

Entry 3

Tzedakah: A Short Story Collection

Sequence of Stories

- 1 The Toy Drive
- 2 The Ten-Dollar Quandary
- 3 The Math Tutor

The Toy Drive

Daniel finally sat down at the kitchen table after scanning the shelves for something good to eat for breakfast. He had decided on a cereal he used to eat all the time when he was younger, and as he ate, he remembered the joy he used to get from pretending the marshmallow coins in it were actual money; Daniel missed his childhood. His sister Leah had been watching him walk circles around the different cabinets and drawers and was pleased to see him finally seated at the table with her.

Leah had been eyeing an opened envelope sitting next to the kitchen sink, and after some minutes of silent pondering, she decided to end her curiosity. "The envelope by the sink," she asked Daniel, "is that from one of those colleges you applied to last November?"

"Yes, it was another acceptance letter, but I think I've decided that it's not the place for me," Daniel replied somberly. Leah gave him a puzzled look.

"You've said the same thing about the last three colleges that have accepted you, Daniel. Don't you think it's time for you to accept the fact that you need to decide on one soon?"

"Don't worry, I'm going to decide eventually, I'm just taking extra time to consider all of my options." Daniel waited for his sister's eyes to return to her food before relaxing his stressed posture. The last thing Daniel wanted was for his younger sister to see him having trouble with something; he wanted to be a good role model for Leah.

The truth was that Daniel didn't know what he was going to do after high school ended. The problem wasn't that he couldn't choose between colleges, it was that he didn't like the idea of college in the first place. He wasn't ready to say goodbye to his childhood yet, and his senior year had been filled with nothing but reminders of the first chapter of his life coming to a close. He didn't know what he was going to do about it yet, but he was determined to make his youth last as long as it could.

cage in the back of the room. Daniel picked up his things and walked out into the hallway to find that it was empty as well.

“Hey, kid!” A janitor exclaimed from the other end of the hallway. “What’re you doing here? School ended at three.” Daniel checked his watch and saw that it was almost five o’clock at night. He immediately started to run home.

While exiting the school, Daniel heard a voice calling his name from the street, and upon looking in the direction of the call he saw Leah leaning her head out of the window of a minibus while yelling his name. It slowed to a stop right in front of him, and as the doors opened, Leah came outside and ushered him into the minibus. “Leah, what’s going on?” Daniel asked confusedly as he mounted the bus.

“Daniel don’t be silly, we’re going home, of course,” said Leah while chuckling at the insanity of Daniel’s question. Daniel looked around the bus and saw a plethora of other kids all sitting in pairs throughout two isles split by a small walkway. The kids looked tired. Some of them engaged in small conversation with their neighbor, while others slouched like statues with their eyes open. There was a variety

of ages; however, the majority of the kids seemed to be around the second grade.

After what felt like an hour on the painfully quiet bus, Daniel noticed that they were pulling into the parking lot of a building, although he couldn’t find a sign stating the name of the facility. A woman boarded the bus and told us to exit single-file and to head to the reading room. Daniel decided that he was just going to do whatever Leah did because he was very confused about the circumstances of the situation.

As he walked inside, Daniel saw the words “Daisey’s Children’s Home” sewed into the wall with purple fabric, proceeded by a multitude of white printer paper stapled to the wall with rules, procedures, and schedules all listed on them. He followed Leah and the rest of the kids into a room about the size of a school classroom. It had a bookshelf on two of the walls, each opposite the other. There were two foldable tables in the center of the room with four chairs each. Those who weren’t sitting in one of the chairs sat along the tiled floor against the walls. The single-file line Daniel was in started to fill in spaces against

the wall, and as each person sat down the person behind them in line sat next to them.

Once he took his spot on the floor to the left of Leah, Daniel looked around the room and observed a few interesting points he felt were worth noting. The first was that most people were not holding a book, and those who were holding one were not reading it because their eyes were zoned out and probably daydreaming about a life more lively than this one. Some of those who did not have a book engaged in quiet conversation with the people near them, while others closed their eyes and slept. Leah was among those conversing as Daniel saw her talking with a few people to her right.

The second thing he noticed was three middle-aged adults walking around the room. They were passing out pieces of paper and markers to the kids sitting at the tables and along the walls. They were all passing out the materials in a different manner. One of them would lean down and let go of the paper and markers when they had reached the recipient's hands, and the other two would drop the materials onto the floor in front of the kids. Daniel hoped the gentle person would be the one to give him his materials, however, the first one to get to him

dropped the materials onto the floor near his foot, giving the piece of paper an ugly crease as it folded under the markers.

The only other thing Daniel noticed in the room was a bulletin board on the wall perpendicular to the bookshelves. There was a big sheet of paper stapled to it that had instructions for some sort of drawing activity, which explained the markers and printer paper. He couldn't see what it said, however, because one of the helper adults was standing in front of it while talking to another kid.

Suddenly the kid to his left tapped Daniel's foot with his own. "Want to see my picture?" The kid asked.

"Sure, you can show it to me if you want," Daniel replied, still uncertain of what exactly it was they were supposed to draw. His neighbor took his paper off of the ground, and then he held it up for Daniel to see. In the upper left corner was written the name *Anthony* in blue and green markers alternating every other letter. Below the name, Daniel saw a person that looked to be a drawing of Anthony himself. In the drawing, Anthony was holding a toy car and was pushing it along the floor. Daniel could feel that the Anthony in the drawing seemed to

believe that the toy car had a life of its own and that it was driving free of Anthony's push.

Daniel looked back at the bulletin board now that it was unblocked by the helper's body and saw that the activity was for everyone to draw a picture of something that would make them happy. He then looked around the room, trying his best to see everyone's drawings, and discovered that the main thing that the kids wanted was some form of toy or entertainment. Daniel decided he couldn't blame them, for if he were in this children's home every day with nothing to do but sit against the wall and read a book or draw a picture of what life could be, he would desire something more as well.

All of a sudden he heard a voice to his right calling his name. It was Leah's voice, but upon looking at her he realized she wasn't moving her mouth.

"Daniel...Daniel...Daniel!" Leah's voice called, and then suddenly Daniel woke up.

Back in his real English classroom, Daniel found Leah standing next to him. "Daniel, your English class is over, we're on our lunch

break now," Leah said slightly concerned that her brother had slept through an entire class.

"Sorry," responded Daniel, "I've just been really tired, and I had the weirdest dream and-"

"You can tell me about it later." Leah interrupted. "C'mon we have to go soon or else we're gonna need a pass."

The two of them hurried towards the cafeteria and sat at their usual table near the back. "So, tell me about your dream," said Leah.

"It was all really confusing. I woke up at the school, except everything was empty, and when I went outside, a mini-bus took you, a bunch of kids, and me to a children's home."

"Interesting."

"When we got there we sat in this reading room where people were handing out paper and markers, and everyone was drawing pictures of what made them happy."

"Let me guess. The kids were drawing toys."

"Yes. How did you know?" Daniel was shocked by his sister's accuracy.

“Never mind, continue,” Leah laughed. She knew Daniel had a good heart and would eventually come around to participate in the toy drive.

“So, as you said, the kids were drawing toys, and the more I thought about it, the more I realized that the things that I’ve been complaining about for the last year were all selfish. The fact that I’m sad about my disappearing childhood in the first place emphasizes how good it must have been. How can I complain about a chapter of my life coming to a close when it has unfortunately been a much better one than those kids will ever get?”

“Yes, I’m sad that my life is moving on from its innocent youth, but I want to make a difference, Leah. I don’t want to grow up with all of the toys I used to play with as a kid just sitting in crates in the basement when they could be given to someone who never wanted anything more than a toy to play with. Those kids at the home will never have the privilege of saying ‘I miss my amazing childhood,’ and why should I be any more deserving of that than they are?”

“The truth is that donating toys isn’t going to change the fact that those kids were dealt an unfair hand in life, but seeing them draw

pictures of toys as something that would make them happy has made me realize that giving someone the gift of happiness is one of the greatest things one can do. I still remember the images of their long faces and tense postures as the kids sat on the mini-bus and on the tiled floor in my dream. If I can do something to change those faces to smiles and make the kids feel relaxed for even a second, I feel that I’m obligated to do it.”

“So what are you saying?” Asked Leah, smiling proudly.

“I’m going to need a box,” replied Daniel as he returned the smile.

Later that night, back at his house, Daniel started collecting toys in his room to contribute to the toy drive for the children’s home. He went through all of his stuffed animals, action figures, puzzles, and legos. With each new thing that he picked up to put in the box, a memory would surface in his mind of playing with that toy when he was younger. Instead of being sad about it, however, he thought about the fact that he was giving someone else the chance to make that memory.

Daniel smiled as he picked up his toy car, which resembled the one Anthony had wanted in his dream. Even though he knew Anthony didn't exist, Daniel was sure that there was a kid at the home who wanted the toy car just as much as Anthony had. Daniel pictured what would have happened if Anthony had gone through the box and found a toy car sitting in it, and the idea that something like that could happen with one of the kids made Daniel really happy.

He thought back to something Leah had said earlier that day, something about how it feels good to know that you're doing something good to help other people. Daniel thought about that concept. It did feel good to know that he was leaving tracks for future generations, but he didn't care that he felt good. Daniel knew that it would make the children at the home feel good, and that was all that mattered to him.

The next morning rolled around quickly. "You look like you're in a good mood this morning," remarked Leah as Daniel walked down into the kitchen with his box of toys to donate. Daniel returned her comment with a smile as he began to make his breakfast. Once again he chose his favorite cereal from when he was younger, except this

time when he ate it he had a newfound appreciation for the joys he had in his youth.

Daniel decided that he enjoyed doing whatever he could to make the world a better place, and if at some point in the future an opportunity arose that requested services from him, he would do his best to contribute as much as he could to assist others.

He picked up the opened envelope next to the sink that Leah had remarked on the previous morning. He took out the acceptance letter and looked it over.

"Have you made up your mind on a college?" Leah asked as she noticed his attention to the letter.

"Yes, I think I have," Daniel responded.

"Mind if I see it?" Leah requested.

Daniel brought the letter over to Leah, and she smiled as she looked at the name of the college to discover it was *The University of Philanthropy*. After reading it over for a few minutes she handed it back to Daniel.

"What do you think?" Daniel inquired.

"I think they will be lucky to have you," replied Leah proudly.

The Ten-Dollar Quandary

It was a bright summer day as I, Sam Herling, walked along the neighborhood sidewalk from my house towards the local retail store. It was the first time I was ever allowed to go by myself, and the feeling was amazing. We had a rule in our house that we weren't allowed to go to public places on our own until we were at least twelve years old, and as of two days ago, I met that requirement. Retail stores had always been my favorite places to get cool new things since they usually had lots of toys, candies, movies, and games.

When the store began to come into sight, I thought about all of the great things I could get with the ten dollars my mom had given me. There was a toy I had seen in an advertisement a few weeks before that could launch a toy rocket as high as the roof of our house. I hoped

they would have it on their *As Seen on TV* shelves. I could also get some candy too, or maybe a large-sized chocolate bar. There were so many good options.

Upon entering the store I was met with a cool rush of air conditioning that was a pleasant refresher from the blazing sun. In the corner of my eye, I could see some sort of box-like object sitting next to the sliding doors inside, but I didn't pay much attention to it. My eyes were more focused on the candy aisle, which was stationed right in front of the entrance. The rainbow of assorted candies that lined the walls of the aisle called to me from the moment I laid eyes on it.

The candy was a lot more expensive than I had anticipated. The cheapest ones were the sticks of licorice, and I would only be able to get about 7 of them, which I would finish in no more than a few minutes. I wanted something that would last, like a lollipop, however, the lollipops only came in jumbo-sizes, so I could only afford one, which I decided wasn't enough.

I moved down a few aisles to find the toy section. My immediate thought was to look for the new rocket launcher, however, upon searching the aisle, I couldn't find it. There were a few cool

things, like rainbow bouncy balls and boomerang frisbees, however, that I considered would be just as fun as the rocket launcher. There was a toy bowling ball set that caught my eye as well since bowling was one of my favorite hobbies. I took some of the pins and set them on the floor in a pyramid formation, similar to the way they would be set up at the end of a bowling alley. I rolled the toy bowling ball and scored a strike. I added it to the list of toys I was considering.

At the end of the store, there was an entertainment section filled with many movies and video games. As I scanned the movies over I saw a few that I was interested in watching, and there were one or two games that caught my attention as well. They all were priced at a full ten dollars, so if I decided to get one I wouldn't be able to get anything else.

Being in charge of the money was a lot more complicated than I expected. It was much easier when I just had to tell my parents what I wanted and they would figure out the financials themselves. With ten dollars, there were so many different combinations of candies, toys, and games that I could get. I walked up and down each aisle multiple

times to ensure that I was considering all of my options in my final decision.

When I looped around to the beginning of the candy aisle for the second time I glanced towards the entrance doors, and that was when I saw a large booth that read "As Seen on TV" that contained the new rocket launcher. I skipped over to it in jubilation because I was thrilled to discover they had it in the store after all. To my surprise, the rocket launcher was on sale for only five dollars, which meant that I would be able to get it along with some candy or additional toys.

In the corner of my eye, I once again spotted the box-like object that was sitting near the sliding doors that led outside. It was only a few feet away from where the booth of the rocket launcher was stationed. I walked a little closer to it so that I could get a closer look. The first thing I noticed was a big picture on the front of the box of a young child looking sorrowfully at the camera. Above the picture was a phrase written in big bold letters: *Our mission is to provide hunger relief to all that we can. Do your part and donate what you can so that we can tackle this issue together.*

I stood in front of the box for a few minutes as I thought about what it said. What did it mean when it asked me to do my part? I didn't know I had a part that I was responsible for. How could I, twelve-year-old Sam Herling, possibly have a part in the fight to end world hunger? I pondered on these questions for a little while, especially the concept of responsibility. I looked at the child in the picture on the box. Did they do something that caused them to be in that position, or did something happen outside of their control? If the second one was true, then why was it fair that the child in the picture was in that position instead of me? If it was out of the child's control, then how could they possibly be deserving of that lifestyle?

Then, I thought about what the box was asking me to do, which was to donate. I started to wonder if instead of using the ten dollars I had for myself, I should use it to help *others*. What did the concept of *others* mean? Was I helping the people who use the money for hunger relief? Was I helping the victims of world hunger themselves? Was I helping the families and friends of those in food-related trouble by assisting someone they care about? Perhaps I would be helping all of them.

I thought more about the word *others*. Was it possible that someday I could become one of the *others*? Something could easily happen out of my control that could put me in that position. Would someone in the future say they are helping *others* and be referring to me? If that was the case, shouldn't I be helping others the same way I would want to be helped in that scenario? I concluded that it was impossible to know what the future held in store for me. The people who are aided by hunger relief programs probably didn't plan to end up there either. If I were to become one of the *others* at some point, I would look at someone in this position and hope that they put some of their money into the box so that I could be helped by the hunger-relief programs.

I only had ten dollars with me, and ten dollars didn't sound like it would make much of a difference in hunger relief. But then I thought to myself, why would they be asking for donations in a retail store if they expected contributions of large amounts of money? Surely, nobody has ever dropped a hundred-dollar bill inside a donation box at a retail store. I had seen donation boxes in other retail stores before, and the cash in them usually consisted of one-dollar bills. I looked into

the box, and just as I had predicted, I found a series of one-dollar bills and some change. Suddenly my ten dollars was a lot.

All of a sudden I remembered what I came to the store to do in the first place, which was to buy something for myself. If I left the ten-dollar bill in the donation bin, I wouldn't be able to get any of the toys, candy, movies, or games that I had looked at earlier while walking the aisles. Then again, I reasoned, I could just go up to the cashier at one of the check out lanes and ask them to split the ten-dollar bill into smaller amounts so that I could donate and still get something for myself.

The rocket launcher was five dollars, the candies I was interested in were three dollars, and the toy bowling ball set was two dollars. That meant I had three main options. I could omit the candies and donate three dollars, I could omit the bowling ball set and donate two dollars, or I could omit both the candies and the bowling ball set and donate five dollars. I left the rocket launcher in all of the scenarios since I wanted it the most. I thought about my choices and decided that the options in which I donate three dollars or two dollars did not contain enough money going into the donation box.

The scenario where I spent five dollars on the rocket and five dollars on the charity seemed fair. Half of the money I would spend on myself and then half on the charity. But then I began to think some more, and I realized that splitting it half and half would be a very selfish decision. How could my wants hold the same weight as the needs of other people who would be getting help through donations from boxes like the one sitting in front of me? By splitting it half and half, I would be saying that I was just as equally important as the victims of world hunger that would be helped by my donation, which I believed was not true since they were definitely in much more need of the money than I was.

Since a half-and-half split would not do justice to the number of people I could be helping with my donation, I wondered what ratio would be more practical. If my donation were to help 99 people, then I should donate \$9.99 into the box and keep a penny for myself, and then everyone would be getting a fair share of my ten-dollar bill. But what would be the point of keeping one penny when it couldn't even buy me anything at the store? I might as well just put all ten dollars into the collection box since there would be no benefit of keeping the

penny to me, but there might be a benefit of it to the recipients of the donations.

I started to wonder if my calculation of the amount to donate should even include me at all. After all, donating is about being selfless and helping others, so why should I, little Sam Herling with a nice family and comfortable home, keep some of the money to myself when it could go towards a better cause? Even if my donation was only going to help one person, shouldn't that person come before me anyways? It would be great if I could help nearly a hundred people, but realistically, ten dollars probably wasn't going to make that big of a difference. I decided that even if I would only be able to help one person with my donation, it would still be worth it.

I reflected on what I wanted now and what I might want in the future. How would my reactions differ between looking back on the purchase of a few temporary goods, such as toys and candy, as opposed to a donation that could help other people? Perhaps in the short term, I would enjoy the toys and candies better because I would have fun with the toys as I played with them, and I would love the taste of the candies when I ate them. In the long run, however, I would

probably feel better looking back on using the money for a donation as opposed to using it for myself.

I stared longingly at the rocket launcher display next to me for a few seconds, and then with a deep breath, I dropped the ten-dollar bill into the donation box. I walked out the sliding glass doors feeling different. At first, I couldn't decide if it was a good difference or a bad difference, but when I walked out into the sun it no longer felt blazing, it felt illuminating, so I recognized that it was a good difference.

As I walked home, I thought back on my decision of what I did with the ten dollars. I pictured the little kid in the photo on the donation box getting help because of a supply of money that I helped contribute to, and it made me feel fortunate that I was capable of helping someone else. Even though I could have been walking home with a new rocket launcher and some delicious candy, picturing that scenario didn't make me feel as good in comparison to walking home knowing that I was able to make a difference in the world. I knew I didn't use the money just for myself, and decidedly that was better.

The Math Tutor

“Oh no, look at the time! I’m gonna be late!” Exclaimed Elisa as she rode in the passenger seat of her friend River’s car. The two of them were on their way to the city rec-center for Elisa’s seven o’clock shift at the education center for Middle School students. Elisa had signed up to volunteer there at seven o’clock every evening for five days every week, and she was passionately anticipating her first day on the job.

Elisa and River were co-workers at a computer company called *Systems Incorporated*. They spent their days running back and forth to each other’s cubicles while on their breaks and texting each other whenever they had the chance. River and Elisa carpooled to and from

the office, and it was from this job that the two of them were driving towards the rec-center.

“I’m sorry, I can’t go above the speed limit, Elisa, but I’m trying to get us there as quickly as possible,” River said apologetically as she passed around two cars in front of them using the lane to their left.

“I know, and I’m not blaming you. I just really don’t want to be late on my first day. First impressions are important!”

“Yeah, I get that. I’m sure they’ll understand some traffic, though. Everyone gets caught up on the road every once in a while.”

“Yes, but I don’t want to take any risks. Today has to go perfectly so that I will have permission to continue volunteering at this place. You know it’s my passion to teach the younger generation and help them learn. This volunteer opportunity would be like paradise.”

“What about our work at *Systems*? Isn’t that paradise for you?” Proceeding this question by River, the car stopped at a red light. The two of them stared at each other for a few seconds before laughing. They certainly enjoyed their jobs, but it wasn’t what one would call paradise. “What exactly does this position entail?” Asked River. “I get that you’re tutoring middle schoolers, but is it in a specific subject

area? Also, are the students you're tutoring sent by their schools or their parents?"

"Well," replied Elisa, "I told them I was flexible with any subject, but my understanding is that the majority of students they receive are seeking help in math courses. As for the other question, the students are sent by parents who feel that their child's grade in a specific class is not up to par with their standards."

"That makes sense," said River. A few seconds later the rec-center began to come into view. "See, we weren't late after all," River commented with a teasingly lighthearted tone. She pulled the car up towards the front to drop Elisa off by the main entrance.

"Thanks for the ride!" Elisa shouted since she was already outside of the car by the time it had stopped. River looped around the parking lot and found a spot in the back to park in while Elisa was volunteering. She was Elisa's ride home too.

Meanwhile, Elisa checked in at the desk near the entrance and hurried towards the education center, which was about two hallways away from the check-in desk. She eventually found the room she was

looking for and went through the double glass doors that read "Education Center" on them.

Upon entering, she saw a black and white analog clock on the wall across from the doors she had just walked through that displayed the time as exactly seven o'clock. Relieved that she had made it on time, Elisa walked towards a desk in the back of the room where the other volunteers were gathered.

"Name please," said a man sitting behind the desk.

"Elisa Aarons," Elisa replied.

"You'll be at table three helping students with geometry." The man handed Elisa a lanyard with a name tag on it that read *Elisa: Geometry*.

"Great, thank you!" Said Elisa as she walked away from the desk towards table three. She sat down at the table and waited for the students to arrive, which wasn't supposed to happen for another fifteen minutes.

The next two hours were filled with lots of class notes, homework worksheets, and whiteboards with markers flying around the room. Elisa worked with about four students throughout her shift.

Her first student, Alex, needed help with memorizing the equations to find the areas of different shapes and figures. Elisa had created a fun acronym to help him remember them all.

Her second student was a girl named Olivia, who needed help learning how to prove that two triangles are similar. Elisa taught her a song she had learned back when she was a student on how to use the sides and angles to prove similarity between triangles.

Cory came to Elisa for help after Olivia. He needed to finish his homework on trigonometric functions in right-triangles by the next morning. Elisa reviewed the curriculum with Cory first and then helped him work through each problem individually.

Elisa's final student before the end of her shift was Anna, who was struggling with the different rules of what happens when a transversal passes through two parallel lines. Elisa got a whiteboard and explained each rule in thorough detail until eventually, Anna was able to solve a few practice problems that Elisa made up.

By nine o'clock, Elisa was exhausted. She had spent the last two hours teaching people different aspects of geometry, and she was ready to head home and call it a night.

As she left the rec-center into the parking lot, a young boy shouted at her from about twenty feet away.

"Wait up! My name is Ryland. Are you from the education center?" The boy questioned based on the lanyard that Elisa was still wearing. He ran up to Elisa until he was at normal talking distance.

"Yes, but my shift just ended," Elisa replied. "I'm sure the people inside will be very happy to help you, though."

"I can't go inside the rec-center," Ryland said, slightly embarrassed.

"Why not?" Asked Elisa.

"My parents don't know I'm here. I live in the neighborhood down the road. I ran here in hopes of finding someone who might be able to help me with my schoolwork. You see, have a big geometry final tomorrow, and I need to do well on it or else my parents will get angry. If they know I'm here, then they will find out that I'm not prepared for the test tomorrow and they will be upset. Is there any way you could help me? Please?"

Elisa knew she had to help him, but time was going to be an issue. It was already past nine o'clock at night and she had to get up

early for work the next day. She sent a text to River, who was still parked at the other end of the parking lot. River drove around to the front of the lot where Elisa and Ryland were standing.

“Another hour?” River complained. “But I have to be home by ten for my tv show.”

“I’ll try and be as quick as possible,” Elisa said. River closed her window with a theatrical frown and drove away back to the far end of the lot.

“So,” Elisa addressed Ryland, “What do you need help with?” Ryland hesitated for a second before responding.

“Well...everything,” he replied. With a deep breath, Elisa started on her new task of teaching Ryland a full year’s worth of geometry in a single hour. She knew she wouldn’t have time to go over everything in great detail, but she did her best to make sure that Ryland understood a certain topic before moving on to a new one. She put all of her efforts into teaching different mnemonic devices, songs, and acronyms, while also drawing various pictures and creating multiple practice problems. After about fifty minutes, both Elisa and Ryland himself felt that Ryland had a good understanding of geometry and

that he was well prepared for the test. River came back to the front of the parking lot to pick Elisa up.

“Thank you so much for your help,” Ryland said as he started to walk away back towards his house.

“No problem!” Elisa replied while hopping into River’s car. “And good luck on your test tomorrow!”

Elisa and River drove away from the rec-center back to their homes. On the way, they discussed the recent occurrences. “Honestly Elisa, I don’t understand why you even bothered to help that kid after you had already been volunteering for a whole two hours,” said River.

“I just felt really bad for him. It wouldn’t have sat well with me if I had simply left him there with no help.”

“But Elisa, it’s kind of his fault that he even needed help in the first place. I mean, he obviously didn’t pay attention in class for the entire year, and then he waited until the day before the final exam to seek help.”

“I understand that he clearly wasn’t trying his hardest in school, but he still needs to learn these concepts eventually for higher levels of math. He seemed to regret being in the circumstances he was in, and I

believe that from now on he'll follow along in class in order to prevent being in that situation again, but he's not going to be able to get to that point if he still doesn't know geometry. By helping him, I allowed him an opportunity to start succeeding." Elisa finished her explanation with a breath of satisfaction as River admitted that Elisa had a good point.

After their time on the road, River dropped off Elisa at her house before proceeding back to her own. In her house, Elisa prepared for the next morning, in which she would have to get up early for her commute to work. The next day would be Elisa's turn to drive in the carpool between her and River, so she went to bed early to allow for an extra early rising.

The next morning, Elisa started on the road to pick River up from her house. After pulling up to River's front yard, Elisa sent River a text telling her that she was waiting outside. A few minutes later, River slumped out of her house looking fatigued.

"What on earth happened to you?" Elisa asked as River collapsed into the passenger seat.

"I was up super late trying to find a station playing a rerun of the tv show I missed last night due to your spontaneous desire to help that kid," River said with a tone mixed with exhaustion and humor.

"Sorry about that," said Elisa apologetically.

"It's okay. As long as that kid does well on his test I'll forgive you." Elisa had already been thinking about Ryland's test before River mentioned it. She really hoped her work the night before would pay off and Ryland would be able to satisfy his parents.

A short while later they pulled into the *Systems Inc.* parking lot, and after a few minutes, Elisa and River walked into their office space. For Elisa, the next few hours were filled with a normal uneventful day at work. It wasn't until her lunch break that she noticed anything out of the ordinary.

"River, did Mr. Melvin seem to be in an unusually good mood as of half an hour ago?" Elisa asked as the two of them returned from the cafeteria back to the office. Mr. Melvin was their boss.

"Now that you mention it I think he did," replied River as she thought over Mr. Melvin's recent conduct. A few more hours passed,

and at around four-thirty in the afternoon, Elisa noticed yet another peculiar situation and went to River's cubicle to discuss it with her.

"Have you seen Mr. Melvin? I haven't seen him for nearly an hour," Elisa remarked to River.

"No, I haven't. I wonder what could possibly be going on with him today." As River said this, the two of them left the cubicle out into the hallway.

"I wonder the same thing," replied Elisa. Perhaps he-

"Perhaps he what?" River inquired.

"Turn around River," said Elisa with a pale look on her face. River turned to face the other direction and the two of them watched as their boss walked across the hallway towards his office with none other than Ryland walking by his side.

Elisa and River rushed towards their boss' office, and after knocking, the two of them went inside.

"Can I help you?" Mr. Melvin asked.

"We were just wondering where you had gone," explained Elisa, hoping to get an answer as to why Ryland was there.

"Well if you must know it has been quite an eventful past few hours for me," Mr. Melvin started. "Around lunchtime my son texted me saying that he had gotten a perfect score on his geometry final. I was utterly elated at hearing this as I know math is one of Ryland's more difficult subjects. As a reward, I decided to pick him up early from his last period, gym, and take him out to eat. I then brought him back here, where he'll stay while I finish up some of my work." He gestured to where Ryland was sitting while explaining the end of his narrative.

Still in shock, Elisa noticed a look of fear come across Ryland's face, which she assumed was because her presence threatened the integrity of his performance on the geometry exam in the eyes of Mr. Melvin.

River drew Elisa to the side and spoke to her in a low voice. "This is great! Now you can tell Mr. Melvin about how you helped his son prepare for his geometry exam, and he might be so happy that he'll give you a raise!" River said.

Elisa pulled away from River's side conversation and addressed Mr. Melvin. "Oh, congratulations! I hope you and your son

enjoy the rest of this beautiful day,” said Elisa. She then left the office, taking River along with her.

“What was that?” Asked River, slightly confused. “You could have gotten a raise!”

“Maybe, but at what cost? I could see the fear on Ryland’s face when he saw me in that office. Perhaps I would have received some sort of gratification from the boss, but Ryland deserves his father’s praise. Even though I helped him prepare the night before, he aced that test all on his own. It wouldn’t be fair to Ryland for me to expose our study session to his father.

“When I decided to help Ryland last night, it wasn’t in hopes of some sort of compensation, I did it because I saw a problem worth my time and energy to fix. Sure, I was already exhausted from my two-hour shift at the education center, but my decision to help Ryland was a decision that I made, and a decision that I still stand by.

“Also, I didn’t feel the need to tell Mr. Melvin in the first place, because just the fact that I made someone happier makes me feel pleased, and I don’t need gratitude or a reward to be satisfied.”

“Yes, I guess all of that is true,” River admitted. The two of them began to walk back to their cubicles. “You always do the right thing don’t you?” River laughingly teased.

“What can I say?” Elisa said with a smile. “It makes me feel good knowing I’m able to make people’s lives a little happier than they were before.”