

## September

### Sunday

My name is Hillel, IM EIGHT, AND I LIVE IN SAMARKAND. YOUd think that means riding bikes and trading candy at recess--but nope. Here, kids don't just go to school. They get hunted by teachers. Straight up.

Today I learned why our family's life feels like a never-ending spy movie:

- The government wants every kid in THEIR schools.
- Their schools teach you to forget Hashem exists.
- Our parents refuse to send us.

That makes them "enemies of the state." And us? We're "invisible kids." On the unfairness scale, this is a solid 50 out of 10.

### Monday

I couldn't go outside today. AT ALL. Not to play ball, not to ride my bike--nothing. If I was seen, the teachers would report me faster than you can say "extra homework."

Tatty's instructions:

- Never step outside during school hours.
- If someone knocks, use the SECRET KNOCK:
- Knock-knock, pause, knock-knock-knock, pause, knock-knock.
- Get it wrong and we all PANIC.

Guess who almost gave us away?

"KNOCK, KNOCK!"

Me (apple in mouth): "Hey, mailman!"

Mommy dove for the door, I dropped my apple--and it rolled under the couch and got fuzzy. Gross.

That was a 9 out of 10 on the Unfair Meter.

Tuesday

Today Dad forced me into public school--UGH--because neighbors spotted me hiding behind the curtains. They threatened to yank my parental rights unless I complied. So IM IN MS. NINAs class now, singing Soviet songs about Stalin.

Ms. Nina asked me to sing. I panicked and blurted,

"YOUR SONGS ARE DUMB."

Her eyes went WIDE. She said,

"WHICH SONGS ARE YOURS THEN?"

Next thing I know, IM AT THE BLACKBOARD, HEART POUNDING. I REMEMBERED PINCHASOVs Azerbaijani tunes and belted out a tune in crazy high notes. She loved it. She forgot all about my "dumb" comment.

Silver lining: IM OFFICIALLY THE CLASS ENTERTAINER, SO I GUESS THATs a 3 out of 10 on the Unfair Meter this time.

Wednesday

Wearing tzitzis under my shirt at school is like trying to smuggle candy past a sugar police. One wrong move and my cover's blown.

Plan A: Keep my cap on so no one notices me bareheaded.

Plan B: Before shots, hide tzitzis in my briefcase and pretend I forgot underwear (...well, almost!).

"I SEE YOUR TZITZIS STRINGS," WHISPERED THE JEWISH NURSE.

"YOU'RE A LITTLE RABBI," SHE GIGGLED.

I friggin MELTED. A JEWISH NURSE IN SOVIET SCHOOL? THATs like finding a candy stash in a kale farm. 4 out of 10.

Thursday

So apparently missing school on Shabbos is a "serious crime," and the principal sent my father a letter thicker than my math workbook.

Today I got summoned. My dad coached me to say I was "too weak" and needed rest. I repeated it so many times I almost believed it.

The principal yelled, "Pick another day off--but not Saturday!"

Dad promised to find me a new school so no one would notice my Shabbos routine.

When Dad said,

"YOU'RE NOT BAR MITZVAH YET," I KNEW "ONE MORE SATURDAY OFF" WAS CODE FOR "RUN FOR

## YOUR LIFE."

I sneaked out at dawn to Michael's house. He gave me stale bread--thanks, buddy. But at least I avoided the office. Unfairness level: 11 out of 10.

### Friday

By Friday I was DONE with public school nonsense. Good news: We now have a secret cheder in our cellar. Bad news: The cellar smells like a donkey stable--and maybe a forgotten sandwich.

Reb Bentcha Maroz is our teacher. He:

- Whispers so even walls can't "hear."
- Pulls us aside to correct our Alef-Beis tunes.
- Slaps our hands with his gartel if we mess up.

I accidentally called him "Rebbi" in front of the cleaner and got yelled at so loud I almost peed my pants. That was a 12 out of 10.

### Saturday

Not a shabbos story I'd expect, but it happened: a prisoner escaped the

fence next door and the guard thought I was him.

Guard: "Stop!"

Me: RUNS LIKE GREASED LIGHTNING.

He shot in the air. I hid behind a car tire until he gave up. My heart still hurts. Today was 15 out of 10 on the Scary Map. I'll stick to hiding in the cellar from now on, thanks.

Sunday

During a farbrengen (secret gathering) in our cheder, Reb Bentcha told us how real heroes drowned in NKVD cellars so the rest could live. He compared them to soldiers marching across a river to conquer a city--totally wild.

We giggled when he said, "Does scrap paper have any value? Your words are worth less!" Then he raised a shot glass of vodka and sang a lullaby about staying loyal to Hashem.

I almost spit out my tea laughing. But the message hit me: Even one kid standing up to millions of soldiers is a real tzaddik. That's huge.

Monday

Tomorrow is my Bar Mitzvah--at home, with eight people, no fancy synagogue, no TV cameras (yay!). I begged for a special siddur called a Torah Ohr. Everyone wanted me to get a coat instead.

I WON the argument and got the siddur--but Auntie wanted pictures inside! No pictures, just holy words. I can'T WAIT TO READ IT...UNTIL I TUCK IT UNDER MY MATTRESS SO THE KGB DOESN't confiscate it.

Unfair? Maybe. Unforgettable? Definitely.

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And that's Chapter 1 of my super-secret diary--where hiding from teachers, outsmarting soldiers, and learning Torah in a stinky cellar is just another week in Samarkand. Until next time, pray for my hiding skills (and my elbow--still sore from tumbling into Yankel).

--Hillel, 8, Professional Hider & Amateur Spy