

Hannah was late for Hebrew school. Again.

She knew the nasty teacher's aide who just got promoted to instructor would be all over her.

She hadn't done the Jerusalem assignment, she didn't know the Gaza Strip from a pothole and she didn't like a single other person in her class.

But her parents made her attend, every Tuesday after school. Sometimes there was challah and rugelah for snacks and one time when the 'rents weren't looking, she and some girl who lived few streets away snuck some Maneschevitz wine. It left them feeling warm in a weird way.

Oh and there were boys there too. Gangly boys, not grown into their bodies yet. They called her weird names like Brussels sprouts and she had no idea what that meant but she didn't like it.

at least she was comfortable with Dale, the boy who moved in down the street last summer.

He always asked her what went on in Hebrew school, which kids were the troublemakers, who was planning the best Bar Mitzvah.

She tried explaining Hanukkah to him once but he wanted to watch the Kings game.

One day after school, they were walking home together and she said why not come to temple with me?

Would they let me in?

Would they try to convert me?

Will they ask me about religion or expect me to know prayers?

The next week Dale copied off Hannah's math test. She saw him and tried to be calm but the teacher was onto him. Dale's mom was called into the principal's office and told what a disturbance Dale was to the rest of the class.

She forbade her son to talk to Hannah again and reminded him he got off easy. Then she took him to Dairy Queen for a treat.

For a few days, Dale and Hannah ignored each other, stealing only furtive glances as they passed between classes. Hannah wore a short skirt and boots one day

and Dale overheard the catcalls from the football players.

Doug was Dale's best friend, a tall, lanky kid with sleepy eyes. His dad owned the hardware store downtown.

Doug lived on a steady diet of Cheetos, Big Gulps and gas station corn dogs. Last year he had a horrible acne incident and wore wool caps that covered his face. Dale told him he looked like some guy who had been on TV lately for robbing banks in the next town. Doug didn't think it was funny.