

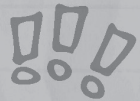
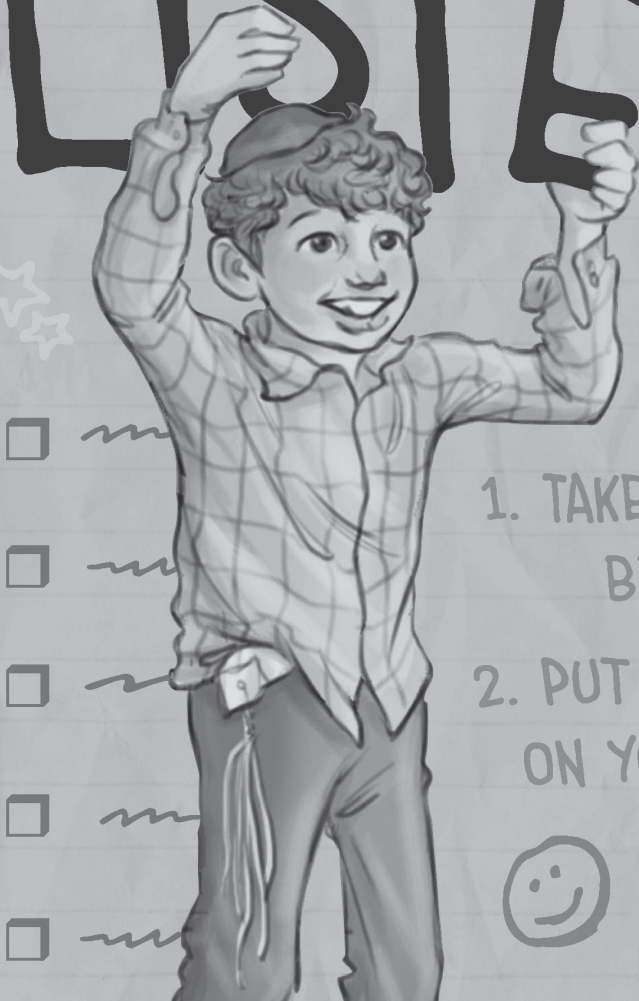
Reuven could hear the shouts of the children through the open windows. He wished he were outside with them. This was what happened at his old school. He just wanted to be part of the group, but something always seemed to go wrong.

But Reuven has a special talent. Can it help him reach his dream of finally fitting in?



BY JUDITH PRANSKY ★ ILLUSTRATED BY SARAH ZEE

# MISTER LISTER



1. TAKE A DEEP  
BREATH .

2. PUT A SMILE  
ON YOUR FACE.





## Chapter 1

# TODAY'S THE DAY!

**R**euvan was wide awake before his alarm had a chance to buzz. He was smiling, even though his stomach was doing nervous flips.

"Today's the day!" he announced to the empty room. He jumped out of bed and threw on the new school clothes he had set out the night before. Then he raced to the kitchen with his shirt half tucked in. His curly hair sprang out around his head making his *kippah* slide over one ear.

"Oops!" He skidded to a halt. "Forgot to make my bed."

Reuvan dashed back to his bedroom. He dragged

the blue-checked blanket across his bed, leaving the other half on the floor. He shoved his pajamas under the pillow, then ran back to the kitchen, still ignoring the hairbrush sitting on his dresser.

“Good morning, Ima!” he shouted, bursting into the kitchen. He flung his arms around his mother. “Today’s the day!”

“It certainly is,” Ima agreed with a smile and in a much quieter voice. She tried to keep her balance in Reuven’s wild hug. “Your first day of third grade in a new school and a new city.”

She unlocked Reuven’s arms from around her waist. “Remember we talked about not running into people?” she asked. “Or hugging them so hard that you hurt them?” She patted down his curly hair and told him to tuck in his shirt. Then she took a hair clip out of her pocket and clipped his *kippah* in place.

“Where’s Abba?” Reuven asked, looking around for his father.

“He already left for work,” Ima said, while Reuven sat down at the table. “He’s starting his new job today. But he wishes you good luck.”

“Hi, everyone,” Reuven’s older sister Shira yawned as she entered the kitchen.

“Today’s the day!” Reuven yelled.

“Ow!” Shira covered her ears. “Ima, can’t you get him to quiet down?” She glared at Reuven. “Don’t give me a headache on my first day of fifth grade in a new school.”

Shira slid into a chair. She smoothed her crisp white blouse and gray pleated skirt. She reached for the cereal box while Reuven picked up pieces that had slid across the table.

“How soon do we have to leave?” she asked her mother.

“In about fifteen minutes,” Ima answered. “The school’s on Maple Avenue, which is only about a ten-minute drive from here.”

“Maple is right after Spruce,” Reuven said. He poured too much milk into his cereal and some of it splashed on the table.

“How do you know that?” Shira asked him. “We just moved here a few days ago!”

Reuven shrugged. “And Spruce comes after Walnut. Then comes Chestnut and Cherry and Elm.” He shoveled cereal into his mouth. Some of it dripped onto his shirt.

Shira stopped eating. She stared at her brother. “Come on, Reuven,” she said. “How do you know all that?”

“I’m wondering the same thing,” Ima said. “Tell us how you know.”

Reuven shrugged again. “You drove us over to see the school yesterday,” he said to his mother. “I was looking at all the street signs.” He took another mouthful of cereal. “I made a list in my head and I asked Abba about it last night. He told me they’re all

names of trees. And he said there's another Jewish school on Chestnut, but it's not Orthodox, like the one we're going to on Maple."

"That's pretty amazing," Shira said.

Reuven turned to her. "After Elm, there are some names of flowers, like — "

"Okay, Mister Lister," Ima interrupted him. "Stop talking with your mouth full and finish eating. You'll be late for your first day." She leaned over to clean the cereal spots on his shirt with a damp rag. Then she wiped off the table and dried the floor around his seat.

Half an hour later, Ima pulled their bright blue van into the carpool line at the Torah Day School on Maple Avenue. Reuven was smiling nervously and his stomach was flip-flopping again.

"So many people," Shira said, her face pressed against the window. "It was a lot quieter when we came here yesterday."

A teacher came over to the van. He showed Shira and Reuven where all the classes were meeting. Shira kissed her mother good-bye and walked toward the girls' building. But Reuven stayed in the van.

"What grade are you in?" the teacher asked kindly.

"Third," Reuven said.

"See that tall man over there?" The teacher pointed toward a young man in a white shirt. He was holding up a sign with a giant number 3 on it. Children gathered around him.

“It’s so noisy,” Reuven whispered, his eyes wide. “I don’t like all this noise.” He covered his ears with his hands.

“It will be okay,” Ima said. “Once you get into your classroom, it will be quieter.”

“Your mother is right,” the teacher agreed. “You’ll only be out here for a short time. Everything will be much calmer inside.”

“In our old school, Shira was in the same building,” Reuven said to his mother. “She used to walk me to my classroom.”

“You’re in third grade now,” Ima said. “And this school is bigger, so the girls have their own building. They’re not just in separate classes like they were in your old school. I showed you that yesterday.” Reuven didn’t answer and Ima said, “You’ll see Shira when I pick you both up later.”

Reuven still didn’t move, and Ima said, “Let’s make a list like we always do when you’re nervous about something.”

1. Take a deep breath and go over to your teacher.
2. Put a smile back on your face.
3. Have a great day.

Slowly, Reuven slid out of the van. He made his way through the crowd to join his group. The tall young teacher turned to him and held out his hand. "Good morning, young man. I'm Rabbi Goodman. Who are you?"