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Kerry Alan Leichtman

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DOLLARS IN THE STREET (PART 1)

By

Kerry Leichtman

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CHAPTER 1

Moe Goldman liked the feeling of walking into the YMCA. He walked with his back straight, his hair wetted and combed to one side. A gray suit was draped over his shoulder and down his back like a cape. He held it with his index finger hooked through the metal hanger. He would need the suit later in the day and had it wrapped in a thin plastic bag. He wore a white shirt, casually, as if he wore one every day. The first two buttons were unfastened and the hair from his chest covered the third. His walk was the walk of a man happy to be travelling in the direction his feet were taking him. His stride was long. His steps quick and light, but not springing off his heels like a cocker spaniel. Moe Goldman followed the signs leading to the training room. He liked to read the signs as he strut by them. TRAINING ROOM. Training room. Moe Goldman was IN-TRAINING. He was training his body to be ready for anything anytime anywhere.
He wanted it to be stronger than he would ever need it to be.

Three days a week for the last ten years Moe pushed his body beyond what it wanted to do. When his muscles tore, shaking the weights suspended over his head as he laid on a narrow bench, he laughed. Not the conventional guffaw, but in a way that more reflected assurance than it did humor. Someone driving home after being away for five years would laugh the same laugh upon seeing the sign that announced his hometown.

Holding the weights high, Moe sucked in all the air his lungs would allow, inhaling so hard it lifted his back clear off the bench. Then he'd wait, wait until the burning inside his chest, through his arms and across his back, became a feeling of pleasure. An undescrivable pleasure that was hot and soft and all his own. His mind painted colors on the air between his head and the weights. The back of his eyes throbbed against his skull. And then, without his body's knowledge or consent, he brought the weights down and then pushed them up again, pausing only a second, with locked elbows, to make sure they could go no higher. And then he brought them down, down to where the sweat was jumping from
his chest, down so far the metal bar touched his nipples before springing up toward the ceiling. Moe pushed the weights up and pulled them down without anymore protest from his body. He stopped when he could no longer feel the metal bar in his hands.

Moe got up clapping his hands high over his head. The blood in his body was delirious. Moe thought he could feel the blood cells crashing into each other in frantic misdirection like drunk drivers on bumper cars. The skin covering his pecs and deltoids was red stained as if the blood inside was bursting from an oxygen overdose. Sometimes, standing in front of the mirror, Moe expected to see red glowing lines where the blood raced through him like a young river after a heavy rainfall. Moe stood a while waiting for his body to calm down. Then he got back to work.

Moe had started his work out at six a.m. in an empty training room. When he finished at nine the room was busy with a few professional bodybuilders and some older men painfully repenting. Moe's exhilarated legs took him away from the leg press machine to where there was a red floor mat. There he did a few calisthenics to corral his crazed
calves.

Moe was tall and by some people's definition, lanky. But some people misuse the word. His body was solid. When he flexed, muscles popped out from under his skin like battleships from Popeye's biceps. But he rarely flexed his muscles when others were around. His height stretched his strength to secrecy. He looked big and solid in street clothes. He looked immensely powerful without them. Before he started training, Moe had looked tired and skinny. His head was, in proportion to his body, too big, and looked as though a strong gust of wind was all that was needed to relieve his neck of its burden.

He sat on the red mat and watched the others work out. There were three bodybuilders. As one worked the weights, the other two called him names. This was supposed to anger him into going three more reps. Moe thought if it were he under the weight, he would throw it into their collective mouth. Watching the older men gave Moe pleasure. He had seen them come and go. They rarely stayed longer than three months. There was a new one today.

At first the new man stood against the wall watching
the others, learning how to use the apparatus. Then he sat down on the stool in front of the military press and put its weight pin near the top, in a light weight selection. He grasped the handles, then removed his hands, rubbed them together, changed the weight load and grasped the handles again. After a few more adjustments he got up and left the room. A minute later he came back wiping his mouth with the blue sleeves of his sweatshirt. He sat down again and moved the weight pin to where Moe judged was a little over one-hundred pounds. The man went through his warm up maneuvers again.

The man had a full head of gray almost white hair. The edges of his hair were wet and the front hung down into his eyes. He brushed his hair back through his fingers adding another movement to his warm ups. Moe glanced at the clock on the wall hoping the man would lift before it got too late. One of the other men stood behind the newer one waiting to use the press. Then he left to do leg curls. After, he got up and waited again for the military press, then moved on to work his lats and from there went to the showers. No one pressured the new man. The military press was the
hardest to do. They were probably glad of an excuse to pass it by. The man continued changing the weight selection and rubbing his hands and fixing his hair. As time passed, Moe saw sweat rings grow under the arms of the man's sweatshirt. A collar of sweat circled his neck.

His hair was now wet as if he had just taken a shower. Still he sat on the high stool adjusting the weight pin between one-fifty and one-hundred pounds. Moe moved along the wall until he was behind the man. His back was also sweat stained up the spine and across the shoulders. Each time the man grasped the handles of the press, his shoulders shook straining to lift. Moe tapped the man on the back and asked if he would mind moving aside for just a minute because he wanted to use the machine. The man crawled off the stool and stood behind Moe.

Moe also went through some warm up preparations. He smoothed his brown hair off his forehead and thrust his shoulders back a few times to loosen them up. When he did this his neck and shoulders became a series of mounds that peaked and formed together like waves over rocks. A deep line ran down his back along his spine cutting between the rolling
cylinders of back muscle. It looked like an earthquake fault between mountains. Moe lined up the stool so the press handles were over his shoulders. He reached down and moved the pin from one-thirty to only forty pounds. He breathed deeply and loudly. He straightened his back and gripped the handles so hard his knuckles were white. His biceps swelled to tremendous size. As he tensed and relaxed them, they rolled around, becoming one with his triceps and then back to the top of the bone. A thin line formed along the bone distinguishing one muscle from the other. Slowly he lifted the forty pound weight. He made his shoulders shake. After only three reps, he let the weights crash down. He again patted the man on the back and thanked him as he gulped down air, and then collapsed through the doorway. From there, he walked briskly to the showers.
CHAPTER 2

Moe showered and then dressed into a gray flannel suit, white shirt, red skinny tie and brown scuffed but polished penny loafers. He was starting his fourth week of job hunting. It began with the *New York Times*. One Sunday classified section could last a puppy through to the next Sunday. Moe had started with the agencies that advertised the most.

On Monday mornings the agencies' offices were so crowded that if they gave out numbers, like a deli, they would go broke from the cost of paper alone. Moe went from one agency to the next. The chairs were always taken. People sat on tables and planters. Recent graduates sat on new briefcases. They wrote the names of their recently alma matered schools in capital letters using pens inscribed with their initials.

The agencies had no jobs to offer. Even when Moe had
taken the six o'clock train and was the first interviewed on his second *New York Times* Monday, they had told him the job was no longer available. Moe felt personally dejected until overhearing two young three-piece suited, briefcase toting, inscribed pen holders, denouncing the employment agencies as fraud at a lunch counter.

The counter was shaped like connected horseshoes. Moe sat at the beginning of the horseshoe chain and the other two unemployed sat opposite him at the end of the first shoe where it connected to the second link. The three of them ate hamburgers. They with cheese, Moe without. Except for the cheese they were equals, Moe thought.

The Brass Grill, where they were eating, was crowded with businessmen, secretaries and unemployed. It was easy to tell who was who. Even the unemployed who would later be secretaries were distinguishable from the employed that were already secretaries. The unemployed secretaries wore a look of frustrated patience, like a cop cruising a hangout, or a gynecologist easing a shapely first timer into the stirrups. On the other hand, the employed secretaries wore a look of practiced patience, like a poodle waiting for the
butler to serve it a biscuit.

Businessmen were businessmen. They bored Moe. Always the capped tooth smile and shiny cufflinks they would make believe their wives forced them to wear. When they stood, they kept their hands in their pockets and played with small change. When they sat, they kept their hands on the table and pulled at their wedding bands, or laid one hand on top of the other. Sitting, their hands were always visible as if saying, "See, they're not in my pocket."

Each one of them would later go home to wife and children and sit down to supper. They would tell many funny stories, but the funniest ones would be about the bunch of sad looking kids that came into his office for a job, and how he and the others, Mike, Phil and Jack, always had a good laugh after they left. They disgusted Moe.

Moe's waitress asked if he wanted dessert.

"Cheese cake and a glass of milk."

"What was that dear?" The waitress had been distracted by a mounted policeman riding by the glass walled restaurant. At the same time, Moe had seen a flashy sleeve poke over the crowded dining room with two fingers spread.
"I love horses," the waitress said.

"Excuse me?"

"Horses. Aren't they handsome looking?"

"Dorothy, your order's here," said another voice.

"Alright," she answered it. "What was that you wanted dear?"

Moe had just seen a waitress run to the table where the sleeve had originated with two cups of coffee.

"A piece of cheese cake and a cup of coffee. Cream and sugar," Moe said.

"It's in front of you dear. That's Half and Half in the creamer. I can get you straight milk for your coffee if you want."

"No thanks. This'll be fine."

Dorothy carried herself as if she helped build the restaurant. She stepped in front of the manager who had been yelling for her and balanced four plates on her left arm and carried two more with her right hand. The manager said something to her. If Dorothy heard him, she didn't let on. She served the two people next to Moe and four others sitting across from him. The two unemployed had already
left. She served Moe his coffee.

"I'll get your cake in a minute dear."

She hadn't run over to Moe with the coffee, but at least she was nice. She just earned her tip, Moe thought. As if she had read Moe's mind, she served him the cheesecake smiling from ear to ear.

"You're looking for a job. Aren't you dear?"

"Yes."

"You look strong. You should have no trouble getting something."

"Thanks."

"If you can manage a restaurant stick around. I think the marine is about to run home to his mama."

Moe looked over to the manager. He had a flattop haircut and no sideburns. He was standing with his back to the pick up window calling one waitress after the other. The orders were piled so thick in the window it was hard to see through to the kitchen. All the waitresses seemed busy serving water and coffee. Moe knew their busyness was an act. They had it out for the manager.

"Is he new here?" Moe asked Dorothy.
"About two weeks. I thought he was going to work out."

Moe was an impulse person. The impulse he had now was to scream at Dorothy, "Help the bastard." But he saw a slight smile on her face as she needlessly rearranged the used dishes in her busbox. He watched her stack dishes and collect silverware and occasionally look up over the counter checking to see what the other waitresses were busying themselves with. She rinsed a handi-wipe and cleaned the counter in front of some customers that had just sat down. She moved slowly. The other waitresses kept looking to Dorothy. Moe knew Dorothy was behind the slowdown. Moe sat on his hands. His impulse was to grab Dorothy and shake her like a rug. Moe never succumbed to impulse.

Occasionally a waitress went to the pick up window and took a few plates away. She would soon be back to have the meal reheated. The cooks were yelling at the manager from behind the plates. He turned toward their voices and then back to the dining room looking from one waitress to the next. His eyes followed them as they served water and coffee. Moe watched the manager's eyes dart around the restaurant. The face around the eyes began to change. The
eyes calmed first. Then the rest of the manager's expression changed as if an invisible Hollywood makeup man was working on it. The tightness that scowled his eyes and pushed his lips tightly together relaxed. He even began to smile. The waitresses sensed a change. They looked to the pick up window more often. They looked to Dorothy who stood still and shrugged her shoulders in response to their wide eyed question.

The manager called Dorothy. This time without the edge of panic in his voice. He called her as if the restaurant was running smoothly. He called her as if there were no question that she would pick up her order. Dorothy asked Moe if he wanted more coffee. Moe didn't answer. He dug his hands deeper under his thighs. The manager picked out three plates from the stacks in the window. He held them out toward Dorothy. She made no move in his direction. The plates crashed to the floor. The restaurant became quiet. All heads turned to the manager. He had two more plates in his hands.

"Syd."

The waitress Syd looked to Dorothy. She made no move
to the manager. The manager's hands went limp and the plates fell. He retrieved two more from the window. He called their waitress. She walked across the dining room and took the plates without looking at Dorothy.

Slowly the other waitresses broke rank and picked up their orders. They were soon running in an effort to make up for the inconvenience they had caused their customers, probably hoping to revive the chance of getting tipped. Dorothy and Syd replaced their orders for the five meals on the floor. The manager made a list of the wasted food and broken plates. Moe figured it would come out of their tips or pay.

The restaurant was alive again. People were coming and going. The air was filled with more conversations than the ear could handle. Moe ordered a second cup of coffee. It was delivered quicker than the first. A mounted policeman passed the restaurant without being noticed by Dorothy.

The manager's back was to the restaurant again. He was calling orders in to the kitchen and calling waitresses to pick them up as soon as they were put in the window. He barely had the pickle and cole slaw on the plate when the
waitresses were at his side.

Twice Moe began to get up. He had wanted to walk over to the manager and shake his hand. Twice he had resisted the impulse. Instead, he didn't leave a tip.

But now Moe was through with the New York Times and Manhattan agencies and overpriced hamburger lunches. He left the Y and headed for the Desert Breeze Diner. In his pocket was an index card he had taken from the bulletin board at the supermarket. The card offered a position as a cook on the midnight to eight shift. Moe knew the card, unfortunately, would be no hoax.
CHAPTER 3

The Desert Breeze diner was set back off the road like an old southern mansion. Closer to the road, standing like two guardposts flanking the Desert Breeze were two fast food restaurants. One chicken and the other meat. At one time the diner's colors were so bright that people had to turn their heads away when a strong sun reflected off of it. Over the years the cheap paint had faded. What was once a neon red, toned down to pink. The blue turned soft aqua and the green looked no brighter than the yellow of a faded bruise. The change of colors brought more business to the Desert Breeze. People that had once been afraid to enter a place their subconscious likened to an electronics plant now came in. They were tentative at first but eventually the word spread that some had gone in and come out again feeling pretty much the same.
The Desert Breeze also prospered from the closing of both fast food restaurants. The meat place, it was discovered was selling something less than the kind of meat they were licensed to sell. Around town people started referring to the Chicken Palace as the Perscription Palace. Now the Desert Breeze had no immediate competition and plenty of parking space.

Moe Goldman had never been in the Desert Breeze and before all the publicity about its two neighbors, (the events happened in the same month), he had never heard of it. He stood on the sidewalk looking at the diner trying to formulate a first impression. Behind him was Hempstead Turnpike. It was the busiest road in town. It began somewhere in Queens and continued eastward through all of Nassau county. Moe had never travelled farther than East Meadow on it, but it could be that the road went through Suffolk County also and ended with the ocean at the tip of Long Island.

The closest corner to the Desert Breeze was the corner of Hempstead Turnpike and Nassau Boulevard. It was a
busy corner with six gas stations. There was one next to the Desert Breeze if you didn't count the closed chicken place which was between them. There was no barrier separating the diner from the gas station. People could drive through one to the other. It was a good business arrangement.

The corner of Hempstead Turnpike and Nassau Boulevard was the kind of intersection people tried to avoid using because it was so difficult to get through. But the reason if was such a busy intersection was because it was hard to avoid. It went where the people wanted to go.

One mile south on Nassau Boulevard was the high school. Travelling north on the boulevard was the most convenient way to get to Long Island's North shore. It was also the most convenient way for the people on the North shore to get to the South shore. West Hempstead was not on any shore. It was right in the middle of the county. It took just as long to get to the north as it did to the south. The Desert Breeze had a perfect location. Armed with his index card Moe walked into the Desert Breeze for his first time.

Although Moe had just come in from a bright summer
morning he had to stand still a few moments inside the Desert Breeze to let his eyes adjust to the dazzling lighting. It's quite possible, Moe thought that the Desert they are referring to is the one Las Vegas is in. His pupils closed down and took in the Desert Breeze.

The tables and seats alternated sand brown and scorched rock gray. At the corner of each booth were deep brown coat racks with kelly green coathooks. It took Moe a while to realize the hooks were supposed to look like leaves. The diner seated eighty-two people at booths, thirty at tables and thirty-two at the counter. Each booth had a small juke box with a small potted cactus on top. Most New York roadside diners were Greek owned, but not the Desert Breeze. There weren't any Greek selections in the juke box. Moe sat down in a booth near the door. A waitress with strawberry red hair dropped a menu down on the table. She slided a pencil out from behind her ear and took a check pad from the front of her apron. She was in her mid forties. Moe had just opened the menu.

"Do you know what you want yet?"

"I'd like a Coke."
"Yes."

"You'll have to sit at the counter. You gotta order something to eat to sit here."

"But you're not busy."

"Those are the rules."

Moe was comfortable. His seat was scorched rock gray, but very comfortable.

"How about if I look at the menu for something to eat and you bring me the Coke to drink while I look?"

"Rules are rules."

The waitress took her menu and walked back to the coffee and danish she was eating at waitress station number one.

Moe sat down at the counter. The back of the chair was too straight. It was hard to relax. A second waitress gave Moe his second menu and asked for his order.

"What would you like?"

"I'd like to sit at that booth and drink a Coca Cola."

"So, what's stopping you?"

Moe pointed to the waitress station a few tables down from the end of the counter.

"Her. Says it's against the rules. She says I have to
Moe's second waitress took a more authoritative stance and renewed her grip on her pencil. She began to write and looked up at Moe.

"Would you like a pickle with your order sir? No extra charge."

"Yes that would be fine."

"Would you please step around to that booth and have a seat. I'll see that your waitress brings you your order."

"Thank you."

"Not at all."

Head waitress, Moe thought. They're always the most loyal. The first waitress emerged from behind the station with a Coke and brought it over to Moe. Moe thanked her but she left without speaking to him. He finished the Coke before he realized she hadn't brought him the pickle.

At the cash register a moustached Puerto Rican man was sitting on a stool eating after dinner mints from a glass bowl with a plastic tree growing from its bottom. Moe put thirty cents and his check on the counter next to the mints. The man didn't look up.
"Excuse me. I'd like to see the manager."

"I dee manager."

"Oh."

"And he dee otra manager." The small wiry manager pointed across the dining room at a large man smoking a cigarette and reading a newspaper. "What dee matter?"

"I'd like a job." Moe showed him the index card.

"You want dee otra manager." The smaller, once again, pointed to the larger. Moe nodded his thanks and walked across the diner. The manager at the cash register rang up Moe's Coke and went back to the mints. He was picking out and eating the pink ones.

"Excuse me, are you the manager?"

The man looked up from his paper. "Yes."

"I'd like to apply for a job." Once again Moe showed the index card.

Moe Goldman was twenty-four years old. He had never gone to college. No one had ever asked him if he was planning or wanted to go. He had thought about it, but no one had asked him, so he kept it to himself. He had worked at Yitzman's Kosher Deli a long time. Everyone must have
figured that Yitzman's was all Moe ever needed. His guidance counselor, the principal and the English teacher he got along so well with; they all came into the deli and said, "Hi Moe, what's good today?" Nothing ever changed at Yitzman's, but Moe always gave a different answer. If ever he was angry with one of them he'd recommend the rolled beef. Moe hated rolled beef.

Yitzman had never paid Moe more than minimum wage. But he paid it off the books. Moe's salary had gone up whenever the minimum did. He gave most of his money to his mother. But when all the kids his age packed up and went to college, he wanted to go too. He had asked Yitzman for a raise.

"A raise? Do you know how much I'm saving for you already? Do you know how I'm risking my neck so you don't get robbed blind by taxes? Not to mention social security and the chunk they take every week of your life. And if you're lucky enough to live past sixty, they give you back enough to stay poor with."

Yitzman then had placed one hand on his heart and the other on his forehead, stumbled backwards onto one of the deli's slight wooden chairs, spread his legs wide, tossed
his head back as far as the front of his neck would allow, and talked to God.

"Have you ever worked in a restaurant?" the manager asked.

Moe had spent each morning pushing and pressing, carefully watching the tips of his fingers as he slid pastrami after pastrami and corned beef after corned beef into the blade of the slicing machine. Before Moe started working out his right arm was noticeably larger than his left. Every morning Irv Yitzman would pick up a piece of the red and white meat and tear it in two.

"I hope dis is not goingk into the lean pile Moe. Yes?"

"No."

"Good boy."

Before leaving Moe and his slicing machine, Irv would fidget with the slice dial; first making it a fraction smaller, then larger throwing it way up to seven and then down, leaving it at the same setting Moe had it on, two and a quarter.

"Yes, I sliced pastrami."

"Anything else?"

"Corned beef."
The day manager wasn't impressed with Moe's experience.

"Slicing pastrami may be nothing much, but corned beef, hoo boy, now that's another story. Corned beef takes a lot of skill and patience. The grain always switches direction. You've got to be on the ball. Without a carefully trained eye the grain could switch direction and you wouldn't even notice. It doesn't change gradual. One slice it could be fine and the next, bingo, you've wasted a slice. That's a quarter ounce of waste right there. And that can add up."

Almost word for word as Yitzman had told him so many times.

"A good corned beef slicer can handle anything."

"We buy our meats already sliced and portioned. Can you work a sandwich board?"

"Just tell me how you want them made."

The first waitress carefully watched Moe as he spoke with the manager. She watched for Moe's finger to point at her. It wasn't until the manager gave Moe an application to fill out that she relaxed. But even so, she kept on her guard. He might tell the manager anyway to get on his good side. She
stayed visible. She wiped down the tables and even the seats. She wouldn't feel safe until Moe left the diner. She had been working at the Desert Breeze for two years and had never cleaned the glass on the juke boxes. Today she did. She wiped their chrome sides and under the cacti. If she could have watered them she would have.

The head waitress watched her. She collected all the plastic coated menus and gave them to the waitress with a sponge and told her to wipe them down. She had finished only half when Moe and the manager shook hands and then she stopped. Not once had either of them looked in her direction. She felt safe again. She brought a cup of coffee to the manager and he thanked her. False alarm. She went back to station number one and ate a bowl of chocolate pudding.
On his way home from the Desert Breeze and wherever else Moe spent the early afternoon, he stopped at my store, Katz' Liquid Spirits. He bought a half gallon of Concord Grape wine. I keep a bottle in the refrigerator for him and charge him the same as I did the first bottle he bought from me years ago. He won't take it for free.

My store is just off the corner of Hempstead Avenue. Walking on the avenue toward my store there is a bakery, a candy store, then a hardware store and then a deli. On the corner of Hempstead Avenue and Elm, that's the street my store is on, is a bar. The next store front down is always changing purposes and has smokey white windows. I don't think that whatever went on there was illegal, but it does make a person wonder. Once it was a Republican headquarters. That was good for business. Then is my store. There aren't any spaces between the stores starting with the bakery and
ending with me. We have a brick front in common and apartments on top. The bakery owns the apartments, but not the stores. The people that rent upstairs have generally been decent and quiet types. I live in my store in two rooms in the back.

My name is Leon Katz. I'm sixty-two years old. I immigrated to America from Poland forty-seven years ago in 1930. I was just fifteen then. My parents owned a small store in Warsaw. There they sold breads and herbs and spices. When times made it hard for a person to live in Poland and be Jewish, my parents sold everything they could and put me on a boat to America.

I have always been a dreamer. I didn't study much books like the other boys in Warsaw. I played and made believe I was other people than I was. I used to overhear my parents and their friends tell wonderful stories about America. Some people had relatives who lived in the big cities like New York and Chicago. They ate in fine restaurants and drove their own cars. They went to picture shows. There was money everywhere, they used to write. Some even said the big avenues in New York were littered with money.
All a person had to do was pick it up. I used to dream about America in my bed at night. Sometimes I couldn't fall asleep because I was too anxious for the dreams to begin.

My parents came with me to the boat. They left their store in my uncle's care while they were gone. I had never travelled before and was excited like any young man would be. I didn't realize that I was not merely travelling, I was saying goodbye. When the boat's departure was delayed for two hours I wanted to untie the lines and push it off myself. My parents were fussing with me and telling me things. But I hardly heard them. We had no relatives in America. I was in a hurry to be there and see picture shows and be free.

At last with one final bellow from the boat's stack, we were moving. The stack filled the air with black smoke. The wind blew the smoke inland. As we got farther away the smoke thinned and I could see nothing but ocean. I got sick a few hours later and stayed that way almost the whole trip. I couldn't keep any food down. I spent most of my time in the front of the boat watching, wanting to be the first to see the statue of New York. I met a boy on the boat. He
was going to Chicago to stay with his uncle. The more he spoke of his uncle the more I could see he didn't want to go. I wanted him to stay in New York with me but when we got to New York the crowd separated us. I didn't see him again for many years. One day I saw an advertisement in a newspaper announcing the opening of Yitzman's Kosher Deli. That was my friend from the boat, Irv Yitzman.

I met a man in Brooklyn, New York. He took me home with him and gave me a place to sleep and a job. He and his wife were kind to me. From the day I met him I never wanted for food or a place to sleep.

One night I awoke crying from a dream. In it I saw my parents saying goodbye to me at the boat. My mother was tugging at the rope around my bag making sure it was secure. My father kept saying, "Be a man Leon. Be a good man Leon. And above all Leon, be your own man." I barely heard him then. I was looking all around me wondering which direction was America. That night I awoke from my dream I saw my parents' faces when the crowd pushed me out from their embraces. I saw my mother stretching her arm to me for one last touch. Maybe I could have reached back and brushed her hand
with my fingers. But I didn't try. I had wanted my trip to begin. When I finally turned to wave to them I couldn't find them in the crowd. My parents were dressed like everyone else and I couldn't find them in the crowd.

That night when I awoke crying from my dream, I lit a lamp and sat on the floor next to my bed. I didn't even have a photograph of my parents. I sharpened a pencil with the knife I used for opening boxes. I ripped off a piece of cardboard from the pile of flattened boxes that were stacked in the corner of my room which was also the storeroom. I leaned over the smooth brown piece of cardboard and drew my parents. I drew my mother securing my bag. I drew my father saying, "Be a man Leon. Be a good man Leon. And above all Leon, be your own man." I drew my father's lips round forming the word own.

I put the picture in my drawer under my shirts. I only took them out at special times. Years later, when I heard about the camps, I took them out and hoped they were dead. From them on I no longer thought of my parents as still living.
Moe Goldman never really wanted my friendship and I guess when you get right down to it, we are not really friends. I like him and for some reason he trusts me. He never reapproaches my questions. We always have good conversations. Sometimes he would become silent and come back later on a different subject.

I'm proud of Moe and the man he has become. He's a good man. Nobody would be able to say different of him once they got to know him. Moe grew up without a father. What happened to his father is not important. Moe wanted to know, but didn't want anyone to tell him. It was sometimes a game he'd play, asking questions that didn't seem to have nothing to do with anything. Then all of a sudden he'd get this look on his face. His eyes would stare ahead at the wall behind me. They would jerk horizontally just to the left and right of center like they were punching data into a computer. His mouth would screw up pushing his lips out like they were puckering from a lemon. After, he'd lean back in his chair and apologize for not paying attention. When he'd do that, I knew
he was putting information together about his father. I could usually tell just by the questions and would be extra careful when I answered. His mother never understood what he was doing and gave him a lot of information.

Moe had always been tall for his age. Full grown he's six-two. Everyone expected him to be good at basketball but he never played much. He never played any sport for too long a time. He would just get good at one and then switch to something else. Finally he found a sport that makes him feel good, that he can do all by himself. It seems like just a lot of hard work to me.

I am not a religious man. Irv Yitzman was ashamed of that and hoped to change me. But now Irv's dead. Irv was the oldest member of the temple able to walk, talk and work. The congregation honored him by giving him a seat on the pulpit. Every Friday night Irv sat up there next to the rabbi. He used to say the prayers over the Torah.

I only went for the big holidays. I went for Irv's sake, lest I be the cause of his death. And I went for the sake of the congregation so they could say, "Look, there's poor old
Mr. Katz." My eyes are very farsighted and my ears only hear what a failing hearing aid tells them. I can't hear much wherever I sit, so I sit back far enough so I can see. Whenever I looked at Irv sitting in his chair next to the rabbi's, he would be looking at me winking.

When Irv died he willed me his prayer book with instructions that I should use it as often as I could. He left everything else to his wife. One other thing he left me was that his death made me the temple's oldest able man.

I hoped no one would pick up on that, but a week after Irv passed away the rabbi informed me that he, and the congregation, would be honored, if I would, in Irv's memory, fill his seat on Friday nights. I humbly declined claiming arthritis. Out of respect for the rabbi's strong beliefs I couldn't tell him what I used to tell Irv.

"Friday is my best night. I stay open until nine-thirty. Sometimes business is so good I can't get to the door until ten o'clock to shut it."

"A few dollars should keep you from attending service? You should be ashamed," Irv would say.

"If it wasn't for Friday night business I couldn't pay
my bills and my rummy loses."

"So you'll owe me a little."

"Irving, do you want me to say what you don't want to hear?"

"No. I want you to say you'll close on the shabbos and come to service."

"I can't."

"Why not? For yourself it would do some good. For me, for Him."

"I do it often enough for you already Irv. For me I don't need it. And as far as He is concerned, I don't think He goes either."

"You shouldn't say such things."

"You shouldn't make me. If God appreciated all your Friday nights and the Friday nights of your father, He would have said thank you already."

This conversation always made Irv nervous. He'd wring his hands together and look as if he were about to take a blow from a rolled up newspaper.

"You shouldn't be talking like that," Irv would say, "Someday we'll need Him. There won't be any more time."
"That day already came Irv, and he looked down at us and spit."

So Moe came into my store and asked me how I am and have I got a cold bottle of wine for him. Moe was wearing his gray suit. I don't know what it looked like in the morning, but when he came into my store it looked about as good on him as a worm does on a hook. A big body like Moe's can wear a suit down fast.

Moe always wears his hair a little over his ears and parted on the side with the front wave crossing his forehead in a slight swoop a little off center. When he needs a haircut, the swoop digs down to his right eyebrow. Today his hair looked as if it had been hurt. Where it came over the collar it was wet and clung together in sticky looking wedges that showed his scalp in between. His swoop was also wet, as was the hair over his ears. Without the graceful upward arch of the swoop, his hair was stringy and hung down past his eyebrows.

I was glad the wine was cold. I gave Moe the bottle and asked him to take off his coat and tie and come in the
back and watch the news with me. He said, "Sure Mr. Katz," and came into the back.

Moe sat in his chair, the one with the soft cushions and high arms, and poured us both a cup of wine. He finished his first cup and poured another as I expected he would knowing how hot and tired he looked.

Like I said before, I'm hard of hearing and my hearing aid doesn't work very well. My chair is as far away from the television as it can be and still be in the same room. I have to turn the TV's volume way up because my hearing aid can't go past number three. I think Moe likes the chair with the high arms because he can sit in it and hold his hands over his ears and still be comfortable. He's good to me and tells me the volume doesn't bother him.

When Moe's with me there's no problem, but otherwise I can't hear the customer bells on the door inside. I attached a good strong piece of twine to the doorknob and ran it to my chair. When I watch TV I hold the string tight. If a customer comes through the door the twine goes slack and I get up.

Moe once told me that I looked like my body was tired
but my mind was too awake to let it sleep. I thought that was a good description. I have three sweaters that I rotate daily. Blue, green and brown. The colors are slightly faded, but the material's strong. There's not a hole or a patch in any of them. They fit well with the sleeves folded at the cuffs.

We sat drinking wine and watching the program that was on before the news. Moe's jaw muscles were stirring, revolving in his cheeks. His eyes never waivered from the television screen and his eyelids blinked often. I'd seen people look like that before. Moe was trying to crush all thought from his mind. I interrupted during a commercial.

"Moe, you went to the Y this morning?" I asked.

"Yeah, sure, I always go."

"What do you do there Moe?"

"I lift weights. You know that."

I pinched Moe's arm. You're not strong enough now Moe?"

"I don't know. I like it."

"Doesn't it hurt? When I was young I too played with weights sometimes, Moe. I know it hurts."

"It doesn't hurt me. Not like it used too. It's not
pain anymore. It's the way I spend some mornings."

Moe looked at me, trying to picture me, old Mr. Katz, pushing weights. The only Leon he knows is the Leon of three alternating sweaters with a wire going from his left ear to a pocket underneath the sweater. But I knew he believed me. He sees me as different than the other older people he knows. His mother, Irv Yitzman and the rest all speak accented English. I don't. This separates me more from them and Moe can talk to me. The man that gave me the job when I first got to America taught me English. He told me, "If you going to live in America, you'd better sound like an American." He taught me English the way Americans speak it.

I could see Moe's eyes wonder what this young Leon Katz looked like. He probably pictured brown hair. Moe looked at me. I watched his eyes collect signs. He saw the age around my eyes and mouth, but he saw youth between every wrinkle and fold. One time his mother told him that every wrinkle on a person's face stood for a suffering in their lives. "Just like the scar on my shoulder mommy?" he had asked her. "Yes, just like the scar on your shoulder."
One of the bodybuilders at the Y once told Moe that it was a shame he had such a deep scar. It ruined the symmetry of his whole left side. Moe told him to go to hell. Moe always rubbed his shoulder when he thought about the scar.

"Moe what do you think of when you lift weights?"

"What do you mean?"

"You must think of something Moe?"

"Nothing. Just lift the weights higher."

"What do you think of to make you lift the weights higher?"

"Nothing. Why are you asking me all this?"

"Moe you're the only young person that bothers to spend time with me. Everyone else is old like me. I like to talk. That's all.

"What do you think of in the Y? Do you think of some work you'd like to do? Your mother? Some dream you have tucked away? You think of a girl maybe?"

"I don't think of anything Mr. Katz."

"Don't get up Moe. The news is on. Won't you stay and watch the news with me?"

"Sure."
Moe got up to close the venetian blinds. It was the time of the summer when the lowering sun glared onto the TV. In a week the sun would be higher and wouldn't interfere with news time.

We passed the bottle back and forth. We didn't speak during the news or commercials until the half empty bottle made it impossible for me to sit on my thoughts. Moe was watching the TV knocking his knees together. One of his hands was tucked under his thigh and the other was holding his cup.

"Moe you know you and I haven't talked religion since your bar mitzvah. That is good. A long time ago I found out there isn't much to talk about. But that Moe, is another story. One that I will tell you some day, just so you hear it right. I want you should know truth Moe, only truth.

"But where was I? Yes. Moe, to run is not a bad thing to do. But there is something about the Jewish people Moe. We don't know when to walk and when to run. We are a sad history of people that walked when they should have run and run when we should have stood still."

"I'm not running anywhere."

"Good."
"Are you telling me I should?"

"No, no Moe. I'm not telling you to do anything. I'm just talking to you and telling you what I know."

The news was over. He offered me more wine, then screwed the cap on to the bottle. I was in the middle of telling him something I'd been waiting to tell him a long time, but Moe didn't know and so he left shutting the door tightly behind him. I knew Moe would think about what I said. Maybe he'd want to talk more about it next time. Then, maybe, I can tell him the rest.
Moe finished the wine and threw the bottle in a garbage can on Elm Street. The street was crowded with shade and chestnut trees. Each house on the street sat back behind the trees and short front lawns that were lined with bushes and flowers. Nothing had much color that day, it was too hot. In the shade the houses all looked the same, but actually they were built before contractors became lazy. Each house was different from the next.

People sat on their shaded lawns in folding chairs with colorful plastic webbing. Almost everyone was drinking from tall glasses filled mostly with ice. The sidewalks were cracked by the great slow force of the chestnut tree roots. The air surrounding the houses smelled differently from house to house. Some families were cooking their dinners outside over charcoal briquettes like civilized pioneers. Moe passed these houses trying to distinguish
the meal that was being cooked by the smoke. The smoke seemed to stay within the bounds of the cooker's front lawn, curling its way along the house, weaving between the branches of the trees. There was no wind. Each smoke had its own smell: Hamburgers, steak, chickens with rich sauces made from ketchup, onions, Worcestershire sauce, sweet vinegar, pepper, salt and other spices that would stick between your teeth, hours later reminding you of the meal too quickly gone.

No one sat on the lawns of houses that had air conditioning. Their lawns had definite lines between grass and cement, and bark chips in the flower beds. They reminded Moe of the houses of some of his school friends whose mothers' wouldn't let them play in a clean playroom. The doors to these houses were shut tight and their windows closed forever to the outdoors. Moe walked faster past these houses making sure to step on their poodle trimmed lawns as he went by.

There wasn't much traffic on Elm Street. The few cars that passed Moe turned into a driveway or down one of the two smaller streets that branched off from Elm.
After Elm Street was Maple Drive. The houses on Maple Drive were richer looking than those on Elm. These houses were among the first built in Weststead. Their lawns were also finely manicured but were large enough to support both trees and shrubs, and flowers and bush gardens. Some driveways were curved and others ran back behind the house to a garage. The owner of the bakery lived on Maple Drive.

At the end of the Drive was Wood Avenue. It was a main street, not as busy as Hempstead Turnpike or Hempstead Avenue though. There were a few tired looking trees along the banks of this avenue, tired from constant trimmings given to it by passing buses and trucks. These trees grew taller and straighter than the trees on the side streets. It seemed as though they stretched high to peek over the tops of houses at the more peaceful existance their brothers and sisters were able to lead on streets like Elm, Maple, McKinly and Trail.

Moe crossed the street quickening his pace against the heat of the shadeless avenue. He thought about Mr. Katz. Can't a person lift weights, he thought. Sure I think of things, it's hard not to. And that speech about
running. Sometimes I worry about old Mr. Katz, he thought.
He'd been acting peculiar lately, like something's eating
at him. Moe hoped he wasn't getting sick.

Moe walked faster down the few more blocks to his
home. He always walked fast as if something was breathing
down his neck. He was usually able to out run it, but this
time no matter how fast he walked he couldn't shake the feeling.
Moe's mother looked up from her crossword puzzle when Moe came in. It was six-thirty. Past supper time. She had left cheese blintzes and sour cream on the table for him. She got up from writing a twelve letter down, and ran the short distance to the table. She pulled out Moe's chair and rearranged the silverware on his napkin. Moe didn't say anything to her. He walked quickly to the bathroom. His splash was long. His mother knew he had been drinking with Mr. Katz.

The kitchen table was gray linoleum with black metal legs. It had two extra leaves that were never used. The sour cream Mrs. Goldman had taken out for Moe a hour and a half ago was warm. She put it back in the refrigerator and scooped a fresh bowl from the two gallon container. She also spooned out a dish of the applesauce she had made the day before and poured Moe a glass of milk. She
had already eaten, but took a banana for herself anyway. She patted her rounded midriff and said to herself, "What difference could one puny banana make." She squeezed the fruit before pulling its skin off.

The toilet flushed. Mrs. Goldman stopped wiping the white enamel refrigerator and listened for the running water of the bathroom sink. She didn't hear it. Moe came in and sat down. He dumped three scoops of sour cream on his blintzes and a spoonful of applesauce directly into his mouth from the serving dish.

"How are you today?" he asked his mother who was sitting across the table from him.

"Did you wash your hands?"

"Yes."

"Let me heat up your blintzes for you."

"I like them cold."

"And how is Mr. Katz?"

"Fine."

"The weather man said today was the hottest day of the summer so far."

"I heard."
"You took with you your transistor?"

"I watched the news with Mr. Katz."

"Oh that was nice Moe." Mrs. Goldman shifted her weight from her right hip to her left. "Do you know who's home from college..."

Moe wasn't listening. He was hurt and frustrated by his mother's refusal to talk about her husband, his father. This time he would not yell, he told himself. He interrupted whatever it was she was saying.

"I realize he was your husband, but he was my father and I deserve to know. Do you hear me? Who was my father? Was he just some poor schmuck who didn't get nothing from life and died young? What was it, some horrible disease? Was he a criminal? Is he in jail somewhere for eating babies? Tell me God damn it. Tell me." Until the last few words he had controlled his voice, but it shook from the restraint.

Mrs. Goldman got up from the table and turned her back on Moe. She was crying. She tried to think of what she could change the subject to. What had she been talking about before this? She couldn't remember. Her mind was not able to focus, to clamp down on a thought. She walked over to the stove
keeping her back to Moe who stayed at the table. He had swung around in his chair and had said the last half of what he had been rehearsing to say since the morning to his mother's back. Mrs. Goldman reached into a drawer beside the stove and took out a wooden spoon. She had soup on a burner that still had a few hours to go. She skimmed the top of the soup. Then she brought some to her mouth to taste. It was cold. The shock of not finding it hot startled her and at once she was able to think. She turned the gas back on and struck a wooden match against the striker Moe had made for her in the cub scouts. She adjusted the flame under the pot and skimmed the soup some more. The activity helped her regain control. She turned around to Moe. The tears had dried. Only her eyes were red, but that didn't matter. Eyes always get red.

"The soup got cold. I thought I had the burner on. I tell you I'm losing my head. I thought it might be ready for you to have a little before you go to sleep. Now I'll have to get up special in the night to shut it off." She moved a few steps toward the table. "Why don't you finish your dinner Moe, it'll... Ha, did you hear me? I almost said it'll get cold. It was cold when you started." She sat back
down in her chair laughing softly and muttering to herself. Her cheeks were a little flushed, embarrassed by her two mistakes.

Moe drank some milk. He cut a blintze in thirds and ate it. He was sorry he yelled. A person didn't have to yell to make himself heard. She was through laughing at herself. She looked at Moe wondering if the topic had been dismissed. Moe ate another blintze to make her happy. He didn't taste either of them. The guilt left a bitter taste in his mouth.

"Ma, why don't you go out sometimes?"

"I go out enough Moe. I go to the temple on the holidays. I go to the market once a week. I go out plenty."

"I mean go out some place real. Like a movie. How long has it been since you saw a movie? I'll take you tonight."

Moe said this with a flash of determination that he knew she would destroy.

"I see television. That's enough movies for me."

"That's garbage. I'll take you to a real movie. One good enough to get four stars in the Daily News." Moe could tell that impressed her for a moment. He decided to stay on
the attack a while longer.

"They cost too much money."

"Not here. Not compared to what they get in the city. Sometimes it cost five dollars a person there. Sometimes more, I think."

"No?"

"Yes."

"That's nerve boy." Mrs. Goldman was shaking her head not believing any one would pay that much. "What's to see that they can charge five dollars for?"

"There's a lot of good movies coming out now. They get better every week."

"Moe, you think you could get in that business? Five dollars." She was still shaking her head. She had learned something new. Everytime she thought about it she would shake her head and say, "Five dollars."

"They don't cost that much here on the Island. The most it ever goes is three-fifty. They usually cost two-fifty. There's some theaters around that still only charge a dollar."

"C'mon. Even years ago you thought a dollar wasn't bad. You went then."
"Save your money Moe."

"I can afford it. We've got plenty of money in the bank."

"Save it Moe. We don't have that much. Someday, you'll be glad for not throwing your money away. Someday you'll have a wife and she'll want something. You'll be happy you didn't spend the money before on something foolish."

She had won. She knew it and Moe knew it. He went back to his dinner. Talking with his mother always made him either hungry or angry. This one had done both. He had been angry before. Now it was time to eat.

"Oh Moe," Mrs. Goldman sat down again, taking her position across the table. "I remember what I started to tell you. Guess who's home from college? You'll never guess. Lisa Ellen. Lisa Ellen Markowitz. And you know what her mother told me? She told me that one of the first things Lisa Ellen did was to ask how you are."

"She didn't find a husband at college?"

"A piece of blintze fell out of Moe's mouth when he spoke. He picked it up with his fingers and put it back. He quickly followed with a forkful of sour cream.

"Isn't that nice of her? The girl goes far away to college,
all the way to Jersey, and then, because she's so dedicated, takes an extra class that keeps her away another month and a half. Then she comes all the way home and the first thing she does is ask how my Moe is. And do you know what class she took so far away? Home Economics. And when she finished she asked how you are."

"That's nice. Is there any more sour cream?"

Mrs. Goldman walked to the refrigerator humming, "Here Comes the Bride."

"Will you cut it out?"

"Cut what out? Oh I didn't realize."

Moe went into the living room and turned on the television. "Moe I got your sour cream."

"I'm not hungry."
Moe laid on the couch and draped his feet over its billowy arm. The couch was his territory in his mother's house, as was the gym on the outside. When Irv Yitzman died, Moe slept on the couch every night for a week. When he came home from cub scouts on father and son nights he'd slept on the couch. The couch was not a conscious retreat, but it was where Moe went when things were not right. He was on it now to keep his mother from annoying him. She had learned that the couch was Moe's and left him alone on it. It was as if the couch was an established home base like in the children's game of tag or hide-and-go-seek.

Mrs. Goldman was busy in the kitchen. The kitchen was her couch, but not quite so demilitarized. She enjoyed company as long as it was pleasant. There were few decorations in her kitchen. Aesthetic items were limited to the dining area. These she kept to a painful minimum. There was a
a salt and pepper shaker shaped like a pair of alligators that Mrs. Markowitz had given her after a trip to Florida.

Every year she brought something back for Mrs. Goldman. One year's gift went into the garbage and the new year's gift went on the telephone table. Mrs. Goldman had changed her phone from a desk model to a wall because she was allowed a longer cord if it went on the wall. She kept the table in the kitchen for the phone books and notepaper and Mrs. Markowitz' yearly gift. Every year Mrs. Markowitz had gone to Florida with her husband. They went two months out of each year, January and February. Mr. Markowitz died exactly a year to the day before Irv Yitzman. They had never liked each other. Yet, they died on the same day of different years and were buried in the same cemetery. They would be neighbors for eternity, unless of course, when the book was reviewed and the points tallied, God sent them in different directions.

Mrs. Markowitz was afraid to die. She was afraid what her husband would do to her when they met again. She once described the scene she dreamed to Mrs. Goldman.
"Rachael Goldman don't you worry a minute. While I was in my dream I looked for you all over hoping not to find you around. Good news--I didn't see you. But to make sure, I checked all around and no one else had seen you. Maybe you got there unnoticed, but you believe this, I asked a lot of people. You weren't there.

"So anyway, these angels came and held me by the arms and flew me up to the clouds. On the way they were singing. They sounded so handsome, like the cantor when he sings Rosh Hashanah songs. I tell you, not that I thought I done anything so bad while I was alive, but I was glad those angels were taking me up instead of you know where. Not for a moment I thought they wouldn't. I've never did something so bad where they should want to take me down. You know where.

I wasn't up in Heaven five minutes when Herbie came up to me. He looked good. So good I began to cry. He hugged me until I stopped. Then he looked at me and said, 'Don't worry. Me and Irv are friends now. We didn't have any differences worth speaking about. Now we're friends.' It was true Rachael. Irv was right behind Herbie waiting to
welcome me to Heaven."

"Did you get a chance to look around and see what Heaven looked like?"

"No. I woke right up. I was so happy Herbie wasn't mad at me."

"Well, then what are you worrying about?"

"It was just a dream. I might get there and things might not be like they was in the dream."

"Don't you worry." Mrs. Goldman's voice had become serious. Mrs. Markowitz stopped kneading bread dough. She had a lot of respect for Mrs. Goldman's thinking. Except when the conversation was light, just meant for passing time, Mrs. Goldman believed in the truth of what she said. She had thought about things. She could always be held to what she said. "I may not know too much," she said, "But one thing I know for sure. Dreams are the closest thinking to truth a person will ever do." Their conversation had then gone on to other things. Mrs. Markowitz went back to kneading her dough feeling better.

The kitchen was cleaned, but Mrs. Goldman having no where
else to go, emptied the refrigerator and cleaned it again. She was thinking about the movies. She always read the daily newspapers and magazines. It would be nice to go to the movies, she thought. But the thought overwhelmed her. She'd rather think of things she had more control over. She scrubbed the insides of her refrigerator with more intensity. She knew her refrigerator. It had broken down only once in the twenty years she had owned it. And before that someone else had owned it and sweared it was as good as new the day they bought it. Katz checked out the compressor for her and told her to buy it.

Mrs. Goldman wondered how Leon was getting along. She hadn't been to his store in years. Moe says Leon is doing all right but she didn't want to ask him too many questions about Leon. Maybe I'll drop in on him next week, she thought. I've some things I have to talk with him about anyway.

Visiting Leon Katz was a big event for Rachael Goldman. One that took place every other year. It seemed as though after seeing Leon for a few hours she had enough of him to last her almost two years. Then he would slowly creep back
into her head. The urge to see him would grow stronger until one day she would decide to go. Once inside his store she would think of ways to shorten her visit. The last time she visited with Leon she had stayed only four hours.

"Rachael, Rachael. Come in. Have a seat. How are you?"

"I'm fine Leon. How are you?"

"The same. Oh, but you wouldn't know what the same is. I'm fine. Still I don't hear very good. I watch TV, I read books and I talk with friends that stop by. How is Moe?"

"What are you asking me for? You see him more than I do."

"He does little jobs for me. He moves boxes around. He's so strong. Sometimes he waits on customers. I ask him not to, but he seems to enjoy it. He likes to work. That's good."

"He works hard enough by Yitzman."

"I know. Irv tells me Moe works harder than his own two nephews."

"I'll bet he pays his nephews more. Why don't you ask him to give Moe more?"

"Moe wouldn't want me to interfere. You know that."
"So who would tell him?"

"I'll bet Irv would. If there's one thing that gives Irv Yitzman more pleasure than anything else, it's telling someone something they're not supposed to know.

"Rachael, would you like a little wine?"

"What does Moe drink?"

"Concord Grape."

"Manneschevitz?"

"Manneschevitz."

"I'll have some of that please."

"How about something a little more special? You don't visit very often."

"You don't visit at all."

"I have a business to run."

"Since when are you open Sundays?"

"I'm not."

"So?"

"So. You want some of this? It's Chianti. Very good. I drink it sometimes."

"Manneschevitz please."

"Okay. I keep one bottle in the refrigerator cold for
Moe. We can open that one. I'll put another in so he'll have a full bottle when he wants it."

"Such a big bottle?"

"I drink it with him usually."

"Do you drink with all your customers after you sell to them?"

"You know I wouldn't charge Moe, but he won't take it otherwise. If I don't take his money, he walks behind the register and puts it in himself. I don't charge him full price anyway."

"He's a good boy." Mrs. Goldman softened up. "And you've been good to him Leon."

"It's the least I can do."

Mrs. Goldman agreed with that but kept silent. They drank their wine and talked small. After four hours Mrs. Goldman got up and told Leon she had to get dinner started.

"What are you making?"

"A pot roast."

"That's my favorite."

"I know," she answered but did not invite him.
"See you next year," Katz called to her.

"Maybe," she said and then walked along the sidewalk of Elm Street as fast as she could. She didn't notice the trees, or the lawns, or the houses with flowerbeds in front of their cement foundation.

While his mother recleaned the kitchen, Moe lay on the couch. He looked past the television to a painting his father had made. It was all Moe had from his father. He had found it in the basement wrapped in a dusty white sheet. His mother had only said, "Yes, your father painted that one." Moe cleaned it and made a frame and hung it above the television.

The painting was of a man dressed in biblical garb wearing a pair of aviator sunglasses. He was holding a knife slightly angled toward himself. He was standing next to a stone sacrificial altar. On the altar was a baby, naked except for a pair of aviator sunglasses. The altar was on a stage. Both the baby and the man were looking at a woman in the audience. All the seats in the theater were empty except for the one the woman was in. She was sitting facing the stage.
She was also naked, but only her back showed. Her head was turned slightly. She was also wearing aviator sunglasses.

The colors were the subdued tones of a darkened theater. Except the baby. He was painted as if he were in sunlight. The baby was painted with detail unlike any other part of the painting. Sometimes Moe looked at the baby through his stamp collection glass.
"Moe, Moe wake up. Lisa Ellen Markowitz is on the telephone." Mrs. Goldman was dressed in a puffy red quilt robe. She was clutching the two sides together under her breasts with one hand, and violently shaking Moe with the other. Moe had woken on the couch early in the morning and undressed and gone to his bed in his room. "Moe it's seven-thirty in the morning. Wake up already. Lisa Ellen Markowitz is on the telephone waiting to talk to you. I was talking with her mother, Mrs. Markowitz, this morning. About nothing, you know, just talking, you know, about the price of coffee, you know. And while we were talking, me and Mrs. Markowitz, who should walk into their kitchen but Lisa Ellen. She woke up herself. Mrs. Markowitz didn't leave the phone. What did Lisa Ellen do as soon as she woke up? She asked her mother if that wasn't Mrs. Goldman on the other end. Mrs. Markowitz told her it was and Lisa Ellen came on the phone
to say hello to me. And then, one of the first things she did was to ask me is Moe awake? I said I'd see. Come talk to her Moe. Such a nice girl."

"Tell Lisa Ellen Markowitz to go back to sleep. She needs the beauty rest."

"And how do you know Mr. Don Juan? You haven't seen her in years. She don't have no braces no more and she went on a diet while away at her university."

"Junior college."

"Junior schmunior. Her face is all cleared up too."

"What'd she go there for, an education or an overhaul? Will you leave me alone? I'm trying to sleep."

"Aren't you going to the gym?"

"It's Tuesday. I go Monday, Wednesday and Friday."

"You have to look for a job. It's late already."

"I got a job yesterday."

"Oh. And you probably told Mr. Katz all about it. But your own mother? God forbid."

"You better get back to your phone. Miss America is waiting for you."

"And what should I tell her?"
"Ask her if she'll marry me."

"Don't be so sure she would, the way you act."

"Go."

Moe laid back in his bed and pulled the covers to his neck. He looked around the room but there was nothing to look at. His sheets were damp with the morning's heat. He waited in bed until he figured his mother was off the phone. Then he got up and did a few stretching exercises. After, he went into the kitchen.

"Oh wait Mrs. Markowitz. Ida, are you still there? My Moe just got up. Moe say hello to Mrs. Markowitz."

"Hello."

"Hello Moe? This is Mrs. Markowitz. Lisa Ellen's mother. You remember Lisa Ellen. You and she were in high school together. She sat next to you in lunch. She was a sophomore when you were a senior. Remember?"

Mrs. Goldman was sitting at the table slicing a banana into a bowl of cereal. She was smiling and humming to herself. Mrs. Goldman couldn't smile without humming. It was never a recognizable tune, but one with a lot of high flat notes descending into a lot of low flat notes. She paused only
rarely for a few middle range flat notes.

"Yes I remember." Moe sat next to Lisa Ellen once. She was already at the table and talking with a friend of hers. One of Moe's friends was at the same table. Moe sat next to Lisa Ellen so as to sit next to his friend. He had said hi to Lisa Ellen when he sat down. That was it. Hi.

"Well I'm her mother, Mrs. Markowitz. We met a few times. Once at the butcher. And another time I was sitting outside with your mother and you came home from school. Anyway, it's nice to hear your voice after such a long time. Lisa Ellen and I went to the Concord Hotel up in the Catskills for the weekend. Just a mother and daughter get together. And you know we were so lucky, I was just telling your mother, Alan King was giving a show there and we were right near the front. I told your mother I'd call the minute we got back. But we were late and didn't get home until almost midnight. I knew that would be too late to call your mother, so I decided to wait until this morning to call. It was a good thing because your mother said she went to bed a little after ten-thirty. She said you fell asleep on the couch
watching TV. I'm glad I didn't call. I would have woken
the two of you. I'm so glad I waited until this morning.
Sometimes it pays to break a promise. Your mother said
she understood. I knew she would."

Moe wanted to throw the phone on the floor. Mrs.
Goldman sat across the table, in her seat, and sipped her
coffee. She smiled at Moe and hummed low so as not to disturb
his conversation. Moe twisted his ear to show his mother how
Mrs. Markowitz was bending his ear. Mrs. Goldman laughed with
coffee in her mouth and almost choked. She held her hand in
front of her mouth as she tried to stifle her coughing.
When the trauma was over she emerged from behind her hand
smiling and humming.

"Moe did you hear me?"

Moe had hung the phone over the back of his chair. He got
some napkins from the cabinet over the stove for his mother.
When he gave them to her, they laughed together in little
snickers led by Mrs. Goldman, at the private joke they were
sharing. When Moe got back to the phone he acted as if he
had heard her.

"Sure I heard you."
This made Mrs. Goldman laugh again. Moe began to think the whole situation was funny also and waved at his mother to calm down. He didn't want to start laughing while on the phone with Mrs. Markowitz.

"Would you like to speak with Lisa Ellen, she's right here? Wait I'll put her on." Moe had stopped thinking anything was funny. His mother saw the change in his face and also stopped. She went back to her coffee.

"Hello Moe?"

"Hello."

"How are you?"

"Fine."

"That's nice."

"Yes," Moe answered. Then without tone he asked, "How are you?"

"Fine thank you."

"You're welcome."

"Oh. Well, what have you been doing?"

"Looking for work."

"Have you found anything?"

"Yes."
"Where?"

"The Desert Breeze."

"That's nice. What do you do there?"

"Cook."

"What are your hours?"

"Midnight to eight, seven days a week."

"Don't you get a day off?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I don't know."

"That's too bad."

"I guess."

"Yes it is."

"Okay."

"Well it was nice talking with you."

"Yes."

"Bye now and take care."

"Bye."

Moe hung the phone up softly so it wouldn't make any noise. He sat opposite his mother and poured milk into the cereal she had prepared for him. He didn't say anything. She and
Mrs. Markowitz had arranged that telephone rendezvous and now she would have to suffer a little. Mrs. Goldman didn't wait long though.

"How did she sound to you?"

"Great."

"You don't mean that. It didn't sound like a nice conversation to me. Why weren't you nice to her?"

"I didn't want to talk with her."

"You can't be friendly and say hello to the daughter of your mother's friend?"

"Not when I'm forced to."

"It took just as many words for you to be nasty as it would have taken to be nice. Maybe I'm wrong to want to see my son have a nice girl, but that doesn't mean you have to be nasty to every girl I ask you to say hello to."

"Thank you for breakfast."

Moe went to his room. He set his alarm clock for two and went back to sleep. He wanted to call Lisa Ellen back. Now he felt terrible. His mother was right. He could have been nice to her. But if he remembered right, she was the kind of girl that would go on husband shopping trips with her
mother. That was probably what they were doing up in the Catskills, Moe thought. I should have told Mrs. Markowitz that I'm not a doctor and hung up.
CHAPTER 9

Mrs. Markowitz had been standing in front of Lisa Ellen as she spoke to Moe. Her expression was tentative, like someone treading on water. When her eyes met those of her daughter she smiled. Her smile was clearly nervous, as it had been when she invited a young man at the Concord to meet them at the lounge before the Alan King show. Lisa Ellen was with another girl at the pool. Mrs. Markowitz had waited until the other girl swam away to the diving board before telling Lisa Ellen the good news.

"Lisa Ellen. I did you a great favor."

"What's that ma?" Lisa Ellen asked already knowing what was coming.

"I met a nice boy."

"Oh that's so nice. I'll hope you'll be happy."

Mrs. Markowitz smiled at the joke for a moment and then got back to business. "For you. I met a nice boy for you."
"Oh you met a nice boy for me. If you met him for me then I guess I don't have to meet him."

"Don't get smart with me Miss Smarty-Pants. He's going to meet us before the show. At the lounge."

"That's nice."

"That's all you have to say? That's nice? No thank you?"

"Thanks," Lisa Ellen said. And then, "You shouldn't have."

"That's alright. Anything for my daughter."

Lisa Ellen swam to the other side of the pool where her newly found friend was waiting for her.

"What was that about?"

"Oh nothing. My mother's playing pimp again. We have an appointment with Mr. Right tonight. That rhymes doesn't it? Mr. Right tonight."

"Yeah. It would be a good song title."

"In the 1930's maybe." Lisa Ellen's expression changed from mock to serious. "Alice, how long have we known each other?"

"Around four hours I guess."
"That's long enough." Her tone was even more serious now. Alice's tone and mood changed with Lisa Ellen's.

"I would be honored," Lisa Ellen continued, "If you would do me the honor of being my, what do you call the head bridesmaid?"

"Maid of Honor."

"That's right. Thank you. If you would do me the honor, no wait. Change that to pleasure. If you would do me the pleasure of being my maid of honor."

"When's the wedding?"

"Oh I suppose after the Alan King show. There's no sense rushing into this thing."

"I'd be delighted."

"Thank you."

"Not at all. Race you across the pool."

Lisa Ellen was as rude to Mr. Right as Moe was to her. Lisa Ellen, Mrs. Markowitz and Eric Natler met, as planned, in the lounge. The lounge was dimly lit, but light enough to see across the room. Eric had been early and was nursing a drink when they arrived. He rose when they approached the table.
"Eric, this is Lisa Ellen." Mrs. Markowitz made the introduction in such a way that Lisa Ellen expected to hear trumpets fanfare.

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Eric said.

"The pleasure is all mine."

A waitress came over and asked for their order.

"I'll have another ginger ale," Eric said. He looked over to Mrs. Markowitz. "I don't drink alcohol."

Mrs. Markowitz smiled back. Lisa Ellen looked at the mousey man next to her. He was wearing a pin striped suit. It didn't fit him well. His shoulders bunched up from sitting down. The jacket's material was so light that the over padded shoulders hung forward slightly. He wore his hair parted in the middle and over his ears. His nose was big and his eyes were small. To Lisa Ellen he looked like a mouse. Much worse, he acted like a mouse. She could tell when someone agreed to meet her out of niceness to her mother and when they met her out of desperation for a mate. This man with the ginger ale was desperate.

The waitress was waiting for the order.

"Who's paying?" Lisa Ellen asked still looking at Eric.
Eric shot a glance at Mrs. Markowitz whose face he could not read. He sat a little straighter in his seat feeling like the man of the family. He lowered his voice, taking charge. "I'll be paying. You ladies order whatever you want."

"I'll have a daiquiri, Lisa Ellen said. She looked at Eric again. "You'd better make that a double."

"A cup of coffee please," Mrs. Markowitz said.

As they talked, mostly Eric and Mrs. Markowitz, Lisa Ellen had three double daiquiries. When the show started she left them to find Alice.

As soon as Lisa Ellen replaced the receiver on the telephone she turned toward her room.

"What did he say Lisa Ellen? Was he glad talking to you? You were on with him so long. Does he want to see you tonight?"

"Don't you ever do that to me again."

"Do what? He wanted to talk with you."

"He did not."
"Yes he did. He asked me. As I stand here with you."

"Don't hand me that crap."

Mrs. Markowitz spat between her fingers.

"Sha, your father should here you talk." Mrs. Markowitz glanced Heavenward.

"If he were here I wouldn't have to."

"And what is that supposed to mean Miss-Know-It-All?"

"Nothing."

"Don't talk to me like that young lady. Do you hear me?"

Lisa Ellen shut her bedroom door. She locked it just as her mother turned the knob.

"Let me in Lisa Ellen. You're not allowed to lock doors in this house."

Mrs. Markowitz knocked on the door a few times before giving up. Lisa Ellen quietly unpacked her weekend suitcase. She took her birth control pills out of her folded bra and swallowed one without water. She didn't think she would be needing them for a while, but it was better to stay on the routine.

It was a cloudy morning. Lisa Ellen let the room stay dark. If she put the lights on there would be graduation
pictures of her high schools friends that she didn't want to see. She would have to call them sooner or later. She lit a cigarette, stuffed a towel under the door and opened the window. She flicked her ashes into an empty perfume bottle and made a mental note to get an ashtray and some incense. She hated the sticky scent.

Mrs. Markowitz cleaned the bathroom. It was something she rarely did. It wasn't used often enough to become dirtied. The bathroom shared a wall with Lisa Ellen's room. Mrs. Markowitz was trying to listen into Lisa Ellen's room. Lisa Ellen knew it but wondered what her mother expected to hear. There was no telephone in her room, only a jack. The phone was in the kitchen. There was a phone jack in every room in the house, but only one phone. She turned her radio on to give her mother something to listen to.

She had left her clothes in the opened suitcase on the bed while she smoked her cigarette. There wasn't much to put away; a few blouses, skirt, pants, bathing suit, underwear, dress and toiletries. She decided to play a game with the sun. If it didn't come out she would only put away one thing each hour. She didn't have much so one pair of socks would
have to count as two articles. If the sun did come out, she would put it all away quickly and then go outside and do something. She hoped the clouds would be strong. After crushing her cigarette in the corner of the window sill, Lisa Ellen lit another and looked at the clock. It was nine. She left her cigarette balanced on the window sill. She put one of her blouses on a hanger and put them both in the closet. She took out another hanger and laid it on the bed for ten o'clock.

Her smoke was riding the limited breeze out of her room through the screened window. She placed the cigarette between her smoking fingers and tried to aim the smoke to go out particular holes. She did well but cheated often and changed the rules of the game as she went along. The cigarette burned close to the filter and her finger. She put it out. She couldn't remember if she had smoked any of it. She lit another and made a mental note to remember to smoke this one. She began to play the game with the screen again. It soon bored her. She had mastered it leaving no more challenge to the game. She walked around the room blowing smoke at anything that fell outside the perimeters of her good graces. The
pictures on her mirror received exceptionally abusive treatments while things such as an autographed baseball fared well. The Mets had been doing poorly the last few seasons. If it wasn't for Bud Harrelson's signature on the ball it would have also suffered the wrath of the fog lady. She took her wallet out of her pocketbook. In the back section there was a picture of Tom Gilly. He was standing in front of his shiny blue Camero in front of her dormitory. She blew smoke at Tom Gilly and his shiny blue Camero until the cigarette became so hot its red glowing tip was as long as Lisa Ellen's best fingernail and came to a point like a bullet. She looked at the picture. Her eyes ripped it into tiny pieces and tossed it in the garbage pail. Her hands were more kind than her eyes and put the picture back to its demoted standing at the back of her purse's picture section.

By the time she was through with Tom Gilly, Lisa Ellen's room was filled with smoke. She heard her mother cough in the bathroom. She picked up the towel that was wedged under the door and decided she would just get an ashtray and forget about the incense.
The sun had come out. The defeated clouds were drifting slowly away as if shamed by what her eyes would say to them. The remaining clothes on her bed were quickly put away. Lisa Ellen picked up a box of stationary and went outside.

Dear Alice,

Hi. How are you? I am fine, sort of. That really means I'm healthy and that's all. We've been back eleven hours and I'm bored stiff. I hope you're not as bored as I am. Maybe I could visit you or you could visit me soon. Real soon.

Already my mother and I have had two fights. Number 1- she couldn't decide whether or not to call her friend Mrs. Goldman when we got home. It was a quarter after eleven. She calls that almost midnight. First she picks up the phone and dials the number. Before it rings she slams the phone down and says to me, should I call Lisa Ellen, it might be too late? So I said don't call, wait until morning. She says, she promised she'd call the minute we got back. So I said call. She gets all mad and tells me that I'm no help. Then she asks me again if she should call. I get
real serious and tell her if there's any doubt in her mind about whether or not it's too late, then she should wait until morning. That made good sense to her. She said Mrs. Goldman would understand. I don't know why they call each other Mrs. Goldman and Mrs. Markowitz. That's weird, isn't it Miss Friedman? Or do you prefer Ms? So anyway then she wants me to help her decide what time she should call her friend in the morning. So the argument starts all over again.

Number 2- (I bet you forgot there was a number 2), all the way home she's talking to me about her friend's son Moe. I swear the whole bus heard her. I was so embarrassed. I kept trying to shut her up, but the more I tried the louder she got. I knew this guy Moe in high school. He's nice. I was even thinking of going over to see him this summer, but now I won't. He's a quiet kind of guy, but nice. He got picked on a lot. He was kind of tall and skinny. He worked at the Kosher deli in town. I used to see him there every once in a while. But only his head over the counter, he was always slicing meat. I think he's shy. This morning she sticks me on the phone with him. I think his mother
stuck him on too. I tried to start a conversation with him but he didn't want to talk to me. I'll bet his mother has been talking me up to him. It's either that or he's a lousy conversationalist. I doubt that's it.

I think I'm going to have a talk with my mother. I love her, but if I'm going to be here all summer she's got to stop playing like she's the host on the Dating Game.

Since I've only been home eleven hours and awake for four, there's not much else I can tell you. I hope we can get together real soon. It was fun meeting you and I'm glad we got to know each other so quickly. Take care and write back soon.

Love,

Lisa

Lisa Ellen put the letter in an envelope and then laid down on the grass. It needed mowing. It was cool and damp near the ground and felt good. As soon as she warmed up one spot, she moved her head and found another. Lisa Ellen believed in fate. She knew it was fate that she met Alice at the Concord. She wondered if it was fate that made her mother push her to Moe, or if it was just an annoyance. The cool
overgrown grass made her feel drowsy and she soon fell asleep.