

THE “S” IS SILENT

“You look tired, Sam, sit down ... have a cup of coffee.”

Pulling out a chair, Rabbi Josh motions the proprietress to join the group.

A flour covered hand chases a lock of hair back into place. “Sounds nice, Rabbi ... I could use a break.”

“Long night?” Josh asks.

“... long morning. Been here since four. Had to meet with Emily’s teacher last night and didn’t get some prep work done.”

Looking around, Samantha Bates spots her assistant manager.

“Leslie, how about watching the floor? I’m going to take five.”

...Hi, I’m Tony Baggz. We’re here at Sam’s Bistro. The Christmas decorations are still up and I’m sitting at a corner table. Behind me is a jolly old elf. Either it’s Santa or Curly from the Three Stooges with a white beard and a red stocking cap. I’m still trying to decide.

The aroma of coffee, and cinnamon rolls fills the air. Though festive inside, there’s a bit of a chill in the conversation. Mr. Krankus is talking with Carolyn Andrews. In a way they’re kindred souls. Both lost their spouse and this morning they’re comparing notes ... or maybe scars.

Carolyn and Sam have a lot in common. Both are single moms in their thirties. Both lost husbands; Sam to illness, Carolyn to “the other woman.”

Cute and somewhat preppy, Carolyn lives around her kids’ schedules. She works part-time in Joey’s jewelry store, and Rabbi Green’s wife’s antique shop. Support from her ex is

sporadic and she struggles, so the gang has taken her and her kids under their wing.

Sipping her coffee, Carolyn turns to Sam. Girl talk? Looks like it.

Let's eavesdrop...

“Sam, after Dave died, how’d you cope?” Carolyn asks. “You’ve always been so strong, so upbeat. You took a week off after the funeral, then came back and opened this place. How’d you do it?”

Breaking a cinnamon roll in half, Sam pauses, a gentle smile spreading across her face. “Well, at first, I felt I owed it to Dave. And of course, there was Emily Ann. I had to keep things as normal as possible for her. And, I had a lot of help from the blessed trinity.”

Carolyn’s eyebrows arch. “What ... you mean, prayer?”

“No, those three,” Sam says, motioning to Rabbi Green, Reverend Daniels, and Joey.

“I don’t get it.”

“Well, the first few months after Dave died, I was numb. Then the feelings started ... anger ... resentment ... fear.”

“Fear?”

Setting the broken roll on her plate, Sam motions at the store’s interior. “In the beginning I was doing it for Dave. Imagining he was with me ... almost like he was in the office. Then one day it hit me. I was alone. Sure, I could run the kitchen, but Dave always handled the business end and I realized I could lose everything because I had no real business experience.”

“And the anger?” Mr. K. asks.

Sam pauses as Rabbi Josh tops off her coffee cup. “The anger, that was the main thing. It was the Rabbi here, who showed me my anger wasn't just a feeling, it was becoming my identity. I was angry at everything ... Dave for dying ... God for taking him ... people for seemingly forgetting us ... not having someone to help raise Emily ... or give me a hug when I needed one.”

“I didn’t realize ...” the Colonel says, his voice trailing off. “You always seemed so in control.”

“Yea, Mr. K ... I thought so too until one morning the Rabbi here pointed out I wasn’t.”

“What did you do?”

“Well, at his suggestion, I talked to Reverend Daniels. He helped me understand it wasn’t wrong to feel a little angry with God. God was big enough to take it. And eventually I understood cancer took Dave, not God. Blaming God was a waste of time.”

“And the business?”

Sam nods at Joey. “That’s where my knight in shining armor over there helped. Joey had his accountant and lawyer come by. When they were done, I knew I was going to be okay.”

“You said three,” Carolyn says, gesturing at Josh. “What did the knight in the shining yarmulke do?”

“Oh, Mr. Flirt? He showed me I was sick.”

“Sick?” Mr. K asks, “all that and you were sick too. What did you have?”

“Sremiehzla.”

Silence. Then, tearing off a check from her pad, Sam slides the paper across the table. “I’ll spell it for you, Orville,” she says.

“S-R-E-M-I-E-H-Z-L-A. The S is silent,” Sam chuckles.

“Rah – meez – la,” Josh says softly, pronouncing it phonetically.”

Setting down the pen, Mr. K shakes his head. “I don’t get it.”

“Spell it backwards, Orville” Josh says, an impish grin in his eyes.

“A-L-Z-H-E-I-M- ... Alzheimer’s. Okay, but how...?” again, his words trailing off.

“Orville, what’s Alzheimer’s?” Josh asks.

“A disease ... of the brain.”

“And what happens?”

“Well, your memory ... your mind dies.”

“Exactly. You can’t remember anything.”

Intently, Mr. K looks at Josh. “I still don’t get it. Is there some form of Alzheimer's I don't know about?”

"There is ... one that slips in the back door ... the kind you don't realize is there."

“And you saw it in Sam?”

"Yes. Bob and Martin and I were here a few months after Dave died. Watching Sam, the anger and hurt kept coming through. Then, out of the blue, she asked why it had to happen now. Why did Emily have to grow up without her daddy ... why did everyone stop caring ... why did everyone seem to forget Dave ever existed ... why me?"

Looking into her coffee cup, Sam chuckles softly. "Not one of my better days, eh, Rabbi?"

"Actually, kid, it was like a lot of others, you just didn't realize it."

Regret crosses Sam's face as Josh continues.

"I was about to offer Sam the canned comfort speech when the answer appeared out the window."

"What did you see?" Carolyn asks.

"Miriam Birnbaum and her father."

"Rabbi Birnbaum's wife? ... at the downtown synagogue?"

"Exactly. Miriam's dad has early stage Alzheimer's, and it hit me. In Sam I saw Alzheimer's, just in reverse. Instead of forgetting, Sam was hanging on to every slight, every unhappy memory. Her mind wasn't emptying; it was filling up ... filling with an insidious poison."

"Can't forget ..." Mr. K. says quietly, looking out the window.

"Josh showed me that holding on to the anger wasn't healthy," Sam says. "Once I accepted that, I was able to let it go. When I did, I realized people did care, just in an everyday way. I began to feel their warmth and concern. I fed off that. I let them love me ... let them be my friends."

“And Sam’s plight made me realize something,” Josh says. “I asked myself, what’s worse; trapped in a mind incapable of remembering, or incapable of forgetting? Dying from a mind breaking down, or failing to live because of a mind filling up ... choked with anger and resentment?”

Topping off his coffee cup, Josh continues. “It’s a Christian belief, forgiving one’s enemy. One I never really held. But watching Sam I began to understand what your Carpenter was saying. That living life remembering every hurt, every slight, and every injustice robs a person of the capacity for joy. Because in forgiving, one finds health and peace.”

“You’re starting to sound like Father Bob,” chuckles Mr. K.

Smiling softly, Rabbi Green looks at the Colonel. “Orville, I have great respect for Bob, and for his Jesus. Jesus was a Jew and that teaching of his is often hard to accept. But I must admit, it has merit ...

... and this lovely lady is proof.”

An eye for an eye; an Old Testament concept ... one very much alive today. Does it really provide justice, healing, or closure?

We think of hell as a place of fire. But it’s been said that, in a way, hell might be more like ice ... a soul frozen for all time in the self-loathing and self-hatred born of the realization of what it has forfeited because of its choices. Might hell on earth be the same? A person imprisoned in a mind clinging to every slight, every hurt, every injustice ... trapped or frozen in anger, resentment, and hatred ... a world of poison memories it won’t let go.

In his youth, Joey was a golf professional. One thing he can tell you is champions have a common trait ... they don’t dwell on the bad shots or the bad breaks. People who are champions in life have that same ability.

**Trapped in a mind incapable of forgetting and forgiving.
Alzheimer's in reverse ... a devastating disease for anyone at any
age.**

Do you know anyone who suffers from it?

Do you?

Thinkaboutit, I'm Tony Baggz.

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