

New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"

Posted by davidt - 07 Aug 2025 02:14

The hotel room was dark, the glow from the shattered phone screen flickering like a dying flame on the floor.

His hands were trembling. Not from cold from truth.

She didn't scream. She just looked at him. Her eyes, which once sparkled with simplicity and loyalty, now shimmered with disbelief and pain.

"I don't care about the scam," she whispered. "Just tell me it's not true... Tell me the rest isn't true..."

He couldn't.

And for the first time since he was eleven years old when he first learned how to delete browser history he felt something inside him truly break.

Chapter 1: *The Perfect Bochor*

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To the outside world, Shaya was the dream.

A *masmid*, a *baal kishron*, *mevakeish emes*. In yeshiva, people said he was the next rosh yeshiva. Even the mashgiach once said at a *mussar shmues*, "If you want to see what it means to live with yiras shamayim, look at Shaya."

He smiled. He nodded. He kept his head down.

But he also knew how to work filters. How to erase data. How to cry on Yom Kippur... and fall the next night.

No one ever guessed. Not his rebbeim. Not his friends. Not his chaver chavrusah of six years who sat inches from him every morning at 7:00 a.m.

Only Hashem knew the truth. And it haunted him.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"
Posted by mountainclimb - 07 Aug 2025 05:37

Please keep on writing. Thanks so much.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"
Posted by davidt - 07 Aug 2025 12:15

Chapter 2: *The Kallah Who Believed*

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The first time Shaya saw Leah, she was stepping out of a small bookstore in with a sefer and a quiet, self-contained smile. Something about her felt untouched by this world simple, soft, pure. Shaya wasn't used to that. He had dated plenty before, girls from polished homes with polished answers, girls who knew exactly what to say to impress a top boy. But Leah was different. She listened more than she spoke. And when she did speak, her questions were quiet but deep. On their second date, she asked him, "Do you ever talk to Hashem when no one's looking?" Not about goals or careers or hashkafos. Just that.

Shaya had hesitated. Once, he used to. As a bochur, he had davened in bed at night, whispered Tehillim between sedarim, cried at times when he felt Hashem was his only friend. But ever since his double life had begun, those conversations became awkward. He felt fake, disconnected. But he smiled at Leah and said yes. She believed him. He married her with hope in his heart. Maybe this was his way out. Maybe being married to someone so real, so innocent, would finally break the chains that had wrapped around his soul since his early teens.

The wedding was beautiful. The kind that people spoke about for weeks. Rebbeim came, neighbors beamed, the band played with emotion. Everyone said, "They're going to build a beautiful bayis ne'eman." And in some ways, they did. Leah brought joy and stability. She was the kind of wife who made the house smell like Shabbos by Wednesday, who left sticky notes of chizuk on his Gemara, who believed in him more than he believed in himself. But the Yetzer Hara doesn't pack up and leave, it waits. And it came back.

At first, it was small. A few seconds here and there. A browser left open. A link clicked late at night. But it never stayed small. He told himself it was only until things calmed down. He promised himself that now that he had a wife, he'd stop for good. But those promises were made after falls, not before them. Before them, he didn't think at all. Soon the second phone

returned. Hidden in a drawer behind the socks. He started saying he needed to stay late in kollel for “chavrusas.” Really, he was sitting in a car in a dark parking lot, trying to feel something, then hating himself for what he felt. Still, he made it work. Somehow. He was a good husband on the surface. He brought flowers before Yom Tov, helped fold laundry, kept things running smoothly. But underneath it all, he was slipping, slowly but surely.

And when he met a man one night through a friend of a friend, someone who promised “a smart investment opportunity,” it didn’t seem connected at first. But it would be. Very much so.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"

Posted by davidt - 07 Aug 2025 15:04

Chapter 3: *The Scam in the Shadows*

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It started with a casual conversation in the hallway after Maariv. A guy he barely knew from another neighborhood said he had something “solid,” a small investment opportunity, something involving a business overseas. “Totally legal,” the man said, “very quiet, very low-risk, but the returns are amazing. I wouldn’t offer this to just anyone.” Shaya laughed it off at first. But the next day, he kept thinking about it. He had been feeling more desperate lately. He wanted something that could give him a fresh start financially, emotionally, spiritually. He didn’t want to keep relying on in-laws or feeling like he was just treading water. So he reached out. The guy introduced him to someone else. A voice on the phone with an Israeli accent, a little too smooth, who promised he could “make things work” for someone like him. No one needed to know anything. It was just a few transfers. Just being a middleman. The kind of thing everyone does. “You’re not stealing,” the voice said. “You’re just moving money around.” That’s how it always starts.

Within two weeks, Shaya had made his first “commission.” It was real. The money came through. He bought Leah a surprise bracelet and told her he got a bonus from a side gig tutoring. She beamed. She didn’t ask questions. Why would she? Shaya was always responsible. Trustworthy. Smart. But then things got more complicated. The amounts got bigger. The instructions got weirder. Foreign wire transfers, encrypted messaging apps, strange names he wasn’t allowed to ask about. When he asked for clarity, the Israeli voice got colder. “Don’t worry about what you don’t need to know. Just do your part. You’re helping us, and we’re helping you.”

He should have walked away. But by then, it was too late. His account had been used. His name was on things. And then he made a mistake. One wrong wire, one transfer too large. And suddenly the voice changed. It wasn’t friendly anymore. “You owe us now. You messed up.

You fix it.” Shaya tried to explain. He didn’t know what had gone wrong. He didn’t understand the system. He begged for more time. But they weren’t interested in excuses. They wanted results. Fast.

That night, he sat at the kitchen table staring at nothing while Leah lit the Shabbos candles. Her tefillah, sweet and innocent, filled the room. Shaya wanted to scream. He was drowning in something he didn’t even understand, with people he couldn’t even trace. But he said nothing. He smiled. He made Kiddush. He joked with her over the soup. And when she went to sleep, he sat by the window shaking, his hands ice-cold.

He still hadn’t told her a word. Not about the business. Not about the threats. Not about the old phone in the laundry room that had started buzzing again with things he thought he was finished with. All the darkness was merging together. The addiction. The money. The lies. One big mess. And it was only getting darker.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"

Posted by davidt - 08 Aug 2025 13:38

Chapter 4: The Web Gets Tighter

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Shaya’s nights had become a blur. The pressure from the men behind the phone calls weighed on him like a boulder, yet his mind kept drifting toward the one thing that gave him temporary relief.

Late at night, when Leah was asleep and the house was silent, he would pull out the hidden phone. It started with “just for a few minutes” to distract himself from the panic about the money. But the minutes became hours. The shame afterward was heavy, but in those moments, the images, the chats, the fantasy worlds made him forget. Forget the threats. Forget the bank transfers. Forget the way his stomach dropped whenever his phone buzzed with that number.

What he didn’t see yet was that each escape left him more exhausted, more distant from Leah, and more paralyzed to deal with the real danger.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"

Posted by davidt - 10 Aug 2025 13:19

Chapter 5: A Double Prison

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The two worlds began to feed each other in ways Shaya hadn't expected. At first, the scam and the late-night addiction were separate in his mind. The phone calls were one nightmare, and the secret hours online were something else entirely. But soon they began to weave together until he could hardly tell where one ended and the other began. A threatening call would come in, the sharp accent on the other end reminding him of the danger he was in. His chest would tighten, his palms sweat, and within minutes he would be locking the bathroom door, the hidden phone in his hand.

It was like pressing a pause button on reality. In those moments, the fantasy drowned out the panic. The images and conversations transported him to a place where the money didn't matter, the voices didn't exist, and no one was judging him. But the peace never lasted. As soon as the screen went dark, the weight came crashing back down—only now it was heavier, because he had wasted more time, avoided another call, and sunk deeper into a pit he couldn't climb out of.

Leah began to notice changes. He stayed up long after she had gone to bed. Mornings, he would stumble into the kitchen looking drained, half-listening to her words. She thought it was just the stress of the business, maybe debt or bad deals. She had no idea that every glance between them was shadowed by two secrets instead of one. Shaya told himself he was protecting her by keeping quiet, but in truth, he was protecting his escape.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"

Posted by goldwings - 10 Aug 2025 14:01

Wow! THANK YOU!! it's amazing! excellent writing! I feel the pain, went through some of it, although not the scam.

I really don't want to disrupt the story, it's just that my filter (nativ) doesn't let me thank (no clue what's bad about thanking).

I'm after a fall and I don't know why, but this truly captivating story is giving me chizzuk.

KEEP IT UP!

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"
Posted by davidt - 10 Aug 2025 14:30

[goldwings wrote on 10 Aug 2025 14:01:](#)

Wow! THANK YOU!! it's amazing! excellent writing! I feel the pain, went through some of it, although not the scam.

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KEEP IT UP!

I appreciate your feedback. Your "thank you" actually did work. Sometimes we don't realize how much a small word of appreciation can give the push to keep going.

Stories have a certain power because they let us step into someone else's shoes. They don't just tell a point, they make us feel it. That's why a good story can bring out lessons and inspiration in a way nothing else can. I'm glad this one connected with you.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"
Posted by hollyari - 10 Aug 2025 15:20

Hey Davidt,

I just finished reading the first part of your story, and wow — what a solid pen you have! It really pulled me in like a real novel. I could feel the pain behind every word you wrote. I'm really

looking forward to part 2 and to hearing how you found your way out. This story feels like it could be a path for all of us to follow and find hope. Can't wait for the continuation!

P.S. My apologies to everyone for commenting in the middle of the story.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"
Posted by davidt - 10 Aug 2025 16:19

Chapter 6: The Discovery

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It happened on a rainy Tuesday afternoon. Leah was folding laundry in the small utility room, humming softly to herself, when she heard a faint vibration from somewhere in the pile of clothes. She frowned, digging through shirts and socks until her hand touched something cold and rectangular. She pulled out an old, scuffed phone she had never seen before.

The screen lit up with a notification from an unfamiliar messaging app. Curious, she tapped it. The breath caught in her throat as she scrolled. Pictures, videos, and conversations she wished she could unsee. It wasn't just one or two—there were dozens, maybe hundreds. Her first reaction was confusion. Then came a wave of nausea, followed by a sharp sting in her chest.

Shaya walked in moments later, carrying a cup of coffee, and froze when he saw what was in her hands. His face drained of color. "That's old," he muttered, stepping forward, his voice shaking. "It's just from a bad time... I've been stressed, you know." He reached for the phone, but Leah pulled it back slightly. She didn't yell. She didn't cry. She simply stared at him, her lips pressed together, her eyes unreadable. The silence between them was worse than any shouting could have been.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"
Posted by davidt - 11 Aug 2025 14:07

Chapter 7: The Walls Close In

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That night, Shaya lay awake listening to the rain on the roof, staring at the ceiling. Leah had barely spoken to him after the discovery. Her voice at dinner was polite but distant, as if talking to a guest she barely knew. At the same time, the calls from the handlers grew sharper, their tone leaving no room for excuses. "You fix this now, or it will get worse," they warned. Each word coiled around his chest like a rope.

His mind spun between panic and craving. The addiction had always been a way to quiet the noise, but now it was tainted. Every time he reached for the phone, he saw Leah's face in the laundry room. Every click felt heavier, every image more hollow. But the pull was still there—stronger, in some ways, because of the shame. He needed to escape the feeling of failure, and the only escape he knew was the very thing making it worse.

The two problems were no longer separate storms—they had merged into one hurricane. The financial mess fed the addiction, the addiction fed the lies, and the lies fed the financial mess. And Shaya was standing in the center of it, unable to move without being struck by both at once.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"
Posted by davidt - 12 Aug 2025 16:04

Chapter 8: Breaking Point

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The next week blurred into a haze of small disasters. A payment went missing from the business account, triggering another angry call from the men overseas. Leah's smiles, once effortless, now seemed forced and brief. At night, Shaya sat at his desk in the dark, the glow of the hidden phone casting shadows on his face. It was no longer about chasing pleasure, those days were long gone. Now, it was about silencing the pounding in his head for even a few minutes.

But each session ended the same way: the relief faded, the guilt returned, and the panic about the money doubled. He promised himself he would stop. He promised he would fix the finances. He promised he would sit Leah down and tell her everything. But by the time morning came, he was back where he had started, except now the problems had grown just a little larger.

The breaking point came late one night when he caught his own reflection in the darkened window. The man looking back at him had tired eyes, clenched shoulders, and a sadness that seemed bottomless. He realized he had stopped living weeks ago. He was just surviving, moving from one numbing hit to the next, while everything around him crumbled.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"

Posted by davidt - 13 Aug 2025 14:49

Chapter 9: A Door Opens

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One Friday morning, Shaya sat in shul staring at the siddur in front of him, the letters swimming until they lost all meaning. His lips moved, but no words came out. An old friend slid into the bench beside him and studied his face.

"You don't look okay," the friend said gently.

Shaya wanted to laugh it off, to throw out some line about not getting enough sleep. But something inside cracked. In a voice barely above a whisper, he admitted he'd been slipping again worse than ever and there were other things too dark to explain. The friend didn't flinch. He didn't ask for details. He just said, "Call this number. It's for GuardYourEyes. Ask for a mentor named Hashem Help Me. Just talk to him once. You have nothing to lose."

Shaya shoved the slip of paper into his pocket and tried to forget it. But all through the day, the words kept echoing. That night, when the urge came strong as ever, instead of reaching for the phone for his usual escape, he stared at the ceiling, heart pounding. What would it feel like to actually speak to someone to tell the truth without being judged?

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Chapter 10: The First Conversation

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The first call was anonymous, his voice low, almost shaking. "I don't know why I'm doing this," Shaya said. "I don't even know if you can help me."

The man on the other end didn't sound shocked. His voice was calm, warm, steady. "You're hurting," he said. "Start wherever you can. I'm listening."

And Shaya talked. Halting at first, then faster, as if afraid the words would rot inside him if he didn't pour them out now. He spoke about the scam, the threats, the fear that kept him up at night. He admitted how the addiction had once been a way to shut it all out, a dark room to hide in but now it had become its own prison, chaining him down, making everything worse.

Hashem Help Me didn't interrupt. He just breathed on the line with him, letting the silence speak when it needed to. "You're not crazy," he finally said. "You're carrying pain, and you're trying to numb it. But numbing the pain is digging the hole deeper. I've been there."

Something in Shaya broke. For the first time, someone wasn't lecturing him or giving him slogans this man *understood*. Before hanging up, Hashem Help Me said softly, "Come meet me. In person. You shouldn't carry this alone."

A week later, Shaya drove to a small, quiet neighborhood and rang the bell. A regular-looking man opened the door, no judgment in his eyes, only understanding. Sitting across from him in a simple dining room, Shaya finally let it all out the money, the sleepless nights, the shame, the endless scrolling and hiding. For the first time, he saw the whole picture: not separate problems, but one vicious cycle feeding itself.

As he walked back to his car, the cold winter air stung his face. But inside, for the first time in months, he felt something he couldn't name. Not hope not yet. But maybe the first tiny crack where hope could seep through.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"
Posted by davidt - 14 Aug 2025 12:43

Chapter 11: Facing the Truth

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Shaya sat across from Hashem Help Me, still nervous from unloading everything in their first meeting. The man's calm didn't waver. He listened, then leaned forward slightly.

"Let me tell you something," HHM said. "You don't have two separate problems. You have one pattern. Fear, shame, and escape. You run from the fear into your addiction, and the shame from that addiction drives you back into the same fear. It's a circle that feeds itself."

Shaya looked down, twisting his fingers. He'd never heard it put that way. He thought the business mess was one disaster and the addiction another. HHM shook his head.

"Every time the pressure rises, you look for relief and this thing you're using, it works for ten

minutes. But it also weakens you, clouds your judgment, and leaves you less able to fight the real battles. The more you escape, the bigger the mess becomes. The bigger the mess, the more you need to escape. You see how that works?”

Shaya nodded slowly, his throat dry. HHM opened a small notebook, the kind he used for every guy he mentored. He sketched a simple loop: **Pain ? Escape ? Shame ? More Pain.**

“This is where you’re living,” HHM said, tapping the page. “And until you break the loop, nothing else will change. You can try to fix the money, you can try to calm your wife, but if you don’t deal with this cycle, you’ll end up right back here.”

For the next hour, HHM walked Shaya through practical steps: guardrails for the phone, accountability, and most of all, a plan to stop fighting alone.

“You’ve been hiding because you’re terrified someone will find out,” HHM said gently. “But hiding is what’s killing you. Hashem gave you this test not to destroy you but to bring you closer to Him and closer to people who can help. The day you start being honest is the day you start being free.”

By the end of the meeting, Shaya felt both lighter and exposed. There was no quick fix, no magical trick. But there was a path and for the first time, someone was walking it with him.

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Re: New story series: "From Shadows to Sunrise"

Posted by davidt - 14 Aug 2025 18:04

Chapter 12: Building a New Road

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The next time Shaya sat across from Hashem Help Me, there was no need for small talk. HHM opened his notebook again and spoke calmly, like a man who had traveled this road himself many times.

“First,” HHM said, “we stop pretending this is just a bad habit. It’s become a force in your life something you can’t fight with willpower alone. You need structure, support, and tools.”

He outlined three principles Shaya had never considered:

1. Guard the gateways.

“Right now your phone is your worst enemy,” HHM said. “It’s like leaving the front door wide

open at night. So we put up fences. Filters, accountability partners, locked settings. No more being alone with devices at night.”

Shaya winced but nodded. Those secret late-night sessions had been his crutch, and giving them up felt like stepping off a cliff.

2. Replace, don’t just remove.

“Stopping is only half the job,” HHM continued. “You have to fill the empty space. Exercise, learning, calling a friend anything that reminds you you’re alive and not trapped in your own head.”

Shaya realized he had been trying to fight this in silence, which only made the crash worse when he gave in.

3. Honesty is oxygen.

“Every time you hide,” HHM said, “you choke yourself. I’m not saying you have to tell the whole world. But you need at least one person me, for now who knows exactly where you stand. No lies, no half-truths. We fight this in the open air.”

HHM gave him small, concrete assignments: texting a short check-in every night before bed, putting his devices in a drawer outside the bedroom, writing down the times of day when he felt weakest and what triggered it. They weren’t huge steps, but they were real and they forced Shaya to stay awake to what he was doing instead of drifting on autopilot.

That week was hard. Shaya felt restless, even angry, without his usual escape. The cravings came in waves. But each time, instead of falling alone, he called HHM. The man’s calm voice on the other end reminded him he wasn’t broken just a soldier learning how to fight differently.

By the end of the week, something surprising happened. The urges didn’t vanish, but they didn’t feel unbeatable either. For the first time in years, Shaya felt like he was standing on solid ground, even if it was just the first stone in a long road.

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