

Will Papa Die?

The swarming bugs, the screeching birds ... Carol lying on a pile of leaves, her bloody hands covering her face ...

The horror faded when I awoke to my cell phone's buzz and vibration. The small alarm clock on the night table displayed 3:00 a.m.

Who the hell is calling me at this hour?

My father's old friend and partner, Professor Arenofsky, said, "It's your father. He's at Flagler Hospital. He's suffered a heart attack."

My gut tightened and I almost choked. "Is-is he dead?"

"Joel, you're just like him—always jumping to conclusions. He's alive. In ICU."

"Oh my God! What happened?"

"We had a late dinner and planned to return to the office for our quarterly business meeting. During dinner he suddenly stood up, his face ashen, grabbed his left arm, and grimaced in pain. He needed to be rushed to the hospital. He refused, insisted he'd be fine. Said Hashem was going to help him. You know how stubborn your father can be."

My nightmare came back: *Papa's voice reverberating in my head, "She'll be all right. Hashem will look after her."*

Professor Arenofsky went on. "He cried in pain. I pleaded with him to let me take him to Flagler Hospital."

Fear and shame swept over me: the memory of Mama in the ambulance, the scream of the siren. Papa and I, following close behind. My repeating "I should have walked with her."

The professor's voice broke into my thoughts. "All the way to the hospital he kept saying, 'I must pass on the Kabbalah's secret to Joel. He's the last male descendant of the House of David.' As we pulled into the emergency entrance, he gasped for air, mumbling something about finding Aaron's breastplate. Do you have any idea what that's all about?"

"Not a clue."

"You and Carol must leave for the hospital, now. There's not a moment to lose."

"Yes. We'll leave right away."

"Let me know when you arrive. I'm at the Casa Monica Hotel."

In a state of shock, I rushed to Carol's bedroom, paused in the doorway, and stared into the blackness. *Is death like this, a dark nothingness? Papa wouldn't see it that way. His philosophy was: As long as the soul lives in the body, it is limited to the body's physical perceptions. But when the body dies, the soul is released to greater spiritual realities. Soul? Do I even believe the soul exists?*

I turned the light on. Carol lay in a fetal position, wrapped in a thin red-plaid quilt.

I said, "Carol, wake up, wake up."

I shook her shoulder, but she brushed my hand aside and grumbled, "Go away."

"Carol, Papa's had a heart attack. He's in the ICU."

She popped up from under the quilt and blinked like a startled owl. I watched the color drain from her face.

"Professor Arenofsky called. We must leave now."

She whispered, "Is he going to die?"

Die? He always seemed invincible. "How the hell should I know? Hurry up."

Her face flushed with terror. "Do you think he'll understand our situation?"

“I don’t know.”

“What if he doesn’t?”

“You’re just like Mama, worrying about things that haven’t happened yet. Hurry, get dressed. It’s a long drive from Princeton to St. Augustine.”

Carol

The streetlights eked out dim rays through the mist. We rushed to my beat-up old Toyota without saying a word. Carol got in the passenger side; I opened the hatchback and threw our bags in, and then I plopped into the driver's seat.

Carol was on her cell phone. "There's a family emergency. I won't be in. Please cover for me. I'll call you as soon as I know something."

She dropped her phone into her pocketbook. "Let's go."

At that predawn hour, the drive on I-95 south was monotonous.

The sight of large oak trees took me back in time to when we were children living in Spring Valley, New York. *Colorful annuals, copious azalea bushes, and large, lush, purplish-pink rhododendrons lined the curved, stone-paved driveway.*

Papa, an Orthodox Jewish scholar, was authoritarian. He always dressed in a white shirt, a rumpled dark blue suit, and a vest with fringes called tzitzit that peeked out from under his jacket. A small black yarmulke sat precariously on his shiny bald head. A long, gray, shaggy beard covered part of his eggplant-shaped body. When in contemplation or upset, he habitually

stroked his beard, especially when Carol or I broke one of the archaic 613 Laws of Moses, as though it was one of the Ten Commandments.

Every evening, Mama and Papa would retire to our library off the foyer and sit on overstuffed green velveteen armchairs. Mama's hand-crocheted doilies adorned the chairs' arms and backs.

The library ritual never changed. They discussed the day's events. Papa read. Mama read.

The nightly ritual of going to bed, too, was etched in stone. Papa kissed us on the forehead and said, "Good night, my kinder."

Mama also kissed us on the forehead. She said, "Pleasant dreams."

On occasion, Carol and I sat on the top landing, listening to their conversations. At times, their private talk would be in Yiddish, and we didn't completely understand them.

The night before Carol was to go to her friend's birthday party and I to my baseball practice, we heard them arguing about Carol's new party dress.

Papa's voice blared: "She's not going to wear the new dress. It's too short. I know how boys think!"

Carol cupped her face and sobbed. "Joel, the old dress he wants me to wear is old-fashioned and too long."

"You're crying over the length of your dress?" I whispered, amazed that such a thing could be of any importance.

"Yes, my friends are going to make fun of me."

Mama almost never contradicted Papa, but that night she did.

"Papa, you make such harsh judgments. It's the twentieth century. Carol has to be fashionable."

Papa bellowed, “You mean the way she dresses will make her acceptable?”

“Keep your voice down, you’ll wake the kinder. Papa, your imagination carries you away. She’ll be all right.”

We strained to hear Papa’s low-pitched voice: “Okay, okay. It’s going against my better judgment—let her wear it! But Joel must walk her to and from the party.”

I made a face; Carol poked me in the side.

Papa’s voice trailed off. All we heard, finally, was, “Thank you, dear. You’re doing a mitzvah. Carol will be so happy.”

Carol smiled, kissed my cheek, and off to our beds we went.

The next morning, Mama’s and Carol’s voices drifted up to my bedroom. “Carol, don’t forget to take the gift.”

Carol whined, “Ma”

Mama called up to me, “Joel, hurry up. You have to walk your sister to the birthday party.”

I have to? I thought, and yelled back, “I’m getting dressed, Ma.”

She stepped on my words. “Your aunt Sarah is coming over in a few minutes to help me with the Passover Seder. Hurry, or Carol will be late.”

Carol’s whining drifted up. “Ma, I don’t need Joel or anybody to walk me. I’m almost nine years old.”

My heart rejoiced. *She doesn’t need me. Thank God.*

Carol continued her kvetching. “Ma, please, it’s not far. I’m in fourth grade.”

“My kinder, Papa would be very angry if I let you go by yourself.” A few moments of silence followed. Mama’s voice lightened when she said, “However, you are growing up fast.”

I could picture Mama standing with arms folded as Carol pleaded.

“But I’ll be late for the party. Please, please, Mama, please, I got all As on my report card and—”

“I’m going against my better judgment, Carol.”

“I promise not to tell Papa,” I heard Carol say as I buckled my pants and looked around my room.

“I promise. I promise,” she squealed. She sounded like she was dancing.

I stopped to listen.

Mama hesitated a moment and said, “Go directly to the party and call when you get there.”

“I will.” Carol’s voice sounded happy.

“Joel, what in the world is taking so long?” Mama shouted to me.

I looked around on the floor in my room and frowned. “Can’t find my catcher’s mitt.”

“It’s on the top shelf in your closet.”

Mama knows everything.

I grabbed it, ran down the stairs, and stopped in the kitchen. She stood over the hot stove, perspiring, as she stirred a large wooden spoon in a pot, her words in cadence with each stir.

“Please try to catch up to your sister. Run if you have to. She’s gotten a good start on you.”

I’m never going to be a cook. “Yeah, I’m outta here,” I yelled over my shoulder, heading for the door. *It’s going to be great that my sister will not have to rely on me so much.*

I’m not sure why, but I noticed there were no chirping birds from the familiar wooded lot that I passed on my way to baseball practice. Instead, large black birds screeched wildly and

flapped their wings as though their lives depended on it. I got a shiver and gripped my mitt tighter.

The sound of moaning came from behind some bushes. Curious, I ventured in. Scared of what I'd find, my mind repeated what Papa had taught me. *"You are a mensch when you always do the right things for others and yourself, no matter what happens."* In spite of my fears, I had to see what was making the awful moaning.

Tucking the mitt into the waist of my pants, I took a deep breath and ventured in farther.

Big, black, evil birds with vulture-like talons and beaks stared with beady eyes from above. It was unnerving. I avoided branches, while I swatted bugs off my arms and face. The moaning grew louder. My heart pounded like a jackhammer.

It was Carol: in the dirt, holding her head, blood running between her fingers. Blood-soaked leaves and twigs tangled in her golden-blond hair—the new party dress, dirty and torn.

The black birds were ready to swoop down upon us. "Go away, get out of here!" I shouted. I threw stones at the squawking birds. They screamed as they flew off in a flurry.

Trembling, I bent over and put my arm behind Carol to help her sit up. Pulling her bloody hands away from her face, I saw a large gash across her forehead. My stomach turned when I saw the bone of her left pinkie finger sticking out, the fingertip hanging by a thread of skin.

She paled and screamed, "My finger!"

I held her tight and said, "You'll be okay."

She began to shiver and shook her head as she looked at me with tear-filled eyes. "There were three of them, I-I was walking—" She pointed in the direction of the sidewalk. "Suddenly, three boys stopped me." Blood mixed with tears ran down her cheeks. "They wanted the birthday present. I wouldn't let go. One of them hit me—another pushed me. I fell, screaming and

kicking. They dragged me here. Two of them held me down and forced the gift out of my hands. The other one tried to lie on top of me—I spit in his face. He jumped up, saying terrible things. Then they ran away, laughing.”

Carol held her head, moaned, and slumped in my arms.

The Portrait

A blast from a car horn brought me back to the present. We passed a highway sign near Richmond: VCU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE. My mind flashed back to the day I received a strange letter from Carol.

My dearest brother,

I hope this letter finds you well. You often told me to be more social. Ever since middle school, I knew my so-called friends made fun of my deformity, behind my back.

If you thought my high school experience was bad, medical school is much worse. I met with my school's psychologist; he recommended I meet with him on a regular basis. However, I know I can handle it without his help. I'm strong and can make the necessary lifestyle changes.

I have left medical school and have taken a position as a pharmaceutical representative. Please don't worry. The job pays well, and I will be able to work a territory alone.

Your loving sister,

Carol

Interrupting my thoughts, Carol said, “Joel, I have to pee.”

Just like a woman. “I’ll pull off at Alexandria. Hang on, it’s the next exit.”

Carol had her hand on the door handle as we parked. She swung the door open, ran out, and shouted, “Meet you in the restaurant.”

The restaurant was jammed. I joined a long line.

A couple minutes later a deep voice reached my ears over the clamor: “Joel, Joel Schwartz.”

I glanced in the direction of the voice. It was one of Papa’s oldest friends and clients, the curator at the West Building of the National Gallery of Art in DC.

Carol rejoined me and followed the direction of my gaze. “Look over there. It’s Dr. Jordan.”

We left the line and headed toward him.

He rose from his seat as we approached and extended a hand to us. He smiled and said, “I haven’t seen the two of you in years. Please join me.”

We settled across him in his booth. His appearance had changed from when we’d last met. What was once a full head of brown wavy hair now consisted of wisps of white strands. Deep lines etched his ruddy complexion. Yet his waxed handlebar mustache with turned-up tips and his distinctive voice were the same.

“How’s your father?” he inquired as Carol tugged at her glove. Her eyes welled up.

The waiter appeared and took our order. Carol said she wasn’t hungry. I insisted she have something to eat—we still had a long ride ahead of us. The waiter left.

Again, Dr. Jordan asked about Papa.

I told him what we knew. “He’s in critical condition in St. Augustine. We’re on our way to be with him.”

“I’m very sorry to hear that. Do you two know how your father and I met?”

“No,” I answered for both of us.

He set down his coffee cup. “I was on the thirteenth-century art staff at the National Gallery. The university gave your father a retirement dinner, and the entire museum staff was invited. It’s because of him I have my current position.”

Carol responded, “I didn’t know.”

Dr. Jordan gave the tip of his mustache a twist. “My life transformed dramatically about a year later, when your father informed me he had become a custom antiquities dealer. He said he could acquire any original piece of art from any era. I laughed at him. Your father went on a tirade. He said he would never lie to me.”

Dr. Jordan gave a shrug. “So I challenged him to produce Leonardo da Vinci’s thirteenth-century portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci, with a deadline of thirty days, knowing the provenance was lost centuries ago. He took the challenge. Less than a week later, he called and asked to see me privately. Convinced I was going to hear an apology, I arranged to have him come to my office at two fifteen the next afternoon.

“Punctual as usual, he arrived carrying a large flat box, leaned it up against my desk, and proudly announced, ‘Here it is!’ He helped me take it out of the box. We tore the portrait’s wrapping away, exposing the ornate carved gold wood frame. It was indeed the portrait of Ginevra de’ Benci. I asked, ‘But is it authentic?’ Your father smiled and assured me it was real.”

Carol’s face reflected my confusion.

I blurted, “Was it?”

“Yes. We ran every imaginable test and consulted the world’s most respected da Vinci experts. They authenticated the portrait.”

He picked up his mug of coffee and took a long sip. “From then on, your father fulfilled my every request. As a result, I got rapid promotions. It did not take long before he developed a client list of the world’s major collectors!”

Dr. Jordan raised an eyebrow, paused, and leaned in. “What a tragedy it would be to lose your father and his secret of how he acquired things. Did he ever confide in either of you?” The old fellow shifted his gaze from me to Carol.

I replied, “The only thing he told us is ‘The answer is hidden in the Kabbalah.’ I’ve been analyzing it for years, but I’ve been unable to find the key.”

Dr. Jordan took a deep breath and sighed. “I sincerely hope your father’s recovering. Please give him my regards.”

“Of course.”

Shanda!

When we crossed the state line from Virginia into North Carolina, Carol was asleep, leaning against the door. I looked at her and sighed. I checked the mirrors and adjusted my grip on the steering wheel. My thoughts wandered back to the day I received my PhD.

“Mazeltov,” Papa had said in his booming voice. He shook my hand and beamed. “You have brought naches to your dear departed mama and me. We are so joyful.”

We left for our apartment, to celebrate with champagne. Carol drove Papa in his car. I hoped she wouldn’t say anything about us sharing a bedroom.

We parked only a few spaces away from each other. I watched as Papa opened the trunk and took out a large gift-wrapped box.

Carol walked over to me, and I whispered, “Have you told him?”

She put a finger to her lips. “Shush. No. He’s coming.”

In only seconds he was standing in front of us and asked what the two of us were up to. I asked him to let me take the box.

He said, “No, I can handle it.”

Once inside the apartment, Papa asked where he could put the gift. Carol indicated the living room, on the coffee table. Then she went to get the champagne.

Papa carefully placed the gift on the table and inquired where the bathroom was.

“Down the hall,” I told him, and off he went.

When Carol returned with the champagne, I asked her how we could bring up the subject of our temporarily sharing a bedroom.

A burst of hysterics came from down the hall: “It’s a shanda! My children are sleeping together!”

We froze.

Wide-eyed, tugging at his beard, red-faced, and neck veins bulging, he came into the living room and bellowed, “You two are an abomination! My children are dead to me!” Pounding on his chest, he recited the mourner’s prayer—“*Yit-ga-dal ve-yit-ka-dash she-mei ra-ba—*”

As Papa rushed out the door, Carol cried, “Don’t, Papa, don’t! It’s not what you think!”

Carol screamed, “Watch out, you’re going to hit that car!”

I swerved back into our lane just in time, barely missing the car to my left.

“What’s wrong with you?” Carol snapped. “You’re going to get us killed!”

I didn’t answer.

Flagler Hospital

The setting sun threw long shadows of the stately palm trees that lined the road to the hospital entrance. The parking lot was full. Luckily, a car pulled out of a space near the emergency entrance, just as we arrived.

A half-dozen people sat in the spacious lobby. Large watercolor paintings hung on the walls. A male nurse in green scrubs sat in a glass cubicle, focused on his computer screen.

Speaking through a small opening in the glass, I asked, "What is the condition of Professor Schwartz?"

He looked up. "Are you relatives?"

"Yes, we're his children," I replied, fighting the panic growing in my chest.

"Spell the name, please."

I did, enunciating each letter.

"Is Mrs. Schwartz here?"

"She passed away long ago," I muttered.

He resumed working at his computer. We waited in silence, Carol shifting her weight from one foot to the other.

Finally, he looked up and said, “One moment, please, while I call someone who can discuss your father’s condition with you.”

Carol started to speak, but he interrupted and pointed to chairs in a corner. “Please have a seat. Someone will be with you in a few minutes.”

The few minutes seemed like an eternity. A broad-shouldered, middle-aged woman in green scrubs and a white lab jacket, with the nameplate, C. K. SMITH, RN, approached us.

“Are you Professor Benjamin Schwartz’s children?”

We stood. I nodded and the nurse sighed. “Let’s sit down.”

Carol reached for my hand and I held on for dear life.

The nurse shook her head. “I’m sorry. Professor Schwartz passed away a short while ago.”

Carol crushed my hand.

“He suffered a massive stroke. We did everything possible, but we couldn’t save him.” She cleared her throat. “He had a message for his children.”

My heart sank. “Were you there? What were his last words, exactly?” I managed to say.

“His last words were: ‘I unconditionally forgive my children.’ ”

Carol paled and covered her face, trembling and crying. Her voice faltered. “He-he’s gone. We didn’t make it in time. But, at least, he finally forgave us.”

Pulling her close, I felt her warm tears on my neck. I whispered, “He had to, Carol. He truly believed if he didn’t, God wouldn’t forgive him for not forgiving us. Papa would want us to celebrate his life. The Torah states that there is an existence after death. Our soul returns to God so it can continue to serve Hashem. ‘*Baruch dayan eme*, blessed is the one true Judge.’ ”

Leaning back and wiping her tears, Carol said, “I know, I know. He also believed in *Olam Ha-Ba*, the world to come, a higher state of being. As far as I’m concerned, dead is dead.”

In silence, we made our way to Papa.

I expected the morgue to be a refrigerated room with human-sized filing drawers. However, it was a large, quiet room with gurneys lining the walls. A few of the gurneys held bodies covered with sheets. Carol clutched her elbows, her eyes darting from left to right, around the room.

The morgue attendant asked, “May I assist you?”

“We’re looking for Professor Benjamin Schwartz.”

“Follow me.”

He guided us to a gurney in a corner. He pulled the sheet down, exposing Papa’s colorless face, and solemnly asked, “Is this Professor Schwartz?”

“Yes.”

“I’ll leave you alone,” he said as he turned and walked away.

“I just can’t believe Papa’s gone,” Carol said between sobs. “We all missed so much.”

I said, “You couldn’t reason with him. We certainly tried, but he wouldn’t hear us out.”

Carol kissed Papa on the cheek and started to cry louder.

I recited the Shema (the acknowledgment of the one God): “*She-ma Yis-ra-eil A-do-nai E-lo-hei-nu, A-do-nei E-chad! Ba-ruch sheim ke-vod mal-chu-to le-a-lam va-ed.*”

Carol joined in. “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is one! Blessed is His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.”

We stared at Papa’s lifeless body, lost in our own thoughts.

My mind jumped back in time: *I should have walked her to the party.*

Mama told me Carol had been traumatized and would need to see a mental health professional. Papa refused to consider her therapy. He felt she was strong enough to get over it all.

I had catered to Carol: served her milk and cookies, filled her glass with fresh water, and brought her anything of mine she wanted. I even gave up watching the World Series. I became my sister's slave—and I loved it.

From that day forward, Carol hid her left hand from view by wearing gloves or keeping her hand clenched.

The morgue attendant's tap on my shoulder jerked me back to reality. He asked if we were through.

I nodded yes. Carol wiped her eyes.

But I hoped in my heart that we weren't.

The Sword of Islam

Papa's home in St. Augustine was surrounded by fragrant gardenia bushes. A large old Victorian with two turrets and a wraparound porch, the painted lady resided on the quiet southern end of St. George Street, the rear facing Lake Sanchez.

Entering the old house, I pondered what Carol had said in the hospital. *"It's too bad we all missed so much."*

It wasn't true. As children, we did things together, like sailing on his catamaran as he pointed out historic places such as the Castillo de San Marcos, the Great Cross at the Mission Nombre de Dios, and the Fountain of Youth.

He'd take us around the house, pointing out new artifacts he'd collected from around the world. I'll never forget the day we lingered at a new wall display: Five swords arranged in a fan shape; the center one had a gold tassel hanging from its ornate pommel, and the letters *J C* etched in the blade.

Papa had explained. "Those swords belonged to our ancestors." Boasting, he added, "No one in the world can acquire the things I can. I always get the better of the El-Khattab—also called the Sword of Islam."

“Papa, how do you do that?” I’d asked.

Pushing his glasses higher on his nose, he said, “*Pe’ulat ha-koah*. It’s in the Kabbalah, and someday, my son, you will understand. After you discover the map.”

I’d retorted, “Papa, you gave me an English copy of the Kabbalah. But you never gave me a map.”

He put his arm around me, chuckled, and said, “When the time is right, you’ll have the map. It will lead to the greatest treasure of all time!” He laughed. “My son, maybe it’s hidden in the attic—maybe not!”

The next day I needed to learn what arrangements Papa had made for his final parting. I figured the first place to look was on the second floor, in his private office. My heart pounded. I paused, turned the doorknob slowly, Papa’s words echoing, “*The two of you are not to go into my study.*”

Carol’s voice broke the silence. “Open the door already, Joel.”

On the opposite wall was an imposing floor-to-ceiling, wall-to-wall bookcase crammed with old, worn books, and hand-penned manuscripts, in English, Hebrew, and Greek. Against the wall to the left was a large antique oak rolltop desk, with packed cubbyholes. On the wall above the desk hung two oil paintings: one of the Masada fortress, the other of Rabbi Baal Shem Tov, founder of Hasidic Judaism.

Carol stood in front of the Masada picture and remarked, “Joel, someday I’m going to visit Israel and stand on the ground of our martyrs.”

I laughed. “Sure! Now help me find what we came here for, and keep your eyes open for a treasure map.”

After looking through all his possessions, I finally found what we were seeking: a contract for a prepaid gravesite at the King David Cemetery in Jacksonville. I phoned the cemetery and explained the need for an orthodox rabbi. They were pleasant and suggested calling the Etz Chaim Synagogue in Jacksonville.

While waiting for someone to pick up the phone there, I had another flash from the past come over me: *Bubbie once said, "If you have to choose smart, rich, or lucky, always pick lucky."*

Today I was lucky. Not just any rabbi was available, but the one who had known Papa for many years. We made the burial arrangements for Sunday, the first day after the Sabbath.

In preparation for sitting shiva, Carol covered the mirrors in the house, just as Mama had done when Bubbie died. When I was a kid, my mind had the notion the spirit from the dead wouldn't get lost on its journey back to God. However, Papa taught me differently.

The mirrors are covered because to look at your reflection is considered idolatrous when one's only thoughts should be of God.

Immediately after the funeral, we went back to Papa's house, where we started the seven-day ritual of sitting shiva. There we received condolences as well as platters of fruit and food from relatives and friends.

Professor Ira Arenofsky, whose small stature deceptively concealed his huge intellect, was Papa's partner and best friend. They had been roommates at Yeshiva College in New York City.

He was still slim and dignified, with a neatly trimmed mustache and goatee. His pale skin defied the fact that he lived in Florida.

I took notice of the professor and a group of people standing by the dining room table, engrossed in animated conversation. Carol and I meandered over.

Standing next to our overweight cousin Susan, a tall and thin redhead looked like a reed. A strong scent of perfume emanated from her décolletage, which displayed generous mounds of breasts. Under her dramatic eyebrows, coal-smudged eyelids heightened her beautiful blue eyes.

“Did Professor Schwartz live in this house all his life? Where did the antiques come from? Did anyone find a map?” she asked in shotgun fashion, with a French accent.

Her questions unnerved me. Interrupting, I asked the professor, “And who might this lovely woman be?”

“Oh, I’m sorry, Joel. I didn’t see you and Carol standing there. Forgive me. This is Joel and Carol, Professor Schwartz’s children. And this is Ms. Krief, an adjunct professor from Morocco.”

She flashed a film star smile. “Nice to meet both of you.”

After some small talk, we excused ourselves on the pretext of going for some fresh air.

Once outside, Carol remarked, “I think Ms. Krief is a phony.”

“Why do you say that?”

“Look at the way she’s dressed!”

“What’s wrong with it?”

“An adjunct professor couldn’t afford an expensive Halston designer dress.”

“How would you know it’s a Halston?”

“My dear brother, I’m a charter *Vogue* subscriber.”

By ten o’clock, everyone was gone except cousin Susan, who was sleeping over. She was afraid to drive at night.

As Carol and I cleaned up, Susan washed the dishes. Half asleep, she said, "This is the last of the dirty dishes, thank God."

"God had nothing to do with it," I refuted.

"God has everything to do with everything," she countered. "It's been a long day, and I'm going to bed." She bade us good night and left the room.

Carol suggested, "Let's look for the map now."

"Shouldn't we wait until the shiva period is over?"

"It doesn't matter. Papa's gone."

"All right, let's do it. We'll go through the backyard and around through the old servant's entrance."

"Why that way?"

"In case Susan is up. What we're doing is none of her business."

