

The Tycoon With The Broom

by Ben Avraham

Illustrated by Mordechai Zeffren

Mr. Morris Berger, President of Berger Plastics, had just left his office. The owner of one of the most successful firms in its field did not leave unnoticed. Two of his employees, Daniel Powers and Brian Winter, were watching him intently.

"There he goes again, two o'clock on the dot," Brian Winter whispered, "with that brown package under his arm. I wonder what is in it?"

"And, most of all, where does he go?" wondered Powers thoughtfully. "It's so strange—every week, the same time!"

"And he always comes back perspiring, but happy and content, just as if he had completed another million-dollar deal," remarked Winter.

"Let's ask his secretary, Miss Neuman. Maybe she will tell us."

"Miss Neuman, we have a question," Powers said as they approached her, "where does the boss go every Friday afternoon at two o'clock?"

"Yes, and what's in that brown package he always takes along?" asked Winter.

Miss Neuman seemed surprised at the questions, but, with a sly smile, she remarked, "Tsk, Tsk, gentlemen, don't you know—curiosity killed the cat!"

"Oh, is it some international secret?" Powers countered, raising his eyebrows in false surprise. The men smiled and left the office.

"Looks like she's not talking," Brian Winter said.

"Well, I have an idea," Powers replied. "He always brings the package back with him when he returns. Let's distract him for a while and examine the package."

"How do you propose to do it?"

"Well, when the boss returns, you ask him if he could look at your latest report on the research regarding the new product. Meanwhile, I'll slip into the office, open the package and grab a look."

"How about Miss Neuman?"

"I'll arrange for her to have a telephone call, a long one—from a friend of mine."

And so the grand scheme was hatched. Little did Powers know where his plan would land him.

Berger returned at four o'clock, almost time for closing. Everything started to work according to plan. Mr. Berger was examining the papers on Winter's desk, Miss Neuman got her long call, and Powers slipped into the open office. He went straight to the closet and found the package. He opened it . . .

"Well, did you find out what was in the package?" Winter asked Powers when they met late that afternoon.

"Sure, but wait till you hear this—you would never, in a million years, guess what it is . . . overalls and a work-shirt!"

"You must be kidding—what would he be doing with work clothes?"

"Sure is queer—maybe he robs banks in his spare time."

"I'm getting more curious by the minute—now we *must* find out what he does."

"Well, there is only one way to do it—follow him and see."

"OK—it's a deal—next Friday!"

They agreed that Powers would follow Mr. Berger while Winter would cover for him in the office in case any questions were asked. Two o'clock came and Morris Berger left his office. Powers slipped out by another door. He watched Berger leave the building and cross the street, turn the corner and walk down the block. Powers kept him in sight, carefully concealing himself to avoid detection.

Two blocks later, Mr. Berger neared the synagogue on Greenleaf Street. He unlocked the door and entered. The synagogue! What would he be doing there on Friday afternoon? Perhaps he only stopped in to pick up something. Powers waited impatiently outside.

But Mr. Berger did not come out. Perhaps the secret work was going on inside the synagogue? Powers walked around the building looking for an unlocked window. Little did he know that a woman across the street saw him and suspected him of being a burglar trying to break in.

Powers found a window that was slightly open and peered into the sanctuary. He heard someone moving around inside.

Suddenly, he was startled by the wailing sirens of a police car. Brakes screeched and Powers turned to find three policemen facing him with guns drawn.

"HANDS UP!" they shouted, "we have you covered!" Powers was astounded. What was this all about?

"What's the matter, officers?" he asked, "what did I do?"

"Isn't it obvious—trying to break into the synagogue—that's what! A woman across the street was watching you prowling, and now we saw you at that window."

"But I wasn't trying to go in—honest—I was just looking for someone."

Sergeant O'Reilly handcuffed him saying, "I know— that's what they all say. You were probably looking for a lost cat—or was it a dog?"

"Please, officer, look inside the building. My boss is in there! You're arresting an innocent man."

"Okay, buddy, we'll search the building and see what we find." The alert on the police radio was picked up by the local newspaper. They dispatched a reporter to the scene and alerted Alan Meyers, the synagogue president. Meyers rushed over to investigate.

O'Reilly and his men knocked at the door. After several minutes, it opened. There, dressed in overalls and a dirty work shirt with a broom in his hand, was Mr. Morris Berger, President of Berger Plastics Inc., and one of the wealthiest Jews in America. Sergeant O'Reilly almost fainted.

"Mr. Berger," he exclaimed, "what are you, of all people, doing here in that getup?"

Mr. Berger was very surprised to see the police. He regained his composure to say, "Oh, come in, gentlemen. What seems to be the trouble?"

Pointing to Powers, O'Reilly said, "We caught this fellow snooping around the building. He claims he works for you. Do you know him?"

"Powers!" he exclaimed, "what are you doing here?"

Sheepishly, Powers explained that his curiosity had gotten the better of him.

Mr. Berger smiled, "Oh, well, no harm done. I guess these gentlemen are also wondering. And I see Mr. Meyers coming. All of you are waiting to hear my story."

"Yes, if you don't mind, sir. We have to file a report," said O'Reilly.

"Mr. Berger!" Mr. Meyers exclaimed, "what are you doing with that broom—and with those clothes!"

"It's really very simple," Mr. Berger replied, smiling. "What does anyone do with a broom—he sweeps the floor!"

"But, Mr. Berger," Sergeant O'Reilly protested, "you can afford to hire a million workers—why do you have to do it yourself?"

"That's right—" Mr. Meyers chimed in. "We have a custodian—that's his job."

"Well, you see, gentlemen, *Shabbos* is about to arrive and the synagogue should look its best in honor of the Shabbos Queen's arrival. When a queen arrives, she has to find a sparkling, beautiful home awaiting her. Our Sages tell us that everyone should

help prepare for Shabbos. This is my way of doing it—and my dirty shirt and trousers are the uniform of my service to the queen.

"But why the synagogue, Mr. Berger?" Sergeant O'Reilly asked, "why not do this in your own home. Isn't it the Sabbath there, too?"

"It sure is, but my family has the situation very much under control. Evelyn and our sons and daughters do all the work themselves. They hardly let the maid lift a finger to make Shabbos preparations. They do it so well, there is nothing left for me. I had to look for another place to be involved—and what could be better than the shul?"

"And to think I was going to recommend a raise for our custodian at the next Board meeting—I thought that he had done such a good job," Mr. Meyers remarked, shaking his head in disbelief.

The next day there were pictures on the front pages of the local papers of "The Tycoon with the Broom." Everyone got some unexpected publicity – Mr. Berger, Powers, the shul, and most of all – *Shabbos Kodesh!* (Oops, I forgot to tell you what happened to Powers. Well, of course, the police let that red-faced man go and Mr. Berger laughed the whole thing off. Powers learned a few things, though—about the dangers of curiosity and the holiness of Shabbos.)

