1	vesday
T	atty says summer is "Registration Season," which is Soviet[speak for
"F	IND EVERY KID AND STUFF HIM INTO THE HERESY
F,	ACTORY." Translation for me: ZERO outdoor fun until Elul.
I	tried arguing that sunshine is medically important, but Mommy just
w	nispered,
	"WE'LL BUY YOU EXTRA ORANGES. NOW BACK
	BEHIND THE CURTAIN."
G	reat. Oranges. Exactly what I wanted instead of fresh air.
	ednesday
W	
	very family on our block uses the super-secret knock:

If you mess it up, three things happen:

- · Mommy turns white.
- Tatty dives for his coat and passport.
- I drop whatever I'm eating (usually sticky) and it lands jelly-side down.

So before I leave my room I now practice on the wall like I'm auditioning for a job as DOOR-KNOCK SYMPHONY CONDUCTOR.

### Thursday

11:05 a.m. - Spotted two schoolteachers with clipboards roaming our courtyard. They look sweet, but Tatty calls them "velvet hammers." Yankel peeked out and announced,

"THEY'RE TAKING ATTENDANCE OF THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE."

I suggested my brilliant "Fake Mustache & Tall Hat" disguise again.

Rejected. So we hid in the pantry between the potatoes and a sack of

onions. My eyes watered for two hours. If I ever smell borscht again,
might cry from trauma.
Friday
Every normal family hears a door knock and maybe says "Coming." Mommy
hears a knock and invents a brand-new Olympic sport called
DOOR-DASH-HIDE-THE-KIDS. Today she set a personal record:
both boys shoved behind the wardrobe in 4.6 seconds. New bruise on my
elbowsouvenir of Soviet childhood.
Silver lining: I can probably fit in any suitcase on Earth by now. Spy
career, here I come.
Sunday
Family meeting (whisper edition). Tatty says:

"IMPOSSIBLE TO HIDE EVERYONE. GOVERNMENT IS SNIFFING."

"SOLUTION: RIVKA WILL REGISTER FOR SCHOOL."

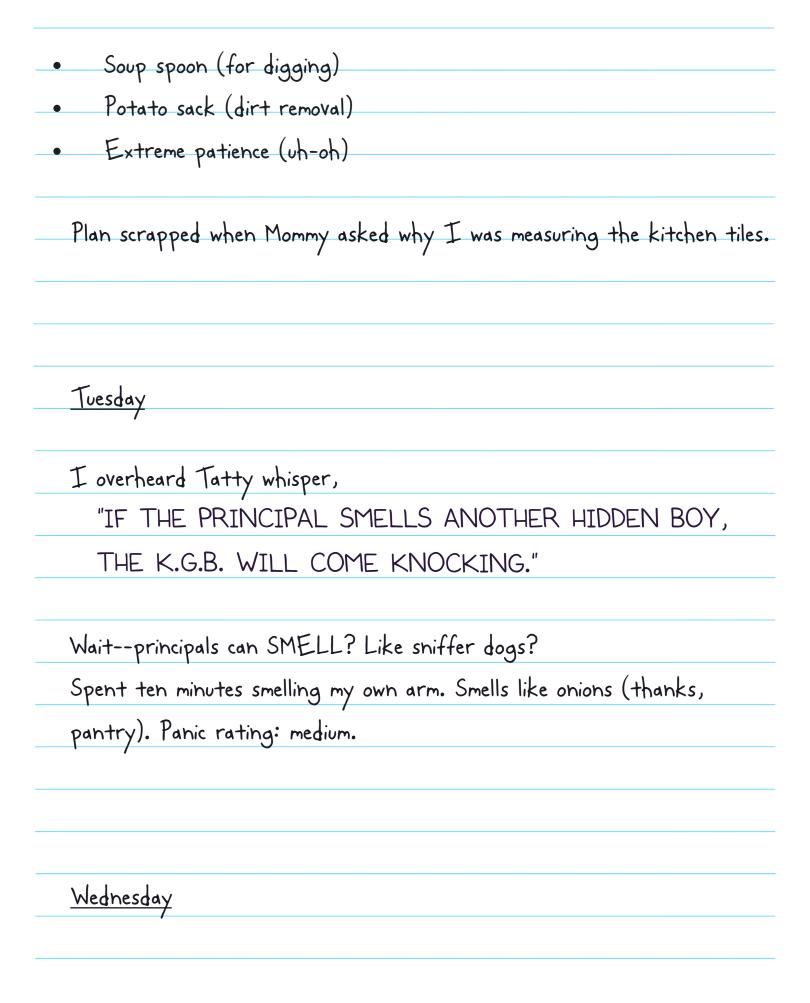
Rivka's face = the look you get when you realize the last piece of kokosh is gone AND your brother ate it. She still said "Fine" because she's older and apparently martyrdom is her hobby.

Meanwhile I'm thinking, YES! BOYS STILL INVISIBLE! and instantly feel 0.3% guilty. Only 0.3 though-because I didn't make the rules.

#### Monday

Rivka left early wearing the government-approved RED RAG scarf. I swear the rag glared at me.

I spent the whole morning inventing BRILLIANTPLAN #14: dig an underground tunnel to the far alley so Yankel and I can sneak a five-minute game of catch. Supplies list:



News flash: Principal accepted Rivka, asked no questions about brothers.	_
Tatty said we can "relax a bit" which in our family means we can tiptoe t	0
the staircase window for ninety seconds if no neighbors present. BEST 9	10
SECONDS OF MY LIFE. Sunlight, glorious sunlight! Unfairness rating	3
drops to 34/10.	

## Thursday

#### What I've learned:

- KNOCKING CORRECTLY is more important than handwriting.
- Sisters = human decoys (who knew?).
- · Principals might have super noses--needs more research.
- · Potato-onion pantry doubles as safe room.
- Even when life is a giant hide-and-seek, you can still collect victories (today's sunlight = trophy).

End of mission log. If the K.G.B. finds this notebook, please return--after you finish being evil, obviously.

M	onday
G	uess what? My secret identity got BUSTED. The neighbors squealed
+}	ne principal: "Hey, that Zaltzman kid exists."
Sa	Tatty had to register me in a public school across town where nobo
	nows alef from beis. Extra-long walk, zero Jews, double yuck.
To	atty's survival speech to Ms. Semyanova (my new teacher):
	"HE'S A DELICATE BOY. DOCTOR'S ORDERSTWO
	REST DAYS A WEEK. SUNDAY AND, UH SATURDAY
Tł	hen he slid her a fancy gift. Bribery Level = Legendary. She nodded
	otally clueless about Shabbos. Victory dance (quiet version).
11	hursday

i Pros: I'm officially the mysterious new kid who only shows up five days a week.

i Cons: Every subject = "Hooray Mother Russia." Also the cafeteria smells like mystery meat.

Today in art, the class went wild over my doodle of a horse and carriage. I pretended my hand cramped and stopped drawing. NO WAY am I letting them label me "School Artist" and drag me into poster duty for May 1st rallies.

### Tuesday

Period 6 = Music with Ms. S. Whole curriculum: songs praising Lenin, Stalin, and random tractors.

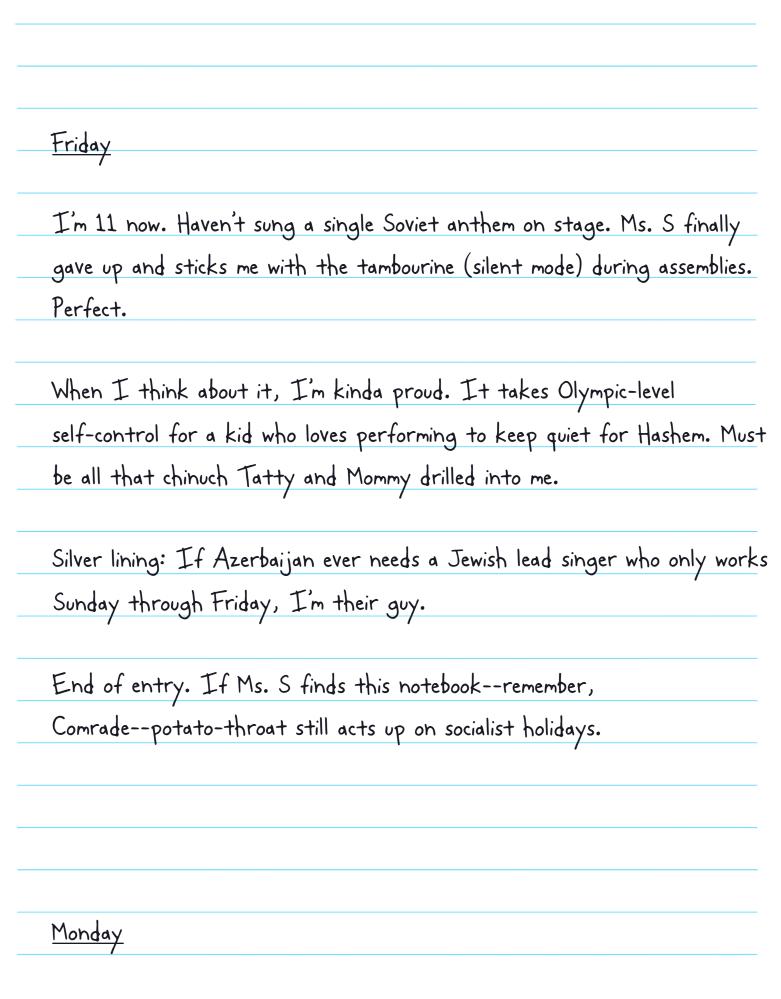
She waves her baton. Everyone sings like broken accordions; I move my lips like a fish, NO sound.

Ms. S spots me. Uh-oh.

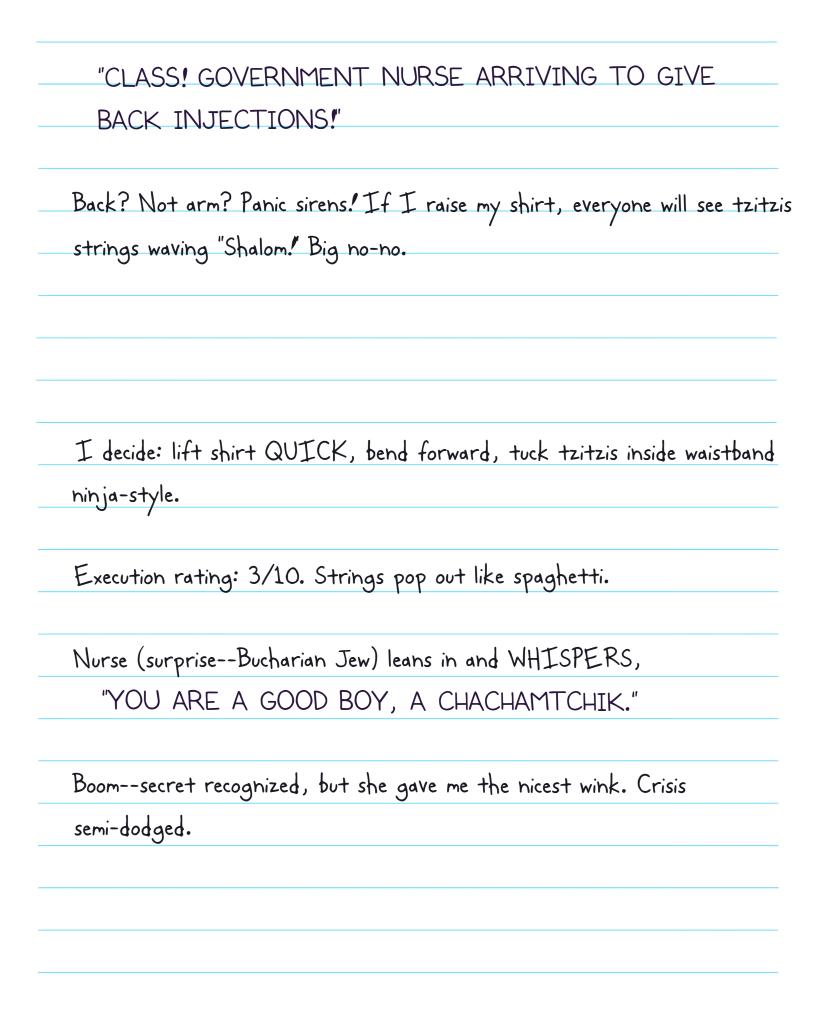
"ZALTZMAN, WHY DON'T YOU EVER SING?"
"I I DON'T LIKE YOUR SONGS."
1 1 DOINT LINE TOOK SOINOS.
Brain, meet Mouth. Mouth, meet Trouble. Whole room freezes. I realize:
I've basically insulted Stalin's Grandma.
Ms. S's eyebrow shoots to the ceiling.
7
"WHAT DO YOU MEAN YOUR SONGS? SING ONE OF
YOUR SONGSAT THE BOARD, NOW."
Sweat level = Niagara Falls.
a Alfalla a karalas ala aras
Walk to board in slow-motion.
<ul> <li>Heart tries escaping through ribcage.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Remember Pinchas Pinchasov upstairs blasting Azerbaijani records 24/7</li> </ul>
I know those by heart!

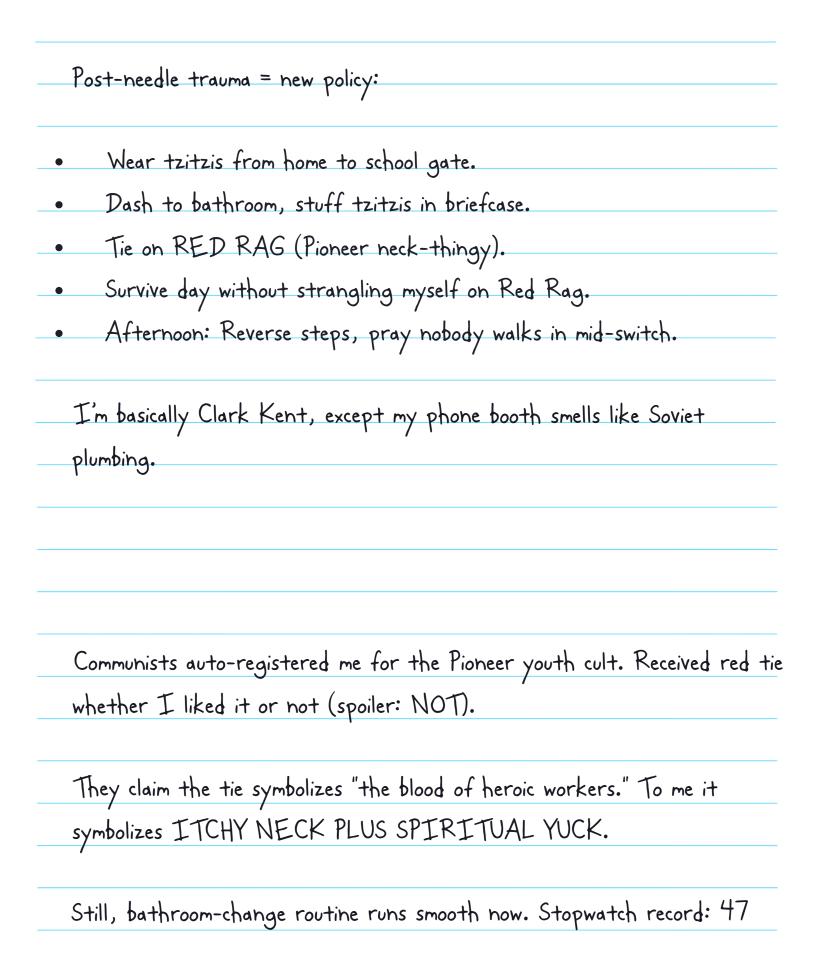
I turn, gulp, and launch into Rashid Baibutov's hit song about blossoms on the Caspian Sea (don't ask).
Miracle: I actually sound good. Ms. S's jaw drops, class stares like I've grown antlers.
End notecheer. Teacher forgets my insult. Crisis averted! Thank you, loud landlord!
Unfairness rating slides to 45/10 (still unfair, but at least I'm not in Siberia).
The afternoon-shift teachers walk by, hear me crooning, and slip inside.
Ms. S beams:
"LOOK WHAT MY STAR PUPIL CAN DO!"
Great. Now I'm a "star."

After class she corners me: "WE'LL NEED YOU TO PERFORM ON INTERNATIONAL WORKERS' DAY AND REVOLUTION DAY. COMRADE TALENT! I nod like a bobblehead. Inside: screaming NOOOOO. Pro-Performance Brain: "Spotlight! Applause! Maybe candy afterward!" Anti-Performance Brain: "Do you really want to serenade pictures of Lenin? Also concerts on Shabbos = disaster." Internal tug-of-war all week. My stomach learned gymnastics. Final decision: HARD PASS. I skipped every rehearsal and "accidentally" lost my voice on holiday mornings. (Tip: stick a potato in front of your mouth and mumble, sounds convincing.)



I call Mondays "Re-Appear Day." After missing Shabbos and Sunday, I have to stroll around the playground BEFORE the bell so the other kids remember I exist and don't point like, "Whoa, mysterious ghost boy."
Extra problem: my UZBEKI CAP + TZITZIS combo. Communists think "fashion" means a red Pioneer tie. Everything else = suspicious.
I slip into class. Ms. Semyanova barks, "ZALTZMAN! CAP OFF!"
Can't argue, can't uncover. Solution: pretend to SCRATCH my head forever. I shuffle to my seat, hand glued to skull like I'm searching for fleas. Arm cramp level: volcano.
Teacher:





seconds tzitzis-off-rag-on.
Silver lining: If Olympics add "Quick-Change Judaism Survival" event, gold
medal coming my way.
Tuesday
Things I juggle before first period:
• Cap maneuver
Tzitzis concealment
Red Rag disguise
• Fake smile so no one sees terror
Other kids just worry about math homework. Unfairness confirmed: 62/10
still stands.
But heynurse called me CHACHAMTCHIK. That's like getting a secret
badge of honor. So maybe Mondays aren't TOTALLY awful just 99 %

awful.

End of entry. If janitor finds my briefcase tzitzis stash, please return--after you finish wondering why a string garment is folded next to algebra homework.

### Wednesday

Thought I'd already reached max panic with the back-shot fiasco.

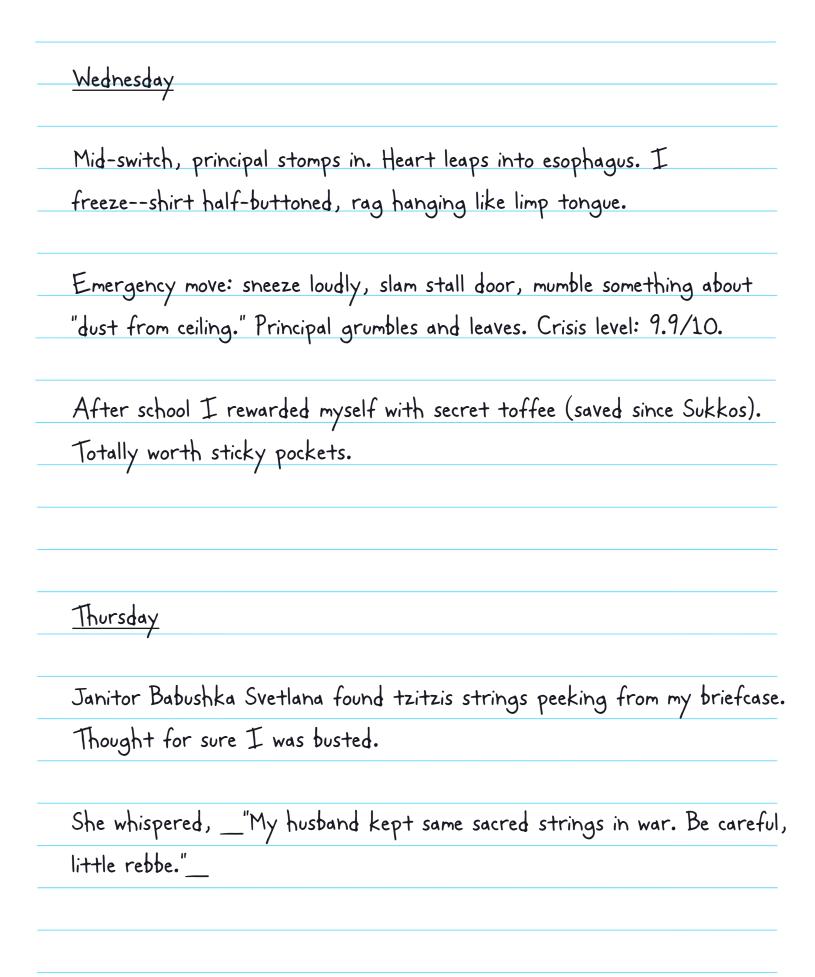
WRONG. Today the Red-Rag Committee made random hallway inspections to be sure every kid was wearing the Pioneer tie. Translation: if they'd caught me in my tzitzis and no rag, I'd be toastier than yesterday's black bread.

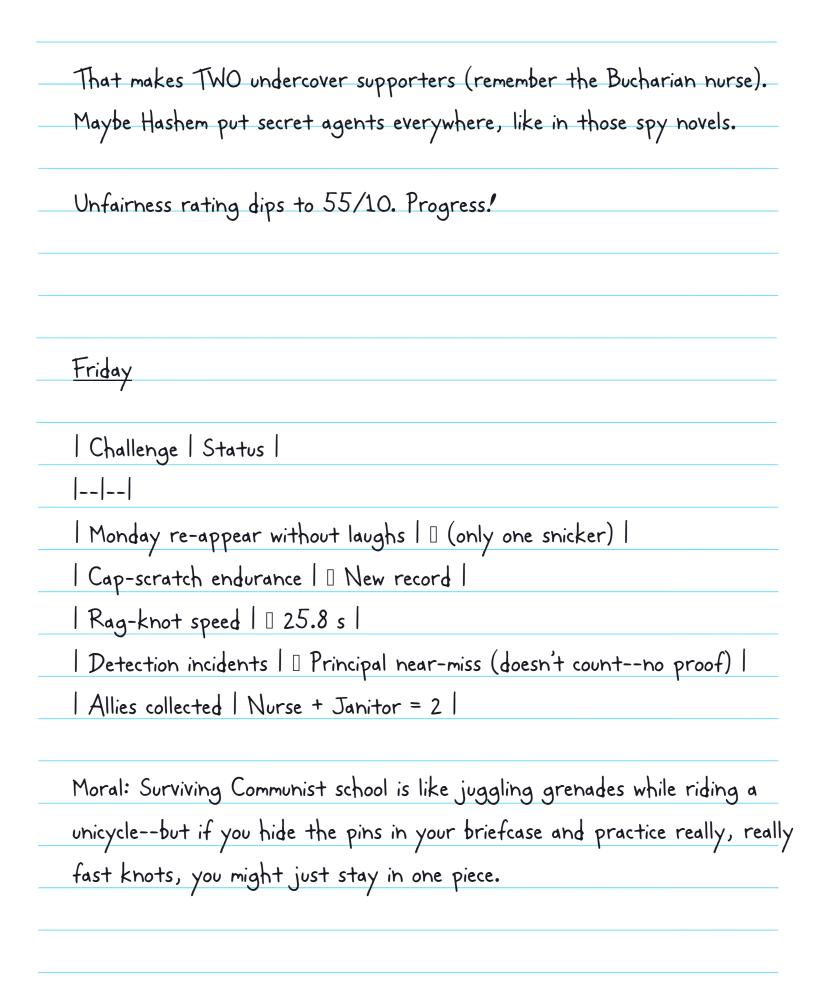
New life skill unlocked: tying a perfect knot in under eight seconds while balanced on the edge of a toilet seat. My record so far? 7.4 sec. Olympic judges, take notes.

Thursday
• Walk into class.
<ul> <li>Teacher says, _"Cap, off, Zaltzman."</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>I go into World-Class Head-Scratch Routineô (looks casual, saves</li> </ul>
kippah-mode).
<ul> <li>Yankel bet I can't keep my hand up there longer than the math</li> </ul>
period. I lasted 27 minutes, 12 seconds. Elbow = overcooked noodle.
· ·
Reward: zero detentions, plus 2 kopeks from Yankel. (He paid in stale
sunflower seeds, but still.)
Friday
Schedule:
Step   Action   Time Goal

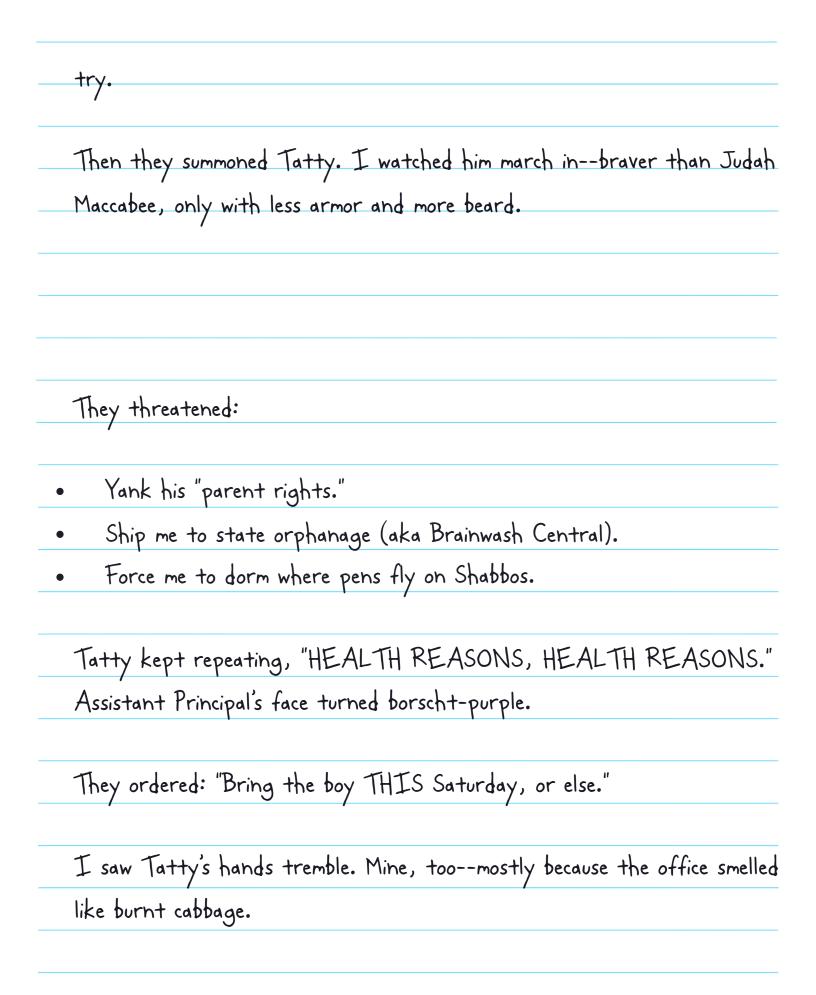
||--|--| 1 | Enter stall, lock door (double-check) | 3 s | 2 Untuck shirt, remove tzitzis 9 s 13 | Fold, stuff into briefcase pocket A | 4 s | 14 | Fish out Red Rag, shake crumbs | 5 s | 15 | Tie rag, rehearse "Yay Mother Russia" smile | 6 s | | TOTAL | | 27 SECONDS | Today I nailed 25.8 s--new personal best! Almost cheered out loud, but someone was flushing in stall #2. Close call. Monday Comrade Misha (class busybody) asked why my tie knot always looks "fresher" than everyone else's right before assembly. Me (thinking fast): "SUPERIOR KNOTTING TECHNIQUE. MAYBE YOU SHOULD PRACTICE?"

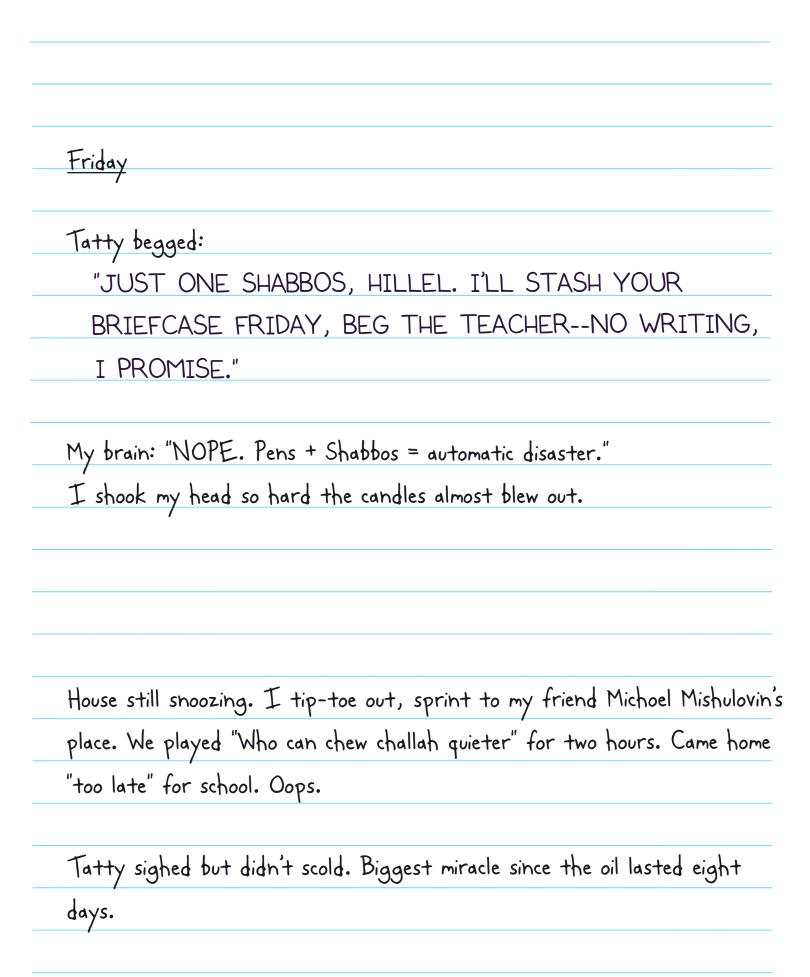
He scowled and wandered off. Phew.
Note to self: invent messy-looking knot variation to blend inProject
Rag-Wrinkle_ starts tomorrow-need water, desk edge, maybe a quick
stomp.
` 
Tuesday
Discovered annoying math fact:
i Red Rag visibility [
i Cap-scratch time [
Teacher suspicion [
Meaning: if rag slides, I use BOTH handsone yarmulke-hand, one
rag-handand then can't write. Teacher: "Why zero notes, Zaltzman?"
Me: "Deep concentration, Comrade." She actually bought it. Win.





_end of entryif you see a red tie in this notebook, please burn it
Tl
Thursday
Happy Chanukah? Not exactly. I got ambushed with a "See the
Principal NOW "note before first period. That's like being served a bow
of latkes that turn out to be raw potatoes.
Walked into the office: Principal, Assistant Principal, and Ms. Semyanova
sitting there like the Three Judges of Doom.
Principal booms,
"COMRADE ZALTZMAN, WHY NO SATURDAY
ATTENDANCE? WHO FORBIDS YOU?"
Translation: _We know you're a Shabbos kid, spill it
•
I served them the classic "weak lungs" line. They yelled, I played faint
kitten. They threatened to replace SATURDAY with any other day. Nic





### Monday

Tatty: "We'll hide you in a FAR district--non-Jewish area, new teacher, fresh bribe."

Result: School #7, almost an HOUR walk each way. Winter mornings = pitch-black, snow slush up to my ankles, wolves (okay, maybe dogs) howling. Still better than writing on Shabbos.

School #7 starts asking why I ghost every Saturday. Tatty flips the strategy:

- · Transfer me to School #3 inside Jewish neighborhood.
- Ask staff nicely to ignore my absences.
- BUT--(genius level) ask old principal to hand him the file "so he can deliver it himself."

He "forgets" to deliver. Papers vanish into the black hole called Tatt desk drawer.		
Week 1:	No teachers.	
Week 2:	Still nothing.	
Week 4:	Realize I'm a free agent.	
I'm basico	ally an official student of NOWHERE ELEMENTARY.	
Mission	Status	
Survive	Principal Inquisition   [ (still breathing)	
Avoid w	riting on Shabbos   [ (O letters penned)	
	ng trek in snow   [ (feet thawed by Pesach)	
	ear from Soviet system   IIII TOTAL WIN	
Unfairnes	s rating drops to 15/10still unfair, but at least I'm not doi	
multiplicat	tion tables under Lenin posters.	

Tatty calls it "paperwork loophole"; I call it the GREAT
DISAPPEARING ACT. Finally, a magic trick that even the K.G.B.
can't explain.
_End of entryif any principal finds this notebook, please note:
transferring me requires seven signatures, three stamps, and a miracle.
Sunday
You'd think being a fugitive from the Soviet school system would earn me a
day off. Nope. Tatty enrolled me in the underground CHEDERa.k.a.
Basement Academy of Hide-and-Seek Torah. Totally illegal, totally
awesome.
First period was with REB ZUSHE PAZ, nicknamed "REB ZUSHE DEF
SHAMASH."
Stat sheet:

Stat   Score
Height   Shorter than the bimah
Beard   Snow-white, reaches belt
Voice   Thunder meets accordion
Weapon   Soft GARTEL (but wow, it stings)
Reb Zushe passed out BREAKFASTreal bread with actual BUTTER.
(Okay, "butter" = microscopic yellow freckles in the crust, but still.)
I did scientific calculations:
1 slice dark bread
• 0.0003 cm of butter
= 312% happier Hillel
I almost hugged him, but his beard looked like it would tickle-slap me bad

<b>.</b>	
	e of class: Every pasuk gets chanted like we're auditioning for a one
cho	ur.
Rel	Zushe:
ı	"NU, PRONOUNCE THE KAMATZ LIKE A LION, NOT A
Č	SLEEPY GOAT!"
I	roared "AAAH" so hard Yankel fell off his bench. Teacher
gril	nnedthen reminded me lions don't fumble the next vowel. Oops.
Cla	ssmate Shlomo whispered a joke during ASHREI. Reb Zushe whippe
off	his GARTELWHOOSHgentle slap on Shlomo's wrist.
No	bruises, but the sound alone convinced the entire room to become any
for	the next ten minutes. I call it the "GARTEL OF DOOM."

Turns out the cheder is like a relay race of rabbis:
REB ZUSHE - weekday mornings (breakfast + vowels + occasional)
whack).
· REB MOSHE VINARSKI - Fridays, teaches weekly PARSHA in
turbo-Aramaic. My brain melts by verse seven.
<ul> <li>REB BEREL GUREVICH - cameo guest star; teaches fast,</li> </ul>
disappears faster.
<ul> <li>REB AVROHOM YOSEF ENTIN - calculates the Jewish calendar</li> </ul>
BY HAND. Basically a walking sundial.
Kid brain math: four teachers feel like forty. Still beats Communist School of Lenin Worship.
Reb Zushe made me lead PESUKEI D'ZIMRA. Weeks later, big chossic

K. Chaim Zalman heard me daven and said,
"AH! MUST BE A REB ZUSHE STUDENTHE HITS
FVFRY SYLLABLE!"

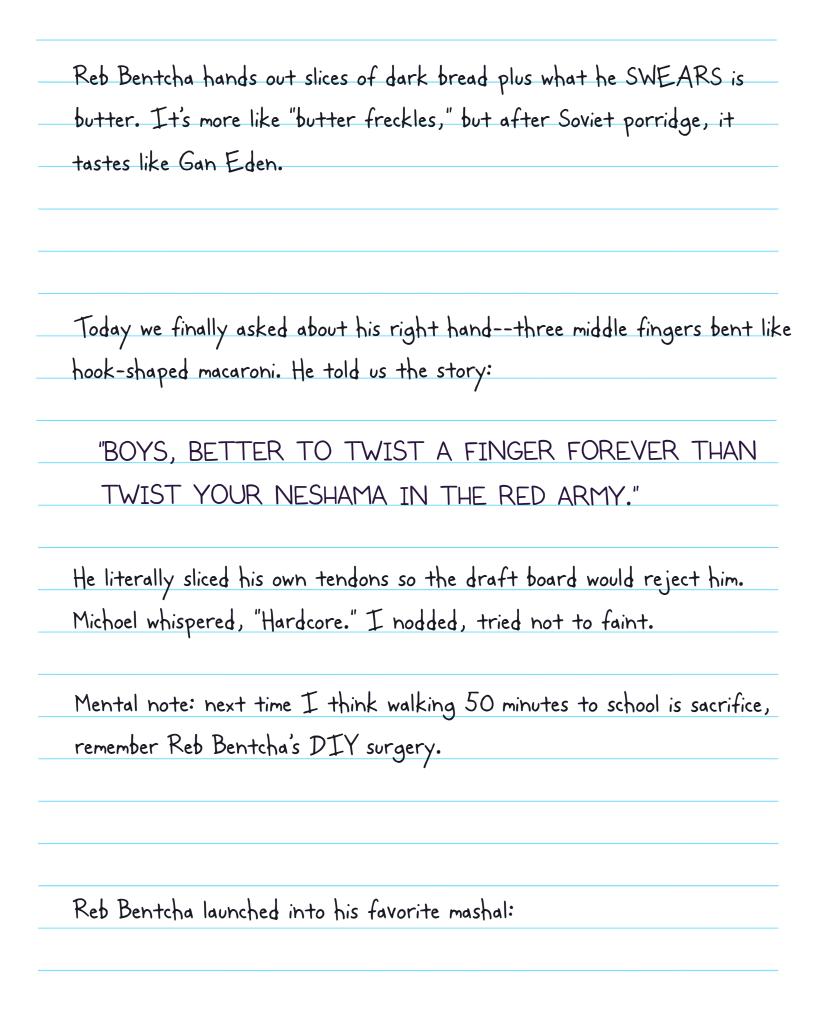
Secretly leveled up to PRONUNCIATION NINJA. Couldn't brag about it though-- "Rule #1 of Underground Cheder: don't talk about Underground Cheder."

- Reb Zushe walked TWO HOURS each Shabbos in Moscow just to dunk
  in the MIKVAH. That's farther than my entire
  disappearing-to-nowhere school commute.
- Bread with butter speckles is still the greatest breakfast since manna.
- A GARTEL can double as a disciplinary laser.
- Illegal schools give better snacks than legal ones.

End of entry--if K.G.B. agents find this notebook, please wipe the butter fingerprints before filing it under "Evidence of Excessive Carbohydrate Joy."

# Tuesday (That's LOW for Samarkand standards, because today's cheder was actually kind of epic.) i Me "Michoel M. (master of stealth challah sneaks) TYaakov L. (can balance a Gemara on his head) ï Mottel G. (joke-teller, 50 % hit rate) I Binyamin M. (owns a pencil that EVERYONE "borrows") I Zalmen F. (future Kohen Gadol, calls dibs) "Our teacher: REB BENZION "BENTCHA" MAROZ

Cheder is inside the Mishulovin family courtyard apartment--basically the Fort Knox of secret Torah. No nosy neighbors, perfect view of the gate. Code knock, door opens, and BOOM: breakfast.



Army reaches river -- no bridge. Commander yells "FORWARD!" Front soldiers drown; bodies pile into makeshift bridge. Remaining soldiers cross, conquer city. Then he looks straight at us: "WHO CONQUERED THE CITY? THE ONES WHO FELL FOR IT! Chills. Real, actual chills. Yaakov asked, "So... we have to be the bridge?" Reb Bentcha smiled. "If Torah needs it--yes." Unfairness rating jumps to 28/10, but Inspiration rating hits 100. After lesson, Reb Bentcha starts schmoozing with the older Mishulovin brothers-- Dovid & Eliyahu. That's our unofficial recess. We're supposed to "review," but today we:

Timed Mottel balancing two siddurim on his nose (6.3 sec)	
i Played silent Alef-Beis charades (Binyamin's "tzaddik" looked like a	
chicken)	

I Got caught exactly zero times -- success!

Shlomo (younger kid) scribbled moustaches on a Rebbe picture. Big mistake. Reb Bentcha didn't yell. He quietly took Shlomo's hand, SMACKED it on the table--loud clap, zero bruises, MAX embarrassment. Whole room froze like wax fruit. Lesson learned.

My turn to chazar a sugya. I sang it with my best "learning tune." Reb Bentcha stops me:

"HILLEL, IF YOU CHANT WRONG, YOU THINK WRONG! START AGAIN."

I tried, still wrong. He tells the Reuven/Shimon "not a thief?!" story to show how a bad tune can change meaning. Homework: explain the Gemara to

	immy tonight. If she understands, I pass.
Pre	essure level: Mount Sinai.
Sor	mebody mentioned a boy who tried to jump off a roof after not gett
	o university. Reb Bentcha fired:
	"IF MY LIFE WERE THAT CHEAP, I'D FOUND A
	HUNDRED YESHIVAS! LIFE'S PRECIOUSTHAT'S WHY
	RISK IT SMARTLY."
He	says things so fiery, you feel your payos singe.
1 1	Metric   Today's Score
	·l
B	butter visibility   2.1 % of slice (new high)
_	Sartel slaps witnessed   O (good)

Table-hand claps   1 (R.I.P Shlomo's pride)
Inspirational chills   Multiple     Mischief incidents caught   0.5 (Mottel's charade almost busted)
• Re-learn sugya WITH correct "nah-nah-nah" tune.
<ul> <li>Teach it to Mommyno yawns allowed.</li> </ul>
• Decide which friend would volunteer to be "human bridge" (jury's out).
<ul> <li>Thank Hashem for butter freckles.</li> </ul>
End of entryif K.G.B. discovers this, please remember: crooked finger still beat crooked souls.
Thursday
(Two points extra because getting caught mid-bicycle-kick is mortifying.)

Courtyard = our stadium. Michoel "Lightning-Feet" Mishulovin versus Yaako
"Goal-Stopper" Lerner. I was official commentator / occasional ball-stealer
Score: 3-3. Tension: epic.
Suddenly a shadow looms. We spin aroundand there's REB BENTCHA
smack in the center circle, clutching his head like he just saw someone chev
on a sefer.
Zero whistle, no words, just THE STARE.
We freeze. Mottel still has his foot on the ball; even the ball looks guilty.
We shuffle into class expecting the GARTEL OF DOOM. Instead, Reb
Bentcha says,
"BEFORE WE LEARN, I SAW SOMETHING
FASCINATING ON MY WALK."
No gartel? Interesting. Everyone leans in.

"I	PASSED THE ALLEY," HE BEGINS, VOICE ALL
DF	RAMATIC.
"A	ND WHO DO I SPY PLAYING SOCCER?
_	R. ELIYAHU PARITCHER
_ `	YERACHMIELDER ALTER
	AND BORUCH THE SHOCHET!"
Chass	sidim. Imagining them in shorts juggling a ball = brain melt.
Reb I	Bentcha continues, totally straight-faced:
	ORUCH KICKS YERACHMIEL SPRINTS
"Bo	
	BOOM!_ BALL SMACKS R. ELIYAHU ON THE HEAD

At first we try to hold it, but the mental picture is too ridiculous. Snicker escape, then a full snort-laugh from Binyamin. The room erupts.
Reb Bentcha slams palm to tableWHAM! Laughter vacuumed out of the
air.
"WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING AT? FIVE MINUTES AGO I
WATCHED _YOU_ DOING THE SAME FOOLISHNESS!"
He scans us with laser eyes.
"TELL ME, IF IT LOOKS SILLY ON GEDOLEI
CHASSIDIM, WHY IS IT SUDDENLY NOBLE WHEN YOU
DO IT? TORAH BOYS KICKING LEATHER BAGS? THINK
AGAIN!"
Gulp.
<b>\</b>

i Soccer ball: confiscated (temporary, we hope).  i Ego: bruised harder than Shlomo's table-hand.
i Lesson: When Reb Bentcha starts "story-mode," cancel all giggles until you're 100 % sure it's actually funny.
<ul> <li>Imagining elder Chassidim in a World Cup = hilarious, but only silently</li> <li> in my head.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Next recess, switch to "Less Suspicious Exercise." Maybe invisible jump-rope?</li> </ul>
• I still owe Yaakov a rematchfirst to 4 wins, somewhere Reb Bentch.
End of entryif future historians find this: yes, even secret-cheder kids sometimes just want to score a goal.



Communist rumor of the day: "If you don't go to university, you'll starve."

Tatty's counter-rumor: "If you DO go, your neshama will starve."

Who to believe? The guy with the beard who sneaks me buttered bread usually wins, but still... I kinda wanted a fancy diploma to hang on a future wall.

- · STEP 1: Learn reading + math at home.
- STEP 2: Master Gemara + Chassidus = brain muscles of steel.
- STEP 3: Hashem sends parnasa.

PROOF: He opened a sign-making factory with Berel--zero college, 100 % income.

Conclusion: I'm apparently headed for the COMMERCIAL SIGNS SUPER-LEAGUE instead of rocket science.

## Tuesday

Our friend Shimon struts into cheder:

SHIMON: "GUESS WHAT, GENIUSES? MY MOM REGISTERED ME FOR SCHOOL-SCHOOL. I'LL BE EDUCATED. WHAT WILL BECOME OF YOU?"

I was mid-eyeroll when REB BENTCHA swept in.

He points to our chumash:

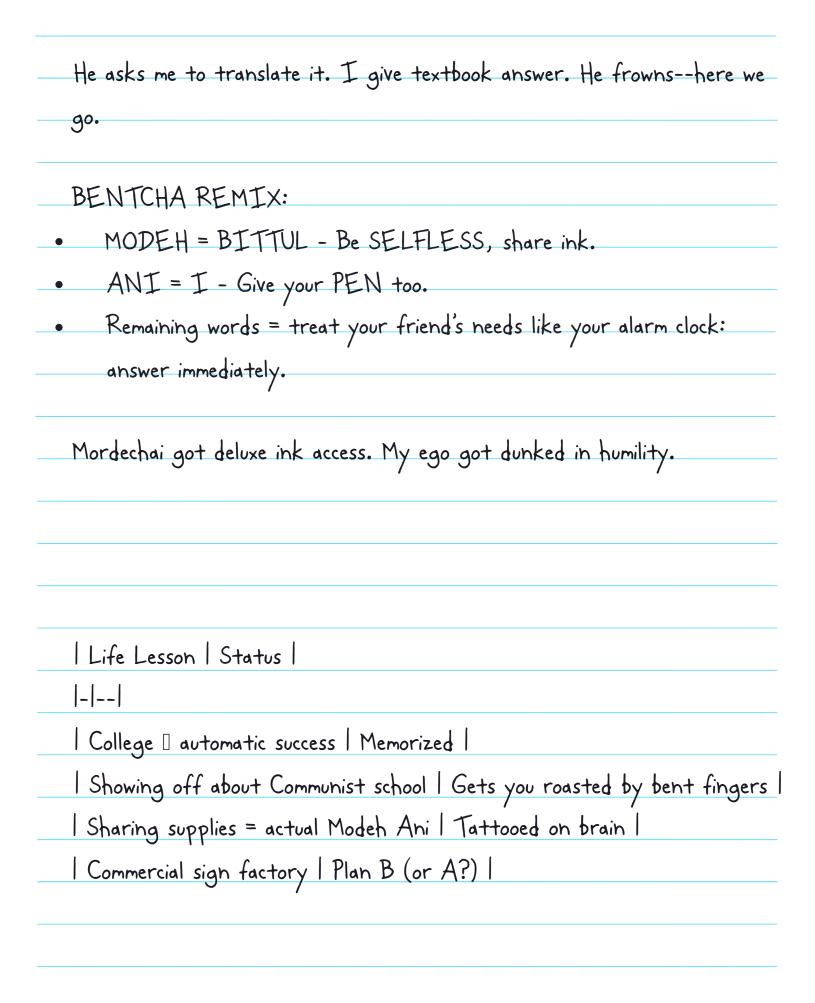
"EXPLAIN YOU SHALL FOLLOW HASHEM, FEAR HIM, WORSHIP HIM, CLEAVE TO HIM."

Shimon rattles off the plain translation. Bentcha's eyebrow climbs Mount Sinai.

Second try... third try... now Bentcha's bent fingers are an inch from Shimon's nose.

FINAL BENTCHA TRANSLATION (SHOUTED WITH DRUM-ROLL TUNE):

"Follow Hashem" = Only Him, not Lenin. "Fear Him" = No Communist school. "Worship Him" = Actively DESPISE said school (plus a few Russian adjectives I can't repeat). Shimon shrank to a pocket-size Pioneer. No more bragging. Revenge served kosher. Wednesday Mordechai forgot his ink. He asked to borrow mine. I said: "SHOULD'VE BROUGHT YOUR OWN, BUDDY." (Yes, not my finest moment.) Bentcha didn't yell--just waited, which is scarier. Ten minutes later: "HILKE, DID YOU SAY MODEH ANI THIS MORNING?" "OF COURSE."



Unfairness rating dips to 30/10still no diploma, but at least I now own the world's holiest inkwell.
End of entryif future me ends up making neon signs instead of rocker
ships, remember: Tatty called it, and Bentcha approved.
Thursday
Today I learned two things:
<ul> <li>I am NOT Olympic-sprinter material.</li> </ul>
• Guards with rifles do NOT appreciate surprise cardio.
Let me back up.
Our classroom window faces the courtyard gate. REB BENTCHA sits
<ul> <li>I am NOT Olympic-sprinter material.</li> <li>Guards with rifles do NOT appreciate surprise cardio.</li> <li>Let me back up.</li> </ul>

there like Mission-Control, scanning for strangers. Rule is simple:
• Stranger enters 🛘 Bentcha waves "evacuate."
<ul> <li>We scatter faster than cockroaches at a kitchen light.</li> </ul>
<ul> <li>Hide, pray, hope stranger loves gardens and not illegal Torah classes.</li> </ul>
Usually works great. Emphasis on "usually."
Stranger suddenly steps through the gate. Everyone boltsexcept me,
Mister Slow-Shoelaces. I flatten behind the door. Heart drumming so loud
I'm sure the guy can hear it. Minutes feel like three weeks of detention.
Stranger finally leaves. I still can't feel my legs. Think I might be part
chameleon now.

Important background: Soviet geniuses are building a giant government cube next door using PRISONERS as free labor. They fenced the site with barbed wire and added four watchtowers-basically a bonus level in a war video game (if Chabad kids played video gameswhich we DON'T, calr down).
Today one prisoner ESCAPES. Sirens? Nope. Just guards sprinting around waving rifles like they lost their favorite babka.
He peeks out, sees the madness, turns to us super chill:
"KIDS, TIME FOR AN EARLY DISMISSAL. WALK SLOOOOW. NO SUDDEN MOVES."
Sounds easy. Spoiler: not easy.

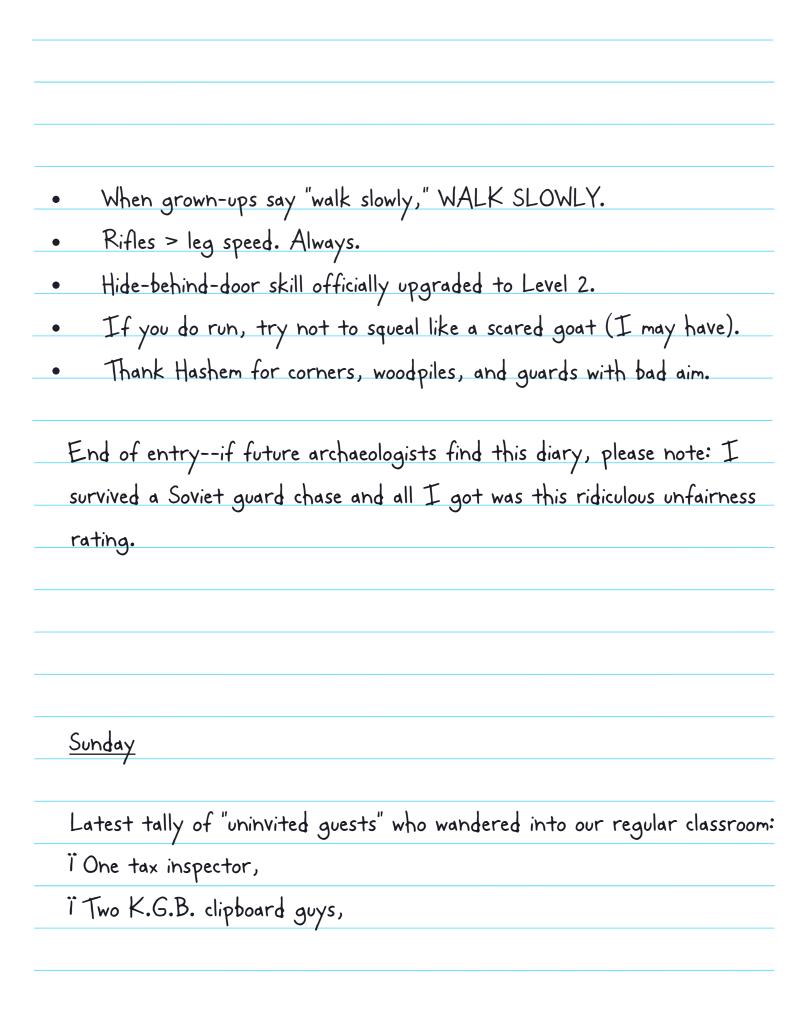
I "Is this how you become a martyr? Because I didn't study that chapter yet!"

I round the corner, dive behind a woodpile, and hold my breath till I'm officially part of the scenery. Guard thunders past, still yelling "DDD!" at nothing. Ten seconds later silence-except my heart, which is basically a hammer factory.

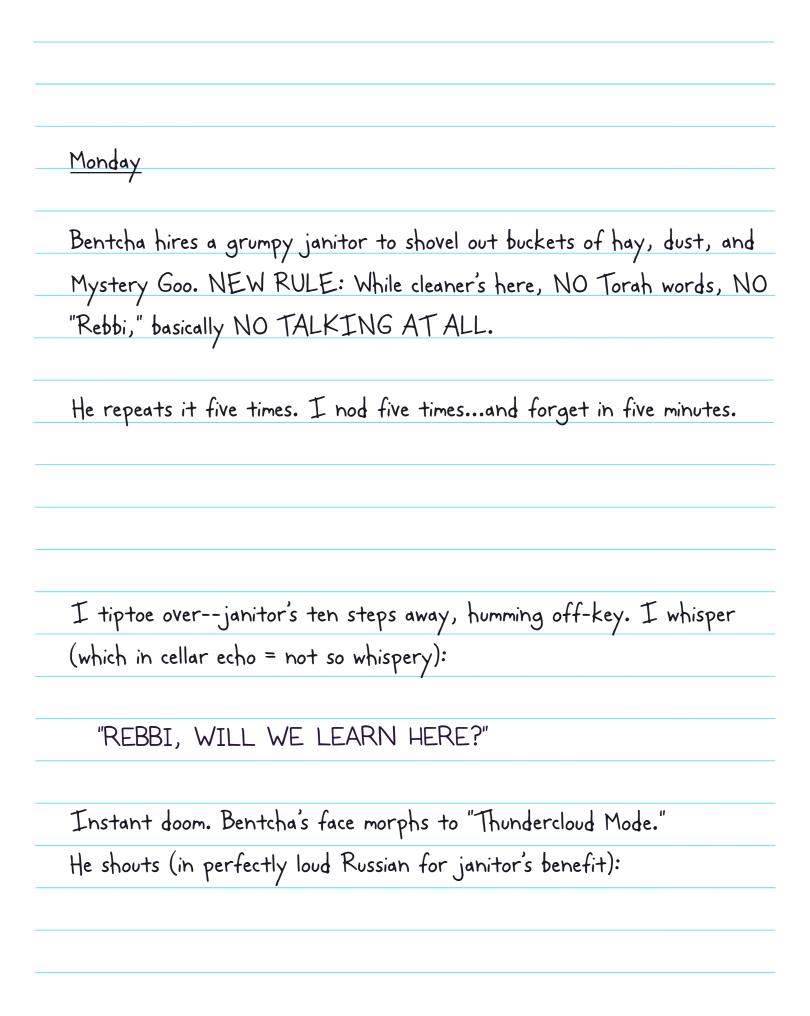
I tiptoe home taking alleyways only cats know. At lunch Yankel asks why I'm the same color as sour cream. I tell him. He says the guard's warning shots probably shaved three seconds off my future in-law speech. Thanks, Yankel.

Later Tatty explains: running made me look guiltier than pickles in Pesach. One wrong bullet angle and--well--no more diary.

Miracle Score: INFINITE. Also, my shoelaces are now double-knotted forever.



"A woman looking for her runaway chicken (don't ask).
Result: BENTCHA'S NERVES: 0 / STRESS LEVEL: 100.
Solution? Move school intodrumrollan abandoned HORSE STABLE.
Yup, Torah with a side of manure.
Feature   Upside   Downside
-
Thick walls, zero windows street-side   Nobody suspects study hall
Smells like "Eau de Donkey"
Two barred windowsfront gate + back alley   Spy view & emergency exi-
Bars = scratch-o-rama
Natural cross-draft   Free A/C   Dust tornado 24/7
Mystique level   100 % "Secret Lair" vibes   0 % normal-kid vibes
We kids voted 6-0 in favor. Anything beats rifle chases.
•



"KID, OUT! NOW!"
I sprint so fast I nearly crash into a barrel labeled "Glue???"
Janitor leaves. Bentcha turns laser-eyes on me:
"I WARNED YOUNO 'REBBI,' NO 'LEARN.' YOU
HOLLER:
REBBI, WE'LL LEARN HERE? REBBI, WE'LL PLAY
HERE? REBBI, WE'LL EAT HERE?'
ONE SLIP = DUNGEON FOR ALL OF US!"
I sink lower than donkey manure pile.
Lesson Title: OPSEC 101 (aka "Shut Your Mouth, Hillel").
Tuesday

Substitute code words:
i "Rebbi" [ "Uncle"
- i "Learn"   "Practice"
· Before opening mouth, count to Alef-Beis backwards.
• If cleaner present, pretend to be a lamp.
Scratched knuckles climbing out back window todaybattle scars of Torah.
Category   Points
-
New hideout cool factor   +8
Smell factor   -5
My stealth rating   - 1 (for now)
Lesson retention   Permanent
End of entryif anyone finds this notebook, please ignore hoofprints on
the pages. That's just what happens when your yeshivah used to board
donkeys.

(F	But Inspiration Rating blasts to 97 / 10, so it evens out.)
I	ingredients:
	Tiny kitchen in Mishulovin house
	One samovar huffing like a train
	Five shot-glasses (for the grown-ups, RELAX)
	REB BENTCHA on turbo-mode
W	le boys got front-row seats on overturned crates. My job: keep the s
	owl from "accidentally" refilling itself into Yaakov's mouth.
1.	ocal chossid (#NameRedacted) grumbles:

"THAT FELLOW WHO JOINED THE COMMUNIST
PARTY HE'S BASICALLY A GOY NOW."
BOOMBentcha smacks table, vodka does a mini-tsunami.
"EIGHT MILLION SOLDIERS BLOCK HIM FROM
TEFILLIN; HE STILL STRAPS THEM ONTZADDIK!"
Everyone freezes. I secretly imagine eight million soldiers squished into our
courtyard. No room left for the samovar.
Conversation drifts to weather, prices, boring stuff. Bentcha starts
rummaging, lifts a dusty scrap.
"THIS WORTHLESS? YOUR SMALL-TALK WORTH LESS!"
Cue immediate silence. Even the samovar stops wheezing out of
respect/fear.

## Bentcha story-time: He's standing in Red Square. Thousands rush like they're late for cholent. He thinks: "100 years ago--NONE of you. 100 years from now--ALSO none. Calm down." Michoel whispers, "Does that mean homework is meaningless?" I whisper back, "Nice try, he only cancels materialism, not Gemara quizzes." After three "small" I'chaims, Bentcha belts a Russian Iullaby: Jewish mom telling her son to stay faithful even when EVERYTHING crashes. Finger knocks table like drumsticks. Low-key catchy; I hum along. Years later my brother Berel will sing it for

en	ndless tragedies = not the Rebbe's playlist.)
I	always thought Bentcha looked newer-model than the other
ela	dersfancy beard trim, tie, stylish cane. Yet he chats with R. Boru
	uchman & R. Eliyahu Paritcher like bunk-bed buddies.
He	e finally notices our confused faces:
	"WE LEARNED TOGETHER BACK IN LUBAVITCH!"
Tr	ranslation: shared yeshivah = lifetime secret handshake.
Be	entcha paints a scene:

I Rebbe Rashab delivers Shabbos maamar.

I Select students (including mini-Eliyahu) memorize every word.

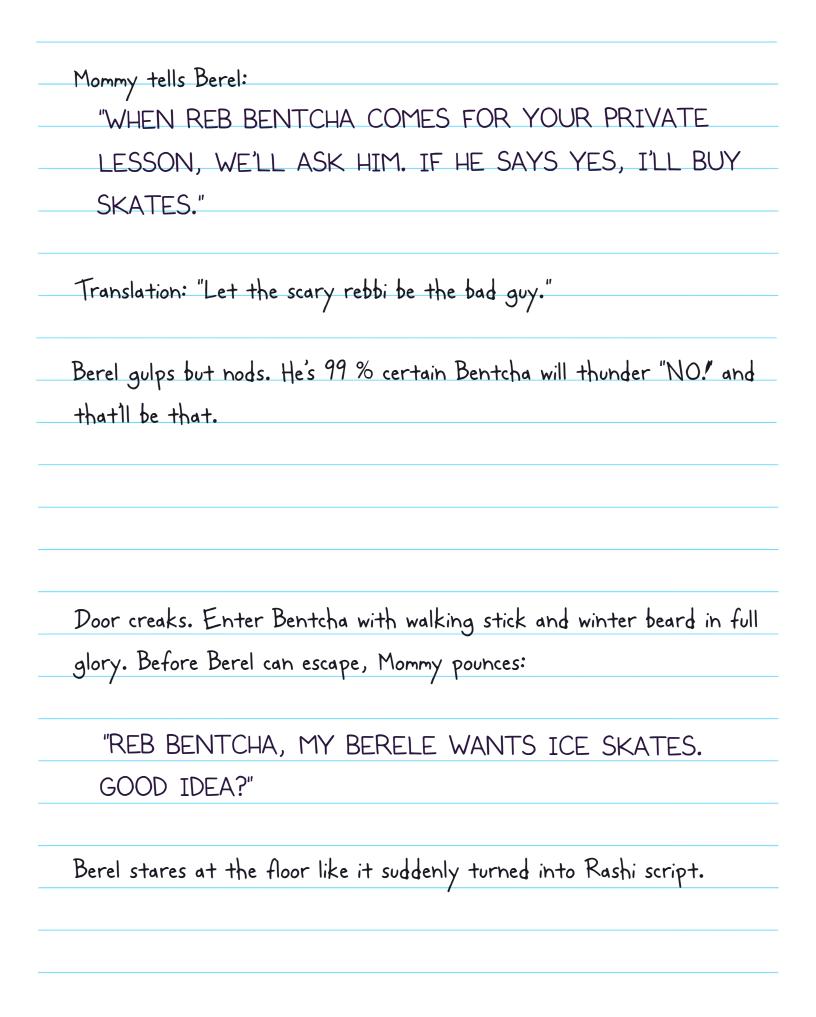
i Shabbos morning, Eliyahu jumps on a TABLE to review it aloud-hair literally falling out from deep contemplation.

Yaakov whispers, "If hair loss = holiness, I'm doomed." (He's got curls like a lion.)

- · One Jew vs. eight million = Jew wins (with tefillin).
- Small-talk < scrap paper < zero value.</li>
- Life = fairground; grab mitzvos, not cotton candy.
- · Stylish walking stick does NOT cancel hardcore mesirus nefesh.
- Be careful what Iullabies you perform for the Rebbe.

Unfairness rating holds at 29/10 because I still have to memorize tomorrow's Gemara. But after seeing Bentcha turbo-preach, I kinda want to be the kid who one-handedly blocks eight million soldiers--preferably without losing all my hair.

Sunday	
(That's m	y rating. Berel's rating soars to 73 / 10just wait.)
ï Berel =	my older brother, 12 years old, proud owner of exactly zero
ï Berel = sports eq	
sports eq	
sports eq	uipment.
sports eq Î New nei ditch.	uipment. ghborhood craze = ICE SKATES on the frozen irrigation
sports eq Î New nei ditch. Î Mommy =	uipment. ghborhood craze = ICE SKATES on the frozen irrigation = believes Gemara + blades don't mix.
sports eq Î New nei ditch. Î Mommy =	uipment. ghborhood craze = ICE SKATES on the frozen irrigation



Bentcha	wrinkles his forehead, strokes beard dramatic pause then:
"SKA	TES? EXCELLENT IDEA! BUY THEM!"
Berel's jo	iw = drop. Mommy's eyebrows = fly off her face. I almost chok
my tea.	
Bentcha	raises a finger (uh-oh clause incoming):
"YES	, DEFINITELY SKATESON ONE CONDITION.
	T IN LINE MUST BE R. BORUCH THE SHOCHET.
SECO	ND, R. ELIYAHU PARITCHER.
THIR	D, R. YERACHMIEL THE ELDER.
TUCN	NAND ONLY THENBERELE MAY SKATE
I HEI	

tzad	dikim wobbling across the ice in long kapotasthen Berel zooming
behi	nd like their tiny bodyguard.
	rson   Facial Expression   Thought Bubble
Mo	ommy   Half-smile, half-told-you-so   "Buying skates? Never happen
Be	rel   Mixture of hope & doom   "Find three elder Chassidim on skate:
Imp	possible."
l Me	:   Trying not to laugh aloud   "Where do you even buy a
	pta-friendly helmet?"
	ntcha   Total poker face   Mission accomplished.
* • •	ate request technically APPROVED.

I Logistical odds of it happening: 0.00001 %.
"Berel now researching if 80-year-olds can learn triple axels.
"Mommy silently thanks Hashem for classic Bentcha loophole.
Unfairness rating for me stays 22 / 10 (still no soccer ball back from
confiscation). Unfairness for Berel? Let's say the ice just melted.
_End of entryif you ever spot three venerable Chassidim speed-skating
through Samarkand, call our house immediately. Berel will need to lace up.
Wednesday
(It's actually a calm daynobody chased me with a riflebut the mystery
level shot way up.)
Cheder door creaks open and in walks a boy who:

- · Is way older than us, maybe 16.
- · Has peyos so long they could double as jump-ropes.
- Wears a totally different style kapota.
- Speaks EXACTLY ZERO WORDS to anyone.

Naturally the class response = nonstop whispering + mild teasing (Mottel tried to lasso a peyeh--bad idea).

## Older-peyos guy finally sighs:

"PROMISE TO QUIT BOTHERING ME AND I'LL TELL YOU A STORY ABOUT YOUR REBBE YOU'VE NEVER HEARD."

Instant silence. Even Shlomo's ink stopped dripping.

We make the pinky-swear. (Yes, I know pinky-swears aren't in Shulchan Aruch--but neither is lassoing peyos.)

Turns out he's a SLONIMER CHOSSID. Last year his Rebbe went on a "Tzadik World Tour," visiting holy rabbis everywhere. After the trip the Slonimer Rebbe said: "I saw a REAL tzadik in Lubavitch--gold watch, two golden chains, HUMBLE like nobody else." "Fortunate are the eyes that saw him." "Fortunate are the eyes that saw someone who SAW him." (Spiritual chain-reaction. Then, while everyone was snacking at the farbrengen, the Slonimer Rebbe told Mister Peyos: "THIS ISN'T YOUR PATH--GO TO LUBAVITCH." So he packed a bag and--boom--now he's in our manure-cellar classroom. Respect.

١k	Cid   Reaction
	-
1 1	lichoel   Whispered "Golden chains? Like treasure."
ΙΥ	aakov   Already drawing the Rebbe with double chains in notebook.
	le   Thinking "If even other Rebbes call our Rebbe 'real tzadik,' tho
hex	t-level bragging rights."
1 1	lottel   Quiet for first time all weekmiracle!
	Don't indea a how by his course langeth - ha might have VTP intel
	Don't judge a boy by his peyos lengthhe might have VIP intel.
	Apparently "humility" can come with fancy accessories.
	Apparently "humility" can come with fancy accessories.  If your Rebbe tells you to move cities, you MOVE.
	Apparently "humility" can come with fancy accessories.

Inspiration rating = shiny golden 100 / 10.

\_End of entry--if I ever get two golden chains, remind me to keep the humility part, too.\_

## Thursday

Unfairness Rating: 35 / 10

Excitement Rating: 99 / 10

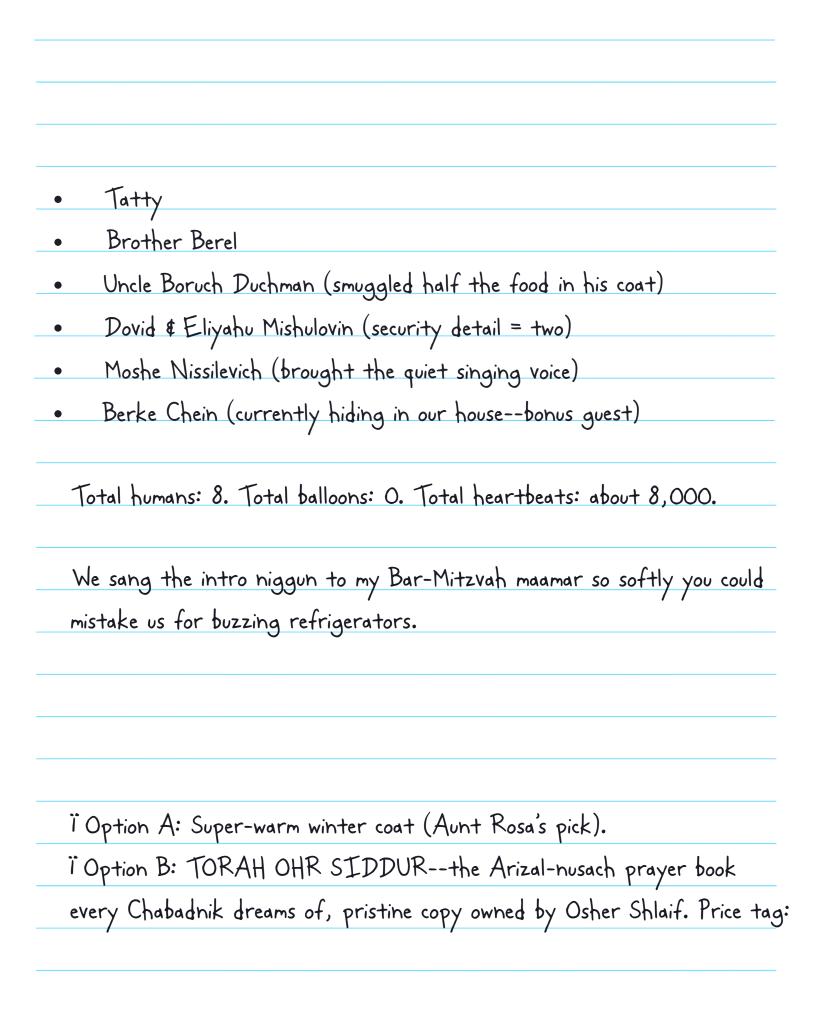
Tonight was IT--my official upgrade from Kid to

Grown-Up-Who-Puts-on-Tefillin.

Venue: Apartment 6, second floor, Chudjumskaya St., Toopik 1.

Translation: Dead-End Alley #1. (Yes, my big night is happening in an actual "no-way-out." Couldn't be more Soviet if we tried.)

Backdrop: Stalin is supposedly packing 3 million of us onto a one-way train to Siberia. Forty-thousand frozen barracks already waiting. So, giant parties? Not trending.



THREE HUNDRED RUBLES. (That's like trading a whole goat plus its
winter boots.)
I threw all 13 years of stubborn power on the table: "SID-DUR OR BUST."
Tatty sided with me; Aunt Rosa rolled her eyes so hard they nearly left orbit.
Purchase completed. I hugged the siddur like it was a new puppy. Aunt Rosa flips through, frowns:
"THREE HUNDRED RUBLES AND NO PICTURES? AT LEAST A COAT HAS BUTTONS!"
Note to self: future printing idea"Illustrated Torah Ohr" with sheep cartoons for the aunts of the world.
Category   Score

- -
Guests who danced (tiny shuffle)   3
Number of neighbors who noticed   O (victory)
Tefillin nerves   Maxed out
Cold Siberia thoughts   Sneak in every five minutes
Joy of owning siddur   Pricelesssorry, Aunt Rosa
If Stalin really tries to ship us off, I'm packing my tefillin, this siddur,
and maybe one mitten. Everything else can freeze.
END of entryif you find this diary under my mattress, please handle
the siddur with clean hands; it cost us a winter coat!