you can never be sure how they'll turn out. You should see how disrespectful he's gotten and Gitel thinks it's my fault he joined the Army. One day I'll make a fortune and I'll show them all."

"I wish you would show me, Harry," said Angelo.

"What are you talking about?" asked Harry, turning to Moses.

"We all can sing better than Frank Sinatra and you know it Harry. You heard me sing La Traviata a dozen times when we marched in the Air Raid Wardens. Give me the secret, show me how to pitch pennies," pleaded Angelo, to his unresponsive excommander and Chief. "Marianna's mother just gave us another toaster for our anniversary. That makes number four. Either she hates me or she's forgetful. I never even opened the box. Make a nice present, don't you think Harry? What do you say, need a toaster?"

"Gitel, hurry and find my chewing tobacco!" Harry roared. Gitel, who was in the kitchen slicing the apple cake, did not respond. "She's getting deaf in her old age too.

Wait here. I think it's in my dresser." Harry disappeared and returned momentarily. "I got it Angelo," he smiled. "Here."

"I don't like chewing tobacco, Harry."

"If you want to win this summer? You better learn to chew. Moses, do me a favor and show him our secret."

Rhoda was commiserating with Bruno, when Eli entered her small bedroom.

"Hey Bruno, mind if I Lindy with my favorite sister one last time?" he said, pulling Rhoda to her feet. "Will you please stop crying? I'm sorry for everything," said Eli, trying to spin her around. "Don't you hate small ballrooms, Rhoda? Promise you'll write" he pleaded, giving her a hug.

"No."

"Listen Rhoda. I had to do it. I just can't live with Papa anymore."

"I know," she said hugging him. "You've said it more than once. One day you won't hate him so much Eli. He's your father."

"Why, you don't hate him? After the way he's treated you all those years, I just don't understand you Rhoda? You're, much more forgiving than I. Maybe that's why I love you, he said kissing her tenderly. "And don't believe her Bruno, she only says she hates me." Smiling, Eli left to nibble on the chopped liver.

Holding Rhoda's hand, Bruno was sad. "You know how I feel about you, but I couldn't take my mother's screaming any more. She wants me to tell her why I'm not as

smart as my friends."

"She loves you Bruno. She only wants the best for you," Rhoda said, sobbing.

"I'll write to you twice a day. I'll call you whenever I can. Tell me you still love me," Bruno said looking into her dark brown eyes. "You know, you have beautiful eyes? And beautiful lips?"

"What about my ass?" Rhoda whispered.

"I never noticed," Bruno whispered in return. "I'm a boob man, remember?"

"How can I forget?" she said kissing him on the cheek.

After everyone left, impressed by the electric shaver, leather traveling kit and the fifty, Rose's son Josh had sent, Harry noted, "If I made you a going away party every week? you wouldn't have had to look for a job, or even go to the Army," laughed Harry.

As Benny devoured the last piece of stuffed cabbage, a small piece fell on his new, rolled-up black corduroy pants. Watching it come to rest on his fly, Benny laughed, while Gitel dried the dishes and sobbed.

That night, while Benny snuggled to the wall and Eli's hand hung down trepidously over his small bed, he thought of the time his brother had imagined there to be a mouse in their bed. Cheek to cheek, big brother to little brother, saying goodbye, they laughed themselves to sleep.

"Goodbye Eli," Rhoda and Benny said, hugging him.

With tears in her eyes, Gitel said her goodbye. "Promise me you'll take care of yourself and if you have to eat ham? God will forgive you. Amen," she *'shushkered'* to her departing son.

Prior to taking the Third Avenue El, Eli stopped at toothless Tony's. I came to say goodbye Tony," he said shaking his hand. "I'll miss you."

"Anda I'ma gonna missa you too Eli. "Ia haven'ta seen youra beautiful sister for a while, and Ia hopea thata Benny still comes," he sloshed embracing Eli. "Ia know you since you were a little boy, soa you takea good care of yourself."

Meeting his nervous friends at the Claremont Parkway Station, they boarded a rickety old train and were off.

Having checked in at the induction center on Whitehall Street, they were told to undress in front of a complete bunch of strangers. Despite being uncomfortable, they did so. Once unclothed, they were ordered to sit on a cold, marble bench.

With their teeth chattering, because the marble bench had just about frozen their Jewish asses off, a tall, menacing, crew-cut Sergeant appeared. Staring at their tightly crossed legs, in a very noticeable southern accent he shouted, "All right men! Let's see what you got! Attention! Now, take those pretty little hands of yours and try to touch the fuckin' ceiling!"

"I don't know what's worse? Standing here balls naked, or that fucking, cold marble bench?" whispered Eli to Bruno, who suddenly had become aware that an ominous

looking Sergeant had approached Aaron from the rear.

"Cough!" he ordered, squeezing Aaron's unsuspecting left testicle. Being a fast learner, Aaron coughed and then nervously coughed again, but unfortunately it was just a split second before his right testicle was squeezed. "Don't be such a damn wise-guy! Wait until I got 'em in my hands! Now, one more time, cough!"

After, much trauma, having learned not to cough until ordered to do so, they, then were sent to the adjoining room where six doctors awaited their arrival.

"All right men! These doctors are here to check your hearts! I want you to start hopping and I don't want you to stop until I tell you! Now, start hopping you bunch of faggots!"

Frightened, in different directions they hopped for their lives.

Still upset, Aaron was not the least bit amused when the hopping Eli whispered, "Find the beat. Think of Tito Puente and mambo."

"It's your fault. I shouldn't have listen to you. I don't want to go," Aaron whined. "I don't think it's for me."

"Me too. I changed my mind. I don't like the Army. I want to go home," Natie murmured.

"It's all right with me, if it's okay with the Sergeant," Eli said, as their little dippers swung first to the right and then to the left.

"All right men! Get dressed! You're all alive. Now, we'll see how smart you little

sissies are! Aptitude test! Room 104. Let's move it!"

On its gray walls hung, "I Want You," Uncle Sam posters.

"If I catch any of you punks cheating? I promise you'll spend the next two years in the stockade!" another crew-cut Sergeant roared.

Shortly after it was discovered that Eli had gotten the second highest score, Bruno said sadly, "They'll probably send you to Officers Training School."

"I suppose you expect us to start saluting you?" said a nervous Aaron.

"I want to go with you Eli," chimed Natie. Come on, were friends. Make me a colonel."

"All right, you geniuses! Room 102. Eye test!"

All had gone smoothly until it was Eli's turn to be tested.

"Okay, now try it without your glasses buster!"

There was silence as all eyes turned to Eli. And as *deja vu* would have it, a barrage of cat-calls and guffaws were heard when Eli could not read the first letter on the chart.

Things might have turned out different if he had time to memorize the eye-chart.

Stamping, "Acute Myopia" in red ink on his papers, the Sergeant said, "Go home kid."

"What do you mean go home? There must some mistake Sergeant? The letter said I was going to be sent to Fort Dix."

"Go home kid. We don't take half-blind soldiers."

"Give me a rifle. I'm a great shot, a great shot," Eli pleaded.

Having kicked a beer can aimlessly along Center Street, about to drop his token in the turnstile, he lamented, "I don't want to go back home and listen to Papa's bitching again.

--And what about the presents? Do I have to give them back?

About to board the I.R.T. he saw Bruno.

"Boy, am I glad to see you," he gushed, embracing his best friend. "What happened?"

"You tell me first," Bruno said as the subway doors closed.

"They said I have acute myopia and they don't take half-blind soldiers," Eli sadly admitted. "But, there can't be anything wrong with you Bruno. You're as strong as Mr. America."

"They say I got flat feet," Bruno noted shamefully.

Eli yelled and jumped for joy. "We're still together. Nothing will ever separate us."

"I'm going to try the Navy, Eli."

Flat feet and all, two weeks later, Bruno was stationed in Pensacola, Florida.

Chapter XIII

"Remember the time when Eli gave me that perfect puncture wound and even when I threatened to leave the dart in until Papa came home from the Home Relief, he still wouldn't let me sleep on his side? Well, last night I slept on his side Rhoda and I still can't believe it. There's something wrong with him," Benny said, annoyed that his arm was sticking to the plastic tablecloth. "And he hasn't called me a Jap in three days."

"You'd be depressed too, if you lost your best friend Benny," Rhoda said, longing for Bruno. "And I wish Papa would stop bugging him. Eli will find a job. He has to or else he's gonna explode."

"Soon as he finds one, he said he's gonna move out. Too bad he can't get a job singing. Let me put the garbage in the dumbwaiter," Benny said rising. "Maybe there's something in there I can *'nosh'* on?"

Without his friends to buffer his father's constant harassment, Eli knew he had to get away. Since there was an abundance of jobs available, he had given little thought as to

what type of job he would get. Finding it difficult to find one he thought he'd like, his frustration added to his depression.

By the middle of the second week, Eli got a job at Alexanders Department store, selling shoes on the main floor. His boss and manager of the shoe department was Eddie Bloch, who hired Eli because he was impressed with his personality and gift of gab.

Eddie Bloch personally showed Eli the ropes and within the hour Eli made his first sale and though his manager was delighted, the three other salesmen were not. Akin to having a captured audience, by the end of the first week, to the consternation of his envious cohorts, it appeared the more he sang, the more shoes he sold.

Of the forty dollars he was paid, he gave twenty to his father, three to Rhoda and one to Benny.

"At this rate, I'll never be able to get an apartment," he thought climbing over a sleeping Benny.

With prosperity abounding, (Eli's \$20 was looked upon by Harry as the sowing of what he had so painstakingly seeded) for the moment, peace was had on the Greenwald reserve.

Less than two months had passed, when Eli was given a five-dollar raise. Despite being grateful for the extra fin, he was aware that he had outsold all other salesmen and therefore a bonus should have been forthcoming.

After six months of his Al Jolson and Frank Sinatra revue, Eli was made assistant

manager, making sixty-five dollars a week.

While writing up another sale, Eli heard a familiar voice, "I would like to see those alligator shoes you have in the window, size nine-and-a-half, the moment you get the opportunity young man."

"Who the heck do I know that wears ninety-five dollar shoes?" he pondered turning to see who it was.

Tall and handsome, with a magnetic personality to match, it was his cousin, Joshua Jacobs, who besides being the only relative on his mother's side who had come to his Bar Mitzvah, he had sent Eli \$50 as a going-away present. "I hope he doesn't want it back."

"What a great surprise! My favorite cuz!" Josh said, with great fanfare. "How the hell are you?"

At 33, Josh had much in common with his handsome father Issac, who, soon after having failed to molest his beautiful young sister-inlaw Gitel thirty-three years ago, had decided he would get much further in America, if he shaved his magnificent, pearl-blond beard. In doing so, Issac soon found the services of various hookers to be more to his satisfaction.

Both warm and generous, Josh was nothing like his aloof mother Rose, who had often pinched Benny's rosy cheeks with her cold, arthritic-fingers.

Wearing a two-button, black, sharkskin suit, white on white shirt with tie to match, Eli thought his cousin never looked better. He remembered when Josh had told him at

'Zeyda's' funeral that he had left his wife and two daughters and was living in Manhattan with a beautiful Italian 'shiksa,' gentile named Toni.

"'Zeyda' was a prick," he said. "I was banished just like your mother. And who's better than my Aunt Gitel?"

"Gee, it's good to see you Josh," beamed Eli.

"Same here cuz," Josh replied with equal fervor.

"Do you really want to see those alligator shoes?"

"In brown and black if it's not too much trouble kid?"

"Are you sure? They're \$95."

"They're a bargain. I saw them at Bloomies for much more."

Buying both pair, Josh insisted on taking Eli to lunch.

Parked near a fire hydrant on the Grand Concourse, Josh opened the door to his brand new, fire engine red Caddie.

"Wow, what a car! It's sensational!" said Eli, rubbing its shiny fender.

Handing him the keys, Josh asked, "Want to drive?"

"Do I?" Eli said, sliding behind the wheel. "Now I know why I got my license.

"Where to Mr. Benny?" he growled ala Jack Benny's old sidekick, Rochester.

Playing along, Josh said, "Patsy's. It's on a 116th and First Avenue."

Aware that his young cousin had never eaten in an Italian restaurant, Josh really laid it on the moment they were seated.

"A bottle of Dom Perignon and a couple of three pound lobsters for me and my favorite cousin, Patsy."

"Very good, Mr. Jacobs," said the smiling, old gentleman. "How about some nice clams oregonatta to start?"

"Good idea, Patsy. You're always selling. I like that."

Having survived the baked clams and about to taste the lobster, Eli was certain he would throw-up. To his amazement he found it to be delicious.

"I like it," he said fumbling with its claw. "You know? I never ate lobster before."

Sucking in a large piece of lobster Josh laughed, "There's only one thing that tastes almost as good."

"What's that?" asked Eli, as the champagne started to take effect.

"Pussy! Stick with me kid and you'll have more lobster and pussy than you ever dreamed of. How'd you like to make a lot of money?"

Sticking a lobster tail dripping with butter into his mouth, Eli slurred, "What's a lot of money?"

"Maybe, three, four hundred a week?"

"What do I have to do, rob a bank?" Eli said, enjoying the buzz he had gotten,

"You're a born salesman. With that mouth of yours, three, four hundred should be peanuts."

Refilling their glasses, Eli asked, "What would I be selling?"

Lifting his glass, Josh spoke loudly, "A toast to Macvac! The best damn vacuum cleaner money can buy!"

"I sell shoes. What do I know about vacuum cleaners?"

"What did you know about shoes, before you started selling them?"

"Nothing."

"Exactly. And now you're a pro. Once I teach you the pitch, there'll be no stopping you. Skies the limit!"

"What about my father? I have to give him at least twenty a week."

Removing three, \$100 bills from his bulging wallet, he placed them in Eli's hand and said, "I think this ought to get my Uncle Harry off your ass for a while?"

Fingering the crisp hundred dollar bills, Eli drooled. Aware, that he was in a fancy restaurant; he controlled his instinct, which was to stand and shout, he had three big ones in his hand!

"How'd you like the lobster, cuz?"

Feeling high, Eli answered, "I hear the only thing that tastes better is pussy, but listen Josh, I can't take this money. Why it's more than I made on my own *'Bar Mitzva'*."

"Stick with me cuz and you'll have a *'Bar Mitzvah'* everyday."

"How do I know they're real?" asked Eli staring at the hundreds.

"Here's another to pay the check with. See if Patsy takes it."

With his eyes half closed, Eli asked, "When do I start?"

"You already have. I'll pick you up tomorrow at eleven sharp. And you know what? Here's another deuce. Go buy yourself some nice clothes. In fact, let's go to Bloomies right now, and then I'll drive my favorite cuz home... Yeah, I can see it all now. Pretty soon you'll get your own pad in Manhattan and wait until you see all the chicks."

"Are you sure I shouldn't borrow my friend's forty-five?"

"All you need is that mouth of yours kid. Now, let's get you your front," Josh said speeding away.

Gitel was worried. They had finished supper and Eli still was not home. Arriving around seven, eyes at half-mast, Eli was stoned.

"*Gott tsen dahnk'* thank God you're all right," Gitel said hugging her inebriated son. "Your manager called and asked me if anything was wrong? He said you didn't return to work after lunch. I hope everything's still O.K.? Sit down, I'll give you supper and what's the matter with your eyes?"

"Never mind his eyes. Who gave you permission not to go back to work?" roared Harry, angrily. "And what's in those boxes?"

Trying to avoid another confrontation, Eli said, "Wait until you see my new clothes."

"First eat then you'll show us," urged Gitel.

"I'm quitting Alexanders," he slurred, disregarding the mushroom and barley soup that Gitel had just placed before him.

"What do you mean, you're quitting?" shouted Harry. Rising, his arm stuck to the

plastic tablecloth. "I never quit a job in my life!"

"Which job are you referring to?" Eli asked, handing his father a crisp \$100 bill.

Having never touched one, Harry held it to the light. Satisfied that its ink did not smudge, Harry's demeanor changed. "What'd you do, rob a bank?"

"Can I see it?" Rhoda asked.

"Sure, but don't rub the ink off," said Harry, ogling Eli's packages.

After explaining what had happened, Harry was still annoyed. "I'm disappointed in you, Eli. If Joshua offered you 200 to start, that rich conniver would have given you more. Believe me, he is nobody's fool and neither am I! He would have given you double. And make sure your poor mother get's one of those vacuum cleaners right away!"

"Let's see what you got in those boxes," Benny said, entering the kitchen.

"It's none of your business and get your hands away blimp!"

The following morning, feeling like a million bucks in his new front, entering the kitchen, Eli was greeted by his '*qvelling*,' appreciative mother. "You are the handsomest young man I know. You look wonderful Eli, just wonderful."

"She says that to all the guys," said a smiling Rhoda. "I got a letter from Bruno. He'll be home in two months."

"What are you still doing home?"

"I'm taking finals this week. My first test is at 11:30 and I love your new suit," she

said kissing him on the cheek.

"Well, you better get good grades, if you still intend on going to college?"

"My Rhoda is very smart. She gets A's in every subject," said Gitel proudly.

"Thanks for reminding me, Ma and thanks for breakfast. Now, wish me luck," said a confident Eli. "I'm off to make a fortune."

Watching the garbage truck pull away, not wanting to wrinkle his new pants, stiff-legged Eli paced in place. Turning, he came face to face with Jimmy Ryan who had just arrived. He was delivering groceries.

"Nice bike Jimmy," said the effervescent Eli. "How ya doing?"

"Great! How you doing Heeb?" said Jimmy, just as Josh came to a screeching stop.

Looking freckles right in the eye, Eli smiled. Once seated in Joshe's fire engine red Caddie, through its open window, Eli responded loud enough for Jimmy to hear, "Drive on James! I'm afraid that I am in a bit of a hurry again."

"Friend of yours?" asked Josh.

"Sort of."

"Sorry I was late. I got hung up with the president of Macvac. What a fuckin' conniver. He was trying to find out how I sold more vacs than Macy's last month."

Gawked Eli, "You sold more than Macy's? That's unbelievable," marveled Eli. I can't wait to see you in action cuz and I can't wait to learn the pitch.

"Beacon, New York, here we come" Josh promised, flooring the excellerator.

"What's in Beacon, New York?" asked Eli, scared out of his wits, noticing the speedometer reach 80 M.P.H.

"People. All-kinds-of-people, Church-goers, factory workers, teachers, and winos, all struggling to make ends meet. Waiting for some gift-wrapped-miracle with a silver lining to fall from the sky," Josh said, sounding more and more like Elmer Gantry.

"Fortunately, those good folks won't have to wait much longer. We'll be there in less than an hour-and-half."

Astounded by Josh's magnetic delivery, almost embarrassed, Eli asked, "Our vac is their miracle?"

"Fantastic ain't it? All they have to do is plug it in and they're home free," beamed Josh devilishly.

Arriving, about 85 or 90 people were already mulling in front of an old, boarded-up movie theater that Josh had rented for the occasion.

"A movie theater. Wow!" cheered Eli. "Are they all waiting to buy our vac?"

"You'll see," answered Josh exiting. "'Morning brothers and sisters. Sorry I'm late. Soon as I turn on the lights we'll get started."

Changing into a red-velvet jacket, Josh handed Eli a wad of five-dollar bills. "When they leave, your job is to take their names and addresses and give them each a five. And when they sign up, I'll show you how to fill out the contracts."

"I don't understand?" asked a bewildered Eli. "You want me to give them all this

money?"

Hugging Eli, he said, "Since you were a kid you always wanted to be in show biz right? Well, here's your chance kid. Just watch your big cuz in action."

Josh's diabolical mind churned as he walked on stage. Scanning his hungry audience, he paused. Raising his outstretched arms he began. "Anybody here interested in making some money? Let me rephrase that. Anybody here interested in making some BIG MONEY?"

"Right on! You know it! Hallelujah," was heard forthcoming from those desperate, fidgeting souls.

This here Macvac is your ticket to getting what you all really deserve. Money! Money to feed your children. Money to find a decent place to live! Money to buy a T.V.! What do we want?" he roared spiritually.

"Money!" they shouted. "Money!"

While his enthralled audience chanted, "Money, money, money," Josh opened a jar of dust and poured it on the stage. Then, turning on the Macvac it swooshed and sucked it up instantly.

"Not only is this the best vacuum cleaner money can buy, I guarantee it's the answer to all your problems."

Seated were the Rev. Reginald Butler and the Rev. Thomas Bull; both anxious to expose the white fraud, who was dressed in the color of Satan.

"Mr. White City, could it be you're stretching the truth some?" the Rev. Butler's voice booming above the crowd."

"May I ask your name?" Josh asked smiling.

"My friends call me Reverend Butler."

"Well, Reverend Butler, I must admit, I do fib once in a while. Why last week I promised my wife a silver fox, but instead I got her a mink. Guess I do stretch the truth some? How about you Reverend Butler? Ever tell a little white lie?"

"You're a mighty smooth talker," the Rev. Bull interrupted. "We do not want you or your vacuum cleaner, sir!"

"I'm sorry, but we haven't been formally introduced Reverend. But are you saying that it's written in the good book that it's a sin to help the needy?"

"I'm not saying that all my friends can't use the five dollars you've promised to give them, that is, just as soon you stop preaching like you's some kind of savior" The Rev. Bull shouted, waking a sleeping wino.

"What the good Reverend is saying," said Rev. Butler "Is no one gives somethin' for nothin'. So, what are you really after, mister?"

"Did you happened to notice my brand new Cadillac parked outside? Well, my wife drives the same one in black. But, you see, rich as I am, I want more and the more money you make, the richer I'll become," Josh taunted, his honesty striking a chord.

"I need a job!" said old man Franklin, who for the past thirty-one years had cleaned

the very same Beacon Theater they were sitting in. "Let's hear what the man's got to say. I ain't made five dollars since this here theater closed down last year."

With hope filling their once hopeless eyes, again they chanted, "Right on for the five! Right on for the Cadillac!"

With his eyes blazing, Josh's heart quickened for he knew he had them as he walked down the aisle. "Just think, the friends that sent you here, they made five dollars! How many people do you know?" he asked a beguiled, old lady.

"Why, why I must know fifty, sixty-- including my family, maybe seven hundred people," Mrs. Bell, who worked in the Five and Dime store said excitedly. "You mean, you'd give me five dollars for each one that I get to come here and listen to you."

Determined to be heard the Rev Butler tried shouting above the tumult, "Why I must know two or three thousand good folks myself!"

"As you can see Reverend Butler, this is the opportunity, the good Lord himself would sanctify. I bet you're asking yourself how are you going to pay for this wonderful Macvac? Well, my good brothers and sisters it's easy, because every time you get someone to listen to me, that are your friends, what do you get?"

"Five dollars!" they shouted, dancing in the aisles. "We get five dollars!"

"And that's pennies. Now, let me tell where the big money comes in."

"Amen for the big money" the Rev. Butler said waving his ornate, silver cross. "And thank you Jesus."

Shaking as many hands as he could, Josh continued. "Every time you send a brother or sister that invests in their future with us, I will personally give you an extra \$25!"

Dreamily, old Franklin sighed, "Why, I could sit back and retire in style."

"Now, the president of Macvac thinks it is only fair that the first \$275 you earn be applied to paying off your investment, which still allows you to make all those five dollar bills. As you can see, it's all up to you. The more brothers and sisters you introduce, the richer you and I will become. Whew, I almost forgot. Every time you get someone to join, and that someone gets someone else to join, you get an additional ten dollars. Just think, you'll be making money on people you don't even know. Now tell me, isn't that what big business is all about?"

On cue, wearing a dark-blue, pin-stripped suit, Eli shook his cousin's hand and faced the audience. "On behalf of our organization, I want to thank you personally for coming. Those of you that want to buy a new chance in life, please remain seated. After you have filled out the necessary papers, you will be given your five dollars. Thank you once again and I would like to leave you with one thought; Why walk? when you can drive a brand new Cadillac. Now, ain't that the truth Brother Butler, ain't that the truth?"

Entering the small office backstage, there were nails, centered over faded outlines of which Eli assumed them to have been signed photographs of Clark Gable, Judy Garland, Bogart, Sinatra and the best friend a kid ever had, Joe Louis.

"35 contracts. What a day and I loved your closing. "Why walk? when you can drive

a Caddie and ain't that the truth Brother Butler," Josh mimicked. "What a mouth kid. I love it."

"Well, you said it first Josh. I just thought it might work at the end?" said Eli, signing another contract. "That is the greatest bit I've ever heard in my life, and it's all legal, right...? The way you got those Reverends on your side. Unbelievable... there, I signed the last one. Hope you don't take points off for penmanship?" said Eli smiling.

"How many did you sign?"

"19. How much did we make?"

"And I signed 15. I'd say, a little more than fifteen-hundred. And when you start pitching, I'll give you ten percent of the action. We'll do two shows a day. That's when we'll make some real money. Incidentally cuz, how much did you pass out?"

"\$485 Josh," answered Eli excitedly.

"I wonder what my uncle Harry would say, if he saw his son Eli giving away all that money?"

Chapter XIV

"Hey Rhoda, why do we have to spread newspaper every time Mama washes the floor?" asked Benny, placing a sheet beneath the dumbwaiter.

"I don't know," answered Rhoda, continuing to spread the newspaper. "I never thought of it."

"Because it's cheaper than spreading mink," Benny said, laughing. "Want a quick game of dominos?"

"You're exactly like Papa. You always win and you like to rub it in," she said trying to *'cutchie'* him."

"Stop trying to kiss me Rhoda," said Benny, narrowly avoiding her puckered lips.

"I'm not a baby anymore."

"You certainly aren't and I don't know how you did it Benny? You are almost as skinny as Eli," said Rhoda inching to him.

"And almost as tall. Do you know what Eli told me, when he bought Mama all those dresses yesterday?"

"What?" Rhoda asked, inching closer.

"He said he swore that Mama would never take another dress from Aunt Rose, and you know what else?"

"What?" she asked, closing in.

"Josh is living with a *'shiksa.'* They're supposed to be so religious and you know what else?" Benny said, unaware that his sister was planning to pounce.

"Gotcha," Rhoda said grabbing him.

"Let me go!"

"Okay," she said kissing him. "Now tell me what else."

"Aunt Rose is having trouble with her business. She lost a lot of money."

With arms full, kicking the door, Eli announced, "Open up! It's me!" Placing the Macvac on the kitchen table, he greeted his beloved siblings. "Hi gang, how ya doing?"

Hearing Eli arrive, Harry scampered in. "*Nu,*' how much did he pay you the first week?"

Handing the Macvac to his father, Eli chortled. "Here it is Pop, the best vacuum cleaner money can buy."

"What do we need it for? Do we have any rugs?"

"You told him to get one yourself," said Rhoda, setting the table.

Handing Rhoda the new, cotton tablecloth he had just purchased, Eli responded. "No problem Papa. I'll take it back tomorrow."

"Why should you take it back?" Harry asked, examining it. "Maybe I can sell it?"

"Where's Mama? questioned Eli, as he helped Rhoda spread the new tablecloth.

"What's the matter? You're working one week and you forgot already? It's *'Ehrev Shabbos.*' Mama's taking a bath."

Wearing the light-pink cotton dress Eli had given her, Gitel entered.

"You look beautiful," her three children greeted her.

"Thank you," she smiled. "Sit down, everything's ready."

"Don't I get a kiss before I sit down?" asked Eli, nearing her.

"Only if you promise to eat everything and what did you eat all week? I hope nothing unkosher."

"Never mind what he ate! How much did you make?"

"Hi Patsy, how ya doing?"

"Very good Mr. Eli. Nice to see you again. Now, what can I do for you today?"

"How's about a couple of three ponders and a bottle of your finest champagne for me and my favorite cousin? And don't forget those clams oregonatta. I love them."

Placing a fine, white linen napkin on his lap, Josh glowed, "I remember when your mother used to sneak you and your sister to *'Booba's,*' where you sang your little heart out for them. Now, look at you. I'm really proud of you Eli and I'm not surprised either."

"I always hated when they made my mother try on your mother's hand-me-downs."

"I'm afraid she's not giving anything away these days. I hear she's almost broke and in

a way, it serves her right. She spent more time being a businesswoman than a mother and now it looks like it's all catching up to her."

"I'm sorry Josh."

"Nothing to be sorry for. A toast!" he said, raising his glass, "To the greatest pitchman since Elmer Gantry, my cuz, Eli Greenwald!"

"You got it all wrong," said Eli, blushing. "I should be toasting you. Instead of making 400 a week, I could still be at Alexanders making 65. Since I've been pitching, do you know how much money I've saved the past two months? My safe deposit box is overflowing."

"Ever think you'd have that much money in your life?" asked Josh, gnawing on his succulent lobster tail. "And what about that apartment on Seventy-second Street?"

"I like it. Now all I have to do is work up the courage to tell my father."

"As long as you continue to give my Uncle Harry the 100 you started giving him every week, I don't think he'll bitch too much? You know? They've been bugging me to visit the main office, and tomorrow's as good a day as any to drop by and say hello? That should give you enough time to tell your father and sign that lease?"

"You look wonderful in your uniform," said Gitel to Bruno, who was holding Rhoda's hand. "Would you like to stay for supper?"

"I'm taking them out for dinner Mama," Eli said enthusiastically. "Let's go gang. We

have reservations."

"Then, you'll come tomorrow?" said Gitel, ushering them to the door.

"I would love to," Bruno said, hugging her. "Thanks for the invitation Mrs. Greenwald."

Seated in a taxi, on their way to Patsy's, Rhoda and Bruno told Eli to take the apartment that he was so excited about. They also said they would marry, soon as Bruno was through with the Navy.

Fay Berger, a glamorous fifty-year old brunette was seated at her desk in Preferred Rentals; an Upper East Side rental agency, that she both owned and operated.

Approaching her desk, Eli smiled and extended his hand, confident that he had made a lasting impression. "Hi, remember me? Eli Greenwald's the name and fortune's my game."

"With that personality of yours and the way you sang, how could I forget?" she said, shaking his hand warmly. "How are you Eli Greenwald and if I remember correctly you liked that apartment on Seventy-Second Street and Lexington Avenue."

"What a memory and what a face. Anymore like you at home?" Flicking his ballpoint pen ala Groucho he asked, "Where do want my John Hancock lady?"

Although the apartment was still available, apologetically Fay Berger said, "I'm so

sorry Eli. That apartment has been rented."

"Foiled again!" he said using his best Bogey voice. "I was sure counting on you lady."

"Don't worry," she said, liking him even more. "There are many apartments and I have the perfect agent to help you. My daughter Rachel, she just got her real-estate license. Rachel, Rachel" she heralded, almost singing. "Would you please come here a moment?"

With her porcelain-like skin, highlighted by her always-rosy cheeks, eighteen-year-old Rachel seemed to radiate. Dressed in a dark-gray skirt and dark-gray blouse with suede heels to match, smiling enthusiastically, she neared her mother's desk.

"Rachel, say hello to Eli Greenwald. Rachel also plays the piano very well. She's been taking lessons since she was four years old. Haven't you Rachel?"

Embarrassed, the attractive girl pleaded. "Mother, will you please stop? Mr. Greenwald is here for an apartment. I'm certain he's not interested in hearing my life story. Isn't that correct?" she said, looking into his hazel eyes.

"Oh, I have plenty of time and I'm really very interested. Besides, I've been looking for an accompanist forever. This, might just turn-out to be my lucky day?" Unaware that he was staring at Rachel, he divulged, "I sort of like to sing myself and who knows? Can I see your hands?"

"I would be happy to help you find an apartment she said, removing her eyes from his. And about the piano, I prefer the classics myself; Bach, Beethoven, Mozart."

"What about Sinatra and Nat King Cole?" he asked smiling. "Can you play any of their tunes?"

"I suppose I could, if I had to. Thanks for the offer, but right now I'd like to find you a beautiful apartment."

Feeling his penis tingle he said, "Just promise you won't discard my offer completely. After all we've been through, the least you can do, is think it over."

After her mother had indiscreetly poked her in the ribs, Rachel took the hint and said, "Let's go to my desk and I'll see what's available."

"Lead on my princess," he exclaimed, daring to take Rachel's arm. "Show me your best castles."

"He's really cute and what a personality," thought Rachel reviewing her files. "There are three apartments I can show you that you might want to consider," she said, noticing the slight quiver in her once unwavering voice. "One's on Seventy-Eighth and Madison. Another's on Sixty-Fifth and Third, but the one I like best is on Seventy-Ninth, just off Fifth Avenue. It's really neat she said, suddenly becoming animated. "It's in an old Brownstone and it has a small garden in the back."

"I'll take it!" he said staring at her sensitive eyes. "Where do I sign?"

Impulsively touching his hand, she quipped, "You're crazy. You haven't even seen it yet."

"You said you like it and being I hear you play a mean piano, your word's good

enough for me."

"Unless you let me show it to you, Eli Greenwald," she threatened, "I will not allow you to rent it."

"You called me Eli. Do you know how long I have waited to hear you call me Eli?"

"Will you stop it? She pleaded, "Please, try and act serious for one moment."

"I am serious, my princess," he said going down on one knee. "Your wish is my command. *'Nu?'* I'm waiting for a command and I even heel," he laughed.

"If that's the way it's going to be," she said taking his arm. "Follow me. We are off to Seventy-Ninth Street."

Escorting them to the door, Fay whispered to her beautiful daughter, "He's a good Jewish boy, and for such a young man to be able to afford such an expensive apartment, he must be doing pretty good. But, remember what I told you about your father and all men. They're all the same. But, maybe Eli's different? He speaks Yiddish beautifully and wait until you hear him sing. Gorgeous, what a voice."

"Since you like him so much, maybe I'll have an affair with him this afternoon? The apartment's still vacant isn't it?" Clutching Eli's arm they departed."

Puffing nervously on his cigar as he reviewed the stacks of paper on his desk, 63-year-old Morton Greer was fuming, as his wife Betty, who was his bookkeeper, egged him on.

"Although he's making money for us, you can't let him get away with it any longer!

When he comes in, you better let him have it!" she ended, as Josh entered.

"Hi Boss, hi Betty. I see you have lots of paper-work too," Josh said grinning.

Holding Josh's accounts receivable, Morton Greer rose and shook his number-one-salesman's hand. "You look terrific, he beckoned. "Please, sit down Josh. Make yourself comfortable."

Staring at Josh with contempt, departing, Betty said, "I have some work to finish."

"Is she mad at me?" Josh asked.

"She's asked you to visit us for sometime, Josh."

"Well, I showed up didn't I? Now what's so important that it couldn't wait 'til the end of the month? Tell you the truth I needed a day off, anyway. Think it's time to go on vacation? Might as well spend some of that money I've been making."

With that, Morton's attitude changed. "Are you aware that twenty-seven of your people did not make their payments last month?"

"Is that why you had me rush over here?" Josh asked, smiling confidently.

Raising his voice, "You may think that is a laughing matter, but we paid you \$1350 in commissions for that worthless paper!"

"How many vacs did I sell last month?"

"To be exact" Morton said scanning the print-out as though he did not know, "293."

"27 out of 293 doesn't sound too bad to me, boss."

Biting on his cigar, Morton Greer did not respond.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but to the best of my knowledge, you must get bad paper from all your salesmen, including Macy's and Gimbels. And incidentally," Josh said, grinning, "How many units did Macy's move last month?"

"It doesn't matter that you out-sold them. If your people don't make their payments, we want our commissions back! And that's all there is too it!" his red-faced boss said defiantly."

"Tell you the truth boss, I understand your position and maybe it's time I moved on. You know I've gotten a few offers from your competition, but because of my allegiance to you and your company, like a fool I nixed them all. Rising quickly, Josh continued as he started to exit, "Maybe I was a little too hasty."

"Wait a minute," said Mr. Greer. "That's no reason for you to quit. Just think Josh. So far you've made over a \$100,000 this year."

"And the year's not half over, but I'm certain there must be a million salesmen just waiting to get their hands on your vac."

"No one can replace you Josh. You're the best, G-d damn it. You're the best and you know it."

Smiling, Josh continued to exit. "What about the bad paper?"

"Forget, I mentioned it," said Morton apologetically. "Besides, your people are only a month or two late."

"It's beautiful!" gawked Eli, staring at the old fireplace. "Does it work?"

"I don't know, but I can find out," said a pleased Rachel.

Gazing at the dormant fireplace, Eli sang, "You'd be so nice to come home to. You'd be so nice by the fire." "Hope you know how to make a fire, because, as a child I was never allowed to toast marshmallows."

"Now, that you have convinced me that you're not a pyromaniac, let me show you the bedroom," whispered Rachel. "You won't believe its size."

Painted forrest-green, with white ornate molding, its parquet floor stained a dark walnut was highly polished. Being void of furniture, it appeared larger than it's size; 12'x18'.

Said Eli, gliding across the room, "It is like a ballroom. I love it! I told you I would love it. Maybe the next time you'll believe me lady?" he said ala Bogey.

"And just think. The Metropolitan and Central Park are around the corner," she said dreamily. "Two of my favorite places."

"I've never been to the Met. After lunch, maybe you could show me around the...? I get lost in strange places."

Unable to stop grinning or deny the attraction she had, Rachel laughed. "You're really something Eli. I bet you say that to all the girls you meet?"

"Only the ones that have a face like yours and play a mean piano."

Shaking her head in amazement she said, "You know all the right things to say don't

you? How are you going to decorate it?"

"I was just going to ask you the same question. What do you have in mind, kid?"

"If you really want my opinion? I see this room in early Americana. Against this wall, I'd have a four-poster, cherry wood bed. A dresser over here and a matching bureau on this wall, a large beveled-mirror over the bureau and a few Icart prints. *'Voila,'* she ended, gracefully curtsying.

"Wrap it up and I'll take it," he said joyously. "Now, what about the living room? They have feelings too."

Taking his arm she said, "Let's go back in there and we'll discuss it... I think it should be eclectic. A white leather couch facing the fireplace, with two floppy armchairs. How about an antique coffee table and since you have ten foot ceilings maybe some track-lighting?" she continued becoming more enthusiastic. "After you get the essentials, then you can get some knick-knacks. So, what do you think?"

"So far you are batting a thousand, but let's see how good you do in the kitchen."

"That's easy. Come on, I'll show you... You need a round table with four chairs in this corner. About 36 inches should do. What about dishes and silverware and towels and linen? I suppose you'll need them also?"

"Everything. I need everything. Help!" he pleaded.

"Remember that backyard I mentioned? Wait until you see it. Shangri-La at your door step."

"Take me to Eden my Shaharezad

Rachel would introduce him to the theater, museums; even the ballet and Eli ate it up. In turn he took her to the Bronx Park and when he called the sleepy walrus '*Zeyda*.' Rachel laughed so hard she would cry. He also took her to Orchard Beach where he told her how he used to collect beer bottles for deposit.

Pacing nervously, while speaking on the phone, Morton Greer was livid. "For the past year-and-half, more and more of your people have stopped making payments. What the hell are you trying to do to me?" he said, angrily.

Momentarily taken aback, Josh responded assertively. "I'm working my ass off, trying to sell your vacs and you want to know what I'm doing?"

"You're not selling my machines," griped Morton, "You're giving them away! I can't take it anymore. We have to talk immediately!"

"Tell you the truth boss. I don't think I can get to see you before Friday, next week?"

"What do you mean, you're too busy to see me?"

Gaining confidence Josh replied, "We sold two-hundred-and-two units last week and we don't have a secretary remember? The paperwork has me up against the wall."

Leaning back in his chair, Morton put his feet on his desk and speaking in a relaxed manner, continued. "Betty pointed out that five people with the same last name, living at the same address bought five units. That's unbelievable."

"I tried to talk them out of it, but they wouldn't listen. They said that they loved your machine so much, that they each had to have their own. Guess it's your fault fella," Josh cackled. "You made them too good."

"And what's so amazing" gushed Mr. Greer, "Is they have made every payment. I don't know how you do it, but you sure do it," ended his bewildered, boss.

"Speaking about payments Morty. Do you think you could ask Betty to send me a list of those new late-payers? I'll see if I can remedy that small problem for you."

"That's wonderful, just wonderful," repeated a happy Morton Greer. "I'll have my wife get on it immediately. And when you get some free time, keep us in mind. Stop by and say hello."

My Darling Bruno,

I miss you more than ever. Eli said, he couldn't
Be happier that we've made plans to marry after
Graduation. I finally told my mother and she said she
was thrilled, but I haven't said a word about it to my
Father. I need you to be here when I spring the news.

Eli's in love with a wonderful girl named Rachel.
He, is making lots of money and I couldn't be happier for
Him. He buys us all wonderful presents, except Papa.

Eli's Coming

Benny has become a skinny-malink and Eli doesn't know that Benny wears all his clothes. Eli said that he's moving out, I'm glad. He and Papa argue continuously. It seems, since I've fallen in love with you I haven't coughed one time. I miss you. I can't wait too...

All my Love Rhoda

Xxxx

It was dark and with Sinatra doing his very best, two young lovers, lying on a four-poster bed made of cherry-wood passionately embraced.

Rachel pleaded unconvincingly, "I can't and I won't. Not until I get married."

"I can't take it anymore. I'm ready to hit the ceiling," said Eli consumed with desire.

Whispering in his educated ear, "I want to as much as you do, but there's nothing I can do. And I found out about it. It is called a pyramid and I think it's illegal."

Receiving the list of late payers Josh was not surprised to find that twenty-six of them were of the Rev. Reginald Butler's doing. Buying 60, \$25 money-orders Josh mailed those 26 and an additional 34 late payments from prior months.

Soon after, while Eli was signing up the Rev. Butler's 46 new applicants, Josh had

Eli's Coming

asked the Reverend to remain backstage with him.

"Congratulations Rev. I see you got yourself a brand new Caddie," Josh said.

"Yeah," he responded excitedly. "And it is about time don't you think? Why walk when you can ride. Ain't that right, brother Joshua?"

"Makes sense to me," replied Josh. "That is as long as you can continue to make the payments."

"All you have to do is make the payments and you can have everything," agreed the smiling Reverend. "I hope you don't mind? But, I am in somewhat of a hurry. I want my Mama to see my new Caddie, so could you give me my money now?"

"The way I see it brother, you're the one that has to do the paying. How much cash do you have on you?" Josh said sternly.

Being he never liked Josh, the Rev. Butler's consternation surfaced. "I ain't got no time for games mister. So, I'm asking you politely, will you please give me the \$500 I earned last week?"

"Lord knows how I wish I could, but it seems that about 50 of your people haven't made their payments for the last two months and according to my calculations you owe me quite a sum of money and I'd like you to pay up!" demanded Josh. "And, I don't think I can accept anymore of your people? They are ruining my reputation, Mr. Reverend."

"You can't do that! I was counting on that money," said the now timid Reverend. "I just arranged to bring a bus load of people from Yonkers here. Please don't cut me off. I

promise, as God is my witness," he said rubbing his ornate silver-cross, "Everyone will pay."

"Good. Soon as they do that, come see me," said Josh departing.

"Dear Eli,

I know we've been telling you to go fuck yourself in all our letters. We were angry. Since we've been getting so much pussy lately, (about every 15 minutes) Aaron and I decided that if it wasn't for you, we might still be home pulling it. So do us a favor and GO

FUCK YOURSELF!

Your pal,

Natie

P.S. See you in three months.

Eli and Rachel, having consumed a bottle of Cabernet, were lying in his bed, kissing passionately, their young, lustful bodies pulsated as Beethoven's Fifth blanketed the darkness.

Running her tongue down Eli's body, Rachel relented. "Okay, I'll take my panties off, but just remember that you promised. We're not going all the way."

"I promise," he said ripping his jockey-shorts off. "Oh, you feel so good. We

should've done this years ago."

"Eli, Eli what are we doing? We better stop before we get carried away," she moaned, pressing her body to his.

Kissing her hardened young nipples, he pleaded breathlessly, "Let me put it in."

"I can't," she panted as he started to play with her vagina.

"Just the head, I swear, just the head," he begged running his tongue where his educated fingers had just been.

"It's wrong," she breathlessly begged.

"Why not? We've been doing everything else for almost two years. Just the head," he said devouring Rachel with kisses. "I promise. Scouts Honor."

"Do you really mean it? Swear to God?" she said, gasping for breath. "Only the head?"

"Not only did most of them pay," said a confused Betty, "Some of them have even paid in advance."

Although Josh got them to make their payments, I still hate him," Growled Morton Greer. "I started this company from scratch and he winds up making more money than I do! If I could only learn how he does it? I'd dump that son-of-a-bitch in a minute!"

"There just might be a way," said Betty massaging her husband's tension filled neck. "I don't know who he is? But, according to the signature on many of the contracts we've

been receiving, a Mr. Greenwald has endorsed more than half. If he's selling as many units as that no-good-so-and-so, then Mr. Greenwald has to know his sales-pitch."

"You're right!" said Morton excitedly. "Greenwald is the answer! All we have to do is steal him. I'll make that Greenwald an offer that will make him drool. I'll put him in charge of sales throughout the country. I'll pay him \$25,000 a year with an over-ride."

"And a contract that has a twenty-five thousand buy-out. Even when we dump him, we'll still be way ahead," added his happy wife.

Wearing a white cotton shawl on her head, Gitel ended her *'shushkering'* over the shimmering Sabbath candles with, "And thank you dear G-d for keeping my family healthy and for all you have given us. Amen. Good *'Shabbos'*" she said to her band of on lookers.

"Good *'Shabbos'* Mama," her children echoed.

"I'm hungry," said Benny, sitting. "How long do we have to wait for Eli?"

"I'm sure he'll be here any moment. Eat a piece of *'challah,'*" Gitel said, stirring the warmed fricassee.

"I love this tablecloth Mama. Nothing sticks," said Rhoda, buttering Benny's *'challah,'* bread.

"He buys everybody presents, but me," bitched Harry. "Come on, let's start with the *'gefilte'* fish. Who knows, if he went shopping again? Rhoda, the horse-radish needs

more sugar."

Hearing a familiar knock on the door, rushing to it, Gitel sang, "Who is it?"

"It's not Joe Louis," smiled the laden Eli, standing in the open doorway. "Okay lady, give me all the chicken fricassee you got," he said ala Bogey. Strutting to his little mother, he kissed her.

"Sit down," Gitel said rushing to the *fricassee*. I made it just for you. I'm so glad you're hungry."

Ever smiling, Benny pinched Eli's tush and said, "I asked Mama to make the fricassee, not you. Now that you're working Eli, it looks like I'm Mama's favorite."

"Never mind, you're all my favorites," Gitel said serving.

Despite knowing, that whatever was in the box his son had entered with was not for him, Harry couldn't resist the temptation. "What do you have in those boxes?"

"I bought you a new suit and a new hat Papa," said Eli handing both presents to him.

Said, Harry rising, "A new suit? For me, I, I, don't...?"

"Try it on Papa" urged Rhoda. "Eli bought you a new suit. Just what you needed."

"Going to his room Harry, turned to Eli, " Remember that vacuum cleaner you gave me? I just sold it to Angelo for \$30."

Concerned by her brother's obvious silence during supper, Rhoda asked Eli to go for a walk. In doing so, Eli had remained silent.

"What's the matter?" she again asked. "Remember the day when you invited Bruno,

Natie and Aaron to come to watch the World Series? And how you suddenly had to get them to leave because the investigator was coming and you didn't want them to see Papa wheeling the T.V. into my closet. You were so embarrassed you wanted to die. But you made it, didn't you...? You trusted me enough to tell me where you used to hide your Black-Beauty. Eli Greenwald! If you don't tell me what's going on, I swear, I'll kiss you right in public!"

"Anything but that," he said, weakly smiling. "Rachel broke up with me."

"Why? She's such a terrific girl. What did you do?" she asked, holding his hand.

"I lied and she said she'll never forgive me," he confided sadly.

"Come on, everyone tells a white lie sometimes. Tell me what really happened."

Kicking a bottle cap into the gutter, he turned to his beloved sister, "I can't take it. It's too personal."

"You once told me I'm your favorite sister, remember? Well, as your favorite sister I've heard a few of your white lies myself. If Rachel really likes you, she'd forgive and forget it."

Eli sighed, "It's much worse than you think. We were really making-out and I promised that I wouldn't put "It" in all the way."

"And she believed you?" Rhoda said trying not to laugh.

When, Eli somewhat nodded yes, Rhoda could no longer contain her laughter. "I bet she even made you swear you wouldn't put "It" in all the way," she burst forth

laughing.

Again he almost nodded yes.

"She's full of shit! It's her fault, just as much as yours. You know what? Call her up and tell her from now on, when you want to do it to her, tell her you'll do it to someone else. And if that doesn't work, just remember I have lots of girl friends and for some strange reason they think you're cute.

"That's the reason I made you my favorite sister, remember?" he bubbled, hugging her. But, that's not all. I think something's not Kosher with Josh. After thinking about it, Rachel said it was a pyramid and she thinks pyramids might be illegal.

Even though I've been making more than a thousand a week, soon as he gets back from vacation, I'm going to quit and see if I can get a gig singing at Grossingers. You know, that's where Eddie Fisher was discovered.

"That's wonderful Eli. It's what you've always wanted. Too bad you can't do it now. When's Josh coming back?

"Two weeks. Anyway, what do you think about this? Josh suggested that I ask Papa to help out. He said that he'd give Papa \$200 a week. What do you think? Should I do it?

Rhoda shrieked. "Are you kidding? Oh, would you Eli? Papa never had a real paying job and you just got him a new suit," his sister sighed dreamily.

"Papa, how would you like to work with me for a couple of weeks? Josh is going on vacation," asked Eli, hesitantly.

"How much is that *'gonnif'* willing to pay me and remember, I'm your father, so tell me the truth," demanded Harry. "And what does he want me to do, hold up a bank?"

"He's willing to give you \$50 a week Pop."

"\$50 a week, is he crazy?"

"How about a \$100 a week, Papa? All you have to do is sign a few contracts and give away some money."

"A \$100? And he wants me to give away money?"

"All right, a 150 Papa," said Eli. "Josh even gave me the use of his Caddie. You'll be travelling in style. What do you say, Pop?"

"Do it Papa," Rhoda pleaded. "The Home Relief won't even know. It's a lot of money."

"It's more than you ever made on the push-cart," Benny echoed.

"What do you mean? I set a record yesterday. Ask Mama. I never sold so many peaches in my life. And what about Eli's *'Bar Mitzvah'*? You forgot that I made over 300 simoleans in one day."

"You drive a hard bargain Pop. Tell you what; I'll give you an extra 50 from my own pocket. That's 200 big ones Pop. What do you say? And you can have your own desk and phone."

"It's some car," Harry said slamming the door.

"Glad you like it Pop. Once we get started, wait until you see how comfortable it feels.

"Never mind. Just keep your eyes on the road. There's a lot of crazy drivers these days," Harry warned.

Stepping on the excellerator, his proud son sped away.

"How the fuck did that Jew bastard get a Caddie," thought Jimmy Ryan, seeing Eli and his well-dressed father speeding up Webster Avenue.

Zippping down the Major Deegan highway, noticing the speedometer, starting to feel queasy, uncomfortable Harry said, "What the hell are you driving so fast for?"

"I'm only doing 65 Papa. Want to see me do 70?"

"What the hell's the rush? What do you think, there's a million people waiting to buy your vacuum cleaner?" Harry said sarcastically. "I forgot, they're probably waiting for the money I have to give out, right?"

"Exactly."

"How much did you give me to give out?"

"500 in fives Pop."

"I never heard of anything so crazy before. Are you sure you know what you're doing? There has to be something crooked about it. Joshua has always been a 'gonnif.'

Hordes of people were mulling about when Eli pulled up to the boarded up Beacon Theater.

"That's all? I thought there'd be a million people," Harry said, entering the darkened theater. Walking down the aisle to the office backstage, Harry said "I remember when you walked down the aisle on your graduation."

"Don't remind me Papa."

"Remember how I was the only one that whistled?"

"I promise I'll never forget," said Eli turning the lights on in the office. "Want some coffee and a Danish? There's a great diner down the block."

"Why not? But what about all those people?"

"Don't worry Pop. I'll tell them there'll be short delay," Eli said, departing.

"Make yourself comfortable. Call Mama and tell her you arrived in one piece."

Dressed in suit and tie, sitting at Eli's desk and speaking on the telephone, Harry looked like the typical successful businessman.

"He drove like a *'meschugeneh,*" Harry was saying when Morton Greer tiptoed in.

"Are you the Mr. Greenwald I have been hearing about," whispered a grinning Morton.

"All right, I have to go back to work," Harry said, ending his conversation.

Turning to his unexpected visitor, he beamed, "Yes sir, I'm Harry Greenwald. What can I

do for you?"

"My name's Morton Greer and I am so pleased to finally meet you," he said, vigorously shaking Harry's hand. "I own this company and I've been informed that you're the best salesman we have."

"Thinking that his historic day, (peddling peaches) had somehow preceded him, Harry replied, "When you sell as many peaches as I do, it seems that news travels pretty fast."

Confident that this outstanding salesman was referring to his Macvac when he said peaches, again whispering, Morton continued, " I want you to head-up my sales division throughout the country. In this contract, which I've already signed and dated, I'm willing to pay you \$15,000 a year to start."

"\$15,000" repeated an incredulous Harry. "Are you sure you don't want my son, Eli? He's a smart boy. And so is my son Benny. I have two wonderful sons you know?"

"Alright! I'll make it \$20,000 and I don't care if you have a daughter too. Just sign."

"Her names Rhoda and she's the smartest one. You really want me to sign this contract for \$20,000?"

"My final offer! \$25,000, plus profit sharing, plus a \$25,000 termination clause, all for your protection, because I know you're quite a family man. It's all here in writing. All you have to do is sign this contract and it becomes binding."

Staring at the contract, Harry thought, "I always told them one day I'll get a job that will make me rich and I was right. I'm always right."

"Sign! I promise you will not regret it," urged Morton Greer. "And you will love working with my wife. She's our head book-keeper and she loves children."

"Are you sure you can't go a little higher?" Harry said, flicking his ballpoint pen.

"It's every penny I have," said Morton crossing himself.

Thinking to himself, "First, I'll phone the Home relief and tell them to all go to hell! Too bad Shultz ain't around anymore," thought Harry, signing. "Then I'll tell Eli, from now on I'll buy all Mama's clothes. That Eli, that's some boy I raised.

The End

Glossary

Litvak	Slavik Europeans
Kuhgle	Bread Pudding
Matzoh brie	Fried Matzoh
Mazel tov	Good luck
Mincha	Morning prayer
Meschugeneh	Crazy
Maommaleh	Sweetheart, darling
Oy vey	Oh no
Nivehras	Sins
Nosh	Nibble, eat
Nu	So

Shalom	Peace, hello
Schmates	Rags
Schvitzing	Sweating
Seder	Passover ritual
Schelepped	Pulled, trod
Shofar	Ram's horn
Shul	Synagogue
Shuskering	Muffled, inaudible sound
Schmutz	Dirt
Tsadik	Revered, religious man

About the Author

Sidney has been happily married, most of the time anyway, to the beautiful, Leslie Duke since 1968. They have two wonderful children, Lewis Damon whose married to Melissa and they have two wonderful sons, Elijah Duke and Nathan Doren, and the beautiful Carie Rachel. His family has always been the love and most important treasure in his life.

In addition to "*Eli's Coming*," Sidney has written five books, six plays, the books and lyrics to 20 musicals of which the screenplays are written, in addition, 10 comedic and dramatic screenplays, one sitcom, three games shows, six children's games and about 800 songs. All waiting to be produced and become hits.

Sidney is also a director of stage and film.

You may check his many projects on **www.SidneyGoldbergWriter.com**