

Lisa's Worry

THE HEAT CREPT up unexpectedly in the middle of May that year, and the school felt as if a giant coal-burning stove was heating it. The classrooms were so stuffy that teaching classes was next to impossible, and opening the doors and windows brought no relief.

Both the children and the teachers were relieved when the final bell announced the end of the school day. A crowd of children poured out of the classrooms and their mothers whisked them away in air-conditioned vehicles.

But no-one came for Lisa. Her father worked somewhere on a construction site and her mother was busy with Lisa's baby brother Yan, who always demanded her attention. Lisa's home was not far, only two blocks away, so she slowly walked home alone under the hot California sun.

As she walked, nine-year-old Lisa became lost in her thoughts, and they were not about dolls or girlfriends. Her thoughts were of her father, Mikhail, who had lived in America for almost three years, who had never learned to understand English, and who was glad to get any work he could. He worked alongside

illegal Mexican immigrants, who also spoke no English, but most of them understood what the foreman wanted from them, and they could talk to each other in Spanish. But Mikhail had no one to talk to. He would come home gloomy, tired, and often frustrated. Every word spoken, and every movement of Lisa or her mother, irritated him. Lisa hated him when he was like that, but she also felt sorry for him. She couldn't understand why he couldn't grasp the English language; it was so easy!

Lisa also thought about her mother Lilia. Lilia had learned English much better than daddy; and if not for the birth of Yan, she would probably have already found a decent job. To make life easier for the family, Lilia occasionally worked as a cleaning lady for rich Americans. She mopped floors, vacuumed carpets, cleaned glass windows and mirrors, ironed clothes, and performed a variety of other jobs. It was very hard work, but Lilia said that she was glad of any opportunity to contribute to the family budget. Lisa didn't like this word 'budget.' Her mom always mentioned it when Lisa wanted something, explaining that there just wasn't enough money in the budget.

As Lisa's house came into view, she also thought about the fact that the entire class was going to amusement park Great America on Friday, and that she would have to stay home because her parents couldn't afford to pay for the trip. Lilia had said that their modest budget couldn't afford such an expense.

Lilia, however, was happy that Lisa wouldn't be going to school on Friday. She planned for Lisa to take care of Yan, leaving her free to clean a neighbor's house.

Lisa felt bad, but not so much for herself as for her mother and father. Why was it that her parents couldn't find good jobs in this prosperous country? Why couldn't her family have a prosperous family life so that Lisa could go to Great America with the rest of her class? Why were they worse off than other families, and

how was it possible that Aunt Masha's family prospered but Lisa's family didn't?



The apartment complex where Lisa and her family lived consisted of several two-storey houses, long carports and a common green space with a playground and a swimming pool. Over several years, many Jewish families had moved into this complex. Many were immigrants from the Soviet Union, who, with the aid of The Jewish Family Services, were able to get a head start in the United States. So among these immigrants, the complex was referred to as the 'Russian House.' After the immigrant families became financially established, they usually moved elsewhere, leaving their apartment free for newcomers. The complex was very big and the immigrants accounted for only a small portion of the tenants; the majority of the tenants were poor elderly Americans.

When Lisa arrived, the pool complex was already swarming with children. In such unbearable heat, everyone was drawn to the water. Near the pool, mothers were watching their children while sitting on a plastic bench in the shade of evergreen plants. Lisa looked around the pool area but Lilia was not there. Lisa thought that perhaps she was cleaning the house or cooking dinner while waiting for Mikhail's arrival.

Sweaty and hot from the heat, Lisa thought about how nice it would be to cool off in the pool, but she knew that Lilia was waiting for her to return from school and would probably ask her to play with Yan. He was only one and a half years old and still too young for the pool. Lilia had once told her that Yan was a gift from God because he was the first person in their family to be born in the USA.

The apartment was hot and the window air conditioner was not powerful enough to cool it down. Lilia stood at the electric

stove. Carrying Yan in one arm, she was stirring something in a saucepan with the other hand. Her face was pale and shiny with sweat.

“Is that you, Lisa?” she asked. “Thank God, you’re safe and sound. How was it coming home in this heat? I’m worried about your father. He works under the scorching sun. Even with the air-conditioning, I’m suffocating.”

Lisa replied, “It’s because our air conditioner is no good. Uncle Boris said that it should be thrown away.”

“What are you saying?” Lilia said. “Don’t you know how hard it was for us to save up for this second-hand air-conditioner? You’re a big girl. You should understand, and you should be thankful for such an air-conditioner.”

“Mom, why are we so poor? Why can’t daddy find a better job? He was an engineer in Russia. Why doesn’t he work as an engineer?”

“In the Soviet Union, your father used to work as an engineer in the Department of Patents. In America, special lawyers do this work. It requires learning a lot of regulations to become an expert in the Patents field here.”

“Dad cannot learn. He does not know English,” Lisa said sadly.

“Yes, it is hard for him. You have to understand this, Lisa.”

“Why are we all wrong? Uncle Boris works at a good job, but my father is working as a construction worker.”

“It takes time to settle everything, dear daughter. Be patient and we will be fine.”

The conversation ended. Lisa held out her hands, and Yan moved toward her. He had a bad smell and Lisa knew that it was necessary to change his diaper. She took him to the bedroom where the change table was and called out, “Mommy, you need to clean Yan. He pooped!”

“Come and take care of the pot roast, and I will wash Yan,”
Lilia replied.



While helping out in the kitchen, Lisa heard the loud happy shrieks of the kids at the pool. How she wanted to be with them! She knew her mother really needed her help but it was very disappointing. How wonderful it would be right now to plunge into that cool water!

Lisa thought again about Mikhail. In such hot weather, it must be very hard for anyone to work in the sun at a construction site. Poor daddy! He was probably sweating terribly out there in the hot sun. “Why is it so hard for us?” she asked herself with a feeling of despair.

Lisa began to daydream. She dreamed of becoming a good witch. Her first duty would be to make it so that Mikhail could speak English like a native. Then she would wave her wand and he would become the big construction boss and work in a large office with cool air. She would bring bottles of cold beer into his office and make him happy. Lisa did not want *anyone* suffering under the scorching sun at the construction site; she would make it so that houses were built by themselves, without needing workers. She would wave her magic wand and a new house would be ready to accept its tenants! Again and again, she would wave her wand, and another house would be built! That would be perfect!

Lilia interrupted Lisa’s daydreams when she brought Yan to Lisa and asked her to play with him. Lisa knew that they were expecting Uncle Boris and Aunt Masha to come for a visit, and that Mother would want everything to be perfect for them. Uncle Boris had prepared a resume for Mikhail to send to different companies so that he could find a better job.

Lilia had accumulated a number of letters from Social Security authorities and she wanted to show them to Uncle Boris as she didn't understand what was required of her in some of the letters. Uncle Boris knew English very well and he would help her to understand. Lisa thought that she might have to go with her mother to the Social Security offices to help her talk with the important officials. Her parents sometimes needed her help when they had to speak to different authorities.



Yan pulled Lisa's hand and said, "Give!" He knew a few words and his favorite was "give." Lisa looked around, trying to figure out what her little brother wanted. She thought Yan was drawn to the doll hanging on the back of her chair, and she gave it to him. But Yan didn't take the doll and he continued to demand, "Give! Give!" Lisa pointed to the bright Rubik's Cube that Aunt Masha had given her a year ago, and Yan happily nodded his head saying "Give!" once again. Lisa didn't want Yan to spoil the toy, but the child was so insistent that she gave it to him. Yan sat down on the floor, and straining hard, he tried to turn part of the cube. Lisa smiled; Yan was obviously copying her actions. He grunted and huffed, and finally managed to budge a section of the cube. Well done, Lisa thought with a smile.

There was a knock at the door and Lisa ran to open the door, leaving Yan on the carpet. It was Uncle Boris and Aunt Masha, and Lisa loved them both. Aunt Masha was Lilia's eldest sister, and she and Uncle Boris helped Lisa and her family as much as they could. Her mother said that Uncle Boris had a good job and that he was very lucky because he knew English. In Odessa, he had worked as an engineer for the development of new products, and not in the Department of Patents as Mikhail had. Uncle Boris was doing the same work here in the United States. Lisa

greeted the guests. "Welcome! We are waiting for Daddy. He has not come home from work yet."

"Here's a little present." Aunt Masha said, giving Lisa a package. "How is your mother today in this unbearable heat?"

"Mommy is home," replied Lisa. "She is worried about Daddy!"

"I am too," said Aunt Masha.

Meanwhile, Uncle Boris went resolutely to the window where the second-hand air-conditioner sat. He looked attentively at the air conditioner and turned to Aunt Masha. "It would not be difficult. I mean, look, it rests on just a few screws..."

"Hello! What do you mean, Boris?" Lilia asked as she came into the living room.

"We brought you a new air conditioner. It will cool this apartment much better," Boris replied.

"Why did you spend money?" Lilia asked, horrified. "We won't be able to pay you back."

"What are you talking about, Lilia?" Aunt Masha asked. "What money? This is our gift."

Lilia looked suspiciously at Masha. She was very sensitive about gifts she was unable to repay.

Lisa felt Lilia's embarrassment, although she didn't share her opinion. The girl gladly accepted gifts from Aunt Masha. After all, Aunt Masha was not a stranger; she was her aunt.

Lisa took the package she had received from her Aunt into the bedroom and took out the two sets of clothing. One set was for her and the smaller one was for Yan. Lisa then led Yan to the bedroom and changed him, and she could see that Yan liked his new outfit.

Taking the child by the hand, Lisa brought him into the living room but the living room was empty. The adults had gone out to the car and all three of them were carrying the heavy new air

conditioner into the apartment. They were not paying attention to Lisa, who wanted to show everyone how nice her baby brother looked in his beautiful new outfit.

She took Yan by the hand and pulled him into the courtyard but the playground was empty. Everybody was near the swimming pool, and Lisa couldn't take Yan there so they returned to the apartment.



Finally, Mikhail came home from work; he looked sad and tired. Lilia rushed to tell him about the new air-conditioner that Uncle Boris had already installed, with the help of herself and Masha. They had turned it on and it was running at full speed.

Lisa noticed how painfully he reacted to the news. She knew that he was uncomfortable because he couldn't properly provide for his family and needed the help of relatives to buy many necessary things. Although he didn't say it, Lisa knew what he wanted to say. She gently leaned against him and said softly, "Daddy, I love you. When I grow up, I will not allow you to work at a construction site." He stroked her head lovingly.

"Listen, Mikhail," said Uncle Boris, "I asked the engineer at my company, Mr. Smith, to interview you. He needs an assistant, a technician who can assemble different machines. I told him that you can do this type of work, and that if it was necessary he could use me as a translator."

"Are you serious, Boris?" Lilia asked. "That would be wonderful. I'm very worried about Mikhail. In this weather it is dangerous to work out in the open."

"Of course, I'm serious," said Boris. They discussed the job a little more, and then Lilia invited everybody to the dinner table. "Please be seated," she said. "I've made sweet and sour roast."

Everyone was anxious the day Mikhail went to meet Mr. Smith. Lilia couldn't calm herself. She walked from one corner of the living room to the other. Lisa was more worried about Lilia than she was about Mikhail. Even Yan felt her worry and was unusually quiet.



Mikhail returned about two o'clock in the afternoon. Lisa knew the result of his interview just by looking at his face. As usual, he was sad. He could not look directly into Lilia's eyes. She waited patiently until he told her about it.

"Why are you looking at me, Lilia?" he asked. I knew it would lead to nothing. Who needs a mute assistant, when there are plenty who can speak?"

Just then, the phone rang. It was Aunt Masha calling. Lilia told her that Mikhail felt that he had failed his interview. Aunt Masha tried to be optimistic, saying that Mikhail was wrong, and that most likely they would take him on the job.

Unfortunately, it was Aunt Masha who was wrong; Mikhail didn't get the job.



Unexpectedly, and quite by accident, however, Lilia was able to find a good job. She too, just in case, had sent her resume to various companies. One day she got a phone call from one of the companies and they asked her many questions. It was a very long phone conversation. At the end of the conversation, the company representative asked her how soon she could start work. They offered her thirty-six thousand dollars a year! This was twice as much as Mikhail could make at the construction site. She told them that she could start work as soon as she could place her child in daycare. They gave her a week to prepare.

Lisa was happy to find out about this proposal, but Lilia was quite upset. She explained to Lisa that she was sorry for her husband. She felt she could not agree to take the job because she had to take care of little Yan. Who would change his diapers? The baby required constant care and no one would be able to substitute for her. Aunt Masha told her that no one should refuse such a job offer, especially in her situation. “Yan must be placed in daycare,” she said. Lilia and Mikhail discussed this and finally decided to look into the daycare situation. Lisa was assigned the duty of helping Mikhail negotiate with the daycare people, and Aunt Masha helped them find the nearest facility.



The woman at the daycare center looked at Lisa and said that they couldn't take children her age. Lisa laughed, and she explained that they weren't there about daycare for her, but they had come to discuss placing her eighteen-month-old brother at the facility.

“Do you take such a small child?” Lisa asked.

“Yes, we do,” the woman replied. “Is he potty-trained?”

“He sometimes asks, but more often he dirties his diaper,” Lisa explained honestly. “He is still little and he has never heard people speak English, so he may not understand you. My mother thinks that this could be a problem.”

Lisa translated the conversation for Mikhail. He wanted to know how much it would cost to place Yan in the daycare facility, and it turned out that it would be very expensive. Lisa explained to him that it would cost more for the daycare each month than he made doing construction work.

The woman of the daycare facility explained that they could not charge less. Mikhail asked his daughter to tell her that they could not make a decision just then and that they would have to think about it. He was very upset by the time they returned home.

Lisa saw that her parents were in despair. They both understood how important it was for a family to have steady income, and Lilia had been offered a job that paid well. Aunt Masha was right in saying that it was a sin to give up such an offer. Even Lisa understood the importance of her mother accepting the job offer. She also understood what the problem was—the problem was little Yan.

How were they to take care of Yan? Lisa thought. He was too young to ask to use the potty. Their family could not afford the cost of daycare. Mikhail was working in terrible heat and yet could not earn enough to pay for daycare. What were they to do? *I can change a dirty diaper*, Lisa thought. It is unpleasant, but possible. It was clear to Lisa that that she should be the one to take care of Yan. Mommy's work was so important to the family!

"Mom, leave Yan in my care. Summer is beginning and I do not need to go at school. I can handle Yan and I know how to change a diaper."

"No, my dear daughter," Lilia replied. "You are too young to be left alone with such a small child. I am afraid to leave you two alone. Yan is not a doll; you cannot take care of him," explained Lilia.

Then Uncle Boris came over. He suggested that Mikhail stay home to care for his children. He explained that there was no sense in going to work if the salary was not enough to pay for daycare. Uncle Boris told Lilia that she should accept the offer because the job could open up opportunities for their future; a future that would be brighter, not just for her, but also for the whole family. Mikhail's job at a construction site had no future, and he needed to quit it.

Lisa listened as Uncle Boris tried to explain that taking care of the children was a better choice for Mikhail than working in construction.

Lilia, making sure that Mikhail could not hear, argued that although the working was hard, the construction job made him feel proud that he was able to feed his family. Not earning money and just taking care of his children would destroy his spirit. “He is a man and wants to be the provider for his family. Staying home and being dependent on his wife to provide income for the family would be very humiliating for him,” she explained.

Boris replied that this was narrow-minded thinking. “It does not matter who provides for the family,” he said. “The most important thing is the *future* of the family.” He believed that Mikhail should learn English; he could attend school and study every evening. After he learned the language, he would be able to find a job, and everything would eventually work out.

Lilia said that she could not ask him to stay home with the children. She loved him and she could not make such a humiliating request.

Lisa listened to their conversation and experienced the humiliation herself. She loved her daddy very much and knew how painful it was for him to know that although he worked so hard, he couldn’t provide a decent living, and that even a ticket to amusement park Great America was not affordable. She knew that he would suffer even more if he were not able to work. On the other hand, if Mikhail didn’t learn to speak or understand English, he would never ever find a good job. She wondered how she could help him....



With *worry* about her parents on her mind, Lisa went into the yard. Carefree children were noisily playing some kind of game. Not paying attention to the children’s game, she sat on a bench near the playground thinking sadly about the fate of Mikhail. All

of a sudden, an elderly American neighbor lady walked over and sat down beside her.

“All the other children are playing, and you sit alone with a sad face,” The woman said gently in English. “What is bothering you? Why aren’t you playing?”

“I do not want to play.” Lisa said.

“What’s wrong? Are you hurt?”

“No. I am fine. I feel sorry for my daddy.”

“What happened to your daddy?”

“He does not speak English and cannot get a good job.”

Lisa just needed someone to share *her worries* with. She told the old lady that her mother had gotten an offer for a great job, and that her father could not find even a good job. Lisa explained that her mother would not be able to accept the offer because her baby brother needed care, and daycare was too expensive. She explained that she was trying to figure out how she could help her father find a better job. The old woman gently stroked Lisa’s head and said nothing.



Uncle Boris came over again to try to persuade Mikhail to quit his job at the construction site. He thought it was the only reasonable decision for him to make. Mikhail listened to Boris indignantly. He could not imagine himself in the role of a housewife. He remained silent, not objecting to Boris’ words. He understood that his wife must accept the job offer. His family badly needed this, but what about him? Would he actually have to babysit and stay home with the children? He felt depressed and miserable.

Lisa was upset too. She wanted her mother to be able to accept the job offer. This would help their family tremendously. And she didn’t want her father to continue to suffer at that terrible construction site. She felt that Uncle Boris was right in telling

him that he needed to learn English. The one thing Lisa couldn't understand was: how would he take care of the household chores? She couldn't imagine how he would cook a dinner. He had never used the stove. This had always been Lilia's duty.

She decided that she must help. She saw how her mother did all the household jobs and she was sure that she could do the same, no matter how unpleasant it might be to change Yan's diaper.

"Dad! Please quit your construction work. I'll help you with the housework," Lisa pleaded. "I don't want you to suffer in the hot sun!"

Those last words spoken by his daughter words upset Mikhail even more. Embracing his daughter, he said, "I can handle the housework. Household chores are not a problem, but it is not right for your mother to be working while I am sitting at home. I cannot be a dependent. I have to provide for the family!"

"Your contribution to the budget? Is that it, Dad?" Lisa asked him.

"That's it!" answered Boris, with obvious irritation. "Mikhail, please, come back to earth. At least one of you should work at a job that has a future! But you cannot as long as you can't speak English. You need to stay home with the children to provide Lilia the opportunity to work. Put all your effort into learning the English language! Go to night school."

"What do you know, Boris? I studied English in school a whole year, but the language wouldn't stick in my head. I was so frustrated I thought I would burst," said Mikhail.

"It will stick if you would study," Boris replied. "It takes time and effort. Sooner or later, everybody learns."

Mikhail finally, but reluctantly, agreed to quit the construction work.



Later that evening, after Uncle Boris had gone, Mikhail paced around the apartment, repeating over and over through clenched teeth: “What a loser I am! I am a blockhead! I do not want to live!”

Lisa felt sorry for Mikhail. She was not able to sleep that night thinking about him. The girl didn’t understand the essence of his emotions; she just felt sorry for him.

Lilia started her new job on the first day of summer vacation. Lisa loved summer vacation; it was not necessary to go to school and she could sleep in late. However, Mikhail didn’t give Lisa the chance to sleep in. He awakened Lisa early and told her to check and see if little Yan needed his diaper changed. Yan was lying quietly and smiling in his crib. He was dry; Lilia had changed his diaper before she left for work. Lisa lifted Yan out of his crib and led him to the bathroom to wash him. She then dressed him and sat him in his high chair near the table.

She asked Mikhail, “What should we feed Yan for breakfast?”

“What does mother give him in the morning?” Mikhail asked.

“Sometimes porridge, sometimes baby food. And she cooked the porridge.”

“Give him baby food today.”

“The baby food is in a little jar. I cannot open a jar,” Lisa replied.

Mikhail easily opened the jar and gave it to Yan. Lisa laughed. “Yan can’t eat from a jar. Mother feeds him with a spoon. He still does not know how to handle a spoon. You need to pour the contents of the jar into a bowl.”

Mikhail watched her and said, “You know very well how to feed your brother. Do it.”

Lisa began to feed him and Yan behaved well. He opened his mouth and swallowed everything that Lisa fed him. Then Lisa took an apple and cut it into slices like her mother did. She would always peel the apple, but Lisa didn't know how to do this. Yan grabbed a slice of apple and started eating it.

“What do we give you for breakfast, Dad?” asked Lisa.

Mikhail replied, “I will have a sandwich with a cup of tea. You should not worry about me.”

For herself, Lisa poured cornflakes out of the box into a bowl and added milk. Yan watched her with full attention, and then suddenly he put his hand in her bowl.

“Daddy, help me, Yan is behaving outrageously!” Lisa screamed. She pushed Yan's arm away from her bowl and moved further away from his chair. Yan began to cry. He was angry that he couldn't play in the bowl of milk. Lisa lightly slapped him on the arm, shouting, “This is my breakfast! Eat your apples! Daddy, he is keeping me from eating my breakfast!”

Mikhail took Yan in his arms and carried him away from the kitchen. It took a long time to calm him down, but gradually he stopped his tantrum. He sat in his playpen working hard to tear off a paw from a stuffed bear. Apple slices were scattered all over the playpen.

There were similar little troubles throughout the rest of the day, but at least Mikhail didn't need to cook dinner that afternoon because Lilia had prepared everything in advance.

In the evening, when Lilia came home from work, Lisa rushed over to ask her how her first day had been. Unfortunately, Lilia was not up to talking when she noticed the condition of her home. She rushed round to clean up everything that Yan and Lisa had thrown or left on the floor throughout the day. The sink was piled with dirty dishes, and she had to wash them all before she could serve dinner. Mikhail was grim. After dinner,

he disappeared and left Lilia alone to bathe little Yan and put him to bed.



Shouting, coming from the living room, woke Lisa in the middle of a night. She got up and quietly left the bedroom. Mikhail, with a red face and bloodshot eyes, was sitting on the couch in the living room.

Lilia sat in a chair across from him, and cried, “Mikhail, how can you say that? I came home from work and took care of the house and what needed to be done. During that time you got drunk, and now you are scolding me for your failures? Is it my fault that you cannot learn, at least the basics, of the English language? No one expects, or is demanding, that you become a Shakespeare, but you need to know just a little bit of the language!”

“Bastards! They all are bastards!” cried Mikhail. “Their language is gibberish! How can I learn this bloody gibberish? Why I was so stupid to agree to this immigration? I am dumb here, completely mute! How nice it would be to return to the Soviet Union!”

“Think clearly about what you are saying!” Lilia said loudly. “Was it good in the Soviet Union for us? Never! We ran from there because we dreamed of a better future for our children!”

Lisa started bawling, and interrupted her parent’s argument. She had been standing in the doorway, unnoticed by them. Lilia rushed to her, hugged her, and said sternly to Mikhail, “Stop acting so crazy! You frightened the child!”

“Mom, I do not want to go back to Russia!” cried Lisa.

“Do not be afraid, my dear! Your dad is just nervous. We will never leave America. Never! I promise you! Do not worry! Go to sleep, my dear,” said Lilia.

“I do not want to sleep! I want Dad to calm down. I’ll grow up and find a good job! I know English!”

“Of course, you will! You’ll be fine.”

Mikhail’s face turned as pale as a ghost. He was ashamed that his child had witnessed his weakness. Lisa cried, sincerely believing that he wanted to return to Russia. Lilia gently led her back to the bedroom and asked her to lie down and sleep. Lisa kept crying quietly in her bed. Meanwhile, Yan slept peacefully, lying on his back. Lilia checked his blanket and said to Lisa, “Sleep well, my daughter! Your Dad will calm down. Please go back to sleep!”

Lisa had trouble going to sleep. She kept listening for sounds from the living room. It was quiet. Her parents were silent. Gradually, she fell asleep, and she had a terrible dream. In the dream, her father insisted that they return to the Soviet Union. They went back to Odessa and found that the people there no longer spoke Russian. They spoke a strange language called “Gibberish.” No one could understand them, not even her mother, and neither her mother nor her father could find a job. Father was in despair. Mother shook her head regretfully and said to father, “We have spent our entire budget! How can we survive? How are we going to feed our children?”



The next morning Lisa woke up bathed in sweat. Yan slept peacefully, nestled in his crib. She sat up in bed and looked around the room. Nothing had changed from earlier that night but she still felt anxious. She felt haunted by the need to make sure that Mikhail was not planning for them to return to Russia. How could she change his mind if it was made up? She couldn’t think of anything.

Throughout the day, Lisa tried to be as useful to Mikhail as she could. She even changed Yan’s diaper before lunch. In the

afternoon, Mikhail led them to the pool. He kept Yan on his lap and permitted Lisa to climb into the water. The old lady, the one that Lisa had explained her worries to, rushed up to the pool. She was very upset and asked Mikhail, "Sir! Can you help me? I locked my door and left the key inside."

"Dad, she is asking you for help. She shut the door and left the key in her apartment," Lisa translated in Russian for him.

"Why couldn't I help? I can open the door. It will be easy," Mikhail said to Lisa. He told her to take care of Yan and to go to the playground. He went back home for his toolbox and then the old woman led him to her apartment. It took barely a minute for Mikhail to open her door. The old lady was delighted. She gave Lisa and Yan some candy and said, "We need a handyman in this building. I'll ask the manager to give you a job as a maintenance man."

"Senk," Mikhail said gladly.

Lisa was pleasantly surprised to find out that her father had understood the old lady and was able to thank her. No, her dad would not go back to the Soviet Union! He would gradually learn English! It was so easy!



In the evening, Aunt Masha came with her family to visit. They wanted to find out how the first two days of work had been for Lilia. Lisa was glad to see Aunt Masha's children, her twin girls Olga and Lily, and her son Leon. The twins were five years older than Lisa, and Leon was a year younger.

Olga and Lily were interested in playing with Yan. He seemed like a live doll to them. Aunt Masha warned them that Yan was not a toy, and if they wanted to pick him up, they would have to be very careful.

“Yan is already walking well,” Lisa said to her cousins. “You do not need to carry him.”

“It is okay, Lisa, let the girls play with Yan,” said Lilia.

“Can I walk with Leon outside?” Lisa asked.

“Yes, you can go out into the yard, but do not swim in the pool.” Aunt Masha allowed.

The courtyard was noisy with children playing different games. Lisa spotted Mikhail sullenly sitting on a bench near the playground. He did not want to talk to either Aunt Masha or Uncle Boris. Lisa became upset, seeing him in this mood. She no longer felt like playing with the children or with Leon. She thought only of her unhappy father.

“I do not want to play. I am returning home.” Lisa said to Leon.

Leon replied, “I don’t want to go back to the apartment. I’ll stay here.”

Several dreary days passed, until one morning the apartment manager, Ms. Hartmann, invited Mikhail to come and talk to her. He placed Yan in his arms and took Lisa’s hand and went to the office. Ms. Hartmann smiled at them and said to Mikhail, “I was told that you could help us with the maintenance of our apartments.”

“He can!” Lisa intervened, turning to Mikhail and explaining in Russian, “She says that you can help them to do some repairs in the apartments, Dad.”

“I can,” Mikhail said in English.

“Then I will think about it,” Ms. Hartmann said.

Several more days passed and Lisa lost hope that Mikhail would get the maintenance job. Mikhail was also gloomy. They had almost given up hope about the job when suddenly Ms. Hartmann called. She told Mikhail that he could begin to work the next day.



Now, Mikhail could also make a contribution to the family budget. Every morning he reported to the office and received his assignment. He would come home, eat breakfast, and then go from door to door. By lunchtime, his work was usually finished. Lisa helped Mikhail by taking care of Yan. Occasionally, there was something urgent, and the neighbors would call him directly. He could be asked for help, at any time, even at night. His part-time job did not bring in large earnings, but he was proud of his new work. How could he not be proud when all the tenants of the complex addressed him now with great respect, especially the elderly people who were the majority of the tenants?

Mikhail's mood became more positive, and there was no more said about wanting to return to the USSR. Yan eventually learned to use the potty and no longer needed to have his diaper changed. Peace had returned to the family. Lisa stopped *worrying* and began to play more with other children in their complex. She felt her family's future looked brighter, and that their lives would eventually be as good as that of her aunt and uncle's family.