

CHAPTER ONE

A GOOD LIFE, A GOOD NAME

Mr. G. sat there. He was devastated. He couldn't believe it. He was at a loss to explain how it had happened. He was bankrupt. He had just learned this and the news was slowly sinking in. Everything had happened suddenly. It had crept up on him without his knowledge and then exploded with the force of a tornado. And in the aftermath, all he was left with were the mangled remains of a broken life. How was it that he hadn't seen it coming? How come he hadn't noticed any sign of the oncoming onslaught? He could not believe it. He did not want to believe it. He shook his head in disbelief. He sat there not knowing what to do next.

He looked over at the photograph and plaque on the wall opposite him in his office. He saw himself in the center of a group of smiling faces. Everyone looked happy and he had been the happiest of all, sitting there amongst his family, colleagues and friends. He read the words engraved on the plaque:

*'To Mr. Benny Greenburg,
as a token of our gratitude and respect
for your generosity and consideration
over the past 25 years.
From your staff and friends at Greenburg & Son.'*

He had been so proud that day and the highlight came when they gave him this plaque to commemorate the silver anniversary of his business. It had been such a happy day with his family and all of the employees of his factory around him. Many of the employees had been with him for years and formed part of his extended family. He felt blessed that day. He could not think of anything else in life that he could possibly want except, of course, more grandchildren. G-d had been good to him and had rewarded his efforts. Yes, he had felt truly blessed.

And now, he felt lost. He did not know what to do. Suddenly, he felt unwell. He needed to sit quietly for a minute or two. He was hot and clammy. He took out the fresh clean white handkerchief that Sarah, his wife, always placed in the top pocket of his jacket and mopped the perspiration from his forehead and neck. It was getting late and he knew that Sarah would soon start to worry and become concerned that he wasn't home. He had not been out this late without her for years, not since his early days at the factory when he put in long hours trying to get the business onto a sound footing. She would have prepared their dinner and got everything ready for his return. It was his habit to change out of his street clothes almost immediately after arriving home. He had been raised to do this. Money had been scarce when he was a child and getting out of street clothes saved on their wear. His house clothes, or as he called them, his *slipping about the house* clothes, would be lain out on the bed just as they had been every evening for many years now. But he could not go home yet. He would be

bringing home shame this evening. He was going to bring home misery to those that he loved and the thought of this caused him great pain and much sadness. And the tragedy of it all was that it looked as if the guilty would go free.

Mr. G. was not a stupid man. He was a trusting man who chose to see the good in people. He had good business instincts. He knew a good deal when he saw it and knew when someone was trying to pull a fast one. His instincts had not let him down. Not until now, that is. So how come he did not see this tragedy coming? He was at a loss to understand how it had happened. He had never been a greedy man. He had never gambled on any risky business ventures. On the contrary, he had always been honest and conservative when it came to business dealings. He had always tried to be fair to everyone and prided himself on paying decent wages for decent work done. He paid his workers sick pay and took care of them whenever he was able. He never refused to help them get over the problems that developed in their lives from time to time. He had never deceived anyone. He had never cheated anyone. He always tried to be fair in all of his dealings with others both professionally and privately. He did not drink and smoked only an occasionally cigar and it had never entered his head to cheat on his wife. He had been raised that way. He had been raised to be fair and just. To Mr. G., his reputation and his good name were everything to him. He believed that this was the natural and correct way to live.

Mr. G. sighed deeply. Bad and as painful as the situation was, what hurt him most was that his good name would be tarnished and his reputation shot. He was admired and well respected by everyone who knew him, friends, colleagues and competitors alike and had earned a reputation for honesty and fairness. His staff, buyers and clients trusted him and he was loyal to them. He remembered his parents' teachings and had endeavored to live by them. They used to tell their children that the only thing that was important in this life, beside the family, was to keep one's good name. He had lived his life by this maxim. And now, his reputation was in ruins and his good name would be dirtied. Everything that he had lived by and everything that he had achieved would now be viewed through a tainted eye.

He felt that dull ache in his chest again. He had been having that ache more often lately. The doctor had warned him repeatedly not to get over-excited and had given him some medication to reduce the number and severity of these attacks. Mr. G. found that if he took one of his pills and sat quietly for a while, the pain would gradually go away. He wiped away once more the perspiration from his brow and stuffed the handkerchief back into his top pocket. He was beyond being upset now. He had been in such a dither earlier when he left home and had forgotten to take his pills with him. He did not want to call the doctor. The doctor would only nag him and insist that he come to the hospital. Mr. G. could not face any fussing at him at this time. All he needed was to rest and the pain would pass. If he sat quietly for a while, he was sure that the pain would subside. All he needed was to sit quietly and allow himself to think some good thoughts and he would gain relief. Yes, perhaps if he did this, he might even find a way out of this mess.

Mr. G. looked through the glass partition separating his office from the main factory floor. The sewing machines were still now. His staff would be at home with their families. They were probably having dinner and telling each other about their day. He sighed and thought about his own family and how they were going about their business not knowing about the storm that was on the horizon. He had worked hard over the years and put in long hours. His efforts had been rewarded and he had built-up a good business. In recent years, he no longer took home much of a salary, and lately, he had taken even less. *Why not take a little more*, his wife Sarah would ask? She would tell him that he deserved to enjoy himself and sit back and reap the fruits of his labor.

Mr. G. thought of Sarah. In his mind's eye, he still saw her as he had that first time, all those years ago, when she was young and carefree and he had been a nervous youth dressed in that comical suit. He remembered that suit well and recalled having no choice but to wear it to a wedding for some, long ago, forgotten reason. He remembered feeling awkward in it. His brother Baruch had tailored the suit specifically for a client who, through bad times, had been unable to pay for it. So as not to waste it, Baruch got the inspired idea that he should wear it. It was a well-cut and classy garment but it needed the right model for it to be shown off to its best advantage. It was made from a nice herringbone wool, but for the coat to fit him correctly, serious alterations were necessary but, apparently, there was no time to make them, and he had to wear it as it was. Mr. G. remembered that the sleeves were in need of shortening as well. The original model was a man of large dimension about the middle. As Mr. G. was a lot slimmer in those days, he had to really tighten his belt in the hope of keeping the pants up. Standing before the mirror dressed in that suit and with Baruch beside him beaming at his handiwork, he remembered thinking that all he needed was a red nose and a derby and he would have made the perfect clown at the circus. But since Baruch had been so proud of the garment, he hadn't the heart to refuse to wear it. Once Baruch had finished placing what seemed like a thousand safety pins in strategic places, he was ready to leave. Although, the suit looked better, he remembered feeling too scared to move with any speed in case everything came unpinned and he would find himself standing there in his underwear. Years later, he and Sarah would often laugh at the suit, but it hadn't stopped her, the prettiest girl in the room, from taking more than a liking to him.

Mr. G. sighed and thought how Sarah would respond to his news. She would weep and would not believe it at first. Then, as he had, she would become angry and upset and still disbelieving that such a thing could happen to them. As it slowly sank in, she would realize that it was true. Sadly, it would all be true. Once she accepted that the business was ruined, she would probably wipe her eyes, blow her nose, give a deep sigh, and then get up and come and sit by him. She would then take his hand, just as she had whenever bad things came their way in the past, and he would know that, no matter what else would befall them, she would be at his side and that they would bear their future together. She would thank G-d that the house was paid for and, as their needs were simple, she would tell him that they would get through it. Sadly, Sarah would not be able to be so generous to the *schule* in the future, and she would not be

able to lavish so much money on her little pleasures, as she had grown used to over the years. For this, he was sad.

Sarah had been born into a wealthy family. She had been brought up to expect only the best. She was her parents' only daughter and they had doted on her and, sadly, spoiled her. Her father had taken a shine to Benny despite his ill-fitting clothes. Even though Benny was poor, her father felt that he was smart and would be going places. When Sarah was ready to marry, her father fell on hard times. Without much of a dowry, her suitors quickly grew less in number and eventually fell away, leaving only Benny. Benny had a great advantage over Sarah's ex-suitors in that he loved her. This, together with the fact that her father liked him and that Benny would have married her even without a dowry, now made him the ideal candidate to win the hand of the lovely Sarah.

Sarah found it difficult at first to adjust to her family's change in fortune. She had trouble not having money to spend freely and indulge her whims. Sarah had fallen in love with Benny almost at first sight and so was happy to marry him. However, in their early years together, she had sometimes wanted him to advance his business at a faster rate. She had wished that his standards for garment production were not quite so high, but once she learned that Benny was highly respected for his work ethics, she came to realize that she was an envied woman but for reasons that were completely new to her. Still, in private, this did not stop her from nagging Benny at times and complaining that he wasn't bringing home enough money to meet the needs that she expected for her family. This feeling led to their only disagreements, which the elder children could not fail to hear when they lived in their apartment on the Lower East Side. These little arguments would generally occur when Sarah was unable to suppress her feelings of envy at the glittering finery worn by her friends at the *schule*. These ladies would appear wearing the most expensive of wigs and decked out in expensive showy jewelry while Sarah had to content herself with much less.

In spite of their occasional disagreements, Benny loved her and still loved her just as he had on their wedding day. Sarah had made such a beautiful bride. He remembered thinking while waiting under the *chuppah*, as her parents lead her to him, how lucky he was, and marveled at his good fortune that such a lovely creature as she was willing to marry him. He had enjoyed a happy life with Sarah and could not think of anyone else with whom he would have wanted to spend it.

Benny felt the tears welling up in his eyes. He was going to break Sarah's heart and that would break his. He closed his eyes in an attempt to hold them back. He could see the faces of his children and was unable to hold them back any longer and they began to slip down his cheeks. What would they think of him once they learned what had happened? Once they learned that he was bankrupt? Once they learned that he had ruined his life? His pain was too much to bear.

Benny shifted uneasily in his chair and looked at the photograph that he kept on his desk. It was a picture of Sarah, their children and himself. It had been taken several

years ago at the time of their wedding anniversary. The children had taken them out to a fancy restaurant for dinner. They were all dressed in their best clothes. He and Sarah were seated and the children stood behind them. Ruth had her hands on his shoulders and was beaming happily. Everyone was smiling and everyone was happy. It had been such a joyous day. He sighed deeply as he looked at each of the children. Each one was a blessing. Each one was a gift from G-d and the birth of each had brought them joy. He looked at Perez. He sighed deeply again. Sadly, Perez had not always brought his parents *naches*. Perez was a constant source of concern to his parents and was secretive. Benny thanked G-d that each of his children had received a good education and had grown and moved to their own homes, all except for his Aaron that is. Only his youngest son was still in school. He was a good son who generally came home for *Shabbos* and brought his mother his dirty linen.

Benny picked up the photograph of himself and his family. He looked at his eldest son, Schmuel. He was a father now, a respected member of his *schule*, and a partner in his firm. He had been a good and able student. Benny had held a secret hope that he might become a Rabbi, but it was an effort for him to study his religious studies at *Yeshiva*. He made every effort to make his parents proud, and tried hard at his *Talmud* study and was reasonable in his ability to debate. Benny knew that Schmuel's grandfather, *may G-d rest his soul*, would have been proud of his efforts. However, as Schmuel grew, it became obvious that he did not have the makings of a Rabbi, and he turned his attention to other subjects. He had a good head for figures and enjoyed accompanying Benny on trips to the business when he was a child. When the time came for them to decide on what he should study in college, Benny hoped that he would study business subjects and follow him into the *shmateh* trade. Schmuel studied business and settled on accounting in the end. Despite Benny's hope that his son would take over the business, Schmuel preferred to take a position with a fancy company on Wall Street. Schmuel felt bad for his father but he explained that he did not want to suffer the worries that followed Benny around each day. Benny was upset naturally but he appreciated his son's honesty and knew that he would do well no matter what he turned his hand to. Schmuel worked hard and quickly fulfilled his father's expectations and did well on Wall Street, and was promoted to a trusted and valued position in the company, and eventually became a partner. Schmuel married young. He married a rather plain girl, but who was a loving daughter to both Sarah and Benny. Schmuel and his wife made a happy couple and soon had two daughters who were a delight and a joy to their grandparents. Once his children were born, Schmuel moved his family over the bridge and settled in Jersey. They bought a big home befitting his position. Although Benny was proud of the achievements of his son, he found the house to be somewhat pretentious, but sensibly said nothing negative about it, but happily smiled when asked if he found the house to his liking. Sarah, of course, loved it and everything about it.

Benny suddenly felt a cold shiver run down his spine as he discovered some positive aspect of his current woes. In spite of himself, he could see that in light of the present trouble, it had been a good thing that Schmuel had declined the offer to come into the business. Imagine, Benny thought, had he joined the business, he would have lost his

home as well as his good name and reputation too. Benny felt the heaviness grow again in his chest.

Benny turned his thoughts to Ruth, their second child. Ruth had been a plain girl, a homely kind of girl but who had shown at an early age a deep-seated determination and a strong will. She grasped things quickly and worked hard at what interested her. She had done very well in school and trained as a nurse at *Bellevue Hospital*. While working on the wards, she had met a young man who was training to be a doctor. They fell in love and were soon married. She and her doctor husband also had two children, a boy and a girl, who were also a constant source of joy to their grandparents. Ruth and her family lived in a very nice apartment with a doorman and a large balcony overlooking the park. Her husband was working hard and building up a good practice. Money was short for them at this time but things could only get better since he was well-thought of and his practice could only grow. Thank G-d, Mr. G. thought, that they can make their own way and were not reliant on him for money unlike his Aaron who was just beginning his life.

Aaron was the youngest of the children. It wasn't that Benny and Sarah loved Aaron more than the other children, but it was that he had been their last child, and so would always be thought of as their baby. He had been born about ten years after Perez. The family had just moved to Yonkers when Sarah announced that she was expecting another child. She was overjoyed. Although happy, Benny was a little more apprehensive at the news. After all he had just taken on what seemed to him to be a huge loan from the bank in order to buy the house where they now lived. He was especially sensitive to their expenditure at this time. But G-d was good and G-d provided for their needs. The birth had not been easy for Sarah and the labor had been long and painful. However, after hours of suffering, Sarah delivered a son she soon forgot what she had been through in order to receive such a gift. Since he was the youngest, and since a number of years separated him in age from the other children, he was like an only child in many ways. He had reaped all the benefits of being the youngest, and like many solitary children, was a bit spoiled since he was raised in more affluent times. In spite of the gap in age between him and his brothers and sister, the elder children were close with Aaron and would include him in many of the things that they did. He had done wonderfully at school. He had outshone all the others academically. He had been a good child and never gave his parents a moment's worry except that he was perhaps a little too impressed by his brother Perez was always there to give his brother support during the times when Perez was causing his parents sleepless nights. Still, despite this, he had done well in school and was now in his final year of law school. Benny had long since given up the idea that any of his children would follow him into the *shmateh* business, and by the time Aaron was of college age, he did not want it for him. No, he wanted that he should become an attorney. Benny was very proud of Aaron and especially proud of the fact that he was going to be a professional. Yes, he was very happy that Aaron had entered the law.

Benny remembered that not too long after Aaron had started at law school, he came to them one evening and asked if he might live in the city during the week so as to be

close to college. He said that he needed to spend more and more time reading and looking things up at the library, and this would mean later nights. He said that this would be a lot easier to do if he lived close by. Sarah had hoped that this day would not come. She had dreaded the day when her children would be gone from the house. Although he had lived in the college dormitories when he had been an undergraduate and had come home for *Shabbos* each week, Sarah had not seen this as her son leaving home. She said that there was a big difference between his living in a college dormitory with a group of other students and having a small apartment in the city, albeit close to the college. At this, she would brush a tear from her eye, and tell Benny that since he was not a mother, he could not possibly understand how she felt. Aaron, she would say as the tears flowed down her cheeks, was her baby. Benny, for his part, had only been putting on a brave face for her sake, for deep in his heart, he regretted the inevitable too, and wished that the day would never come when the last of his children would feel the need to stretch their wings and fly off. But he knew that this was part of life and G-d brought everything to pass in His time.

Aaron, for all of his book learning, was not a worldly boy. He was shy and a bit gangly and had no prospects of marriage as of yet. Mothers would say that the boy needed feeding whenever he was brought to their homes. Sarah, naturally, was not happy about his lack of marriage prospects, and would spend hours, generally when Benny was trying to sleep, telling him of her fears that he would not give them grandchildren. Benny used to tell her that there was plenty of time for him before he thought about marriage. He had to make his way in some law firm before he thought about marrying. Benny said that it wasn't the same for Aaron as it was for Schmuel and Ruth. It took time for him to get into a position of authority, but once he did, the sky would be the limit, and the girls would flock to his side and he would have his pick of the bunch. Sarah would sniff at this and not be convinced. She would have preferred to see Aaron married, settled and with a few children. This, she said, would give him direction and purpose. Benny had to admit that this viewpoint also had its merit hoped that his agreement would allow him to sleep.

In spite of himself, Benny's thoughts turned to their middle son, Perez. Perez insisted, at a young age, on being called Perry. And Benny and Sarah, in spite of themselves, started to call him that. Although a nice boy and willing to please his parents when young, Perry had been the one to give his parents sleepless nights. He did not like school. He made no efforts to study his Hebrew. He cut classes everywhere. He liked to *run* with the local kids. Benny shuddered when he thought of the time that there had been some trouble, which brought the police to their old home on the Lower East Side. Sarah and Benny were beside themselves with shame. Sarah was so distressed and said that she would never be able to hold her head up again as she walked down the street. She said that her neighbors would be pointing fingers at her as she passed and saying that *there goes the mother of that hoodlum*. Sarah got into such a state that she made herself ill and had to take to her bed for several days. Benny was so upset at Sarah's decline that he sent for the doctor. Perry failed to grasp the humiliation that he had brought his parents. The situation resulted in Benny raising his hand to Perry, something that he had hoped never to do.

If Perry learned anything from this event, he learned to be sneaky in his dealings with his parents. He grew up to be cagey and avoided, whenever possible, telling them where he went and what he got up to. At holiday gatherings, Perry would bring girls to his parents' home, which he knew they would find unacceptable. The girls wore too much make-up and wore dresses that were cut too short and cut too low, and worse yet, were too free-and-easy and allowed Perry to paw them and kiss them in public. Perry made it his business not to bring home any girl that could possibly be seen as acceptable to his parents. He seemed to seek out those who had no idea how to make a kosher home. Sarah was horrified by these girls but worse was to come when he started being seen with *shickses*. Both Benny and Sarah tried to be tolerant but it hurt them to have Perry behave in this manner. They could never understand what they had done for him to turn so shamelessly away from the traditions of his people. Perry went about his business and refused to toe the line.

The pain in Benny's chest was worsening again. He looked over at the clock on the wall. He really should telephone Sarah and let her know where he was. But if he did, she would insist on learning what he had been doing all day. He could not face this at this time. He would prefer to wait until he got home before launching into any discussion of past events. He did not have either the heart or the strength for this at this time.

Benny thought about Perry once more. He hadn't seen him in a while. He knew that Perry would be the best one to talk to about his current problems, as he was, without doubt, the worldliest of his children. He was the one that had not been afraid to enter the world and mingle with all kinds of people. He would have an idea on what would be best to do, he was sure of that.

Benny sighed deeply when he thought about how Perry made his living. Perry managed to finish high school but refused point blank to go to university. He grudgingly went, thanks to a bribe from Sarah, for a semester to the local Community College and had received some business training, but soon left, saying that school was not for him. Perry became more and more of a mystery to his parents as he grew. Although he was always cagey, with time, he became skilful at sidestepping certain topics and oftentimes blunt in refusing to answer when asked direct questions. Perry was especially careful not to answer his parents' questions about how he earned his money. Whatever it was that he did, Benny could see that his son was making a good living, since Perry was always well dressed and never without money. Benny remembered the last time that he asked Perry what he was working at. Perry gave him a glib answer and said that he was doing *a little of this and a bit of that*. Benny did not enjoy being smart-mouthed and the conversation led to an enormous argument between them, which resulted in Benny accusing Perry of being involved in shady dealings. Benny remembered being hurt, shocked and dumbfounded when Perry told him that it was a free country and he could think what he wanted. He was entitled to his opinion! Benny had not expected such an answer and could say no more. Perry left the house soon after this encounter and only rarely came to visit after that, and generally only at

the special request of Sarah, to attend some birthday or anniversary celebration. On such occasions, Sarah insisted that the subject of Perry's work be strictly off-limits, as she did not want the day spoiled for everyone else. Grudgingly, Benny had to agree to this. After that last encounter, Perry never came for *Shabbos* again.

Perry was just as cagey about what he did for a living with his brothers and sister too. Ruth would be the most direct with him. She would snap questions at him that would receive biting answers in reply. Perry seemed to get along well with his brothers but did not confide anything about his life to them. Benny did not want Aaron to be too friendly with Perry, as he wanted nothing to stand in the way of his career and future. Benny was frightened that Perry's apparent affluent lifestyle might prove seductive to a young boy like Aaron. Benny feared that Aaron would be impressionable and want to emulate his brother. Perry wore expensive flashy clothes and drove an even flashier automobile. This sort of thing might easily turn the head of a younger brother. So, in spite of the sadness that Benny felt at not seeing Perry often, the upside of it was that he was not there to tempt Aaron away from his studies.

Sarah was less bothered by the outward appearance of Perry. She believed that Perry was obviously doing well, as she judged this by the very things that worried Benny. She enjoyed Perry's company and attention. Perry reminded her of her father and her elder brother. They had been handsome and charming and Perry seemed to have inherited these qualities. Perry could be a real *chucker* and knew how to woo women and get his own way without difficulty. However, Benny was not so easily impressed and certainly was no victim to Perry's charming ways.

Benny sighed deeply again and shook his head slightly. He wondered how many times, over the years, he had found himself worrying about the source of Perry's money. If he had a dollar for every hour spent on this subject, he would be wealthy now. He hated to admit it but he knew somehow that Perry was up to no good and felt certain that Perry would bring grief on himself and his family before he was finished. Benny felt a twinge of guilt at this thought. He had always suspected that one day Perry would bring them trouble. But now, here he was! He would be the one bringing them ruin and shame. Although the irony of the situation was not lost on Benny, it did not ease his situation in the slightest. He thought of his Perry again. Indeed, this son would remain an enigma. Somehow, Benny felt that he had failed Perry. Benny was sorry for this and it filled him with great sadness. Benny knew that this was not a good time to let his thoughts linger further on Perry as the heaviness in his chest was worsening.

Benny looked at the photograph on the desk once more. He knew that he needed to concentrate on the good things in his life and thank G-d for them. He hoped that the pain and heaviness in his chest would lessen soon. But how could they when his whole world was crashing about him? The more he thought, the worse everything seemed. He remembered the trust funds that he had set up for the children and grandchildren. What would become of these? Would they be safe from the creditors? He wished that he had listened more intently to the attorney when they were set up. Who would have

thought that such a day would come when the safety of these funds were threatened? He should have known that this was always a possibility. But he would never ever, not in a million years, have thought of the cause of his present woes.

The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away.

He thanked G-d that only his Aaron was still in need of financial help. Aaron had to finish his studies no matter what. The others were doing well and could take care of themselves and their families and no longer needed his financial help. He felt a deep sadness that he might no longer be able to fulfill his hopes of leaving something to each of his children and grandchildren. He hoped that they would forgive him.

Benny knew that he and Sarah had always enjoyed having the love and respect of their children. He knew that even his argument with Perry had not caused his son to withdraw his love from him. He thanked G-d for the closeness of his family, for the love and concern of his children and for their always wanting the best for Sarah and himself.

As Benny sat there, he recalled some of the many plans and schemes that his children had thought up to enrich their parents' lives. In spite of his current misery and discomfort, Benny could not help but smile to himself at some of these good suggestions. Every now and again, the children would try to interest him and Sarah in taking a long trip to Europe or Israel. This suggestion would fall on deaf ears, especially after that first trip. Neither Benny nor Sarah had been brought up to be cultured and had no interest in high art and the like. He remembered the time when he and Sarah had gone to Europe. It would certainly be true to say that this trip had been made more to please their children than themselves. After that trip, it was obvious to everyone that, for Benny at least, one trip to Europe had proven to be more than enough. Upon their return, both Benny and Sarah dismissed Europe as a place where *you couldn't get a decent piece of cake* and it took a many years before the children learned of the full *horrors* that had befallen their parents during the trip.

Benny and Sarah had faired a little better in Israel but not by much. They had made several trips there and had enjoyed them but only up to a point. The first trip was undertaken while Aaron was studying there. Ruth had encouraged them to go and see him and to use the time to travel a little too. What made this trip a modest success was that Aaron was able to ease their paths and so avoid any problems that might spoil the trip for them. However, Benny and Sarah's idea of a nice trip was not traveling to far off lands but rather an annual visit to the Catskills and no further. They would return again and again at the same time of the year to that little family hotel where they would meet old friends from the old neighborhood. Here, they would stay in the same room each visit, and would enjoy the first few days making walks around the lake, boasting about their children to their friends, playing mahjong and canasta, and eating at restaurants that offered *early bird specials* while *kvetching* about small incidental things. The remainder of the vacation was then impatiently spent waiting to go home. During such a *sojourn*, they always managed somehow to gain a few extra pounds in

weight, which always came as a complete surprise to them both. But enjoyable as they said that these vacations were, they were always glad to get back home, as they relished their return to their own bed.

Benny sat back in his chair and began to think about his life with Sarah. What he, and she, enjoyed best in their life together, besides being with their children, was being in their own home, sleeping in their own bed and being surrounded by what was familiar. Benny enjoyed eating his wife's cooking, which was always to his taste. However, what both of them especially liked was to sit in their den during the evenings. Here, they would sit happily in their own chairs while dressed in their pajamas, which they wore beneath one of the multitudes of dressing gowns-cum-housecoats that they owned. Now free from the cares of the day, with their house slippers on their feet and the knowledge that the front door was closed on the outside world, they could relax and enjoy their time listening to their favorite radio programs. It was during these halcyon times that they were free to pursue whatever activity they chose, which generally meant the noshing and savoring of their favorite treats away from the watchful eyes and disdainful gaze of their children, especially of Ruth who was very health conscious. Years of marriage had brought them to this time of silent and joyful comfort, which they obtained just from being in each other's company and while doing nothing in particular. This peaceful state had allowed them to fall into a routine that would perhaps appear dull to an onlooker. But to them, their life together, although seemingly simple, was a delight to them both and represented the essence and fruition of G-d's blessings on them.

The heaviness in his chest was still there. The pain had moved up to his neck and over to his left arm. Benny knew that he had to try harder and stay calm. He knew that if he got excited, the pain would worsen. Benny thought of his children once more and tried to concentrate on them. He thought again of their many suggestions and especially of those pertaining to how best their parents should be passing their time. However, although always well intended, their ideas would generally cause an unwelcome stir in the household. He remembered the time when once, and only once, Ruth acting as spokesperson suggested that their parents start to think about retirement and consider the possibility of moving to Florida where they could enjoy themselves in the sun and rest. This idea caused Sarah to have a severe attack of what could only be described as *the vapors*, as if she was some Southern Belle of yesteryear. Benny remembered thinking at the time that not even Vivian Leigh herself could have done it better! Sarah had turned white at the suggestion and said that she *would rather die, yes die, may G-d forgive me for saying such a thing, than leave my children and grandchildren*. She certainly gave everyone the impression of being on the verge of fainting, as the children rushed to her side and gently helped their mother to a chair where she was fussed and doted over and brought what seemed to Benny to be an endless number of glasses of water to help revive her. The children spent the rest of the day tending to Sarah's every whim and caprice and spoilt her gladly in the hope of relieving their own guilt at having caused their mother such pain and angst. Benny felt the same as his wife at their suggestion and would most certainly have preferred death rather than suffer separation from those he loved. He had been very thankful to his wife

for taking control and nipping this idea in the bud. However, he would have chosen a less dramatic way to tell them. Since then, Benny had obtained much pleasure from teasing Sarah about her response to their children's suggestion and would occasionally, when they were alone, playfully relive her response by acting it out for her. Sarah would pretend annoyance at Benny and call him a *silly* but she would soon end up joining him in his laughter in spite of herself.

Benny smiled when he remembered the time when Sarah and the children joined forces in a plan to get him to retire from the business and rest. Rest? This was a word that Mr. G., the businessman, did not know. No, he liked to work. He needed to work. And, most importantly, he enjoyed to work. Once the business got onto a sound footing, good orders came rolling in, and the business made money. Benny was able to provide for all the needs of his family and they soon had everything that they could want. As the years passed, Benny worked more for pleasure than from need. He and Sarah lived in a nice home. Sarah had all the things that she could want that she felt befitted her position. G-d had been good to them and had blessed them with four healthy children and a number of beautiful grandchildren with the promise of more to follow. Yes, Benny knew that he had everything that he could want in life. He was happy and certainly had no plans for retiring.

Benny felt his despair flood over him once more. He had everything that he could have wanted in life, and now, through a combination of stupidity and ill-placed trust, his life was in ruins and he was about to bring shame on them all. His sense of shame became almost too much for him to bear.

The pain in his chest was not going away. Perhaps if he drank some water and sat quietly for a bit longer, he might feel better. He poured a glass of water from the carafe on the table. He sipped some. He pulled at his shirt collar. He felt hot again. He needed to rest. Although many thoughts raced around chaotically in his mind, those of the events of the day always came to the forefront. The realization that he was bankrupt came roaring back to him again. It returned to him again and again, in what seemed like waves crashing over him. Just as he began to feel a little better, he would think of something, and boom, he would remember it all and find himself plunged once again into that bottomless pit of despair. He felt old. He felt helpless. He was broken and he was powerless. If only he could think what to do to find a way out of this mess. If only he could save his family from the shame. He sat back in his chair and closed his eyes.

Benny awoke with a start. He looked over at the clock on the wall. He must have fallen asleep for a few moments. He felt a little refreshed. The pain was now a dull ache in the center of his chest. The pain to his left arm and to the left side of his neck was less but was still there. He wished that he had brought his pills. Maybe that old quack of a doctor was not so foolish after all. Maybe he did know something. Still, such thoughts served no purpose at this time. All he could do was sit quietly and wait for the attack to pass. He had suffered a number of these attacks in the past but none had lasted for this length of time. He could not think of anything else that he should be

doing to hurry its end. He just had to sit quietly and patiently wait and hope that the attack would pass.

Benny's thoughts turned to his parents, his dear sweet parents. His father, Israel, Issy, had been a good man, a family man and a religious man. Issy had been born in the Ukraine and had been a good *Yeshiva Bucher*. He had been a great favorite of the Rebbe in the village and it was hoped that Issy would somehow manage to continue his studies and become a Rabbi. This had been Issy's dream, his parents' wish, and the Rebbe's command. He was a gifted student and could study several pages of *Talmud* each day and was able to debate it with a clarity and maturity well beyond his years. His parents were justifiably proud of him. They sacrificed much so that he could continue to study since these were hard and dangerous times. His family was, like others, easy victims for the mean and vicious of the village and they lived their lives in constant fear. As their position in the village was precarious to say the least, they had to remain vigil to the moods and caprices of their fellow villagers. They needed to use all of their intelligence in order to maintain the necessary dexterity needed to walk, and not to stray from, that thin line of tolerance granted to them, as they trod their way through the dangers that were all about them.

Benny's father had married a lovely young girl named Ruth. Their parents had arranged the marriage contract through the village *yenta* following Issy's *Bar Mitzvah*. After a few years, when Ruth had reached a suitable age, the young couple married. It was said that Ruth made the most beautiful of brides. Both Issy and Ruth's parents had been urged to leave the Ukraine and journey to either Europe or America since there were more and more tales of violence against people such as them. Sadly, neither family had the necessary money for such a journey. However, their parents began to urge their children to start to save with a view to leaving. Their parents said that they would give what money they had to them willingly and said that they should leave as soon as possible and start a new life out of harm's way.

Issy did not want to leave his parents. Anyway, if he did leave, he would have much preferred to go to Palestine rather than to Europe or America. However, with time, his young bride began to urge him to leave and go to America since Issy had an uncle there. Issy would listen to his family and wife and gradually he realized that their arguments in favor of leaving were sound. However, he hated the idea of leaving everything that he knew behind him. He could not bear the thought of leaving his parents and perhaps never seeing them again. He hated the idea of never seeing the Rebbe again. Although neither Issy nor Ruth wanted to leave their families, Ruth knew that they had to go in order to have any kind of life free from such tyranny as was coming to the area.

As the days passed, it became more and more apparent that things were going to get worse in the village. Each day brought fresh news of homes being burned, people being cut down and families being forced to leave their homes. What finally convinced Issy to leave was the promise that their parents would follow them as soon as they had saved sufficient money for the trip. Issy said that he would work hard and send money from

America to help them achieve this goal. Meanwhile all extra family money was being saved and put towards the cost of their journey.

Sadly, their parents would never make the journey. Issy and Ruth learned that their parents were victims of the heinous behavior displayed during a *pogrom*. Mercifully, they never learned the details of their parents' deaths and so could not add this to their feelings of guilt, which they would suffer all of their lives.

Issy and Ruth arrived in America on a hot August morning and went through the immigration process at Ellis Island. Once they were allowed entry into the country, the young couple found themselves awestruck by the sights and activities of the city, as so many others had been before them. They carried everything that they owned in two small cardboard suitcases and two little bundles. Although they made a pitiful sight, the young couple was full of hope. They settled themselves on the Lower East Side, and here, with no English and with very little money, but thanks to their willing hands and their will to work, they began to settle into their new life.

Issy tried to continue with his studies, but like so many before him, the need to eat, pay rent and support the babies as they came, ate more and more into his time. He attended *schule*, where he soon became a valued member. He read the *Torah* when called to do so and thanked G-d at all times for his lot in life. He and Ruth kept a strict kosher home and they and their children observed the holidays and traditions. As the boys grew, they studied and Issy hoped that one of them would show the talents necessary to become a Rabbi. As the daughters grew, Ruth instructed them in everything that they needed to know to maintain a good kosher home.

Issy learned to be a tailor or rather he learned to sew. He was never very good at it but it was good, clean, honest work and he made every effort to do quality work. And thankfully, he was able to support his family from his labors. He learned this trade from a distant relative, Uncle Solly, who had traveled to America some years earlier. Uncle Solly was a kindly man and gave the young couple a home when they first arrived. He was a good man and behaved in a fatherly manner towards them. As he had no children, when Uncle Solly died Issy inherited the meager living that the business yielded. So, thanks to the possession of an old sewing machine and a box of needles, Issy could work and was able to eke out a life for his family and himself. His children would help him with deliveries and, as the boys grew, they took on the heavy work. Issy had always suffered from some undiagnosed respiratory condition that caused him to become exhausted easily, especially when he did heavy work.

The family wasn't rich but like many others, they never realized that they were poor. So they observed the holidays, kept *Shabbat* and thanked G-d daily for their happy life where they felt that they could live free. And like other immigrants, they also waved flags on the Fourth of July and enjoyed seeing the fireworks at the local park. They were seen by their neighbors and friends as a nice family and were respected by the members of their community.

At thirty-eight years of age, Issy, Benny's father, suddenly died. Issy's wife and children were now left to fend for themselves. Their eldest son, Baruch, who was eighteen years of age at the time, had been working with his father for several years by then. He assumed the role of head of the family and took over his father's business. Baruch had been trained to sew and had been working hard to help his father build up his business. Life was hard for the family and Baruch was forced to take on any kind of work that he could get at times to feed the family. Despite this, he insisted that his younger brothers and sisters continue with their education and remained adamant in this matter.

Benjamin, or Benny as he came to be called, was the third son and the fifth in order of the seven children of Issy and Ruth. Although young when his father died, Benny had some good memories of him. He could remember going to *schule* with him and also remember going for walks in the park with his parents and his brothers and sisters. However, what he could remember most about his father came from the times when he and his brothers and sisters would sit quietly before him, while he talked. Their father was famous for quoting proverbs and other sayings, which he believed to be important maxims to live by. Benny had listened and learned well and had always tried to live his life with them in mind. Baruch had also learned well from his father and he continued to impress upon the younger children the importance of leading their lives according to their father's teachings. Benny grew up admiring Baruch who became both brother and a second father to him. As he grew, his admiration for Baruch did not decrease and he learned to appreciate everything that he had sacrificed for them all.

Slowly, Baruch built up Uncle Solly and his father's sewing concern into a nice little business with an increased output. Nothing too big, nothing too fancy, but a nice little business that kept food on the table and allowed the younger children to get an education. He had achieved this by employing a number of immigrants, who like his father and himself, were willing to work hard. Through their efforts, the little business grew and eventually, Baruch was able to take a giant step and move the workplace to a small factory. With the help of some additional employees, he was now in a position to take on some larger orders. Benny remembered this little factory happily for it was here that he first went to work. When, at long last, Baruch agreed that Benny was old enough to leave school, he welcomed him into the family business. It had been Benny's dream to join his brother in the *shmateh* trade and had wanted to quit school earlier but Baruch had refused to allow it. Baruch said that he needed to be educated to be successful in this country, and above all, needed to speak English well.

Benny came back to reality with a jolt. He felt total despair at the thought of that little factory and when he remembered his hopes and dreams for the future. And now, here he was, seated in his office and on the point of losing it all. He looked through the glass partition to his factory floor. Its many sewing machines were silent now and covered for the night. He thought how much the business had changed over the years. As he looked at his factory, his thoughts carried him back again to that little building where Baruch had moved Uncle Solly and their father's business. Benny remembered his early days in that little factory with much affection. He remembered how vast he

had found it when he first went to work there, all those years ago. He had been so eager to show that he could pull his weight in the business and proved himself to be an able pupil. Benny learned the rudiments of the business quickly and it soon became obvious that he had a definite flair for the *shmateh* business. The brothers worked well together and, as Benny's experience grew, Baruch began to actively encourage Benny to develop his natural talents for the business. This eventually led Baruch to allow Benny's talent and good sense to steer the company's direction.

It was while he and Baruch struggled at this small factory and were building up a good reputation for the production of quality goods that Benny met Sarah and later married her. Not long after the birth of their son Schmuel, Benny came face to face with certain realities of life. Although he was ecstatic at the arrival of their first child, Benny realized that he would need to bring home more money now if he hoped to provide for his family and see that his son, and any future children, received a good education. Benny also realized that the company was also poised to move up and compete with the large companies for more prestigious and lucrative contracts.

When Benny joined the business, Baruch made all the business decisions. Baruch was conservative and fearful by nature. It was natural that Baruch thought this way, as he had to support their mother and his brothers and sisters once his father died. Without him, Benny knew that they would have all starved and been living on the streets. Benny also grew up to be conservative and fearful of change. However, once he started to work, he quickly found that his ideas and business practices were sound and brought good outcomes to their small business. As the junior member of the company, Benny's position made him mull over carefully any new idea that he had, and only when he felt sure of its soundness, present it to Baruch. Baruch was always pleased to listen to Benny and they would discuss each idea, turn it over, and over again, and then, when they were both happy with it, either put it into practice or shelf it for possible reconsideration at a later time. This approach to each business idea had brought them success in a small and limited way.

So when Benny came to Baruch with the idea of expanding the business, although fearful by nature, he listened to what Benny had to say. Benny said that with the growth of the business, and the potential for further growth, they were now in a position to compete with larger companies for good contracts. If they wanted to compete and be considered as a *major player* in the *shmateh* business, they had to expand now. In order to expand, they needed to move to a larger building. Benny remembered explaining to his brother the wisdom of the venture and also admitted that he had a personal interest in the venture. Benny said that he had to bring home more money, as he had to think of the growing needs of his family. Baruch understood the situation. He had been in a similar position some years earlier once he had married and the children started to come. Benny had said that such a move would mean taking out a bank loan something neither of them had done in the past. After what seemed like hours of discussion, Baruch and Benny were agreed on the sense associated with such a move, and said that they would look into securing a loan. Neither brother ate much at dinner that evening and neither brother slept well that night.

Benny and Baruch were, to say the least, petrified at the thought of taking on a bank loan, assuming that they would get one that is! Neither their father nor Uncle Solly had ever been in a bank. What money they managed to save was either kept under the mattress or in an old tin once used to hold loose tea. Once their business began to grow, the brothers had been forced to open an account at a local bank. The passage of time had not brought comfort to them and they still felt ill at ease when entering that cold and cavernous building. They found the idea of presenting themselves, with caps in hand, before the bank manager to be daunting to say the least. Benny would liken the ordeal to Daniel going into the lion's den.

The brothers consulted appropriate business associates and friends and learned that they needed to develop what was called a business plan for presentation to the bank manager. They were surprised to learn that a lot of preparation would be needed before they could present their idea at the bank. Benny remembered thinking that all they had to do was to put a few facts and figures on paper, collect up a few garments to demonstrate the quality of their work and bring them along to their meeting with the bank manager, and that they would either get the loan or not. Neither brother realized at the start just what would be involved in the development of a business plan and just how much this would disrupt both of their households.

During the time of preparation of the business plan, Benny remembered developing the signs and symptoms of an ulcer and was put on a strict diet, which did not add to the pleasantness of his mood. Where Benny was grumpy and short-tempered, Baruch became morose. Baruch would take to sitting alone for what seemed to be hours on end and stare blankly into space. For a while, his family feared that he had lost his mind. But, in spite of their sufferings and those inflicted on their families, and despite their reservations and fears, deep in their hearts, both brothers believed in their abilities and began to view their future in a more positive way. They both had a willingness to work hard and both had the belief that if they gave the public a good product at a good price and in a timely manner, they would find a market.

After expending a vast amount of energy and after many sleepless nights spent drinking large quantities of bicarbonate on the part of Benny, the arduous task of preparing their business plan was complete. Benny never forgot this time. Later, he would say that the plan had been one of the hardest things that he had ever done and that it had been torn from them and written in their blood, sweat and tears.

Benny shifted in his chair and took out his handkerchief once more and wiped his forehead and around his collar line. Thoughts of that business plan always upset him even after all these years. Benny realized that he had to be careful. If he allowed himself to relive too many details about the writing of the plan, the pain in his chest would worsen again.

He recalled the day when their plan was finished. Benny could see himself and Baruch sitting in their little office at the back of their tiny place of work. They had

been up all night trying to finish it. They both looked tired and their faces were drawn from lack of sleep and days of not eating properly. Once the last *t* had been crossed and the final *dot* placed, they were in ecstatic mood and felt the need to mark the moment. Since neither brother drank alcohol, they celebrated the event by toasting each other with a cold cup of tea.

On the following day, Benny and Baruch took the giant step and made an appointment to see their bank manager. The day of the appointment came and they found themselves being ushered into a vast office where the bank manager sat behind a huge wooden desk. Benny was shaking when he started to present their plan to him. Since he knew that he would be scared, he had written out what he was going to say and started to read it. Benny knew from the start that his presentation was wooden and was going badly. However, as Benny talked, he felt a curious change start to come over him. He found that once he heard his words, words that he considered to be torn from their souls, he suddenly realized that he did not need to be frightened. He did not need to feel ashamed of what they had achieved. He stopped and looked at the bank manager. He realized that the man was not sneering at him or looking down at him. Benny realized that the manager was *wanting* to hear what they had to say and did not have any preconceived judgment about them. Benny remembered feeling as if a giant weight had been lifted from him, and he later said when relating the incident to Sarah, that he miraculously seemed to gain his confidence in himself, in Baruch and in their abilities. Once this feeling overtook him, he put his papers down and began to speak from his heart. Benny did not remember how long he spoke for, but once he had finished, he sat back, exhausted in the comfortable leather winged chair set before the manager's large oak desk. The bank manager who proved to be a man of vision and integrity was obviously impressed by the brothers and their plan. After asking them a number of questions, he picked up his copy of their plan, rose from his desk, extended his hand to each brother in turn, and thanked each for coming. He said that he would read their report and discuss its obvious merits with his colleagues. He said that he hoped and would send them the bank's answer to their request by the end of the week. Benny could never recall what happened next, but somehow, they found themselves out in the street. The brothers walked back in silence to their factory and began their wait.

The bank manager, true to his word, after reading and digesting the contents of the plan, and after discussing it with his colleagues, sent them a letter, which arrived by the afternoon mail on the following Friday. Regardless of the bank's answer, they were pleased to receive the letter when they did, as neither brother welcomed the thought of passing *Shabbat* without knowing. The brothers sat in the office with the letter before them. It was a very grand looking letter. The envelope was white and of excellent quality paper. Benny thought that it was a pity to open it and ruin its look. They examined it, each weighing it in their hands and noting that even the stamp was attached with perfect placement. The address on the envelope had been typed beautifully with each key having been struck under the same pressure. Eventually, Baruch said that one of them needed to open it and read its contents. Baruch urged Benny to open the letter. After a further minute or two, Benny did. He read the words of the letter aloud and soon the brothers were dancing about the office and hugging

each other while laughing in an uncontrolled state of giddiness. Their noise soon had their employees joining them, and hearing the news, they too began to leap about with joy. The bank manager said in his letter that the bank had concluded that the plan was sound and that they would be happy to make their company a loan. Over the years, Benny, thinking himself very funny, would often retell the tale of the arrival of the letter and joke that the bank manager had been *happy* to give the loan and they had been *ecstatic* to receive it! Benny would laugh at each retelling of the story while Sarah and the children would groan and raise their eyes to the ceiling.

So Benny and Baruch were given the loan. They had found the very building that they wanted and used part of the loan to buy it. Within a few weeks, they were installed and ready for business. Because of their reputation for producing a quality garment and for their honesty, the brothers quickly obtained additional good on-going contracts. From their efforts, the business prospered and the bank was paid back their money with ease, and both brothers received good rewards for their efforts.

Benny had always welcomed any additional responsibility given to him by Baruch, and gradually, with Baruch's blessing, Benny assumed the role of senior partner. Benny's natural talent for the business ensured that the company continued to be awarded a growing number of good and coveted contracts. However like any successful person, Benny was not without his critics. With his rise to prominence in the rag trade, Benny found himself the subject of a number of cynical remarks made by less respectable and reputable members of the profession. They would venomously say that although Benny had some good ideas, he sorely lacked a natural talent for *the business side of business*. Such remarks would not have disturbed Benny had he chosen to listen to them. Benny was never one to concern himself with idle and wasteful talk. However, what did concern him was developing the attributes that he did have. What Benny had, and which separated him from these less than reputable members of the trade, was the combination of good business ideas and a definite sense of what it took to make a quality garment.

It was a truly great day in the history of the business when the bank loan was finally repaid. This time the brothers toasted the final payment with some champagne, domestic naturally. Since neither brother drank and certainly had never tasted champagne before, neither could see the point in paying the asking price for the French vintage when the domestic seemed of much better value. Anyway, as the bottle of domestic was larger, it would allow their staff to taste some too. Everyone was happy at the celebration and it turned out to be a red-letter day.

The company's reputation remained intact and grew over the years as they continued to produce high quality goods at a reasonable cost. Everyone in the trade agreed, Benny knew what it took to make *a nice piece of shmateh*. Benny never wavered from his insistence on extremely high standards of quality being reached and maintained, and he would not allow, under any circumstances, a garment to leave the factory that did not meet the standards set. Benny realized that his demands for high quality work would not bring the company or himself great riches, but as he said many times over the years,

he preferred to have a clear conscience and sleep well at night rather than cheating anyone.

Baruch was happy to allow Benny to spearhead their business now since he had the smarts and the know how to keep the business at the forefront of their trade. Meanwhile he was content to apply his talents to the day-to-day routine affairs. However, over the years the business began to take its toll on Baruch. It became obvious that he, like their father, did not enjoy good health. After numerous trips to doctors up and down Park Avenue, he was advised to move to Florida. After talking the matter over with his wife Rebecca, they decided that they would pack up once their younger children finished their education and were in a position to support a family. However, his health continued to decline, and after a stay in hospital, the doctor said that he should move to Florida as soon as possible. During his convalescence, Baruch thought about the doctor's words. It did not take him and Rebecca long to decide what they should do. Baruch announced to Benny that he was going to retire completely from the business and leave it in his capable hands. Baruch was happy to do this, as he appreciated that Benny's talents had turned their Great Uncle Solly's small sowing business into a thriving concern, which was now at the forefront of the trade. Benny did not want to lose Baruch. He would have preferred him by his side but he knew that Baruch's health was more important. Benny was also apprehensive about losing his input to the business. Baruch had smiled when Benny said this and, as he hugged his brother, he told him that he no longer needed anyone's input and that he would do just fine on his own. So, Baruch, Rebecca and their youngest son, Maurie, packed up and moved to Florida sooner than they had expected.

The pain in his chest had eased but had not gone completely. Benny hoped that he might be able to go home soon. He sipped some more water. Since he had not completely recovered from his attack, he decided to remain at the factory for a bit longer. Although he still had a slight pain in his chest, mercifully the feeling of clamminess had gone.

Benny looked at the photograph of his family on his desk once more. He marveled at the number of years that he and Sarah had been married. Was it really that many years? Where had the time gone? He could remember clearly their wedding day and their first few years of marriage before the children came. He also could remember the many sleepless nights when one of the children got sick or was teething. How many times had he walked up and down that small apartment holding the baby and praying that the fever would break and bring the temperature down? How many times had he begged G-d to let him be the one to be ill and spare his child their illness? G-d had been good and allowed their four children to grow up healthy.

Like so many people, Benny and Sarah looked back on their early years together and thought of them as *the good olde days*. But if truth be told, all days to Benny were *good olde days*. At the start of their married life, the young couple lived in a small walkup apartment on the Lower East Side not too far from his place of work. As the children began to arrive and start to grow, the family moved across the hall to a larger

apartment once one became available. Benny was happy and very comfortable in this apartment. He would have remained there for the rest of his life had the decision been his but Sarah, however, had other plans. One day, she announced that it was time that they moved to a house. Benny was horrified and dismissed this idea. But as time passed, and after a tremendous amount of soul-searching and a tremendous amount of nagging on the part of Sarah, Benny could no longer deny that the business was secure enough to allow him to move himself, his wife and their children from the Lower East Side to a reasonable house in Yonkers.

By now, Benny and Sarah had three children. Always the conservative, Benny had held off from moving despite Sarah's urging. It wasn't that he did not want a house for his children, far from it. He wanted to give them a nice place to live in, a garden to play in, and a good education to help them make their way in life. But what he wanted first and foremost was to be absolutely certain that the business was on a very sound footing before he dared take this step. Sarah had been nagging him to move for a number of years but Benny could not shake himself free from the fear that the business might take a sudden downward turn and then where would they be? Living on the streets! Despite his constant fears and misgivings, a time eventually came when even Benny could find no reason not to make the move, and after what seemed like months of searching for just the right house in just the right neighborhood, Benny found himself finally being uprooted from the Lower East Side and moved up to Yonkers.

Benny managed to smile to himself as he remembered how he had passed night after night worrying about that mortgage, which at the time, seemed to be enormous. Sarah had not seemed to notice any of this and busied herself with talk of curtains and cushions and other such matters.

Benny remembered how he had gotten himself into such a state at the time of closing that the deal almost did not go through. Although scared when he and Baruch had borrowed money to expand the business, the fear that he felt then was nothing compared to the depth of fear that he felt when faced with borrowing money for the house. The difference was that he had Baruch with him to share the burden of the loan for the business. And, somehow, he knew that even if the business failed, he would be able to feed his family and keep a roof over their heads. But, buying a house! Now, that was a different matter. It wasn't just the taking on of the mortgage for the house that bothered him. Sarah had convinced herself that none of their furniture was suitable for the new home. Benny liked their furniture. It was true that the furniture was old, but it was of good quality. It was also true that it had been second hand when they bought it, but it was comfortable, and the pieces were like old friends to him. In spite of his protestations, Sarah had decided that only a few pieces were acceptable and would be allowed into their new house, and that, as they say, was that. Sarah had made it quite clear that they would have to buy new pieces to replace the discarded stuff. Benny kept trying to tell Sarah that he was not suddenly made of money like some *Rockefeller*, and that she should ease up on her grand plan. In spite of his warnings, the old apartment seemed to be filled each day with a fresh batch of new shiny and colorful catalogues and brochures announcing the introduction of some new line of furniture

from some company, many of which were in Europe, and according to Benny, were offered at inflated prices. Indeed, after looking at a few of these brochures, Benny quickly felt ill and did not dare look at any more of them for fear of really becoming ill.

Poor Benny had been up for most of the night before the closing and spent the time thinking and rethinking about the mortgage and the repayments. He covered sheet upon sheet of paper with his calculations as he wrote and rewrote out their monthly expenditures. His brothers had all spoken to him many times about the necessity, and the wisdom, of the move and had shown him quite clearly, on paper at least, that the venture was sound. But despite their assurances, he found himself sinking further and further into the mire of gloom and despair.

What frightened Benny the most about buying a house was that he felt himself forced to borrow money from the bank. He had hoped to get the money from his brothers and sisters but, after some discussion with them, he realized that none was currently in a position to help him. Once he got the loan from the bank, which had been an easy operation, Benny would lay awake each night and his thoughts would race away as they tortured him. His thoughts kept taking him to an imagined time when the business suffered a dramatic downward turn due to sudden and unpredictable changes in the economic climate of the country. Benny saw himself and his family, again and again, being dragged from the house and being made to stand outside their new and gigantic house while the bailiffs threw their meager sticks of furniture out of the house and onto the sidewalk. Meanwhile Benny's imagination would complete his scene of utter despair by allowing the snow to begin to fall just to make his picture of gloom and doom complete. For some reason, in this scene of apparent Victorian tragedy, he would always notice that Aaron never had gloves on his hands. The finishing touches to this nightmare would come when he would see all of their fancy new neighbors, who in Benny's dreams had always refused to talk to him, come out to watch the spectacle and cast their looks of disdain at him. Lastly, to make the picture complete, Sarah would suddenly feel herself on the point of fainting in her true Vivian Leigh fashion from the shame and humiliation that he had brought on them. Benny would roll about the bed while tugging at the bedclothes, much to the annoyance of Sarah. Benny was unable to gain any solace, and was not calmed, from the fact that the factory was working on good contracts at the time and had excellent orders for the coming year. He could only think of some of his old colleagues who had bought large homes and driven around in fancy automobiles. And where were they now? In the poor house! Benny, of course, forgot that none of these colleagues was anywhere near the businessman that he was! They produced shoddy garments and solved their money problems by refinancing their debts. No, all Benny could think was that banks were known to call in their loans, which he presumed that they could do at a whim and without reason, and claim the property should they feel that their notes were in question of not being met. All he could think was that if this were to happen then he would not only lose the house but risk losing the business too. He would go cold at such thoughts and lay there in his bed in utter despair.

Benny had built himself up into such an extremely nervous state before closing that when he finally arrived at the attorney's office on the appointed day, one look at him would have given the impression that he was about to walk up the steps to the gallows rather than become the owner, together with the bank, of a beautiful and modest home in Yonkers. When the time came for him to sign on the dotted line, his hand was shaking so much that the signature hardly appeared genuine. Somehow he got through the ordeal, and once the legal side of the business was complete, and he had managed to get back inside their apartment, he slowly began to relax. This state was short-lived however. Sarah, who was also pleased and relieved that the transfer of the deed was complete, stated that he should not get too comfortable in *that old and moth-eaten chair*, as the movers would be coming tomorrow to take them to the house. His heart sank when he remembered that his old friend, the chair, would not be traveling with them.

By the standards of the neighborhood, the house could not be described as lavish, and certainly not ostentatious. But to Benny, it seemed grand and vast. He had never been in such a large home as this before. Sarah did not seem to think that it was oversized in anyway. It had a large eat-in kitchen, which Benny liked. He was used to eating in the kitchen and saw no reason to change a habit of a lifetime now that he was moving to what Sarah and the kids called *the country*. There was a dining room, which he knew they would never use although Sarah had big plans for using it for dinner parties and large family gatherings once the grandchildren had grown in number and size. There was a den, which Benny had no idea what this could be used for since he did not plan on keeping lions in the house. There was a sitting room and a sunroom. The value of the sunroom was also lost on him. Sarah quickly started to behave as if her whole life had been filled with nothing but tragedy prior to their move. She spoke openly of the joy and delight gained from having this sunroom and gave the impression that she could not imagine how they had managed for so long without one. Sarah enjoyed showing it off to her visitors and planted the idea in their heads that now, thanks to the addition of this sunroom, her life had most definitely been enriched. One thing that did give both Benny and Sarah pleasure was that each of their children would now have their own bedroom and, in addition, they would all enjoy the added luxury of having several bathrooms inside the house and for their exclusive use.

The children took the move well and settled into their new life in Yonkers without difficulty. They liked their schools and quickly made new friends. The children had lived through the hard times with their parents on the Lower East Side while Aaron had not been a part of this. Aaron had not lived on the Lower East Side and was born in the house in Yonkers a few years after the move. He had not known the dinners of watery soup or the wearing of hand-me-down clothes that the others had during their earlier lives. Although the elder children had been given love and care, they had also been privy, thanks to the proximity of living in the old apartment, to their mother's periodic complaints about the shortage or lack of money during this time. Now, thanks to the size of the house, only Benny, who, like so many husbands, had developed the ability to tune out the sounds about him, was privy to Sarah's complaints.

Although Benny liked Yonkers, it wasn't the Lower East Side. Benny had been born and raised there and enjoyed living and working there. He knew it well and he was completely at home there. He liked the people, the streets and the smells from the stalls and shops. He could buy everything that he wanted there. He loved the restaurants. He loved the pickles in the barrels. He loved the herring. And he loved the bread. Even after his move to Yonkers, Benny would shop and buy groceries there and carry them back home. He enjoyed doing this and would spend time talking to the shop owners, many of whom he had known for years.

Still, Yonkers was nice. His children were happy. Sarah was happy. So, he was happy. Many of his friends had moved there too and so the family did not feel isolated. Many of these friends took the bus downtown to go to their place of work each day. Benny did this too. Sarah felt that this was beneath his station and stated clearly that he should buy an automobile and travel in comfort. Benny said that as he was no *Rockefeller*, why should he buy such a thing just to impress his neighbors? Benny enjoyed the bus. To be honest, he never quite got the hang of driving. He never felt completely comfortable and at ease behind the steering wheel of a car. He would clutch the wheel tightly, and with great force, while trying to concentrate and perform the many tasks that go to make up safe driving. It was enough for him to drive in the neighborhood. He avoided as much as possible having to drive downtown. He was happy when Schmuel was of an age to drive and would ferry Sarah about. Benny much preferred public transport. The bus journey to his place of work each morning gave him time to read his newspaper and also to sit quietly and think. He also liked to travel by bus as many of his staff also rode it. It gave him an opportunity to talk with them. He could ask about their health and their children in a more friendly setting.

After the move to Yonkers, Benny continued to put in long hours at the factory. Extra money was always needed especially once the children left high school and went on to college. One thing that both Benny and Sarah were agreed on was that they would never deny any of their children an education. As a result, money for schooling was always of the highest priority.

The pain in his chest had almost gone now but still Benny did not dare to start for home yet. He would give himself a little longer before starting off. Better to sit for a while longer than risk a return of the pain during the ride home. He knew that once he got home, there would be an endless stream of questions for him to answer. He owed it to Sarah to explain things to her as soon as possible. It would not be fair to keep her in the dark for any longer than was necessary.

In spite of his efforts, Benny's thoughts turned to the cause of his problems. He knew that it was easy to say in hindsight that he ought never to have taken Maurice, Maurie, into the business. This was certainly easy to say, but what should he have done when Baruch came to him for help? He could hear his parents and their friends now: *'Benny, always remember, never do business with family and friends. No good can come of it'*.

Benny could see them now, sitting around a table noshing cookies and drinking tea, and reinforcing their words with nods and shakes of their heads. His parents had been full of such sayings and proverbs to reinforce their beliefs. Yet his father would also say that you should never refuse to help a family member or a friend when they were in need. His father would say that if someone comes to you for help, don't wait, help him. But his father would also say: *'If someone comes to you and asks you to loan him money, don't loan him any'*. This remark surprised the young Benny when he first heard his father say it. But quickly, his father added: *'No, don't loan him money - make him a gift of it'*. He told the young and confused Benny that when you give someone money, you should not expect to get it back. Money loaned to a friend can cause the friend to resent you: *'No, better to give him the money, rather than loan it, and then sleep well'*. By doing this, his father reasoned that the friend would be under no pressure to get the money back to you and you would not lose sleep brooding and worrying while waiting for him to pay you back. In this way you keep a friend and do not turn him into someone who avoids you if he can't repay: *'No amount of money is worth the loss of a friend'*. Finally, his father would say that: *'And should the friend come to you later and return the money, so much the better. But never expect him to do this'*.

Benny would listen to his parents and learned well and lived his life according to their maxims. But here, now, when confronted with the treachery of Maurie, Benny found himself confused again. What should he have done about Maurie when faced with seemingly contradictory maxims? *'Never do business with family and friends'* on the one hand, and *'help a family member or friend when they are in need'*.

Benny sighed and thought of what the *Job's comforters* would be saying once his ruin became common knowledge. He knew that they would seize upon the chance to tell him that he must have been crazy to help Maurie and bring him into the business. Well, he had helped him and he could not take that action back. Now, he would have to suffer the consequences.

Despite all his efforts, Benny could not stop himself from obsessing on his troubles. He thought about Maurie. Maurie, who had seemed such a nice boy! Maurie, who had been so attentive to Sarah! Maurie, it could not be denied, had played a part in the downfall of his business and the loss of his good name!

Maurie was Benny's eldest brother's youngest son, and was a few years older than his son Aaron. Benny remembered that day, about a year or so ago, when Baruch had telephoned him. Baruch was beside himself and was desperate with worry over Maurie. He had begged Benny for help. He begged Benny to give his son a job. Maurie, it seemed, was breaking his mother's heart. Baruch and his wife, Rebecca, were worried about their son. In fact, they were more than worried. They were at their wit's end over Maurie. Baruch said that Maurie had no direction in spite of his many opportunities. Baruch, although too ashamed to tell Benny everything, hinted at Maurie's gambling and his trouble with some bookies.

Benny did not need to hear any reason as to why Baruch was asking for help. It was enough for Benny to learn that Baruch needed help for him to offer it. Benny could not even think of refusing him. How could he refuse such a plea from his brother? Benny also realized that, if not for the grace of G-d, that it could easily have been him making the telephone call, and telling Baruch about the activities of Perry.

Benny loved his brother. Baruch had been good to him not only when he was a child but throughout his life. Despite the separation of years, Baruch and Benny had always been close. Baruch was the eldest of their parents' children, while Benny had been one of the youngest. Baruch gave up his youth and his education when their father died, may G-d rest his soul, in order to ensure that his brothers and sisters had food on the table and their chance of education.

Benny drank some more water. The pain was once again heavy in his chest. He had to sit quietly. He had to try and not get himself agitated. This was easy to say but so hard to do, especially when everything he thought about upset him. He was bankrupt! His reputation was gone! His good name was about to be dragged in the dirt! But, he needed to stay calm! What was he to do? He had to try harder and think good thoughts. He had to force himself to remain calm, as he had to wait out this pain before he dared start for home.

In spite of himself, Benny could not stop himself from thinking of his brother and that telephone call. Benny looked out over the factory floor. He had come a long way from that little place where he and Baruch had started. The business had grown and they had done well. Benny remembered that while the children were still babies, he held the hope that one of the boys would want to enter his business. He had held this wish secret, since Sarah was always talking about how nice it would be if the boys were to take up a profession. She said that it would be nice to see them grow up to be respected by society. She hoped that one would become a doctor or an attorney. Benny smiled at her agreement but he was a little hurt. He was proud of his work and saw nothing wrong in entering the *shmateh* trade. It was good honest work and the factory produced good quality garments that he would hold up beside those of any other factory. Sarah never realized that Benny was thinking this, and since he did not want to hurt her, Benny never said anything about how he was feeling. Still, Benny would have enjoyed grooming one of his sons in the ways of the business and then passing it along at the time of his retirement. He had been very upset when Schmuel declined this offer. Perry had not shown much interest in the business once he reached high school age, and by the time Aaron was of age, he had decided that he did not want it for him. Still, Benny was sad at the thought that no one would be taking over from him. He remembered hearing talk of his father telling of the pleasure that his old Uncle Solly had got from passing his sewing business on to him. He would have liked to know this feeling too, but alas, it was not to be.

Benny sat there in his small factory and suddenly felt the sadness of one who had somehow failed in his life's work wash over him. Still, Benny realized that his children

were happy, healthy and successful in their chosen lives. Well, he hoped that this was the case, as Perry was always an unknown quantity.

Benny remembered how pleased he was when Baruch asked him to help Maurie. He vainly thought that perhaps, just perhaps, he was going to get a second chance at teaching someone the business. Perhaps Baruch's youngest son might be the one to take over the business and keep their name and the company going. Benny had been delighted at the thought. Although he had been forced to accept that his own children were not interested in doing this, deep down, he knew that he still carried the hope that a family member would step up and carry on the tradition. Benny knew that this idea had not died in spite of what he might have said or pretended to think.

Suddenly, Benny felt a sharp of pain shoot over to his left arm. And as it did, while sitting there in his chair behind his desk, he sat bolt upright as the scales suddenly fell from his eyes. Once more Benny felt that wave of despair flow in and rise up over him. Benny looked shocked. The penny had finally dropped. As he sat there, bolt upright, Benny realized what his parents had meant with their seemingly contradictory maxims. He realized that these maxims weren't contradictory at all. They were, in fact, mutually exclusive and in no way confusing. Benny realized that he could have helped Maurie and this, in itself, would have been fine. All would have been fine had he stopped there. But no, Benny had not stopped there. Vanity had reared its ugly head up and he had allowed himself to be seduced into thinking that his name and his lifetime of work could be carried on after him. He had allowed himself to think that Maurie was the right one to take over his business one day. He realized now that he had been only too willing to believe that the boy would want this and would be willing to work hard and learn the business. Benny now admitted to himself that he had been much more upset than he had cared to say when his own children had rejected his business. He now realized that his stupidity and his vanity had opened the door to his being taken advantage of and this had led to his ruin. He felt that wave of despair carry him down once more and plunge him into that bottomless pit where pain and misery live. He saw now that he was just some silly old fool who had allowed himself to be taken like a lamb to slaughter. It was his own fault. He could see that now. It was his own fault that some slick kid had taken him to the cleaners. Benny now faced the truth. He was like some old chicken that had been ripe for plucking. It had been his vanity and his conceit in wanting to found a dynasty, like some *Rockefeller*, that was not only bringing ruin on him but also on those that he loved. He knew that he only had himself to blame for all of his current woes.

Benny thought of Maurie, who seemed to have been such a good boy and who had been so attentive to Sarah. But now he remembered that Micah, his floor manager of many years, never seemed to like him. Why hadn't he paid attention to Micah? But why would he? Micah was not known to like anyone and was gruff and off-hand with everyone including himself. It was just Micah's manner to be negative when it came to people. Well, Micah, in spite of himself, had been right not to fall for Maurie's charm.

Yes, Benny finally realized that his own vanity had allowed Maurie to seize his chance. Benny sank back in his chair. He felt tired, so very tired. He felt the tears well up once more in his eyes. He was sorry, sorry for everything. He had been such a *dumpkopf*! Just a stupid *dumpkopf*!

What did they say? *There's no fool like an old fool.* Well, he had behaved foolishly and allowed his conceit and vanity to overwhelm any sense that he had been born with. He wanted to tell Sarah how sorry he was for the shame that he had brought on her and the family. He wanted to beg her to forgive him. He wanted to ask for forgiveness from his children. His foolish behavior had caused him to make mistake after mistake, which had lead to all of his efforts and work ending in failure.

The tears began to flow from his eyes as he realized that his only and lasting legacy to his wife and children, was ruin. He wept for them and he wept for his parents, as he had destroyed their legacy to him, their good name. He had dirtied the good name that had been entrusted to him.

Benny was sorry, so very sorry. He knew that he was powerless to do anything about any of it now. He knew that he could not change anything and had to accept his life such as it was. Suddenly, the pain and the heaviness in his chest intensified. It was like a knife being thrust into him. He doubled over from its intensity and, as he did, he grabbed at the photograph on his desk and held it tightly in his hand. He could not breathe. He knew that soon he would be released from his worldly problems and tragically would have to leave them with the living. And as Benny sat there gasping his last labored breathes, he saw the smiling faces in the photograph looking back at him. With these images before him, he suffered that final crushing pain that choked from him what remained of his life. And as it did, all Benny could feel was sorrow for what he had allowed to happen to those he loved.