

Henkin and the Suit

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The events described here took place in 1979.

At this time, I was a Ph.D. student in Utrecht under Dirk van Dalen. I was working on a thesis concerning Diagonalization & Provability. To put the story into context, the reader must imagine that I was a person who was not much concerned with clothing. I had long hair and always wore an old sweater and old trousers.

At a given moment, my promotor Dirk van Dalen called me to him speaking the words *By the way, Albert . . .*. These words are not translated from Dutch, Dirk actually spoke them in English, including the pronunciation of my name. These words usually signaled that either Dirk was going to utter some point of criticism or had some assignment for me. In the case at hand, it was both. Dirk told me (in Dutch) that the famous Leon Henkin was visiting but that he, Dirk, and his wife Dokie would be abroad at the moment Henkin and his wife would arrive. Would I function as his replacement to be the host as long as he, Dirk, was away? Of course, I would. It was an honor to do this. I should realize, Dirk continued, that Leon Henkin was an old-fashioned man, a professor of the old school. He was used to being received by someone properly dressed, more specifically by someone wearing a *suit* with a tie. So would I be so good to wear a suit when receiving Henkin?

Well, I could hardly say *no*, but there was a difficulty. I did not possess anything even remotely resembling a suit, and I had no idea how to select a good one. Fortunately, a solution was easily found: A female friend of impeccable taste volunteered to help me find a suit. We went to a number of shops, and, following her advice, I bought a truly splendid grey suit with accompanying tie. Additionally, I had my hair cut by a high quality hairdresser.

So when the Henkins arrived, I met them in proper attire. Everything went well, and Henkin's visit proceeded without a wrinkle.

At the end of the visit, there was a farewell dinner at which I sat opposite Henkin and his wife. We immediately engaged in companionable conversation. The Henkins were very easy to talk to, so before I knew it, I told them the prequel concerning the suit. Mrs. Henkin looked properly amused. She told me: *Well, after you received us wearing that suit, I said to Leon that apparently they are quite formal here. So, the next days you better wear a suit.* And, thus, Leon Henkin appeared each day wearing a suit.

This is all well and good, but what does the story teach us about the Henkins? The story makes clear that the Henkins were very open and friendly people. They easily gained

someone's trust. The fact that I told them the story during the dinner is the best possible testimony of that.

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