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The Ball

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THE BALL

A baby is being bounced up and down. His head bounces off the floor, grazes the ceiling. Boing. Boing. "Let him learn," says his father. So the basement doors open, and he falls down each step.

It is now his bar-mitzvah. Chaotic, but everything that should get done gets done. The rabbi says: "Spies have come from the desert." But others contradict him. "Joshua wasn't put off," says one. "There are differences of politics, administration, military," says another. "We can agree to disagree. Reasonable men," says the rabbi. "Truly religious Zionism," says the bar-mitzvah boy, "is in touch with the primitive." He lifts a young cousin and dances with him. A thirteen-year-old girl begins to deliver a talk on women in Judaism, in a voice like a lawyer's, flat and rote, the upshot of which is that things change and maybe the status of women will too. "Gets her feminism from her mother," her father whispers to the boy, who blows his nose into a napkin. By the time he's finished the girl's mother is speaking. "And I'd like to thank my husband for sharing the family with me," she says. She looks puzzled when he guffaws. "A real feminist," he whispers. "But in fifteen years I've never had a bad meal." Behind the boy, men in shawls are discussing baseball and the Liberal Party Convention. The rabbi keeps calling for silence with no success. The boy goes to the back of the room and begins bouncing the rubber ball he keeps in his pocket. Boing. Boing. He is bouncing it so hard his yarmulke falls off. He kicks it to one side, and begins bouncing the ball off it.