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Meshulach at the Door

Yankel was bone tired. He had just completed a complicated real estate deal that had taken every ounce of his energy, leaving him drained. All he wanted was to lie low for a couple of weeks, to relax and perhaps sit on the patio with a *sefer*, watching the grandchildren play on their newly constructed jungle gym. No, it wasn't a swing set anymore; nowadays it was a complicated structure, replete with climbing areas, a clubhouse, and a twisted slide costing thousands of dollars. He had no idea why Faigy insisted on ordering the most expensive set in the catalogue, especially since their children were long married, but she claimed it was for the grandchildren, this was her *nachas*, and he let her be.

Come to think of it, Faigy hadn't been feeling so well lately, she was lethargic and exhausted much of the time. It wasn't as if she was so busy either. She had never worked out of the house, taking pride in being a full-time wife and mother, cooking elaborate meals, starching the linen, and organizing the children's closets in picture-perfect order. As the man of the house, Yankel had assumed the burden of *parnassah*, had dabbled in real estate early on, and eventually built a successful business.

Today, with their six children happily married, he could afford to ease up a little, to go on vacation, and stay late in the *beis medrash* after Shacharis, learning with his longtime *chavrusa*. Life would be perfect, were it not for his niggling concern about Faigy's health. But it would be okay. She would go to her naturopath, who would give her vitamins and an exercise regimen, maybe take some blood

tests. It was a passing phase. It had to be. Faigy needed to be healthy. After all, a healthy mother was the mainstay of her family, even if the children were married.

Now, as Yankel walked through the front door of his palatial home at the end of a long workday, he felt the beginnings of a headache coming on. He hadn't eaten breakfast properly, just grabbed a pastry and some coffee after Shacharis, and then had immediately gone to his office to finalize the complicated deal.

The details had consumed weeks of his time, hours upon hours of late nights, poring over documents with his lawyers, speaking with his business partners, and consulting with financial experts. After all, it wasn't every day that his company invested fifty million dollars into a shopping mall somewhere in the South, in a developing community that was said to be a success. He had his moments of doubt, but he had consulted with the experts; the deal was airtight. Now it was all completed, water under the bridge.

There was nothing to do but go home, sit on the patio sipping a tall glass of lemonade, and enjoy a healthy dinner before going to sleep early.

Yankel was surprised to find his house dark and deserted. At this hour, Faigy was usually in the kitchen, bustling about, with the delicious aroma of dinner wafting into the hallway. She knew that he was coming home late, that he was exhausted and hungry. It wasn't like her to leave without letting him know.

"Faigy? Are you okay?" He peeked into the kitchen and was surprised to find it a mess, with the remains of yesterday's supper still on the counters. The garbage was overflowing, and the dining room couch cushions were rumpled, after yesterday's visit from his Moishy's little ones, who had turned it into a fort. Those children were adorable, but quite a handful.

Faigy's phone and handbag were in their usual spot, which meant she hadn't gone out. Now he knew something was really off.

"Faigy?" he asked, going up the stairs two at a time. His wife was lying in bed, a cold compress on her head, the room in disarray. "What's going on?"

"I have a headache," she whispered, her eyes closed. "It started in the morning and it's only getting worse."

"Did you take Advil? Call your doctor?"

"I took Advil, but it didn't help. The doctor said he can see me tomorrow morning. I guess I'll wait until then. I'm sorry there's no supper or anything. I just can't get out of bed."

"It's okay. The main thing is for you to take care of yourself. Do you need anything? A glass of water, or some tea?" Yankel's annoyance turned to concern. "Or maybe you want to read something?"

"No, I'll be fine. I just need some more time to rest. I guess you can order something for supper."

Yankel had many strengths, truth be told, but cooking a meal, or even frying an egg, wasn't one of them. And so he did what most men in his situation would do: ordered a meal from a local takeout place. It didn't taste as good as what Faigy would prepare, but it would have to do.

He ate the meal on the patio, trying to rest, and then went back upstairs to see how Faigy was doing. She was fast asleep, and he was grateful, as rest was the very best cure for whatever was ailing her. He updated the children on the family chat, telling them that Mommy was under the weather, and the response was quick and predictable. His eldest, Shoshy, offered to bring fresh chicken soup, and Malky said she would come visit the following day. His sons chimed in with their *refuah sheleimah* wishes, but his youngest, Elky, was hysterical. She couldn't handle the thought that Mommy wasn't feeling well, and urged her father to take her to a doctor that very evening.

"It's just a headache, Elke'le, not a brain tumor," he assured her. "Mommy is resting, and she'll be okay by tomorrow. Don't worry about it. You can say some *Tehillim* if you want, and come visit her tomorrow."

By the time he'd finished reassuring his children, it was time for Minchah and Maariv. Yankel went out to daven, and when he returned, he was grateful to find Faigy up and about. "I feel much better," she said, "but the headache is still there, still pounding in the back of my head. I'm not going to pay much attention to it, and hopefully it'll go away."

"Are you sure you don't want to go to the emergency room?"

Faigy waved him away. "Nah! What for? For a headache? I'll sit there for hours on a hard plastic chair and then they'll send me home to get some rest. It's okay. I'll see my doctor tomorrow, she'll give me some vitamins and I'll be good as new."