

Ben Jacobs has a problem.

How can he have his bar mitzvah when the shul has disappeared?

And that's not the only strange thing: there are glowing objects and a mysterious light in the woods. Is it all Ben's imagination, or something more sinister?

Together, Ben and his Grandpa hatch a plan to save Ben's bar mitzvah – and the world!



Ben's Bonkers Bar Mitzvah

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First published in 2023 by Green Bean Books,
c/o Pen & Sword Books Ltd,
47 Church Street, Barnsley, S. Yorkshire, S70 2AS
www.greenbeanbooks.com

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PJ Our Way edition: 978-1-78438-925-3
Green Bean Books edition: 978-1-78438-921-5

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available

Typeset by JCS Publishing Services Ltd, www.jcs-publishing.co.uk
Printed and bound in Great Britain by CPI Group (UK) Ltd,
Croydon, CRO 4YY

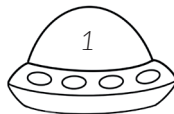
Chapter 1

Ben Jacobs knew his bar mitzvah was going to be a little bit different when he arrived at the shul for his final lesson before the big day to discover it had vanished. Completely and utterly disappeared.

It was unexpected, to say the least. If Ben had made a list of all the things that could go wrong in the run-up to his bar mitzvah, the shul vanishing would probably not even have made the top one hundred. In fact, it might not have even been on the list at all.

At first Ben thought he was seeing things. Or not seeing things, to be precise. His last bar mitzvah lesson had been two days ago. The shul, which was only a few minutes' walk from his house, had absolutely, definitely, been there then. And two days before that. And every single time Ben had been there. Now there was just a big, shul-sized hole where it usually was.

Ben was so surprised that he walked back to check he was in the right place. The sign on the corner read: Kendal Road. It was a very normal tree-lined street, where the shul had stood for the last seventy years. He looked at the name again. And again. And again.





Then he went back to where the shul was meant to have been. He blinked about fifty times, rubbed his eyes, closed his eyes, rolled his eyes, shut just one eye, then the other, covered his eyes with his hands and pinched himself really hard about fourteen times to make sure he wasn't dreaming.

Finally he went up to a woman who was walking with a little girl on the other side of the street.

"Excuse me," said Ben. "I don't mean to bother you, but I just wanted to ask. Can you see a shul over there?"

He was pointing to where the shul had been.

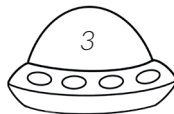
"Sorry, what?" asked the woman. She seemed confused and a little nervous. Ben had short dark brown hair, brown eyes and a smattering of freckles on his face. He was maybe a little tall for his age, but he wasn't a scary person.

"There, between those two buildings," he said. "All I can see are clouds and sky, but I just wondered if maybe you could see a shul."

"Come on, Danielle, let's go," said the woman, grabbing the girl's hand and moving away.

"No, you don't understand," said Ben. "It was definitely there the other day, but now it's gone. Or at least I think it has. I was just checking."

"You're silly," said the little girl, sticking her tongue out at Ben as she and her mother hurried off down the street.



That pretty much confirmed it for Ben. No one could say he hadn't double, triple, quadruple, and whatever comes after quadruple checked. The shul, everything in it, and quite possibly even the rabbi, had definitely disappeared.

He took out his cell phone.

"Hi, Grandpa," he said. "I don't think I'll be able to have my last bar mitzvah lesson today. In fact, I'm not sure I'll be able to have a bar mitzvah at all."

Ben and his grandfather were very close. Ben felt they were more like friends than relatives separated by two generations. It wasn't that he didn't get along with his immediate family—though his older brother could be very annoying—but he just clicked with Grandpa.

They both liked soccer, they both liked Indian food, and they liked similar music. Ben would often listen to some of Grandpa's favorite bands from the 1960s and 1970s on an old record player his grandfather still had, and in return Ben would give Grandpa his headphones and play him some of the latest tracks that were being dropped online.

What Ben liked most, though, was just sitting and chatting to his grandfather. Ben would ask him questions about his childhood. He was both fascinated and amazed by the replies, mainly because, as far as Ben was concerned, Grandpa was





really, really old. It seemed incredible that he'd once been a child, just like Ben.

"I see," said Grandpa after Ben had told him he didn't think he'd be able to have a bar mitzvah. "And why is that?"

"Because the shul isn't there. It's disappeared. Really. I know it sounds crazy. It was definitely there two days ago, but today it's gone."

"Oy vey, that *would* make it difficult to be bar mitzvahed, Benny. What do you think has happened to it?"

"I don't know," said Ben. "Maybe there was a mix-up in the demolition department. They were meant to knock down the building next door, but they destroyed the shul by mistake."

"Yes, perhaps," Grandpa replied. "Or there could be a shul thief on the loose."

"A shul thief?"

"Yes. There was one in my neighborhood when I was growing up. He stole fifteen shuls before he was caught."

"No! Really?"

"Okay, okay, Benny, I'm pulling your leg. It was fourteen."

"Grandpa, this is serious. It really, really isn't there."

"I believe you. But listen to me: I'm also sure there is a perfectly normal explanation for it. In



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my experience, there always is. When I was a boy, my grandfather, your great-great-grandfather, he used to make things vanish all the time. I thought it was real magic. Then, when I was a little older, he showed me how he did it. It was magic, Benny, yes, but it wasn't real magic."

"But Grandpa, did he ever make a shul disappear?"

"Okay, Benny, you got me. He never made a shul disappear, but listen to me, I'm sure everything will be fine and your bar mitzvah will be able to go ahead on Saturday."

"Yes, Grandpa," said Ben, but he didn't really believe that. In fact, something told him that the explanation would be anything but normal.

