

**FOR TV** **OBSESSED JAKE LIGHTMAN**, his parents' divorce is like his favorite show getting canceled: the worst. Now torn between two very different homes, he must navigate a constant tug-of-war. His strictly Orthodox Jewish mother wants him to play the role of "Yaakov," a Torah-loving kid who never watches TV. His secular father wants "Jacob" to focus on science and math and leave all that Jewish stuff behind.

On Jake's first day at a new school, Caleb and Tehilla barrel into his life. Suddenly he has two friends who seem to like the *real* Jake. And when they invite him to Camp Gershoni for the summer, Jake knows he has to go—even if his parents won't let him.

With help from Caleb and Tehilla, Jake concocts a web of lies to get to camp. But he struggles to keep up the ruse *and* be a good friend at the same time. As the cost of lying grows, he must decide what's truly important or risk losing the people he cares about the most.

Author Joshua S. Levy delivers a hilarious and poignant story about finding your voice in a changing family, the power of friendship to carry us through, and the value of truth, even when it's hard.



**JOSHUA S. LEVY** is the author of several middle grade novels. Born and raised in Florida, Josh has worked at Jewish organizations (including camps!) across the denominational spectrum and holds a master's degree in Jewish education from Yeshiva University. He now lives with his family in New Jersey, where he practices as a lawyer. Josh will always play Gaga if asked. You can visit him online at [joshuasimonlevy.com](http://joshuasimonlevy.com).

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The Jake Show

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## CHAPTER 1

**N**othing worse than a good TV show, canceled before its time. The characters feel like old friends. You spend the closing credits imagining what'll happen next. You learn to count on new episodes, whether they drop week by week or all at once. Sure, things go quiet now and then. To every season, there is a season finale. But the story always comes back around. More new episodes. More new seasons. Until, without warning, it's all ripped—

“We have a new student,” the teacher announced, yanking me back to the real world. I panicked at the sight of him. He had a trimmed beard, a broad smile, and a knitted blue yarmulke on his head. “This is Jake

Lightman. Please give him a warm welcome and introduce yourselves after class. We're glad you're joining our terrific seventh grade, Jake."

"Glad to be here!" I shouted, grabbing his right hand with both of mine. I seesawed—up and down, up and down—like he was a game show host presenting me with a giant check for the grand prize. I flashed the biggest smile I could manage without unhinging my jaw. Ear to ear. All the teeth. Extra crinkles around the eyes. First episodes are important. I mean, first impressions. First *impressions* are important.

That bit over with, I took a seat at an open desk and let my mind wander back to TV. It was already Wednesday, which meant that I was now two episodes behind in—

"I'm Caleb," said the kid sitting next to me. "We're in Halacha class."

Caleb was at least a head taller than me. And his arms and legs spilled out of his desk like cooked spaghetti. He had short black hair, small blue eyes, a heel that never seemed to stop tapping the floor—and a knitted yarmulke. Just like our teacher. The panic returned.

"Halacha?" Caleb said again, enunciating the syllables this time: *Ha-la-cha*. "We're learning about the chagim?"

My eyes flitted back to his yarmulke. His green *knitted* yarmulke. Worlds apart from my white *satin* one. I kicked myself. I knew better than that. Wardrobe can make or break a scene. You wouldn't wear a baseball cap to audition for a movie about ancient Greece. Or a paper cone birthday hat to shoot a funeral episode. Yarmulkes are no different. I had a whole drawer of them at my mom's apartment, like some secret agent's stash of currency and passports. Knitted yarmulkes. Velvet. Satin. Suede. My mom lived in velvet country. But this new school was all knit, maybe a little felt. Rookie mistake.

"*Chagim* means Jewish holidays," Caleb translated. "That's the class we're in."

I had to act fast. I pulled a marble composition notebook out of my backpack, cracked it open to the first page, and wrote the words "halacha/chagim" in textbook Hebrew script at the top. I had just transferred midsemester from public school. But I'd spent sixth grade at the Miami Beach Yeshiva and knew Hebrew just fine.

Caleb nodded. I exhaled. Crisis averted. Now he could go back to ignoring me, like he was supposed to. And I could go back to wondering where the plot would go if they ever made a seventh season of—

"Cool!" Caleb said. "You know Hebrew already. That's awesome. This class can be fun. You'll like Rabbi

Allenby. Anyway,” he added, like I hadn’t heard him the first time, “I’m Caleb.”

And I’d been seen.

I was supposed to keep to the background. An extra, without any speaking lines. “Forgettable Kid #5,” slamming lockers and crisscrossing the halls.

So I responded: “I’m Jake.”—and glued that period to the end of the sentence.

He didn’t seem to get the hint. “Nice to meet you, Jake!”

I said nothing and stared straight ahead. What was the point? This wasn’t my *first* first day of school. It wouldn’t be my last. And if you’re thinking: *Come on, TV guy. New kid on his first day of school? What a tired old trope. Seen this episode a million times already.*

Well.

Yeah.

Me too. Gets old, doesn’t it?

I’ll catch you up. *Previously, on the story of my life . . .*

There are lots of kinds of Jewish. In the beginning—me and my family—we were all one kind. Now we’re something else. A few different somethings, actually. In those early days, we celebrated Passover. Lit the menorah. We even did Shabbat dinner together most weeks. But we also used tech on Shabbat and ate at any restaurant

we wanted. Then my parents divorced and each got their own spin-off. Mom slowly became Orthodox. More holidays. More rules. And Dad went the other way.

She stopped watching TV on Shabbat. He put his kiddush cup in storage.

Her apartment went completely kosher. And around the time she got two sinks—one for meat, one for dairy—my dad got a second freezer. He'd signed up for a monthly bacon subscription box and needed the storage.

She married a rabbi. He married someone who wasn't Jewish.

And these new shows—er, new lives—were fine, as long as I wore the right costumes and memorized my lines.

Caleb was still talking. “How'd you get to JDS?” This *newest* new school. “Why'd you transfer in the middle of the year? Do you miss your old friends? I'm sorry. Of course you do. Me, I've been going here forever. It's a good place. I mean, every school can be hard, you know?” He laughed like we were having a conversation. “Anyway—”

“I'm grateful for your gregariousness, Mr. Wagner,” the teacher said. “But there'll be plenty of time to show Jake the ropes after class.”

A few kids snickered and one boy in the back shouted something I didn't catch. Whatever it was enraged a girl

sitting in front of me. She shot up from her desk and chucked a crumpled piece of paper at the kid's head, just as Caleb muttered, "Please don't."

Rabbi Allenby ignored the paper-thrower and pointed at the kid who'd called out. "Noam. Mrs. Prince's office. Now."

Caleb's eyes dropped to the floor until Noam was gone and the girl was back in her chair. Then Caleb looked back up with a grin. Too thin. Too tight. No eyes. Caleb obviously didn't spend nearly enough time practicing fake smiles in front of the mirror.

"Now that I think about it," Rabbi Allenby said, scratching his chin, "Jake makes an odd number of students. We've got this year's Tzedakah project to think about. Caleb? Tehilla? Mind if Jake joins you two?"

"No probleinu, Rabbeinu," Caleb answered. Caleb-speak for *of course*, apparently.

"Nice to meet you!" someone else said. The girl from before. She turned around to rest an arm on the back of her chair. She had messy auburn hair, light brown eyes, and a navy uniform polo shirt faded into oblivion. As she spoke, her eyes darted for a moment to two other girls, on either side of her. They both scooted their chairs a couple inches away and giggled.

"Nice to meet you too," I responded, now surrounded

by two kids who were being nice to me for no reason.

Rabbi Allenby nodded. “Excellent. Thank you. Catch Jake up on the project during lunch. For now, let’s dive right into our lesson on the acceptable height of the menorah when placed in an apartment window visible from the—”

*Please let this be over*, I thought. Caleb and Tehilla were just so . . . friendly. *Too* friendly. It wasn’t like I’d never met nice kids before. I had. Sophie Schapper at the Binsky Day School for Progressive Judaism. Eyal and Alex at the Chabad of Aventura Beach. It was always a mistake. Making friends I had to leave behind was worse than never making them at all.

“Ohmygosh,” Caleb kept going. *Why isn’t Rabbi Allenby stopping him?* “You can come over this weekend and we can start planning. You’ll *love* my house.”

“Everyone loves Caleb’s house,” Tehilla added in a singsongy kind of way, like she couldn’t decide if the words were true.

Caleb: “You’ll come, right?”

Tehilla: “You have to come.”

Caleb: “It’ll be great.”

Tehilla: “So great.”

“So great!” I repeated, teeth clenched to hurting.

Didn’t they know I wasn’t worth it? These kids

already had their storylines: Caleb. Tehilla. Noam too. I wasn't a guest star. And I'd never be a series regular. One day soon, I'd disappear. In a few months or a few weeks or maybe even a few days, just as soon as things started to get good—

*Click.*

Show's over.