

The Thirty-third Hour

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Chapter 1

Sunday, 12:05am

Just after midnight, as Saturday became the Sunday of Memorial Day weekend, Rabbi Arthur Greenberg parked in the space reserved for him alongside Temple Emet, the largest Liberal Jewish congregation in greater Miami. If the broad and elegant facade of the sanctuary did not testify to that, surely the number of reserved spaces under the canopy did. His space first, then those of the two assistant rabbis, the cantor, the cantorial assistant, the executive director, the assistant director, and still more beyond that. He closed the door of his Oldsmobile gently so as not to disturb the neighbor to the south. The plans for the new buildings were before the zoning board. There were enough problems with the neighbors to the north without inviting additional complaints.

Two years it had taken him to coax, cajole, commit the leadership of the temple to the building campaign, and now the whole project was in doubt. Zoning and funding, so necessary if the day school was to expand. Outmoded classrooms and not enough of them. The weekend religious school so large it demanded double sessions both Saturday and Sunday. Eight hundred more families since the last structure had been dedicated. Even the sanctuary, sumptuous as it was, still not large enough to contain the entire congregation on the High Holidays. The time had come to build. He had everything almost in place, so close, and it might all come apart. One scandal and the zoning and funding would come to an end.

Zoning and funding. The words echoed through the numbness. Weddings did this, every time. Alcohol, loud music, and the constant need to smile at banal conversation he couldn't hear from across the table. The Grand Bay or Signature Gardens, it was always the same.

Only midnight, and he was so tired. He knew he would not be able to sleep, with a scandal about to ignite, so he had dropped Charlotte at the house and, still in his tuxedo, proceeded, half awake, into the night.

Arthur entered the sanctuary building through the side door, the one by the kitchen the caterers used. He answered the beeps of the security pad with what he hoped to be the current code. Please, he prayed, eyes braced close, lest the alarm go off. The executive director, paranoid after the desecration, changed the numbers every month. Would he have to explain to the Miami police yet once again he was the rabbi, not a neo-Nazi intent on spraying swastikas on the synagogue walls?

Blessed silence.

Another pad gained him direct access to his study. Not much of a secret that, the year of his birth entered backward, 4491.

An extension of the sanctuary roof sloped down through the long room into the exterior wall. Charlotte had done her best to atone for the sins with antiques and oriental carpets, but the ceiling and the cinder block wall, punctuated by stained plastic panes, were too much to overcome.

Was it because of those windows he wanted the new sanctuary? No. The windows were a crime, atrocious. Long ago he had begged the board for funds to replace them, but it was not only a matter of the two that penetrated his study, but the twenty that scarred the southern wall. No, if it were a matter of vanity, he would have moved for the new building years before. There was a greater need now that commanded it, the need to assemble for a single service on Rosh Hashanah, an entire community together on Yom Kippur to stand in unison for *Kol Nidre*. Repeating the service left a foul taste in his mouth, but the distaste for the congregants was the *balagan*, the traffic confusion between the sessions as families rushed to leave and arrive. He had a vision, a larger sanctuary, a single service for the entire community, a smooth flowing traffic pattern. The board was sold.

With the lights toned down, the study was bearable, stained glass and cinder block notwithstanding, but Arthur needed light to clear the fog in his head. Caffeine was no longer available to him, by doctor's orders. The light was all he had.

With one hand he undid his bow tie and stuffed it into the breast pocket of his tuxedo jacket. The jacket he removed and hung in the closet next to his robes. He had a dozen, eight black for use on the Sabbath, four white for

the Holy Days. He had never discarded a robe. He collected them, a history of his rabbinate, most in moth balls, the camphor vaguely odorous through the plastic covers. Only the newest two, one black, one white, had the three stripes on each arm that marked the honorary doctorate bestowed upon him the year before by the seminary. The wedding couple had requested he not wear a robe, only the tuxedo. More and more he was hearing such a request. It used to be . . . He suspended the sentence. No use considering what used to be.

He removed his ten-commandment cufflinks, put them in his right pocket, and groped for his keys. They weren't there. The keys were always in his right trouser pocket, wallet in his left. The french-cuff sleeves, linkless, sagged limp below his wrists. "Damn," he said aloud, not knowing the target of the epithet, only his need to express it. He rolled the cuffs up to his elbows. Where were the keys? He tracked back across the floor. They were on the carpet, by the closet. He didn't remember dropping them.

A key only he possessed unlocked the private filing cabinet. There was one more file to redeem, one that always remained behind lock and key, but he needed it now. Distasteful as it was, he would read it again. That file joined a stack of tapes, papers, a journal. He had a lot of work ahead of him, and then a decision to make concerning a charge against a colleague. More than a matter of ethics, a criminal charge. With all the resultant publicity, a likely end to the zoning and funding.

The stack of tapes and documents on his desk top was unsettling, not only because of their nature and threat, but by their very essence. Arthur was accustomed to a clean desk at the end of every day. He should have been a lawyer, he thought, as he had every time his work seemed unbearable. He placed his Montblanc pen by a fresh legal pad and considered where in the stack he should begin.

"Brenda," he said aloud. "It begins and ends with Brenda."

Nathan Karman had brought Brenda to Arthur eighteen years before.

Nathan and Arthur had played tennis and golf together at the club. Nathan was the attorney one consulted for zoning, the man of influence one consulted for funding. He knew what could be done, and how.

He was divorced from his first wife before Arthur arrived in Miami. Brenda was to be his second. "She is not Jewish," Nathan said, "but she is very spiritual. She wants to convert."

Spiritual maybe, beautiful certainly. Twenty, maybe thirty years Nathan's junior, no secret the attraction they had for each other.

"I want to know something about Judaism," Brenda said, "and then I'll make a decision whether or not I want to convert." The words were empty, her direction already set. Such was the price she was willing to pay for status and security.

"She's what I always dreamed of," Nathan confided in the cart on the course. Blonde and blue-eyed, Arthur had once entertained such dreams as well. He had outgrown them, but his friend had not.

Charlotte asked Arthur about the direction he would take in Brenda's instruction. Brenda was not a candidate for the conversion course. As the intended of a friend, she warranted personal coaching from the senior rabbi. He said he would begin with the story of Avishag, the young beauty obtained to warm the aging King David in his bed. "Don't you dare," Charlotte said, throwing a pillow at him. "Besides, you don't have to be so young or so beautiful to keep a bed warm." There was benefit from being around Nathan and Brenda in the excitement of their romance. Arthur and Charlotte made the most of it.

The wedding was a big affair at the Eden Roc. Charlotte took Brenda under her wing, and the two couples became a foursome for tennis, bridge and dinner in the Gables.

After five years of trying, Brenda was pregnant and more beautiful than ever. Only her belly grew. It seemed but days after Daniel was born she was back in her bikini by the pool at the club. Daniel seemed fine at first, no hint of any difficulty, but toward the end of the first year they began to make the round of doctors to find a name for what they knew to be wrong.

Nathan died at tennis. He won the set and lost his life, gone before help could arrive. Arthur and Charlotte did what they could for Brenda. She was consolable, left with ample means to provide for herself and her son.

Charlotte was more patient with Brenda than Arthur. Without Nathan Arthur had no reason to maintain the relationship, but Charlotte insisted for the sake of the son. A saint, his wife. He was not worthy of her, the thought no mere formulation. He knew it to be true. Her patience so far exceeded his, she was willing to put up with even him. He told her so every time he slipped beneath what he construed to be her measure. She would only shake her head, and he would laugh, both expressions of love.

Some years after Nathan died Brenda had come to see the rabbi, not Arthur but the rabbi. She came to his study in the synagogue, not to his home. She settled into the sofa across the coffee table from the rabbi in his wing chair.

"I need to consult with you about something," she began. Arthur waited for her to become comfortable.

"It's about men," she said, "married men. Mostly it's the married men who make the passes, not the single men. It's because of Daniel, I guess. But he doesn't keep the married men away. I must send out some signal that attracts them. Some are members of the temple." She named the names.

No great secret. Brenda bragged of her men to Charlotte, those who wanted her, and those who got her. Arthur heard similar stories from other sources. Once she thought a man might leave his wife. He did, for someone else. She was vicious for weeks following. Still Charlotte put up with her. Brenda was like another daughter. To Charlotte, not to Arthur. Arthur tolerated Brenda only for Charlotte's sake.

"Something in her childhood," Charlotte said, Charlotte the social worker. She never ventured quite what, but continued, "It either turns them away from sex or turns them onto sex, rarely anything between. It's probably better this way. But their interest is in unavailable men, so you'd better be careful, darling."

Brenda's list became a litany, a veritable slate of officers for the next Board of Trustees. "I don't know what to do about it," Brenda went on. "If this is what the leadership of a synagogue is like, I don't know that I want to be a part of a synagogue anymore. I don't know that I want to be Jewish anymore, rabbi. Arthur. I don't know what I want. No, I do know. I want something spiritual. I want a religion that points toward God. I want to be able to ask God questions. I have a lot of questions. I don't know that I expect answers, but I want to be in the company of people who are asking questions. I don't mean to hurt you, Arthur, but I haven't found that here. I haven't found that in Judaism."

Arthur defended his faith, made his suggestions. There were different expressions of spirituality, he explained. Not all involved prayer and talking to God. Social action and righteous deeds were a form of doing God's work and filled one with a sense of divine purpose. He suggested participation in the temple committee that cared for the homeless or an association with Habitat for Humanity, a Christian program that nonetheless had a tie to the temple. That seemed to hold Brenda a while. She remained Jewish and continued her affiliation even after Turin came to town and opened his Institute for Jewish Spiritual Experience.

Rafael Turin had Orthodox ordination, *smichah* from a *yeshivah* in Jerusalem and for a decade had taught *Talmud* and *Zohar* at a school in Safed. Some leaders of the Jewish Federation, the secular organization that funneled resources to the Jewish agencies of greater Miami, frustrated that less than twenty percent of the Jewish population of Dade County had any involvement with a synagogue, had invited him to Miami to attract those who might otherwise leave for alien disciplines. With such endorsement it would have been difficult to refuse him entry into the rabbinic association, but Turin made the rounds anyway, to assure colleagues his Institute would in no way compete with the standing synagogues. His intention was only to fill the vacuums that existed in the community.

Turin's Institute was a magnet for Brenda. He spoke of God in the deepest way. Brenda shared what she had learned with Arthur, but the language of the Kabbalah was foreign to him. If he had been more conversant with the vocabulary, would he have recognized the danger?

He drew the confidential file before him, determined to be done with it quickly.

Ultimately three women had filed the complaint. Brenda had been the first. She came to Arthur in tears, at the edge of a breakdown, to express her rage and confess her guilt and confusion. She had come only after the police had turned her away, finding not enough substance in her charge to warrant action. She had been furious, perhaps more with the police than with Turin. Turin, at least, had paid her attention.

Arthur lifted her deposition from the file.

She reported her name, her address, her age and marital status.

"When did you first meet Rabbi Turin?" the questioner asked.

"In November of 1991."

"What was the occasion?"

"I had seen his ad in the Jewish newspaper for classes in Jewish spirituality. I attended a lecture he was giving at the JCC"

"What did he speak about?"

"He spoke about the power of the Kabbalah, that it was an age-old discipline that brought one into the immediate presence of God."

Turin had rented space in an office building and offered seminars, \$150 for the six week course. More advanced courses were more expensive.

Brenda learned about the realms of experience and the expression of the soul through the various worlds. She learned she was an extension of God itself, the connection immediate and eternal. She had been put into this lifetime to refine and perfect her soul, and whatever trials and tribulations she endured were for a purpose, even if that purpose was beyond her ability to grasp.

In the more advanced courses she learned of the need to surrender to the divine, how to meditate on

nothing, closing her eyes and drawing her focus to a spot at the back of her head, so as to offer no resistance to the flux of the *ruach eloheem*, the Spirit of God.

A year into the training Turin advised her she was ready to be initiated into one-on-one study, to learn the secrets of the Kabbalah that could not be taught in a classroom setting. There was risk, he advised her, but she was willing.

She learned of the powers of *gevurah* and *hesed*, constancy and compassion. She understood *Gevurah* as a male principle, that which was finite and extended into the world. *Hesed* she considered to be the female, the infinite, willing receiver. She learned the secrets of the words *eesh* and *eeshah*, *eesh* being man, and written with the letter *YOD*, and *eeshah* being the female, written with the letter *HEY*. The *YOD*, a point of light, was to be deposited into the open receptacle of the *HEY*. She learned that the recondite four-lettered name of God was itself divided into male and female components, that the name of God was complete only when the male united with the female. She was taught humans were created in the very image of God, the original human androgynous, male and female. It was not a rib that was separated from the first earthling, but a side. The feminine side was dissected away from the masculine, each but half the image of God. The full image of God was formed only in spiritual and holy union.

In the eighth session Turin told her she was being blocked in her advancement by certain repressive tendencies. Her surrender was not complete. Dance, he said, might help in the process of surrender, sacred dance to sacred music. He had her stand and sway, her eyes closed, to concentrate on nothing except the wind that emanated from God, to feel the energy flowing up her legs into her abdomen, across her shoulders and down into her breasts. Risk and exposure were the keys, he told her. She followed his instructions and removed her blouse. Greater risk, he said. She exposed her breasts and felt a flush of heat through her face and chest, a holy heat, he told her, an offering of *tiferet*, the Hebrew word for beauty, for glory. The eighth session was complete. He reminded her the personal lessons were secret. There were to be two more in the series. The next night she was to wear a long skirt, and she would learn the secret of *rahameem*, the secret of divine compassion.

“Why did you return for the next session?” the questioner asked.

“I was confused,” Brenda said. “He was a holy teacher, my *rebbe*. I had learned so many truths from him. He had shared with me the secrets of the deepest Kabbalah.”

“Did you enjoy dancing before him, exposing yourself like that?”

“I don’t know. It was a profound experience. I don’t know. I was confused.”

“Were you a consenting adult in a sexual encounter?”

“I wasn’t consenting. I hadn’t been asked to consent. I was doing what I was told. How could I not do what I was told? He was a holy teacher. He was uniting the male and the female. He was lifting sparks. He was restoring the world.”

The next night she had returned as bidden and danced again, her eyes closed. Her teacher instructed her to lift her skirt and unify the lower limbs by massaging the source of mercy. She touched herself, massaged herself, felt the warmth flow through her, a holy warmth.

“Keep your eyes closed.” His words were spoken softly but jarring nonetheless, unnecessary, for her eyes were closed. She opened them and saw him reclining in his chair, his penis exposed, erect, untouched, his pelvis thrusting at some imaginary target.

“Close your eyes!” he ordered. “It is not for you yet to see the source of judgment!” She did not close her eyes. His semen shot into the air seemingly of its own accord. She at once marveled that he had come to orgasm without any physical contact and at the same time was repulsed by the ugliness, the unseemliness of it all. She reached for her clothes. In spite of his commands she left the room and managed to start her car before the first sobs burst from her.

The next day she had gone to the police with her complaint. After a week of degradation, repeating her story from one office to the next, sensing at last she was not so much making a charge as providing an entertainment, she came to Arthur, the rabbi, in his study, to share what had happened. “You have to do something,” she said. “You have to stop him. He must be doing this with others too. He has to be stopped.”

She made the calls and found four others who had suffered similar abuse, two of whom were willing to give depositions. They had completed the ninth session, which culminated in holy fellatio, the tenth in which they had straddled the holy teacher to unify the male and female aspects of the divine. It was good Brenda had stopped when she did, Arthur thought again, as he had every time he had reviewed the material.

The matter came before the ethics committee of the Board of Rabbis which hoped to manage the matter discretely. Rabbi Rafael Turin was summoned to appear before a *bayt din*, a rabbinic court. Arthur had a copy of the summons in his file.

Brenda and the two others testified against him. Turin did not deny the charges but rallied several of his students, male and female, to his defense. “He is a holy master,” they said, “and ordinary standards do not apply to

him. Whatever his actions, their only purpose was the service of God, and though they may appear to be based on the surface, at their depth they were necessary for the ultimate redemption of the world.”

Word that the rabbinic court received and considered such testimony infuriated Brenda even more than Turin’s violation. “Turin never fucked me,” she told Arthur, “but I feel like these bastards have!”

Arthur counseled patience and assured her the court would come to an appropriate judgment. That judgment was also in his file. Ultimately it was not that Turin had taken advantage of women that did him in, but that one of the women, while divorced from her husband by a secular court, had never been issued a *geht*, a religious divorce. Therefore, in the eyes of the rabbinic court, she was still technically married. Turin was found guilty of adultery, and a judgement of *herem*, excision from the community, was passed against him:

Rafael Turin has no part in the God of Israel. It is forbidden for him to be counted among the quorum for prayer, to be called upon to recite a blessing over the Torah, to hold any office or membership in any Jewish organization or synagogue. It is forbidden for any Jew to stand in his immediate presence. It is forbidden even to have conversation with him, or to engage in business with him in any way.

This was the edict pronounced by the rabbinic court to the Board of Rabbis. Turin was advised it would be published to the public at large should he remain in Miami. His defiance lasted but two weeks. He announced to the community he was returning to a teaching position in Jerusalem. Before a farewell party could be arranged, he was gone.

Arthur returned the file to the cabinet, embarrassed by the flush that overcame him. “I’m only a man,” he reminded himself. “Flesh and blood. I’m only a man.”

“I am all right,” Brenda protested when Arthur, Charlotte, and others among her friends encouraged her to seek help for her depression. Hospitalization might have been warranted, were it not for Daniel. She could not be separated from him for any extensive period.

After a year of medication and intensive therapy Brenda came to visit the rabbi again.

“It wasn’t all bad, what he was teaching,” she said. It had taken the year to separate the bad from the good.

“No, I’m sure it wasn’t,” Arthur agreed, “but he misused it.”

“What do I do now?” she asked.

“What do you mean?”

“My needs are the same. I have the same questions, the same concerns. Helping the homeless doesn’t answer the questions. With Rafi, it seemed I was learning how to ask, even get answers. I can’t do that anymore. How can I ever trust such a teacher again?”

Rafi. Arthur was alarmed by her use of the intimate name. She was vulnerable. He had to find a safe situation for her. Without that impetus he might never have remembered Moshe’s letter.

That letter was at the top of the stack on his desk. “Hi Artie,” it began. That should have been reason enough to discard it unread. If only he had done that.

Hi Artie,

I regret I have been out of touch all this time, but I suspect you may know Rivie died a year ago. I have been considering ever since what to do. My work here in the Bay Area is done.

I have developed a program for family education, something to supplement and perhaps even someday replace what is happening in conventional religious schools. What I would like to do is borrow a dozen families for a year, to meet one morning a month. Adults and children will learn together.

Would you bring me in as a consultant? As a consultant, not a rabbi. I suspect the word rabbi will get in the way. And would you assign someone to record the sessions, on tape or in a journal? A book might come out of this, a guide others can follow.

I am writing this letter to you, and to all of our old friends from the upper West Side, those who are likely to remember me and Rivie well. Salary is not important. The situation is. If this interests you please be in touch, and we’ll develop a strategy for integrating the program into your synagogue.

Moshe had signed the letter in Hebrew and in a PS left instructions for reaching him - a PO Box in New Mexico.

"I have been thinking of bringing in a consultant to do a special program on family education," Arthur told Brenda. "He's a remarkable person." He was on the verge of adding they had been classmates at the seminary but remembered Moshe's caution he not be identified as a rabbi. "I met Charlotte at his place on the upper West Side. He and his wife introduced us. Rivkah. She died last year of cancer. Moshe is a specialist in family education, something he developed in California. He wants to come and introduce it here in Miami and asks that we provide someone to record the sessions."

Arthur found himself selling the program to Brenda. He had kept the letter, entertaining the notion only because it dovetailed with another he had received, but until Brenda had come to him looking for something to do, he had not really expected to extend an invitation to Moshe. The other letter was from Federation, offering a grant of \$40,000 to any synagogue willing to develop a family education program. He'd had every intention of requesting the grant, but to staff the program with in-house talent and supervise it himself. He did not need Moshe, yet here he was proposing Moshe to Brenda. "His name is Moshe Katan. He's brilliant. Creative and innovative. Whatever he does will be a challenge."

Contemplating the materials piled on his desk, Arthur reached for a coffee cup that had been missing for months. Why had he done that? He'd had no obligation to Moshe, didn't even care for the man.

Yes, Moshe and Rivkah had introduced him to Charlotte. The Katan apartment on the upper West Side provided cross fertilization between the seminary and the Columbia school of social work. There were a good many rabbis married to MSW's as a result.

Yes, Moshe was brilliant. He had won nearly all of the academic prizes. Talmud, Bible and Outstanding Student had gone to Moshe. History had been Arthur's. Arthur had no complaint. Moshe deserved his awards.

It was not jealousy that made him ill at ease. It was Moshe's attitude, his disrespect for the rabbinate, for the sanctity of the institution. The synagogue was the center of Jewish life, but even at the seminary, Moshe had denied it. "The paradigm has shifted," Moshe said, quoting a *rebbe* with whom he had learned in Jerusalem. "The day of the synagogue as we know it is done, and the day of the rabbi as well. We are fossils, trained in techniques of no avail, masters of a discipline that no longer has a purpose. Our words will be as powerful, our diction as good, our message as clear as those who have preceded us. Their synagogues were full, but ours will be empty." Arthur remembered the essence of Moshe's words. They rang like a curse come true.

Arthur's career had followed the conventional course, an assistantship in Cleveland, then this emerging monolith in suburban Miami, eight hundred families that had become eighteen-hundred. Moshe too had begun in the conventional fashion, assistant to a distinguished rabbi in California, then, nothing. Moshe disappeared, gone from the rabbinic landscape, while Arthur gained in prominence, first a member, then the chair of national committees. His name became known, his congregants proud of it. Still when he preached, his polished words fell into an empty sanctuary.

Arthur had heard Moshe preach only once, and that to fulfill his requirement for ordination. Arthur remembered Moshe's sermon, if not word for word, then step for step. Moshe had said student rabbis served in one-step congregations, two at the most. In casual tones he spoke of driving to his pulpit in New Jersey where only one step separated him from his congregation. When he was ordained, he said, perhaps he might move to a three-step congregation, even a four. His tone of voice deepened, his posture straightened. He projected his message to the students and faculty with more carefully chosen words. After years of service, he might be called to a six-step pulpit, with yet another four ascending to the holy ark, from whence he might stand in robes ten steps high and pronounce his most eloquent phrases. In a clipped accent he said the words might drop from his mouth like pearls to roll down the steps among the feet of . . .

He had left the sentence unfinished. Those familiar with the New Testament completed it without difficulty, the allusion unsettling. Swine was not a kosher metaphor.

Why in heavens's name had he extended an invitation to Moshe Katan to come to his congregation to teach?

Because of Brenda, Arthur knew. Because of his fear of alienating Brenda, he had brought this down on his own head.

With determination and fortitude he reached for the documents at the top of the stack. Aloud Arthur said, "Now let's see what the bastard did."

The first document was his initial letter to Moshe.

Dear Moshe,

So good to hear from you. I am sorry I was not in touch with you after your loss. News of

Rivkah's passing came to me late. I apologize for not offering my sympathies sooner.

Concerning your request to facilitate a family education program at Temple Emet, we would be delighted to have such a program, and I am pleased to extend an invitation to you to conduct it.

We already have a person eager to assist you and record the sessions, as you requested. I think you will find her an able assistant.

I look forward to hearing from you soon so we can discuss the format of the program and, of course, determine an appropriate honorarium for your services.

Charlotte sends her best.

In friendship,

cc: Brenda Karman

The only mistake, he thought on rereading the letter, was to include Brenda's name. But that and the nature of the program might well have been different, more under his control, and this whole matter might have been avoided.

Arthur had expected an opportunity to shape the program. He had been waiting for Moshe to call.

"Good to hear from you, Moshe," he would have begun. "I'm so happy you'll be joining our faculty. I'm sure we'll have no difficulty finding twelve families to work with you. As soon as I put out the word we have such a dynamic teacher coming to town, the roster will be full.

"Now, as for the honorarium. If we paid you, let's say, \$500 a weekend, plus airfare back and forth to, where is it? New Mexico? That's where you are now, New Mexico? That's maybe another \$500. Figure a \$1,000 a session. Let's make it \$1,200 to include your expenses while you're in Miami. We could arrange home hospitality. You'd be welcome to stay with me and Charlotte, of course, but you'd probably want your own space. Maybe the Marriott. We have an arrangement there. Ten programs at \$1,200 each.

"Now for the program. The Garfinkel Youth Center has one big room where the children could have their class and a lounge in the back we could set up for the parents. Are you going to be working with the children or the parents? Do we need to hire another person to work with the group you're not with? If so, we have to know so we can budget for it.

"I must tell you I had been thinking of starting a program like this myself. I know the value of having the parents present to appreciate and reinforce what the children learn. Occasionally we have opportunities in our religious school for parents to participate with their children. Your idea of establishing this on an ongoing basis is excellent. I am happy you will be available to help us with it."

That's the way the phone conversation should have gone, but there had never been such a conversation, or any conversation, until the program was already established.

Instead of calling him, Moshe had called Brenda. Arthur had given him the name. All Moshe had to do was ask Miami information for "Karman, Brenda," and Arthur was out of the loop.

Never before and never again would a program generate in his congregation over which he had no control.

The first he had heard from Moshe was through Brenda. She strutted into his study with camera-ready copy for the brochure. His astonishment must have been apparent. "I don't like the title," he began. "Nobody will understand what *Family Bayt Midrash* means." He had opened not with words of support or praise, as was his custom, but with criticism.

Brenda was too effusive to be taken aback. "It means *family house of learning*."

"I know what it means," Arthur said. "It's just that the congregation won't know what it means. It won't have any appeal."

"Mr. Katan says -"

Mr. Katan. Not Rabbi Katan. The "Mister" irked Arthur, but not as much as a "Moshe" might have. At least Mr. Katan was keeping some professional distance.

"Mr. Katan says we should treat our people like intelligent adults. They will learn as they go along. I didn't know what *bayt midrash* meant, but I know now. It didn't take me long to catch on. It won't take our members long to catch on either."

Arthur scanned the text of the brochure. "He has it taking place in homes, not here in the youth center."

"We have it in homes," Brenda agreed. "Mr. Katan says the challenge isn't to make the synagogue Jewish but the homes Jewish. If we do Jewish programming in the homes, the families will remember that. They will learn the home is also a place where we do things Jewish."

Arthur was thankful for the *also*. At least the synagogue wasn't left out of the picture entirely. He

continued his way through the brochure. "The adults and children study together. I imagined they would have separate classes and come together at the end."

"Mr. Katan says it's important the families work together as families. He's developed a system that works on several levels at once. When the children have had enough, they can go off and play. Most of the adults will continue to study. Mr. Katan says the kids learn, the adults learn, but most important, the kids learn that the adults learn. That's the essence of it. Mostly all the kids ever see is kids learning and adults playing tennis. Here the kids see adults learning and enjoying it. They will have role models, adults learning Torah."

"We have adult education in the synagogue," Arthur responded.

"He asked me what the budget was for that."

"Two thousand dollars," Arthur said without hesitation. He knew every line of the budget.

"Then he asked what the entire operational budget was. I didn't know the answer to either question."

"Two point two million."

"He said it would be something like that. A thousand to one, funds spent for children. Even when some adults are learning, the children never get to see it. Besides, it's not their parents doing the learning."

"How will you find your families?" Arthur asked.

"I have four already. The Kantors, the Garfinkels, the Lopezes and the Schwartzes. I could have twelve if I wanted. You'd be surprised how many are looking for an alternative to religious school. But I thought I would leave the rest of the positions open and see who would come forward of their own accord. I have an article in the next temple bulletin, and we'll send this out next month. That should take care of it."

Arthur tapped a pencil on his desk pad as he recalled the conversation with Brenda. The tapping made little noise. Ten months before, as Brenda had been speaking, he had also been tapping. It had taken some little time to absorb the shock of Brenda's words. It was a *fait accompli*. He couldn't do bupkis about it, and he detested the feeling. Beyond that, the four families were among the most generous donors to the temple. In large measure he was depending on them to lead the way in the funding of his new building.

"Dollars," he had said in an attempt to regain control. "We haven't yet decided if we can afford this. The cost of airfare alone will be prodigious, and I don't know what he will require by way of salary. We'll have to get all of this approved by the Executive Committee."

"We talked about cost," Brenda continued in the same matter-of-fact tone. "Mr. Katan doesn't want a salary. He says his funding comes from another source. There won't be any airfare. He will be staying here in Miami."

Signed and sealed. A done deal. Arthur could not dispose of Moshe without disposing of Brenda as well.

Charlotte had invited Moshe and Brenda to dinner. "He's single," she'd explained to Arthur. "He did as much for us."

"Rivie did that," Arthur countered. "That was all Rivie. One hundred percent."

Charlotte would not talk about Rivkah. Charlotte's mother and grandmother had both died of ovarian cancer. "Even if Brenda wasn't going to assist Moshe, I would have invited her anyway. She's looking for someone spiritual."

"Whatever that means," Arthur said.

Moshe was late for that dinner. Arthur opened a bottle of Chivas Regal some congregant had given him at a Hanukkah party only God knew how many years before, poured some for Brenda, Charlotte, and, for himself more than he could finish. The cheese dip was nearly done when the doorbell rang.

God, Arthur thought, Moshe still looked like a student. Twenty-five years had salt-and-peppered his beard and grayed him at the temples, but the curly brown hair was still too long and the jeans -- he still wore jeans -- too baggy.

Charlotte was effusive in her greeting. After a hug and kiss she said, "You've lost so much weight."

"A long time ago," Moshe said.

Arthur hadn't noticed that. What he saw most was Moshe's vacant smile, there and not there at the same time, as if he were looking at something amusing in the background. Arthur remembered that smile, how Moshe used to make him want to turn around to see what he was missing. But it was Moshe who had become missing, he reminded himself, missing in action, missing from the Rabbinic Union for the last two decades, missing from the committees that set policy and direction for Liberal Judaism. Even as a student, Moshe seemed missing even when present, but for all his seeming inattention in class, Moshe was the cistern who held everything. He spoke rarely, answered questions only when no one else could. His answers were always correct.

Dinner conversation was limited. Charlotte did not want to speak about Rivkah. Arthur could not talk of the rabbinate without somehow implicating Moshe as a colleague. Moshe had not been inclined to include Arthur in the planning and could not be expected to discuss the program. That left Brenda to carry the evening. She did so by telling stories from the Kabbalah she had learned from Turin, speaking of him as if the abuse had never occurred. Every mention of Turin's name contributed to Arthur's indigestion. Moshe listened to the stories, nodding his head, enjoying his meal.

To Charlotte's question Moshe said he had rented a small house in Coconut Grove, in the old section where the neighborhoods were mixed, poor African American homes yielding year by year to gentrification. Charlotte said, as she had on other occasions, she would like to move from Pinecrest to the Grove. She claimed the Grove had character, Arthur was content in the comfort and security of Pinecrest.

The dinner done, Charlotte and Arthur accompanied their guests to the street, Brenda to her Mercedes, Moshe to a gleaming silver Porsche. "This is yours?" Arthur asked, feeling stupid in the question.

"I'm not sure whether she is mine, or I am hers," Moshe responded.

Seventy-thousand dollars, Arthur thought as he watched Moshe drive away.

"Did you see that car?" Arthur asked his wife.

"What car?"

"Moshe's Porsche. Seventy-thousand dollars minimum for a car like that, it's German, and rabbis don't drive Porsches."

"Brenda drives a Mercedes."

"Brenda's not a rabbi."

"Moshe's not either. Didn't you tell me he didn't want to be a rabbi anymore? I guess he can drive a Porsche now."

In his study Arthur pondered the Porsche and fiddled with the first videotape. The Porsche was a paradox. He would like to own one. With his salary he could afford it, especially now that Tamar was on her own. No more college expenses, not another penny for Oberlin. She should have gone to Kenyon. Even with a smaller Jewish census, it would have been better, less damage done. One incentive to anger opened the door to all the others. Better to think of the Porsche. That was enough. He would like to have a Porsche, but should he buy one, he might be out of a job and have no salary.

"Rabbis don't drive Porsches," he said aloud, slamming the door shut on his anger.

Arthur recalled his discomfort following that dinner. It did not fade as the Porsche diminished in the distance, rather it moved into his stomach, a presentment immune to Tums and Maalox. His father-in-law, Aaron Deutsch, of blessed memory, had taught him not to ignore such conditions. They would only get worse. Better to confront them at the outset, over martinis.

The Captain's Table, a haven of cool, nautical-themed darkness buried in the flank of a strip mall on South Dixie Highway was his venue of choice for such encounters. If Arthur had a difference with a member of the board, it was at The Captain's Table such differences would be aired. But not in the first meeting, never in the first meeting, and sometimes not even in the second. In the third meeting differences might be brought safely to the table.

Arthur invited Moshe to lunch at The Captain's Table the first day of September, the Thursday before Labor Day weekend, a wasted Labor Day because Rosh Hashanah followed immediately after, so there was no vacation, no getting away. Pressed as he was, this was something for Arthur to do before the holy days, to settle his stomach.

Maybe Moshe played tennis, Arthur thought, as he cruised through the parking lot in search of an open space. He was looking also for the silver Porsche. He didn't want to be first to this luncheon, having to wait. He wanted Moshe there, waiting for him. He found a parking space, but no Porsche.

Maybe Moshe played tennis, Arthur thought again as he opened the door and crossed the threshold, a familiar transition from light to shade, from the blast of Miami summer heat into the envelope of Miami air-conditioning.

The oak bench in the vestibule was empty. No Moshe. Arthur checked the bar, scanned the tables for a man sitting alone. No Moshe. The bench was his to sit on and wait. Several times the door opened. Light and heat, but no Moshe.

Five minutes Arthur waited, an eternity, until Moshe entered blinded from the Miami sun, not able to see Arthur directly in front of him.

"I'm right here," Arthur said.

"Hi, Artie," Moshe said and smiled. "I'm sorry if I'm late. Couldn't find a parking space."

Their table was by one of the aquaria that supplemented the nautical paraphernalia that hung on the wall and from the ceiling. Bright blue and yellow fish circulated among the artificial coral.

"A gin martini, straight up, two olives," Arthur said to the waitress. "What will you have, Moshe?"

"I've never had a martini," Moshe admitted.

"Two martinis," Arthur said. "If you don't like it, we'll get you something else, and I'll have the pleasure of two."

They had the fish to look at.

"Do you play tennis?" Arthur asked.

"I scuba dive," Moshe said. "Do you dive? You have some of the best diving in the world only forty-five minutes away."

"No. We have friends with a boat, though. We go out on the bay, fish a little, have lunch."

"Off Key Largo. Pennekamp Park, an underwater park. No spear fishing. So many fish. Coral gardens, twenty, thirty feet deep. How often do you play tennis?"

"Twice a week."

"That's good. I've been diving only once since I've been here. Maybe I can dive every week. Rivkah and I used to go on diving vacations. Here, actually, down in the keys. And the Bahamas. Do you get over to the Bahamas?"

"No. I was sorry to hear about Rivkah." The martinis arrived, full to the brim. "I don't know how they do that," Arthur continued. "They don't spill a drop from the bar to the table, and I can't get it from the table to my mouth without slurping it all over my hand."

The olives, pierced through by a plastic sword, were served on the side. Moshe examined his with care.

"Do we say the blessing over the olives or the drink?"

Arthur had never said a blessing over a martini.

"For the olives," Moshe said, reciting *boray pree ha-etz*. "It was like a scuba dive, those last months with Rivkah. I hadn't thought about it like that before." He looked up from his drink. "Are you happy here, in what you do?"

The question startled Arthur. If anything, that was for the second meeting, surely not the first.

"What does that mean, like a scuba dive?"

"Dying. A scuba dive is like a little lifetime. You go down with a full tank of air, thrash about the reef looking for fish. Then in mid-dive you settle down. The fish come out to look at you. When you have only a few hundred pounds of air left, you slow down, stop moving to conserve air and prolong the dive. You settle on a few square inches of coral. During those last minutes you see more wonders in that small world than you did in the entire dive. Then you drift off to the ladder, a pair of angel fish with you, and you climb up to the higher world. The captain greets you and asks how the dive was.

"That's a scuba dive. That's what it was like with Rivkah. Her world closed in and in, down to a few square inches. The angel fish were with her, and she climbed to a higher world."

Arthur sipped at his martini. "You were with her?" he asked.

"I was with her. I died, too, Artie. I died with her. She went on. I came back. I don't know why."

"What do you mean, you died?"

Moshe shrugged. "Died. Dead. I stopped breathing. My heart stopped beating. But I didn't stay there. I came back. Are you happy in what you're doing?"

"Why do you keep asking that? I don't seem happy to you?"

"I don't know. I find most people aren't happy in what they're doing, especially rabbis. I don't know many happy rabbis, do you?"

Arthur sipped from his drink and eyed Moshe's. "Do you like your martini?"

"It's good. I'm happy to have it. Something new. Have you ever had a margarita? I think I'll try that next. Not today. Next time. This is a good thing, lunch together. Next time a margarita. That's the one with salt around the rim? Rivkah and I weren't much for drinking. Wine. She liked red wine. We used to go up to Sonoma, a place there, up in the hills. It used to be off the beaten path, but then all the paths got beaten. Poor paths. Beaten all to hell, tourists trampling all over them. Like us. Tourists like us. We were guilty, too. We just found those paths and beat the hell out of them. I don't think you can find an unbeaten path in all of northern California, now."

Golf, Arthur thought. Maybe Moshe played golf. But he didn't ask. He finished his martini and looked around for the waitress. "All of the fish is good," he said to Moshe. "The trout Françaises, especially. If the captain

himself is cooking. But if it's someone else in the kitchen, don't order the trout Françaises."

"Whatever you're having, Artie. I'll have the same."

The captain was cooking. Arthur ordered trout Françaises, with capers. Blue cheese dressing for the salad, no sprouts. "You never know about sprouts," he told Moshe. "Bacteria."

"Are you happy in what you're doing?" Moshe asked. "I heard there was a rabbinic conference last year, I forget whether it was Traditional or Liberal or something. Rabbis only, not open to the press, and someone asked how many of the rabbis would be members of their congregations if they weren't working there. Not one raised his hand. Or her hand. Not one."

"I wasn't at that conference," Arthur said. "Where are you going to be for the High Holidays? Do you have a pulpit?"

"A pulpit? No, I haven't had a pulpit in a long time."

"I forgot. You stopped being a rabbi."

"I stopped. I stopped being a rabbi before being a rabbi stopped me."

The salad arrived.

"I asked for no sprouts," Arthur said.

The waitress made to take the salad back. "Not to worry," Moshe said. He reached over and picked the mound of sprouts off Arthur's salad and added them to his own. "This much risk I can take."

"Where will you be for the holidays?" Arthur asked him. "Do you need a ticket? Call the office, and I'll make sure one is waiting."

Moshe laughed. "Thank you, but I'll be in California."

"Where do you go to services?"

"With the Havurah. There are about three hundred of us."

"I thought a havurah was a small group."

"This is a large group made up of a lot of small groups. The only time all of us get together is for the holy days."

"Do you lead the services?"

"I used to. I don't anymore."

"Since Rivkah died?"

"Since long before. I might lead one of the services now and then." He seemed about to add something, stopped, then began again. "I didn't go to services at all last year. I was out in the desert. I lost track of time, somehow. When I realized what time it was, the holy days had already passed."

"It was hard for you, Rivkah's death."

"It was hard. Her dying, her death. My dying, my death."

Arthur didn't know how to continue. He had counseled any number of people in mourning, those who had lost parents, spouses, even children. Moshe seemed to have lost something more. Himself. Was that possible, to be in mourning for the loss of oneself? "Are you happy in what you're doing?" he asked Moshe, turning the question back on him.

"This is very good, to be here," he responded instantly. "It's very good to be here," he repeated. "With the martini," he held up the glass. "With the fish." He nodded toward the aquarium. "With you. I remember you. How many years? Twenty-five? I remember your paper on the Pharisees. What do you think would have happened if the Temple hadn't been destroyed by the Romans? Would we still be offering animal sacrifice? You never addressed that question. No one ever addressed it."

Arthur was saved by the trout Françaises, a generous portion, with capers, and scalloped potatoes on the side. The ate for a while in silence. Moshe ate slowly, putting his fork down between bites.

"You like it," Arthur said.

"I wonder if it would be as good without the martini."

"The captain is a good cook, but I'm sure the martini helps. Would you like another?"

Moshe hadn't heard him. He was lost in his fish, chewing slowly, his eyes almost closed. The man was damaged, Arthur realized. "Moshe," he asked, "what's happening with you? Are you okay?"

"Time isn't quite right with me, Artie. Time and space aren't quite what they used to be. I have to be careful now, to stay attached. But I understand things better. The fish is good. The potatoes are good. I don't care much for the capers. Next time, no capers. I've learned how to do one thing at a time. Fish. Potatoes. Capers. No, I haven't quite learned. I'm still learning. Do you know the story of how the Baal Shem Tov fasted?"

Arthur shook his head more to dispel his astonishment at the disjointed responses than to acknowledge he

did not know how the Baal Shem Tov fasted.

“There was a student,” Moshe said, “a young man who wanted to be very holy, so he told his teacher he was going to fast from *Shabbat* to *Shabbat*. The teacher said it was forbidden, to fast like that. The student said the Baal Shem Tov used to do it. ‘Ah,’ said the teacher. ‘You want to fast like the holy master fasted. That’s okay, then. You can fast that way.’ So immediately the student knew he was in trouble. He had no choice but to ask his teacher how the holy Baal Shem Tov used to fast. The teacher said, ‘Saturday night, after *havdalah*, the Baal Shem Tov would bring to his table enough food to sustain him a week, so he wouldn’t have to be disturbed in his studies. Sometimes, at the end of the week, he would be astonished to find the food was still there, untouched. To fast like that is all right.”

“That’s a nice story,” Arthur said.

“I wonder about Yom Kippur,” Moshe said. “Last year, when I was alone in the desert, I don’t know if I fasted on Yom Kippur or not. I like to think I did. I like to think Yom Kippur was during one of those weeks.”