

# PLOT SUMMARY

---

Joe is a bold and crass surgeon, who scoffs at anything above or beyond himself and freely indulges his passionate appetites. Adam is a painfully shy and anxious medical researcher, who seeks security in devout religious practice, but finds little relief from his discomfort. These most unlikely of associates come together with four other individuals under the watchful eye of David Web, their group therapist. In order to find healing, the patients must tell their stories, and in so doing, Adam and Joe find a common bond in war-torn Europe and its soul-numbing Holocaust sixty years before. Both Adam and Joe must confront ghosts from that time, ghosts that now live in them. Adam and Joe struggle together until both are forever changed, hope is renewed and a new spirituality is forged.

# ENDORSEMENTS

---

*Dr. Milgraum is a gifted story teller. Like a fine symphony, themes present at the beginning are developed as the work evolves. There are moments of crescendo and of fortissimo, unexpected turns, but a confident direction... **Never Forget My Soul** is a brave work that touches the soul and invites us to remember a way that can nourish and not destroy the soul.*

—Michael Berenbaum, former Director of the United States Holocaust Research Institute at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum

*Dr. Milgraum's novel is one of those "can't put it down" books that takes you on an exciting journey, all the way to the end. This highly readable story will appeal to a wide range of readers. I enjoyed the insight into the dynamics of group therapy. This author is very skilled at weaving the past histories of the characters into their present stories. The story clearly illuminates the multigenerational effects of such a devastating trauma as the Holocaust, for all to understand. But it goes beyond that: it reaches into the very soul of the reader and causes one to examine one's own life. And it all happens as one is enjoying reading this wonderful book. Truly an uplifting experience!*

— Ellen R. Price, M.Ed., Manor College, Jenkintown, PA

---

---

*Dr. Milgram's compelling new book is very much for our times, yet goes far beyond our times. His narrative takes on a history of destruction and the shattered parts of ourselves with the profound conviction that there must be a better way to live. His story demonstrates gently and with compassion that hope is renewed the moment a human being opens his heart to the plight of another. And much more than a mere story, **Never Forget My Soul** is a journey toward the discovery of ripened, abiding spirituality.*

—Dr. Yael Danieli, Distinguished Professor of International Psychology at the Chicago School of Professional Psychology

*Michael Milgram's first novel is a refreshing approach to the issue of Holocaust survivors and in this case, appropriately, the children of survivors. The novel uses as a catalyst the setting of a group therapy session, where all the attendants, including Adam, the son of survivors, work through different issues. The reader can empathize with the problems exposed in very detailed discussions among the patients and experience catharsis along with some of them. Even those who know nothing of the Holocaust can relate to Adam and Joe, another character who comes to understand the reasons behind growing up in a dysfunctional family.*

— Deborah Adiv, English Professor, IDC University, Herzlyia, Israel

---

# WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING ABOUT THIS BOOK

---

*This book might very well start a movement for a different kind of book club and therapy groups everywhere. It takes away the taboo and the fear of a group encounter. So many are trapped in loneliness and pain, but do not have the courage or the encouragement to finally have an encounter with themselves. This book totally relieves them of their encumbrances. Such a hopeful, helpful, and downright interesting book to read!*

*Long after the end of the book, you will find yourself thinking of the themes and the characters – they stay with you and impart a personal courage to look into one's own soul, along with a desire to face one's own existence and purpose.*

*In the looking, one finds understanding of self, of others, of the missing parts of life. It is here that healing happens.*

*This book heals...if you only let it!*

— Anne Maloy, University of Maryland

---

---

*Dr. Milgraum's book is a true gift to any reader who is interested in an exciting, suspenseful plot with an added depth that is uncharacteristic of many fiction novels. The author masterfully portrays the excitement of a psychological odyssey as he weaves together history, interpersonal struggle, and self-confrontation. The reader is taken along on this adventure and is challenged to reassess him- or herself. This book is thought-provoking and stays with you, really stays with you. Now that I have finished it, I want to read it again!*

— Alicia J. Odum, M.D.

---

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

---

**N**otwithstanding the stereotype of the isolated, struggling novelist, the production of a novel is a group endeavor. I want to first and foremost thank Dr. Yael Danieli for the attentive ear and trained clinical eye she has turned towards Holocaust survivors and their progeny over many decades. Without her inspiration and insights, this book would likely have never come to be. Her research revealed the presence of distinctive types of survivor families, and I have used two of these types in creating the story herein. Not only did Dr. Danieli's work serve as inspiration and guide for this book, she also extended to me the kindness of reviewing my manuscript and making detailed comments and suggestions for improvements. I am particularly gratified that our collaboration on this book led to further work together, as I assisted her in refining a questionnaire assessing the multigenerational effects of the Holocaust.

I want to also acknowledge the many other sources of wisdom and inspiration that have played their role in the formation of this novel. My teachers—psychological and spiritual—have, over the years, helped me to refine my vision and deepen my understanding. Although they are far too many to name, I would like to at least acknowledge three—my father and mother, Leonard and Sylvia Milgram, whose devotion, intelligence, wit and wisdom I have taken as models for the man I want to be; and the recently departed Rabbi Noah Weinberg, may his memory be

---

---

for a blessing, whose infectious love and warmth led a new generation back to its spiritual heritage. In addition, no acknowledgment would be complete without mentioning my patients, who, over the years, have inspired and truly astounded me with their courage, honesty and strength.

In terms of the technical aspects of this novel, I am grateful for the fine editing and stylistic input from Erica Thompson, copy editing by Lynn C. O'Connell, superb cover design and text layout by Kit Oliynyk, and my other readers—my additional sets of eyes—for giving further input, including Naomi Singer and Lea Milgraum, my wife and soul mate. Further, I want to particularly thank Lea for tolerating the great time expense involved in creating a novel and bringing it to fruition.

Finally, there are two more to thank. The first is Michaela Lyons, who all those years ago handed me a notebook and suggested that I make regular notes of my thoughts and observations, so I remember them for all those books I planned to write. The second, and most important, is God, who has made this and all our blessings possible.

---

## FOREWORD

---

**T**o confront the Holocaust some struggle with God, some with humanity and some with memory. In this moving novel, *Never Forget My Soul*, Michael Milgram struggles with all three..

The two central characters, Adam and Joe, are both descendants of Holocaust survivors. Adam is the child of survivors, the son of a family where memory haunted his childhood home. His world was divided between those who could be trusted and those who could not. The content of his Jewishness was fear and anguish. Adam's mother was barely functional; she internalized her pain. His father's aspirations were seemingly modest—safety, security, survival. Yet only after seeing what he had seen and entering into the world of the *Shoah*, could one appreciate how significant an achievement that was.

Over the vehement objections of his parents, who wanted him to avoid danger and stay close to home, Adam journeyed to Israel in the post-1967 euphoria, a pilgrimage that brought him into the presence of a Rabbi, a man of faith and learning, who despite his prior internment in the concentration camps and his life under Nazi persecution, did not lose his belief in God or in life. He taught Adam that faith, and he modeled an alternate Jewish path as to how to grapple with memory. Adam desperately embraced that path, but could not overcome the legacy of his past. His religious praxis was perfect; his spiritual development arrested. His prayers were by rote and yet he was both comforted and tormented not by his inner spiritual attainment, but by the idea that there could be one, should be one, one that was not his.

---

---

Joe is the grandchild of a Holocaust survivor, a hero, one of the few who escape Treblinka, where some 900,000 Jews were murdered and there were less than 100 known survivors. Scott Cohen had participated in the Treblinka Uprising and escaped the death camp in its aftermath. In response to his youth, he was living, what Primo Levi described in his magisterial work *If This Be a Man*, falsely re-titled to give it an upbeat feel for an American audience *Survival in Auschwitz*, “the cold life of a joyless dominator.”

Joe’s grandmother was submissive, and Joe’s mother sought to escape her father’s domination by marrying a non-Jew who seemingly was everything her father was not, yet who, as often happens in marriage, shared much in common with her father. He was a determined dominator, yet, unlike her mother, she escaped, neglecting her children, by burying herself in a successful career.

Brilliant and impulsive, selfish and hedonistic, Joe rebelled, seeking refuge in drugs and sex and acts of daring, then, at least externally, finding his own way through life as a successful physician, an indifferent husband, and an occasional father, drowning himself in sex and work. The fact of his grandfather’s survival seemed of no importance, and he last made contact with his own Jewishness when he stormed out of his own Bar Mitzvah sermon, having spoken defiantly, confronting God and Abraham and mocking those who revere sacred scripture.

Both Adam and Joe are driven to therapy and find themselves in group sessions with diverse characters led by David, a wise and caring

---

---

therapist who seems to know precisely when to intervene and when to remain silent. The skill of a good therapist is not only in knowing what to say, but also when to say it. As one who has done some significant counseling as a chaplain and rabbi, I always marvel at the patience required. A scholar, writer or preacher must tell the truth that he knows; a wise counselor must guide the person being counseled to discover their own truth. Milgraum is a therapist, and one can tell from this novel that he has grappled with these issues himself.

Milgraum is a gifted story teller. Like a fine symphony, themes present at the beginning are developed as the work evolves. There are moments of crescendo and of fortissimo, unexpected turns, but a confident direction.

I suspect that I have been asked to write this foreword not for my understanding of literature – I am but an appreciative reader but not a literary scholar – but for my efforts to grapple with the Holocaust, God, humanity and memory and also, perhaps unknown to the author, for my appreciation of literature as an important form of theology, especially to Jews.

The Torah, as any student of Rabbinic commentary knows, is not only a work of law. Rashi, the great French commentator (1040-1105) wrote in his commentary on the first words of the Torah, that had it been just a book of laws, the Torah would have began with the first commandment in the 12th chapter of Exodus and not with the Genesis and Exodus narratives. If Greeks might say: “in unity there is strength,” Jews would be more inclined to tell a story of “two dogs that killed a lion.”

---

---

So what does this story tell of the Holocaust?

Viktor Frankl, the eminent Viennese psychoanalyst who was an inmate of the camps, wrote of liberation: “only later-- and for some it was much later or never – was liberation actually liberating.”

Milgram does not choose the easy path. He portrays the painful truth of survival, which tends to be obscured in our feel-good society. Adam’s parents and Joe’s grandfather and mother, paid for their experience of trauma. The Holocaust did not end for them, not in the conventional sense. They did not overcome; they endured, paying an ongoing price for all that they went through, for childhoods interrupted, witnessing the death of parents and siblings, the murder of their entire community, the demise of a whole world. The anguish does not end with the generation of survivors, it is transmitted directly and indirectly, knowingly and unknowingly, in ways that are acknowledged and in a manner that cannot be, to the generation after, and even beyond.

Theologically, he offers no cheap grace, no feel-good story and no way out of the abyss, without confronting the darkness. One must respect the integrity of the writer and of the therapist who resists the all-too-prevalent temptation in our world to retell only the good, to describe strength and not probe weakness and to offer easy triumphs. The impact of the Holocaust is lasting, and even though survivors demonstrated manifest, dare one say awesome strengths, in the very fact of their survival, they paid a price for that survival, an ongoing price.

Twice during the work Milgram insists that there is only one way to confront the Holocaust and that is to go into the darkness.

---

---

This endears him to my heart. Permit me a personal story. When I was writing my Ph.D. dissertation on post-Holocaust theology and the work of Elie Wiesel, I found myself drawn to the image of the void, absence where presence had been. I considered three Jewish theologians — Emil Fackenheim, Richard L. Rubenstein and Eliezer Berkovits, who were among the earliest of the American Jewish theologians to confront the twin revolutions of American Jewish life, the Holocaust and the rise of the State of Israel. Fackenheim had achieved fame by speaking of the 614th Commandment:

*The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz says:  
Jews are forbidden to hand Hitler posthumous victories.  
They are commanded to survive as Jews, lest the Jewish people perish. They are commanded to remember the victims of Auschwitz, lest their memory perish. They are forbidden to despair of man and his world, and to escape into either cynicism or otherworldliness, lest they cooperate in delivering the world over to the forces of Auschwitz. Finally, they are forbidden to despair of the God of Israel, lest Judaism perish. A secularist Jew cannot make himself believe by a mere act of will, nor can he be commanded to do so . . . And a religious Jew who has stayed with his God may be forced into new, possibly revolutionary relationships with Him. One possibility, however, is wholly unthinkable. A Jew may not respond to Hitler's attempt to destroy Judaism by himself cooperating in its destruction. In*

---

---

*ancient times, the unthinkable Jewish sin was idolatry. Today, it is to respond to Hitler by doing his work.*

Richard L. Rubenstein had also achieved fame by speaking of the “death of God”, not in the sense of the Christian theologians celebrating humanity coming of age, but of living in a world without a Judge and without Justice, a world in which the fear of God is no longer real and unrestrained human power had been and can be absolutely lethal.

Fackenheim had to back away from the abyss, fearing the consequences of confronting the darkness. See his use of the word “lest.” He would not allow us to go there. Rubenstein had gone beyond the abyss, living in a godless world where humanity is the ultimate arbiter of all things. After “the death of God”, everything is permitted – everything. Berkovits had postponed the conflict, believing God answerable in the end of days for the anguish of the created world in which humans alone are responsible for history. Only Wiesel, the early Wiesel, the writer before he had achieved prominence and internationally celebrity– grappled with the darkness and worked through the abyss. He became my model, asking challenging questions, refusing falsely comforting answers, neither backing away nor resolving the issue but living in the tension. I found in Milgraum a kindred soul.

The denouement of the novel comes in two parts. The first is when David finally intervenes and says to the two men:

You are both fighting against the same thing, hopelessness, or perhaps I should say that you are both trying to protect yourself from the pain of hopeless. The only difference is that, Adam,

---

---

you protect yourself against hopelessness by denying it, while Joe, you protect yourself from hopelessness by embracing it, by becoming its chief protagonist.

Had one spoken such words of Fackenheim and Rubenstein, they might have concurred.

The second part is the confrontation between Joe and the Rabbi, whose synagogue he stormed out of a quarter century before. Now aging and more frail, the Rabbi too has known loss, the death of his wife and the loneliness of being a widower, but he also knows where to find consolation.

There is an intriguing, ritualistic phrase that pious Jews recite to the mourner: *Hamakom yenachem*, May the Place [a name for God] console you." I have often interpreted this phrase more literally: "May there be a place where you will find consolation. That place for the Rabbi is the book of Job.

What makes a holy text timeless is its potential to speak of each generation and each reader at each stage of his or her life as if it was written for them, here and now. Joe barges in on the Rabbi in anguish and in despair. The Rabbi cannot answer his anguish, but he can, like Elihu (a key figure in the book of Job), acknowledge the despair and listen to the anguish. By listening, and by acknowledging, there is the possibility of alleviating.

And finally, Joe and the Rabbi return to the two basic texts of Genesis, Abraham's confrontation with God over the fate of Sodom and his non-confrontation with God over the command

---

---

to sacrifice his own son, his beloved son, his Isaac. For the Rabbi, God's gift to Abraham at Sodom was the opportunity to demonstrate love of others in action. "The root of all human goodness," the Rabbi says "is the awareness that we are not alone in the world."

Joe responds: "I see no gifts, only a cold world where the strong survive and the weak are crushed."

The Rabbi remembers the rules of counseling: "To treat the darkness you have to bear your own entry into the darkness." That is the inescapable beginning.

But one need not end up in that darkness. Some in that darkness can discover God. God did not answer Job in the whirlwind, God addressed him. With presence there is the possibility of meaning, without it, there may just be despair.

And some in that darkness can discover another person and find that loneliness can be bridged with another, anguish can be shared with another. To protest the cold cruel world, one can reach out toward the other and share the warm embrace and with that comes healing. There may be some light out of the tunnel.

*Never Forget My Soul* is a brave work that touches the soul and invites us to remember a way that can nourish and not destroy the soul.

*Michael Berenbaum  
Los Angeles, California  
July 20, 2012*

---

*To Lea, for loving me and my dreams,  
To Yael Danieli, for having the courage to listen when others didn't,  
To M., my gentle teacher and guide,  
And to Hirsh, Shayna, Rena and Hannah... our future.*

© Michael M. Milgram December 2011

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any other information storage and retrieval system, without the written permission of the copyright holder.

All characters appearing in this work are fictitious. Any resemblance to real persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Published by Guidelight Books  
9525 Georgia Avenue, Suite 203  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
guidelightbooks@gmail.com

# NEVER FORGET MY SOUL

---

A NOVEL BY MICHAEL M. MILGRAUM

# PART ONE

---

*Were I to keep silent now, I would expire.*

—Job 13:19

## CHAPTER ONE

---

Grace was eight years old today. As her party wound down, she played tag with two friends in the front yard, awaiting their parents. The afternoon sun sent slantwise golden rays across the lawn, causing the girls' shadows to lengthen. It had been a glorious, blue-skied, autumn day, during which Grace had immersed herself in the pleasure of being celebrated and having her friends near. At times, she would think of her father and wonder why he had not kept his promise to attend. But her feelings about his presence were mixed, so she would push the thoughts out of her mind quickly. Now, as the sun lowered in the sky, the day faded, and a chill entered the air, her dark thoughts began to intrude on her consciousness again. She wondered when her father would return and what state he would be in when he did.

Two cars pulled up, and each of the friends recognized her respective ride. The first friend to leave was Tracy, a bubbly girl who had a quick smile and a giddy laugh. Tracy waved and blew Grace a kiss and went sprinting across the yard towards her mother's car.

Laura, the other remaining guest, was Grace's best friend. The girls hugged each other. Laura attempted to pull back from the hug, but Grace kept a firm hold. Grace felt that she was safe only as long as she held on to Laura. Laura, who was tolerant of Grace, half spoke and half whined, "Grace, I have to go!" Still, Grace's grip did not loosen.

Grace said quietly, "Please stay."

"Can't. Love you, but can't. Mom says no sleepovers on Sunday nights," said Laura, pulling back from Grace and tugging at her arms, so that Grace finally let go.

Laura began to walk away, looking back with a reassuring smile and a "thank you" directed at Grace.

Grace's eyes followed Laura as she approached the car. Laura's long brown hair bobbed behind her as she ran. Laura opened the car door, stepped in, seated herself, and reached out for the door. Grace got a last glimpse of Laura's face as she closed the door, and then Laura's form rolled away in shadows of tinted glass.

Grace went inside and saw the mess her guests had left behind. Grace's two younger brothers had each taken a large piece of cake for themselves and were playing marbles on the dining room floor. Their paper plates, with cake on them, were at their sides on the floor, and crumbs were strewn about the plates. A plastic cup of orange soda was spilled on the wood floor, next to her youngest brother. Grace entered the kitchen and saw her mother feverishly preparing dinner. She had placed pans, mixing bowls and utensils in precariously-stacked high piles and was attempting to rapidly complete dinner preparation in the small counter space that had been liberated. This sight caused Grace to spring into action. She dashed to the kitchen table and began to clear and clean it. Remnants of breakfast and lunch were on the table — a bowl, half-filled with milk and a few Cheerios, which were engorged from ten hours of soaking; a half-eaten tuna sandwich; a plate with watermelon rinds surrounded by a cloud of fruit flies;

plastic cups, filled with small amounts of milk, juice or water; a few toys and children's books; and an assortment of eating utensils. In ten minutes, Grace had managed to clear the table, stack the dishes and wipe off the crumbs and food scraps.

She paused for a moment, with a look of relief on her face. Suddenly, her face dropped as she remembered her brothers, the cake and the state of the dining room. She grabbed a towel and knelt down to wipe up the orange soda. Just then, she heard the door open and close. There was no voice, but she could hear the footfall, and she knew it was her father. She stopped, as a small animal might freeze when it expects it is being watched, and she wondered: Which way, the bedroom or the dining room, which way? Her unstated question was answered immediately as she heard him approach the dining room. Grace's stomach clenched. He appeared, a tall and muscular man wearing a brown T-shirt and blue jeans, covered with grease and grime. He had a hard expression on his face. His face was always the same when he was sober – not angry, annoyed, or worried, just hard. He walked past the boys and Grace, not acknowledging them, and grabbed a glass and a bottle out of the liquor cabinet. He disappeared into the living room. Grace resumed her work of cleaning up the dining room. Fifteen minutes later, she heard her father's steps again, as he entered the kitchen and said, "Where the hell is dinner?!"

Grace heard the mollifying voice of her mother, "It's ready. You can come sit down."

Grace's mother then entered the dining room, quietly telling Grace and her brothers to come to dinner.

The family gathered at the table. Grace's father sat silently, looking at his plate and drinking a beer. The boys were in and out of their seats. Occasionally, their father would growl at them to sit down, and each time he did so, their mother would look up nervously. Grace kept her eyes on her plate, like her father. When dinner finished, her father rose without a word and returned to

the living room. Grace's mother asked her to clear the table. Grace picked up a plate to scrape its contents into the garbage, when she heard her father's heavy, rapid footsteps enter the kitchen.

His face was no longer frozen into its "hard" position. It was red, with a furrowed brow, tight lips and fierce eyes. "Who made that mess!?" he shouted, pointing to the dining room.

Grace's mother answered quietly, "It was Grace's party today, dear, I'm just a little behind —"

"A little behind!" he yelled, nostrils flaring and eyes widening. "This whole place is a mess!" His gaze turned to Grace, "And you, you ungrateful sh\*\*! You get a party and leave it for everyone else to clean up! I bet you were playing games all afternoon and didn't even think about the others that have to live in this sh\*\*hole!"

Grace did not know why she answered. She knew it was stupid. She knew nothing good could come of it. But she remembered how she had jumped to action when she saw her mother's distress and how hard she had tried to clean up quickly. She answered quietly, "I didn't get to the party mess yet, I was clearing the kitchen table for din — ." In a blur, her father approached her, and she smelled the hot stench of his alcohol-laden breath. In a blur, he raised his hand and brought it down hard against her face, so hard that she stepped back and almost fell. For a few moments, she did not see and only heard — her father's voice, "**YOU WILL LEARN TO RESPECT ME!**"; his footfall, heavy and angry; her brothers' tears; her mother trying to comfort the boys and Grace. When Grace could see again, she immediately ran out of the kitchen and into her room, burying her sobs in her pillow. She did not know how much time passed before she fell asleep.

Grace awoke with a start, feeling a weight on the mattress beside her. In the darkness, she heard her father's voice and she again smelled the alcohol as he spoke.

"Princess, please forgive me, I beg you." Her father's words were accompanied by sobs and rapid breathing. "Sometimes I get

like a little boy. I just want everything done when I want it. Can you ever forgive me? Daddy never wants to hurt you.”

She felt his hot hands begin to stroke her hair. Then his hands were on her shoulders and her chest, as he began to undress her. She felt panic in her stomach. She was frozen — helpless and frozen. Not again, please God, not again.



“I’ve come here because I don’t want to throw away ten years of marriage and I don’t want to lose my kids. And, truth is, my wife deserves better than this. She’s been good to me, and she didn’t ask a thing from me in the home, took my mind off everything, while I developed the practice. I’d be an idiot if I just let my family slip away, because of my anger.”

Grace observed the dark-skinned African-American man sit silently after he had finished speaking. The man’s name was Tyrone. He was a large, imposing man wearing a blue three-piece suit and a blue and red tie. His shoes were black and shined with a perfect polish. She noticed his big hands and feet. He must have weighed two hundred pounds, but he did not look fat. He spoke with a natural sense of authority and a deep, sonorous voice. It was the kind of voice you deferred to, the kind of voice that you would immediately assume knew what it was talking about.

Grace did not know how much of Tyrone’s comments she had missed. She knew that the images had flooded her mind shortly after Tyrone had started speaking, and that he was still speaking when she was again aware of the present. But she could not say how much time had passed while she was “there,” as she referred to it.

In order to more fully pull herself out of “there,” she reminded herself what “here and now” meant. She spoke in her mind, “I’m thirty-two years old and I’m safe. He’s dead, he’s gone, and mom’s

suffering is over, too. I'm in this room to get help. And I think that man over there can help me." She looked across the room at a face that was very different from Tyrone's. A face with blue eyes, staring fixedly ahead, seeing the surface and beneath, reflecting the devotion with which he was listening. The eyes were kind and warm, and when she saw them, she was reminded of the way they could twinkle from time to time. The twinkle conveyed a gentle humor that was there to ease a burden or to teach. She saw the man's full head of hair — brown, but streaked with lines of grey. His beard had the same coloring. His face and general form were round but not fat, the roundness, she assumed, of a man who liked to eat. He had a large nose, full lips and heavy eyebrows. He was David Web, her therapist and the therapist for the group of clients in this room.

Grace looked back at Tyrone. She recalled how he had started speaking. Before Tyrone had spoken, David had explained the ground rules for the group therapy, which were surprisingly few: Not revealing information shared in the group, referring to group members by first name to help ensure confidentiality, and revealing to the group any outside contacts between group members. Then, David had fallen silent. The group had sat uncomfortably, until Tyrone said, "Well, I guess I'll start. My name is Tyrone and I'm here because I have an anger problem. I get angry too easily and I yell. I guess some people today would call it verbal abuse. My wife says she has had enough of it and that I need to be in therapy and change it, or else she's leaving." Now that Grace had returned to the present, she hoped she would be better able to follow what was being said.



As Tyrone started to speak, Adam wondered why he was here. How was this black guy's anger control problem of any relevance to Adam? Adam was feeling tense and uncomfortable, as

he usually did in social settings. He felt that all eyes were on him, judging him, thinking he was such a spineless, scared wimp. In his mind he knew this was not true, that he was of no particular interest to the others in that room, but his mind was of little help for his problems. He felt a different reality in his flesh, in the tension of his shoulders, in the beating of his heart, which would sometimes accelerate for no apparent reason, and in the sweating of the palms of his hands. He *was* being watched in this room. There was nothing he could do to shake that feeling. And, as far back as Adam could remember, it had always been crucial that others not see his fear.

Adam surveyed the room with furtive glances. He noted that there were six other people sitting in the room. As he looked around the room, his eyes settled on Grace. She looked like she was in her mid-thirties. She had a pleasant face and shoulder-length blond hair. The form of her body was hidden under a gray, loose-fitting dress; however, her double chin suggested that she was substantially overweight. Her eyes were lowered and the expression on her face suggested that her thoughts were far away. This expression made her look remote to him... and very fragile.



“Quiet!” hissed Adam’s father. “You mustn’t upset your mother. She has a very bad migraine. She suffered enough in her life. Do not disturb her with this!” Adam’s father never needed to yell. Somehow his father was able to convey the most intense range in a whisper, a hoarse whisper that particularly frightened Adam. The intensity of his father’s whisper and the flash in his eyes could silence Adam and his sister in an instant.

Adam was nine years old. He had been bullied and beaten up by a boy in school today. The incident had occurred when Sammy, a fat kid who was a head taller than Adam, had approached him

on the playground. Adam regularly sat or played by himself on the playground. He would often read, and some kids would taunt him as an “egghead.” Today, Adam had been reading and Sammy had walked up and knocked off Adam’s hat. Adam had responded by doing what his father taught him to do in such situations. “Just ignore bullies,” his father would always tell him. “They want to see you cry. They pick on you because you break down and cry. Pretend they aren’t there and they will go away.” So in response to Sammy, Adam silently picked up his hat, not looking at Sammy, and continued reading. As is always the case on playgrounds, the other assorted children instantly sensed the possibility of entertainment in Adam’s vicinity and thus clustered around Adam and Sammy. “Ignore, ignore, ignore,” Adam thought to himself, the tears beginning to well in his eyes. “Don’t let them see you cry.” He tried to continue reading.

“What’s wrong, egghead?” sneered Sammy. “Did you forget how to talk? I guess all that reading made you forget how to use your mouth.”

He knocked off the hat again.

“That’s the way Jews are,” said Sammy to the audience, drawing out the word “Jews” for dramatic effect. “They don’t talk to us. They think they’re better than us. Or maybe they just like to be beat up.” Sammy knew his audience well, which consisted of no other Jews. There were numerous chuckles among the assembled in response to Sammy’s witticisms. Sammy moved his face two inches away from Adam’s and blew on it. Adam tried to hold back the tears, but the print in his book became blurry. Sammy knocked off the hat again. Adam did not respond and just looked at his book.

“See?” announced Sammy. “Jews don’t fight back. They — never — have.” Sammy said the last three words very slowly and then pushed Adam on the shoulder. Sammy laughed heartily, and numerous chuckles echoed in the audience.

In an instant, Adam rose to his feet and swung at Sammy. But Sammy was an experienced fighter. He easily sidestepped Adam's fist and responded with a solid blow on Adam's cheek, which almost knocked him over. Adam jumped back at Sammy, lunging at his chest. Adam made contact, but this appeared to have little effect on Sammy. Sammy stepped back, and, before Adam could think, there were blows falling on his chest and his face.

Just then, Mr. Summers had bounded into the center of the circle, shouting at the boys to stop fighting and grabbing Sammy. After a little inquiry, Sammy was led to the principal and Adam was sent to the nurse's office. As Sammy was being led away, he looked back at Adam, smirked and mouthed the word "Jew" to Adam, with a look of disgust and hatred.

When Adam's father picked him up, Adam was holding an ice pack to a black eye. The bleeding in his nose had stopped, but he still felt the crusty flakes of dried blood around his nostril. His father's face was sad. "Why couldn't you just ignore him?" he said, shaking his head. "Haven't we suffered enough?"

Adam's father was silent throughout the car ride home. As his father parked the car near their apartment building, his father turned to him and said, "There's no winning with them, Adam. You can't fight them. I can't lose time from work like this anymore. I need to work so we can live. This *is* going to stop, Adam!"

Adam opened his mouth, but nothing came out. In his mind he replayed his efforts to avoid the conflict, Sammy's insistence, and Sammy's stinky breath blowing in his face. "Jews don't fight back. They — never — have." The words replayed and seared his brain. Adam began to sob.

"Come on, come on," said his father impatiently. "Stop crying. Let's go inside."

Adam followed his father into the apartment building, still crying quietly to himself.

It was when they approached the elevator that his father

hissed at him that he must be quiet, so he would not upset his mother.

Adam was used to being hushed. His parents did not tolerate loud noises or any vigorous physical activity in the apartment. “Shhhh!” they would say. “Don’t disturb the neighbors.” But Adam knew it was not only the neighbors his parents were considering. His parents disapproved of any extremes in sound, in movement, in emotional expression. “We just want peace and quiet,” they would say. Well, quiet there was, but there was rarely peace, not the sort of peace that makes your stomach relax, not the sort of peace that makes you smile. There was always a sense of tension at home.

The main rationale for the imperative of quiet was the health of Adam’s mother. There was always a pain somewhere, always a problem — headache, stomachache, backache. The condition varied, but there was always a condition, always a reason to be quiet and “not disturb your mother.” Today it was a migraine, which she had about once a week. At the beginning of a migraine she would retire to her room, and Adam would not see her for the rest of the day.

Adam went into his room, closed the door, and began crying quietly into his pillow. After a while, he was calm enough to hear muffled sounds in his parents’ room, which was next to his. He heard his father open the door to his mother’s room and say something to her. She moaned a response to him. Looking up at the window to his room, Adam noticed that the sky was getting dark. He sat in the gray half-light of his room, wishing that, as the light faded, so would the gnawing pain in his chest.



When Tyrone finished speaking, the other group members again waited nervously, wondering who would speak next.

“Well, if no one is going to talk, I guess I will,” said Marcia. Marcia was blond and blue-eyed. She had a pretty face and an attractive, thin, form. She was fifty years old, but took good care of her health and looked younger.

“I’m Marcia. I’m here because I want to get married,” she said. “Well, not necessarily to any of you,” she added giggling, and a couple of group members chuckled. “But... well, you see, I was married a long time ago and it didn’t work out so well. Mind you, I was very much in love and he treated me well, for a while. And we did have three wonderful children. But he cheated on me. I caught him, and he promised never to do it again, and I suppose he only kept that promise until his next date with whoever he was fooling around with. So I sent him packing. Well, anyway, long story short — God was good to me. It was a struggle, but I got on my feet financially. Not only that, I found out that I could make money better than my cheating ex could. And I raised those three kids — every one a gem. Now the last one is out of the house and I’m, frankly, lonely. Not that I haven’t had my share of boyfriends, but I’m just getting tired of that. I’m together with a guy for three or four months, then he wants to move on or I want to move on, and so I have to go out looking for a new one. I guess, it was fun once, now it’s a drag. I’ve thought of remarriage before, I’ve even been close, really close, like break-it-off-on-the-day-of-the-wedding close. I guess I just couldn’t bring myself to trust another man like that again.” She was silent for a few moments and looked thoughtful. “But now, there is no one left at home. I’m lonely and I really want to try. But enough about me. I’ll let someone else have a turn at bat.”

“I guess I’ll go next,” said Terry. Terry was a petite woman, in her mid-thirties, who created a social impression that was somehow bigger than her actual size. Perhaps it was the intensity of her dark brown eyes, or the keen intelligence that her face projected. Or perhaps it was the enthusiasm in her manner. But whatever the

reason was, Terry was used to the attention of others and naturally drew that attention to herself.

“My name’s Terry,” she said. “I’m here because David thought it would be a good idea,” she said, motioning with her hand to David. “I’m not really sure why. I don’t have a problem with people. I like people and I make friends easily. But although I am loath to admit it, David often sees things that I miss, so I’ll give him the benefit of the doubt and try this thing. I guess the most important thing to know about me is that my life went through a fundamental change seven months ago, when I became sick. I don’t know what the illness is. The doctors are also still trying to figure it out. I have frequent stomach cramps and chronic muscle pain. Then I started to pass out without warning. I tried for a month to continue working, but eventually the pain and fatigue were too much. So I left my research position in Maine, moved down here with my mother, and I’m bored out of my skull. So I go to David for individual sessions and talk about how bored I am, and he tells me how angry I am with my father. And I say, sure I am, but that’s not my problem. My problem is that I’ve lost what I have been working for all my life, and I don’t know what I’m going to do with myself now.”

“What have you been working for all your life?” asked Marcia.

“To be a university professor, a full professor, and I got it,” responded Terry.

“You, a full professor,” said Marcia, her voice pitch rising in disbelief. “But you’re so young.”

“Yeah,” responded Terry, “but I did it. This was my first year as full professor. You think *you’re* surprised. I couldn’t believe it when my department chair told me last year. I almost fainted, and that was before I was sick.” She smiled in recollection of this honor she had received. Then, in what seemed to be an effort to provide some explanation for this achievement, she said, “I’ve always been a workaholic, since grade school. Always A’s. Finished

undergrad at age 20, Ph.D. at 25. I got an associate faculty position six years ago. I worked hard, published a lot. They like me there. I guess they wanted to make sure I would stay. Lots of people said I was lucky. But that always bothered me. I wasn't lucky. I worked, and I had to work double because I'm a woman. Male chauvinism is alive and well in the ivory tower. But when you work hard and long enough, it pays off — people can't ignore it any more."

"My goodness, you sound like me," said Marcia. "And Lord knows, I've dealt with my share of male chauvinism in my professional life. You're right, Terry, it's a war. We women just have to perform well enough and long enough, until the males have to admit that they can't do without us... I think you and I are going to be friends."

"I think you're right," responded Terry. "You remind me of my mother. She was divorced when I was ten. She didn't have higher education, but she made a decent living as a paralegal. Life could just never push her down. She always told me that people fail not because of the cards that they are dealt, but because they give up on the game halfway through." Terry paused, thinking of how she could apply her mother's lesson to her present condition. "Only problem is," she continued, "I have no idea what to do with the hand I'm holding now." She was silent, and it was clear that she had finished speaking for now.

The group sat in silence. The silence became uncomfortable, as if all were waiting for something. Three group members had not yet spoken. One was an athletic-looking man with curly brown hair, a mustache and dark brown eyes. He appeared to be about forty years of age. He wore a green T-shirt and jeans, and his muscular biceps could be seen protruding from short sleeves. He wore a blank expression on his face, and his eyes appeared to be looking beyond the room. As the group members had spoken, he appeared to be somewhat interested in what was being said, but he also appeared distracted and somehow detached. He slumped

in his chair, as if his shoulders carried a great weight and he needed the chair to assist him with his burden. This man finally broke the silence: "I guess I'll go next. My name is Joe. My life is really OK. I'm a surgeon, and I make good money, way beyond what my parents could have ever dreamed of. What does a man need? Money, food, sex — I've got those things, so I have no reason to complain. Yeah, I've got some problems with my wife, but doesn't everybody — especially after being married for fifteen years. She's not so interested in sex. I mean she's willing to do it, but she just goes through the motions. And for me, if sex isn't alive, it's like being with a corpse. Since she's not interested in sex, I've found someone who is and we're good together. I've got my wife, I've got my kids, and I get the sex I need, so everything is covered. The only problem is this feeling of depression that I get. It keeps coming and going. And lately it's been coming more often. It's like a weight on everything and I don't know where it comes from. So I met with David a few times and he suggested that I do this group thing as well, and here I am."

"Does your wife know about your mistress?" asked Marcia.

"No," answered Joe.

"Don't you think it's wrong to deceive her?" she asked.

"What do you mean by wrong?" he responded.

"Not the right thing... immoral," she said, with a note of impatience in her voice.

"I've got my morality, you've got yours," he replied nonchalantly. "What, am I supposed to live by your morality? I get the sex I need, she gets the children she wanted, and she gets a better standard of living than she would ever get without me. So who is hurt? I don't understand what people mean when they say 'morality.' Some African tribes think it's moral to eat other people. When I hear someone say 'morality,' all I hear is that they want to make the rules to govern my life. I don't need other people's rules."

Adam felt increasing discomfort as Joe spoke. In fact, it was

more than discomfort, it was dislike, a dislike that expanded as Joe continued to speak. There was a confidence, glibness and abrasiveness in Joe's style that made Adam recoil. Adam knew this kind of man — successful, thinks the world belongs to him and that others are there either to defer to or serve his needs. Adam sensed that Joe engaged neither in self-scrutiny nor in second-guessing himself. If Joe wanted something, Adam presumed, Joe would simply grab it. Adam had been raised with stories of people who grabbed things and used other people as implements to serve their ends — confident Nazi soldiers shouting orders to shivering naked prisoners. These soldiers were untouched by any of the suffering. On the contrary, they exploited it, by stealing whatever they could from the prisoners, indulging their passion to beat others, making rape into a sport. And at the top of it all was Hitler, the ultimate example of using others — capturing, torturing and killing — in order to maintain his power. His parents had repeated these stories to Adam — about the crowding of the ghetto, the final evacuation and the hell of the camps. These experiences had twisted and contorted the souls of his parents. His mother had emerged broken, lifeless and depressed. His father carried a quenchless anger and hatred for all those who were in power. Adam realized that he inherited this hatred and it was part of him. Politically, Adam always voted for the guy who supported the underdog. And Adam intensely disliked people like Joe, who think that the purpose of life is feeding their appetites, regardless of who gets hurt.

Adam turned to Joe and said, "But you're married. Marriage is a promise. You're breaking that promise."

Joe looked at Adam, who was sitting two seats away from him, in the circle of chairs that David had arranged for the group. It was the first time Joe noticed Adam. Adam was thin and tall and appeared to be in his thirties. His hair was red and his eyes blue. He had an intense, self-controlled look about him. The tension in

his neck muscles and the anxious frowning of his brow revealed his general discomfort. For a few moments, Joe was confused, wondering how such an anxious and shy-looking person could say something challenging. Joe looked for someone else in the room who could have made the statement, but it had come from Adam's direction and it was a man's voice. The only other people sitting on that side of the room were Marcia and Terry. When Joe looked more closely at Adam, he noticed that Adam was wearing a yarmulke. Then Joe understood. He thought, "This guy has no backbone, just like he looks. He's just a religious fanatic loyally mouthing his doctrine. That's all I need. Thanks, David."

Joe finally smiled and said, "And who do I have the pleasure of addressing?" his voice dripping with sarcasm.

"I'm sorry," Adam responded, nervously. "I'm Adam."

"I don't recall you being present when I met my wife, when I had sex with her for the first time or when we married. How do you know what promise we made?"

There was much Adam could have responded. He did not want to let this rationalizing, slimy creep off the hook. It was obvious that the man did not want to face himself, and he was simply spinning flimsy arguments to avoid accountability. Adam wanted to say this. He did not want to let another person suffer from such self-serving callousness. But the words did not come. Adam's eyes met the angry gaze of Joe, and Adam shriveled. He was simply too afraid of the confrontation. Adam shrugged and looked away.

The group sat in a nervous silence for what seemed like a very long time. Then David spoke. "Well, I am impressed. I have never seen a group get into things this early. Remember what I said at the beginning of this session. The key to progress here is being as honest and authentic as possible. I see the group members diving right into that. But maybe you all are a little too eager to dive in and we've missed some introductions. Perhaps the group members are still wondering why Adam ... and Grace decided

to join this group.”

When he finished speaking, David turned his gaze to Adam, as if David were inviting him to say more.

“Well,” replied Adam, “I — I’m here because of social anxiety. I’m just very uncomfortable with other people. And the bigger the group of people I’m with, the more anxious I get. I’m especially uncomfortable in conflict situations.” Adam kept his eyes on the floor as he spoke. After speaking, his eyes darted around the room, as he tried to avoid the gaze of others.

“Nice to have you,” said Marcia with a warm smile. In a maternal attempt to draw him out, she asked, “Are you married?”

He appeared to respond to her warmth, relaxing his posture slightly.

“Yes,” he replied, “and I have four children.”

“I see that you have a yarmulke on your head,” she said. “Are you an Orthodox Jew?”

“Well, yes,” he said. “My parents were not observant. In fact, they did not even believe in God. But I’ve been Orthodox for about twenty years.”

“How old are you?” she inquired.

“I just turned forty,” he replied.

As the group became silent once again, David took the opportunity to shift the attention to Grace. He knew that Grace would not speak at all without assistance. She had said as much to him. While he had offered her no promises, because he knew that such gestures of salvation undermined the therapeutic process, he felt that her avoidance of speaking was not a choice, but a deeply ingrained instinct. He did not feel that her request for assistance was an attempt to control him or deny her power. It was simply an accurate reflection of the response of those who have been victimized, degraded and burdened with dark secrets for too long.

“Grace,” he said softly. “Perhaps you could take a turn.”

Grace’s response was even softer, so soft that the group

members leaned forward to hear what she was saying. “I’m Grace. I’m here because I’m fat and depressed and scared all the time. I’m by myself and I always have been. David thinks there’s hope, but I don’t see it. All I see is more unhappy or less unhappy, but no actual happiness. That’s all there is.”

“What are you depressed about?” asked Terry.

“That’s a long story,” answered Grace. “I don’t think I can tell it now without crying, and I’m tired of crying. I don’t want to cry today. It’s hard enough for me to sit in this room as it is. I don’t feel safe here. I feel anger between people. And from what I have seen, when there is anger, people get hurt ... But I said I would not talk about that today. There’s just so much that is not in my control.”

Grace seemed very young and lost, as she spoke. Many of the group members reacted with a desire to take care of her and make her feel welcome.

“I don’t know what you’ve been through,” said Terry, “but I certainly can relate to the last part. My life is in shambles because of a disease that I can’t control.”

“I grew up on the streets of New York,” said Tyrone. “There was plenty I couldn’t control as well — the poverty, the violence, the corruption ... and a lot more.”

“And I couldn’t control the fact that men can be selfish pricks, sometimes,” said Marcia. “I would have had a radically different life, if I had chosen a man who was loyal to his vows, to his promises.” She glanced towards Joe.

Grace responded to these acknowledgements with the faint trace of a smile. It was a smile like weak rays of sunshine briefly showing through a gray sky, but rapidly swallowed again by the clouds. Such is a light that does not warm or truly illuminate, but merely emphasizes the absence of the sun.

The group took up the rest of the time discussing what group therapy was actually supposed to be. David had given all of them little guidance in this respect. He had just told each of them that

he believed group therapy would be helpful treatment for them. The conversation was mostly carried by Marcia, Terry and Tyrone. Tyrone expressed the opinion that the group was there for the other group members to give suggestions on how to improve things. Marcia thought that they were supposed to discuss painful experiences so they could “get over” them. Terry wondered out loud if there was any structure. For example, should they each take turns around the circle to talk about what was going on for them, or would each person just call out when they had something to say? David contributed little to this discussion, allowing the group members to figure things out for themselves. Adam and Grace returned to their silent shells and Joe just stared into space, making occasional comments.