

"I couldn't stop reading. The pleasure was effortless and intense."

LINDA SPALDING

**THE
CAPACITY
FOR
INFINITE
HAPPINESS**

ALEXIS VON KONIGSLOW

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This book is for Oliver and Jake, and my family
It's dedicated to the memory of Margaret and Ruth



BEFORE EVERYTHING

BLIMA, 1928

“Pay attention,” said the tall man.

He was so long that he seemed to be folded into the hallway. He was standing close to Blima’s mother, his big hands around her smaller ones, pressing papers into her palms. Blima had seen this man before, and she hadn’t liked him then either. She backed away, quietly so that they wouldn’t know she was there.

“Ayala, I need you to listen to me,” the man said again.

Ayala bowed into his chest. Blima shivered.

“I don’t want you to panic, or pretend that you’re bored. Here’s what I want you to do. When the officials ask to see your papers, I need you to pinch the little girl, pinch her hard. Don’t tell your husband that you’re going to do it. That way, she’ll be crying, you’ll both be concerned, everyone will want the scene to be over.”

Blima crouched down. She was the only little girl in the house.

“Also, make sure that your shirt is unbuttoned,” the man said, touching her mother’s blouse. “That will help.”

“I don’t want to do this,” said Ayala.

“As a plan, it’s perfectly safe. You’ll send these back by post. We’ll be together again before the end of the year.”

“And what about Misha? What about Max, Raisa, Efim?”

“I’ll bring them with me.”

“I can’t just leave.”

“I’ll find a way to get them out. If anyone can do it, I can. Things will carry on just as they have been. This is a momentary change.”

Blima crept away. Sometimes, the tall man kissed her mother. Sometimes the little boy with the ice blue eyes appeared out of nowhere. Blima didn’t want any part of it.

When Ayala came to find Blima some time later, she’d been hiding forever, was ready to be found.

“Pay attention,” said Ayala.

Blima sat up, and all the dust particles she’d been counting scattered. She crawled out from under the table and scrambled onto the chair across from her mother.

“I want you to practise your spelling,” said Ayala. “I want you to write our family name.”

Pride welled in Blima. She could do this. She’d known how to write her name for months, forever. She wrote it out in measured letters, careful not to smudge the ink. Then her mother crossed it out and wrote something new beside it.

“I want you to write our name like this.”

Blima puzzled over the letters, familiar somehow, but wrong. “That’s not our name.”

“Do what I ask.”

“But that spells something different.”

Blima wrote her name again. She turned the paper around, hopeful, but Ayala drew a stroke right through it.

“This isn’t fair.”

“Who told you that anything would be?” said Ayala.

Blima slid off the chair and inched toward the door, wiping hot tears off her cheek. Nobody had told her things should be fair. It was just something she knew.

“Life will never be fair. And we will never be safe. There

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are always people just outside the door. There will always be another threat."

"I know that," said Blima.

"This is how we write our name from now on," said Ayala, writing the word again. "If I ever catch you writing our name in the old way, I'll take out the strap."

Blima rushed back to the table and pushed the paper off. It drifted. For a moment, she and her mother watched it together. Then it touched the floor with a shush.

Ayala stood. "Things in this world are not immutable," she said.

Then Blima watched as she disappeared right out of the room. A few seconds later, a door slammed shut somewhere in the inner house.

IF AN OLD MAN APPEARS, YOU HAVE TO FOLLOW

HARPO MARX, 1933

Harpo felt tugged along, like he was attached to a string and someone at the other end was pulling. He felt like one of those wooden ducks with wheels that tenement families gave their kids instead of pets, and, right now, the string was leading him on a tour of the waterfront.

He slowed, to test it out, and there it was again. So off he went.

His life wasn't working. That was the lesson learned, the great discovery. He was very different from his dad, and his father had been by far the better man. But he couldn't think that much about it right now because he was feeling pulled into the woods.

He hurried along the path, up a gentle incline full of weeds and spots of light like pennies that were less bright now than when he'd started out. It must be getting late. He must be getting hungry. Harpo slowed as he passed the lodge's canoe shed, then tripped over a broken oar, propelled forward again. No water sports. He tried to stop at the equipment shed, but found himself stumbling forward faster instead. No fishing either. That one was okay. He hadn't had the stomach for fishing since that trip to Montauk

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anyway. Now he could hear the bustling of the people who'd been packed in the lodge last night like saltine crackers in a great tin can. He'd bet they were whooping it up on the waterfront now, with their deck chairs and bathing suits and the little martinis with snaking orange peels. His brothers were probably out there. They might be missing him. He kept moving.

Finally, in a clearing, Harpo stopped and felt no desire to move forward. The rope was slack. So he sat down on a fallen tree. He didn't know what to do next. He needed to change his life. That was clear. But how did you do that? He slapped his pockets, felt for the notepad and pen. There were concrete things he could be doing. He could write to Susan. He'd brought paper after all. He could pretend he was practising his letters, everyone laughed at that line. He could combine the two. Right now *L* was his favourite letter, *L* for love, but no, that wasn't enough to justify all that postage. Besides, he'd have to write more than one letter to fix the mess he'd made. Susan was sore. He just hoped she wasn't moving on. Or he could try to write another script instead. Maybe the Marx Brothers weren't as finished as everyone said.

Harpo sighed. His father would have known what to do.

At least he'd finally made it to the lodge that everyone talked about. He was here because this was where he belonged. He was here because he couldn't go anywhere else. He was a Jew. The other resorts wouldn't take him. He was really here because there were beautiful women around. One more wild weekend. One final blowout. One last three-day-long party and he'd consider settling down, finally, just like Frenchie had wanted. And in the meantime he wouldn't have to feel all alone. He'd just have to get himself ready. He'd just have to work himself up to it, if he wanted to go on a proper bender with his brothers.

So he sat back. He could see the lake a little bit, or was that the river, and a sunset, a streak of wicked orange spread over a purple sky, a layer of marmalade over raspberry jam.

He waited for the old magic, the predatory pull. Nothing happened.

When an old man walked out of the forest, Harpo wasn't surprised. He scooted over on his log to give the man room, ready for the company.

"How do you feel?" said the old man as he settled himself beside Harpo.

"Pardon me?"

"What I mean to ask is, how are you holding up?"

"What?" This man couldn't know about Frenchie. It had hit the papers of course, but the papers had all reported that Harpo Marx's father had just died and Harpo looked nothing like the Harpo Marx from the pictures. He hadn't packed the raincoat and fright wig, and without those, he was just a scrawny Jewish man.

"It's okay," said the old man. "You don't have to tell me yet."

"Okay."

"I don't mind." The old man stared. Harpo got lost in his expression. His hair was white and grey and everywhere, and there was something familiar about him, about that face like an old pillow.

"Do I know you?" said Harpo.

"That depends. You'll have to tell me who you are and then I can say if I know you."

"Who am I?" Harpo thought about his name in Cyrillic, how it looked like it spelled something completely different. "I'm Exapno Mapcase," he said.

"Nope."

"Exapno Mapcase, secret agent."

"I don't think so."

He could have been from the tenements of New York, this man. He looked like Uncle Harold a little bit, or Henry, Aunt Hattie's boyfriend, or that other guy who lived in the Bronx. He was taller, and he didn't have that slightly sour smell, but even so. Harpo loved him immediately.

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“What’s your name, really?” asked the old man.

“Pinky,” said Harpo, for his character in *Duck Soup*. “No, Harpo MacMarx.”

“That’s closer,” the old man said. And then he smiled, and Harpo smiled right along with him. There was something about that face, all those wrinkles around eyes blue and bright like a little kid’s. “Try again.”

“I like you,” said Harpo.

“Fine. If that’s the best I can get. I see now why you don’t talk much.”

“Are you staying here too?”

“I’m not staying here.” The old man hopped off the log. “I’m going for a walk. You’re coming with me. Neither of us is staying here. Why would we when I know a better place to go?”

Harpo couldn’t think of an answer, so he slid down too, then followed.

They left the path, then pushed their way into the dark part of the woods, in which direction Harpo couldn’t say. He’d guess north, by the way the moss was growing on the trees, or did moss grow facing south, or was that even moss? He kept walking behind the magnetic old man, although he heard a funny kind of rushing sound now.

“Do you hear that?” Harpo stumbled to catch up. “Should we turn back?”

The old man didn’t even slow, even though the sounds were getting louder. Harpo pictured wild animals, or maybe marching men, goose-steppers out of rhythm.

Finally, they came to a cascade, and the sound resolved itself into a rush of water, a tiny little waterfall with a roar like Niagara Falls. Imagine that.

Harpo scrambled up the little incline after the old man, who was standing at the top now, staring down. “Can I ask you a question?” he said, reaching the top, no, the *summit*. “I need advice.”

“How well do you know the Kogans?” asked the old man.

“Who?”

The old man fixed him with those deep blue eyes. “The people in the Jewish lodge.”

“Oh. Of course. I met Sam when I checked in.”

“Did you see his wife, Ayala?”

“I saw a picture of her on the desk, and he introduced me to that. He said the real lady probably wouldn’t come downstairs much. She’s beautiful though. She could be in the pictures.”

“That much I know for myself. I have eyes. They have windows. I know what she looks like.”

“The rumour is that she doesn’t come down from the attic much,” said Harpo. “She’s been a bit atticky for a while, that’s what I heard.”

“They have daughters too,” said the old man.

“Little ones?” Harpo hadn’t seen any little kids. “Do you know them, the Kogans?”

“I like the look of them. I like the way they look as a family.”

“Oh,” said Harpo. “I like families too. I’m from a big one. Four brothers, two parents.”

“Lots of cousins?”

“You could fill up New Jersey.”

“I had three brothers and five sisters,” said the old man, “but only one daughter.” Then he patted Harpo on the back. “I like the look of you too. How are you feeling today? You never said.”

“What?”

“I’ve been thinking about it,” said the man, “and you might as well call me William.”

YOU HAVE TO FIND TWO KINDS OF LOVE

EMILY, 2003

Emily crept to the kitchen, then up the stairs and through the hallway, then down again toward registration. There must be a vault somewhere with all the family documents. The registration area was too wide open. Nobody would leave birth certificates here. She moved on. The first visit to the lodge that she remembered had been when she was six years old, when she'd visited with her parents. She remembered dragging a towel down this narrow stairway. Corners had been difficult. But still. The lodge had been fun.

She stopped at the shut office door.

On that same trip, she'd visited her grandfather, Papa Moshe, in his office. Every time he'd moved toward her, she'd cried, and her father had had to pick her up. All the adults minus Moshe had laughed. Jonah had been there too, of course, a little boy hovering in the doorway. The door was locked. That boded well. The filing cabinets were locked too, from what she remembered. That was also a good sign, but hard to work around. She'd never figured out how to pick the locks. There might be other hiding places around, however.

Emily crept to the room of windows next, then stopped. Jonah was in there. Jonah, no longer the little sapling of a cousin she'd followed around all the time. He was tall, and his sandy hair was blonder than she'd remembered, and he was tan somehow, even though the season hadn't started yet. Emily felt something, that regular tug toward him, the slight pull of gravity that she must be feeling because objects in space always attract each other. Yesterday, her horoscope had said, "you will soon meet your deity, your perfect power, the person to whom you can tell all your stories." If she could choose the one person she could tell all her problems to, it would be him. So she hid behind the door and searched her thoughts for a way to start: family (no), math (no), ghosts (nope), Harpo (absolutely not). She wanted so badly to tell him everything—that her mother regretted parenthood, that she was MIA from her job—but best not lead with those things. Nobody liked problem enumerators. Nobody liked other people's problems at all, in fact. So she found nothing socially appropriate to say. Then she saw what he was doing, bending over to look at a notebook she'd left open on a table, and so Emily found herself walking right into the room.

Jonah stepped back abruptly, nearly tripping over a rug. "I was just wondering what you're up to."

"Math," she said. If she grabbed the book, he'd notice. She wouldn't have left it open at an inappropriate page. She wouldn't have written his name, say, or a love note in mathematical notation or something equally bizarre, and just walked away. She was more careful than that. "I'm finishing my master's."

"What kind of math is it?" asked Jonah. "Or is math all the same?"

"It's not the same." His eyes were bright blue and shining, and was he teasing her? Emily looked down again. "There's analysis," she said, watching the swirling patterns on the hardwood floor. "Algebra. Topography type of stuff. Classification, I guess." Classification could be considered math, and she'd spent the entire

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morning at it, quantifying the impropriety of noticing that a cousin was cute. It had to do with the degree of relation, she'd decided, the length of the shortest path that connected them on the family tree. Emily to her mother to her aunt to Jonah would be terrible, but she didn't have an aunt, so that was out. The path had to be longer than four, and since path lengths have to increase by twos, they weren't first cousins. At least she'd established that.

"So which one do you do?" asked Jonah.

"I study connections," said Emily. "It's called graph theory. I'll show you." She grabbed her book. She drew in vertices and edges connecting them, the most basic kind of graph, and felt a hot swell of relief. She had the notebook back at least. "You connect things, then count the degree of the vertices, the number of points they attach to. Then there's calculations, statistics."

"That looks like your family." Jonah pointed to the open page and Emily saw Doran Baruch's name and some half-completed diagrams, nothing incriminating though, that she could see. She'd also been piecing together how he might fit into the family, but he'd stumped her. She couldn't figure out the connection.

"You *can* represent a family tree like a graph," she said. "I'm kind of obsessed with that right now."

"That's a weird obsession."

"Graphs aren't what people say they are," Emily said quickly. "Graphs are really just points and lines, called vertices and edges. You can draw one vertex to show all the members of a family. And then draw edges to show how they're related, count the connections." She drew vertices and connected them. Then she labelled them, with her name, her mother's, her grandmother's, up until her Papa William, because that was all she knew so far. "I want to use the family tree as an illustration for my thesis. But things weren't making sense, so I came here, to figure out what's off in my family representations." She wanted to tell Jonah more than that, why she'd postponed her thesis defence and the start of her Ph.D.

She looked up at him again, hopeful.

"That isn't right," said Jonah.

"What isn't?"

"That line. Edge." Jonah touched the page. "That one." He traced a finger along the Ayala-to-William edge, absently touching the side of Emily's hand. Her fingers tingled.

"William," Jonah said. "He doesn't belong there."

"He's my great-great-grandfather. He was my great-grandma Ayala's father."

"William's related to my family, not yours."

Jonah took the pencil and drew his own graph. "I looked into my own family tree a while back. I wanted to see—I went back to, like, 1888 or something. No, earlier, because William was born in 1860, and I found his parents too. Anyway. William had one daughter, that's my great-grandmother. Then he got a son-in-law. That's all."

"That can't be right." Emily studied the two graphs side by side. "But that's exactly what I kept finding. Connections in the family tree just don't make sense. Nothing was working out. We can't be connected before that, because my side was in Russia then."

"You know William had five brothers and three sisters? No, three brothers and five sisters." He drew vertices but didn't label them. "Anyway, a lot of siblings. They all died before they turned thirty, and their parents died right after that. William was left all alone on the island, except for his wife and kid. It must have been weird to go from a huge family all living together in one house to just a couple people."

"How do you know all this?" asked Emily.

Abruptly, Jonah stepped back. "We're not related," he said. "You do know that, right?"

"Then what connects our families?"

"We're neighbours. That's all. I checked. That's what I was looking into."

"Our connection is geographic?" In her notebook, there were

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two separate tree graphs, no vertices touching, no physical connections at all.

"For God's sake," said Jonah. "Don't look so stunned. Sometimes *cousins* is just a thing that people say."

"Oh." They weren't really related. That opened up a new space of possibility.

"So why are you back?" he said.

"Because my mother just told me that she'd never wanted kids, that having me was her great regret."

This time, Jonah looked lost. Why did she always just admit to everything? Other people found graceful ways to segue into conversations.

"I mean I came back for the Seder," she said. "I wanted to be with my family." Then Emily found herself walking again, drifting back to the dining room.

"Don't believe everything your cousin tells you," said Emily's grandmother Blima, as she set the Haggadahs on the central dining-room table. "Relation is much more complicated than just biology."

"I'm only asking about the biology," said Emily.

"You can do the seating for tonight."

"Fine, I can do that. I'll print name cards. But I need information because I want to draw little graphs on them, family trees that represent the biology. You and Auntie Sonja were born to Ayala and Sam Kogan?"

"I'm the older sister," said Blima. "Also wiser. Also, I know more."

"I knew that you're the eldest."

"Old is old to young people. I just want to remind you that there are degrees of it."

"Ayala had four siblings. Max, Robert, Efim and Raisa. You were born in Russia. And Auntie Sonja was born in Kingston?"

"I can vouch for your Auntie Sonja, but for me, I can't remember. I was very young at the time."

"Can you please be serious?" said Emily

And then Blima shuffled back to the table, carrying a big white box. "Blessed are the Pacific Tribes, for they dine with the saints."

"You were born in 1924, and Auntie Sonja was born in 1929."

"It's a family tradition to use your Great-grandma Ayala's good china for Passover's extra setting."

"I know —"

"It's not every family who serves Elijah. You'll find lots of Jews who only pour him a drink. But he needs something to line his stomach. That's what our mother always said."

"When was Great-grandma Ayala born?"

Blima rested the box on the table, then pulled out a big plate, a little plate and a delicate little bowl. "You know, sometimes you called her the old Bubbie. I was the new Bubbie. It's been a long time since I was the new anything." Dark hair, pink cheeks, perfectly put together in slacks and a sweater, she looked exactly the same as she'd always looked, if slightly more compact. She looked delicate now. And maybe she did look a little bit old. Maybe Emily had been away too long.

"I do remember Great-grandma Ayala, you know," said Emily. She used to love to come here to see her. They'd watch Marx Brothers movies together in her bedroom. Harpo was Emily's favourite, so great-grandma Ayala would make up stories about him, like the ones where he got lost in the woods, where he battled the anti-Semites, where he fell in love with the sad lady he saw crying in a dirty window. Emily had brought her Marx Brothers DVDs this visit, to continue the tradition.

"These plates were hers," said Blima. "And now they're mine, and when I die they go to you, so soon they'll be yours."

"Not that soon."

"And they're not for use by just anyone. Especially not guests. They have germs and who knows who raised them. These plates, they're just for prophets and for anyone who isn't corporeal

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enough to scratch good china. In case I die, now you know how we do things in this family.”

Emily fiddled with the cutlery. “Who is this guy who’s coming tonight?” she asked innocently, as if she’d just heard that he was coming.

“His name is Doran Baruch.”

“Is *he* a relative?” Emily had thought that he was one of Auntie Sonja’s old boyfriends, but she might have misread the signs. He might be some long-lost relative, although romance and blood relations might not be mutually exclusive in this place. In all her research into lodge history, his was the name that had come up the most. That’s all she really knew. “Would he be included in a family tree?”

“How is your work coming along?” said Blima.

“Fine,” said Emily.

“It’s your thesis, your mother said. What is it about?”

“I’m studying connectivity.”

“That’s not what I heard. Your mother said it was about the Internet.”

“I did research on the Internet.”

“That’s fine,” said Blima, and then she stared.

Emily didn’t know what to say next. Did her grandmother want an explanation? Most people didn’t. “I’m looking at the connectivity of people,” she said after a moment. “I’m quantifying how people change each other.”

“Go on.”

“Oh,” said Emily. Nobody ever asked her to do that. “Okay. I’m measuring social influence. The Knights of the Round Table were all influenced by King Arthur, and that’s why they all went looking for the grail. That’s a bad example. I don’t know why I even thought of that one.” She needed a central analogy for her work, some image that readers could understand, but that was a bad one. She’d been banking on the idea of family trees, of course, or of

lodge history, that's the real reason she'd come, but she certainly couldn't tell her grandmother that.

"The writers of the Algonquin Round Table all influenced each other," Emily said suddenly. "That's probably a better illustration of what I'm doing." She might even look into that example more, because non-writers were part of that round table too. Harpo Marx was a part of it, even though he wasn't even thinking of writing at the time. He was only doing crossword puzzles and correspondence then. Maybe Emily could track the development of all the writing, or how Harpo's comedic sensibilities leaked from person to person, or maybe she'd just focus, like her advisor kept begging her to do, on the actual math.

"It's math," said Emily "It's really just math."

"Your mother said it was about social networking," said Blima. "On the Internet."

"That's where I get my data."

"Well you must be almost finished. Your mother said you just needed the quiet, and the lodge is just opening for the season. There aren't even guests yet. There's nothing here but quiet."

"I just got here. But I'm almost done. I'm working some last things out, I just need some help—"

"Maybe my Eliyahu can help you." Blima shuffled around the table again, straightening the napkins one by one. "Except if Elijah's spirit can find his way to our table after all that wine, then it really would be a Passover miracle. You see, lovie, every year, Elijah drinks with the Pacific Ocean Jews, whose geographic location allows them to dine first and be most blessed. Because that's where the sun sets first!"

"Are there even Jews on the Pacific Islands?"

"It's hard to find a safe place, I know. Even here. The Kingston folks are okay, but the people in the townships, well, you know. They're always closer than you think. Anyhow. Soon after the nightfall of the Tasmanian Jewish populations, Elijah gets lost

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in the region of the Himalayas. Every year, the same. He's *shikkered*, you see, because of all those families and all that wine, and most of it, I hate to tell you, is Manischewitz. It reflects badly on our people, but there you have it."

"I like Manischewitz."

"Elijah generally wakes up in late April, in either a cave or in a motel with coin-operated beds."

"Can you please stop being weird?"

"Elijah has to drink with every Jewish family," said Blima, handing Emily the regular plates. "That's a lot of sacramental wine for just one prophet."

"Oh, of course," said Emily, as she snuck one more plate for her cousin Jonah and put it next to hers. She wanted to be close to him, to see what this lack of connection might mean.

"Hang on," said Blima, eyes narrowed. "Are you setting more places now?"

"Can we leave a place setting for any ghost?"

Blima brightened. "Of course we can set places for ghosts."

Emily smiled. Although if she could set a place for a ghost, Emily would invite Harpo Marx. Her thesis advisor might be right about her focus. She had to remember why she was here. "Do we have any old documents? I mean like passports, marriage records, birth certificates, death certificates."

"We might have kept some of those things. If they're important, we would have kept them in a safe place."

"Okay," said Emily. In her family's weird crossword-puzzle world, that probably meant that they were kept in a hidden safe somewhere. Then she felt the need to move well up in her, and then she was walking, and Blima, she saw out of the corner of her eye, was on the move too, creeping right out the door.

As Emily passed through the great hallway a few minutes later, she heard her grandmother again. "But this year *is* different," Blima

was saying. "This family is different. Most of our history shouldn't be remembered. Things are hidden here, don't forget, and I don't know why I'd reconsidered that."

Emily stopped. There were hidden things.

"Do you remember when we got death threats?" said Blima "They still throw rocks, paint on the walls. There will always be angry voices right outside the door. Why had I thought the world would be gentler now?"

Emily crept on. If one person hides a thing, it's another person's job to find it. Hadn't that always been the rule?

"Are you still following Jonah around?" Emily's great-aunt Sonja called from inside the bathroom.

"I don't follow him," said Emily.

"You used to."

"Are we related to Papa William?" Emily sat down in Great-aunt Sonja's sitting room, on the overstuffed chair that had always been her favourite in the whole place. Then she shot up again and crept from one glass-topped table to another, from bookshelf to bookshelf. This was a perfect room for hidden things. She picked up a book, flipped through the pages. "Jonah seems to think we're not related."

"Related means a lot of things."

"I'm pretty sure it doesn't."

"Oh but you used to follow Jonah everywhere! Don't you remember? He's a very proficient young man now. Not educated, but he'll do okay in his own sort of way."

"Auntie!"

"We just have to remember not to use our standards when we think about him, that's all." Emily could hear the clink of ice in a highball glass. "Not everyone can aspire to the same things. And he'd be uncomfortable if we made him sit down. Anyhow, why doesn't your mother come to the Seder?"

"She knows she'd drink too much and argue with everyone."

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"I wouldn't fight with Rebecca."

"She would probably fight with you." Maybe she regretted the entire family, not just her daughter.

"It's funny to think," said Sonja, "but Jonah used to follow you around too. Do you remember that?"

"Some things are starting to come back, I guess." There were little things that Emily was starting to remember, feelings mostly, colours. Certainly, she remembered *him*.

"Lovie," said Aunt Sonja, "could you help me in here?"

Emily followed the wall into the bathroom, touching the framed etchings lightly. They were too skinny to be safes. But even so. She used to do this a lot. She'd run her fingertips along the walls, to feel the textures and to look absorbed when she didn't want Jonah to know that she was feeling left out.

"I'm all in a state," said Sonja.

Emily blinked into the bright yellow bathroom. There was the powdery smell she remembered, the big oval mirror in its blue and gold mosaic frame. Sonja pattered from the sink to the cabinet to the sink again.

"Doran Baruch is coming tonight," said Sonja.

"Doran Baruch," said Emily. The name that showed up over and over. "Is he Jewish?" Because for some reason she thought that he might not be, yet another detail that had made his file stand out. The whole family was Jewish, obviously. All the old guests had been Jewish too. That had been the point.

"Is who Jewish?"

"Doran Baruch."

"He's close," said Sonja.

"What does that mean?"

"He's a goy with a Jewish last name. That's something that can happen. But you have to remember not to call him goy because we don't say that word in polite company. You can call him a Gentile, I think."

"I'll remember that."

"I haven't seen Doran Baruch in so many years. Maybe I should tidy."

"He's not going to see the inside of your bedroom."

"I don't know if he'll recognize me. Maybe I should put more makeup on my face. I'm feeling atticky, all of a sudden. Maybe I should clean more in here. That might help."

"Why would he see the inside of your bathroom?" Emily looked at her great-aunt's reflection – red cheeks, hair that was still blond, or dyed blond maybe, perfectly pressed jacket sleeve leaning against the gleaming countertop. She remembered sitting on that counter, lifting her arms and Auntie Sonja patting her stomach with a powder puff, the powder filling the air around her like a cloud.

"Well," said Sonja. "Your bubbie, her eyes are going, I think. She wears blue eyeshadow, and I don't think she knows what colour it is. It's blue like bluebells. That is not a colour for a face."

"Blue eyeshadow is in," said Emily.

"Usually, I tell her. But if she wears it tonight, I'm not going to say anything. I'll look better beside her if she looks like a Picasso portrait." Sonja turned back to her own reflection and clucked at it. "Anyhow," she said, "I need all the help I can get. I'm not what I was."

Emily's eyes wandered around the room, at the yellow tiles, the sparkling shower and the bath with clawed feet.

"This is just what happens when you get older," Sonja said. "You stop growing hair on your head, and you start growing a hair on your chin. Not many of them. Just the one. And it's long like a vine. That's what you have to look forward to when you get old."

"I can't wait."

"I don't want Doran to think I didn't take care for his visit."

"I thought he invited himself," Emily muttered.

Sonja smiled at Emily's reflection then cupped her cheek, her hand cool and soft. "That beautiful face," she said, "and those cheeks. I'd give anything for cheeks as red as those. You wouldn't know it now, but your bubbie and I were lookers too, when we were young. We were the legendary Kogan girls. There were songs

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written about us, but they weren't particularly good ones, so that was that."

"There were songs?"

"Lovie, I was known for dating every handsome young gentleman who came to the lodge."

"No!" said Emily, but of course she remembered. It was a story she loved.

"Oh yes. One man would drop me off at the front door, and then I would have to run to the back door to meet my next date there. And so it went every night until I met your great-uncle."

"What about Doran Baruch?"

"What about him?"

Emily had thought at first that Doran Baruch must have been one of the front-door suitors, a shy young man carrying a single daisy night after night. But he'd invited himself to a Seder, and that was too brazen for a man with a daisy. When she'd tracked him down over the Internet, she'd just asked for an interview, hadn't suggested he invite himself here before the season even started. Maybe he used to bring a rose. Roses were dangerous flowers. Maybe he was one of the back-door boyfriends, who dressed in fancy clothes and was exciting but had no scruples, who Great-aunt Sonja had had to trick and run away from in the night, leave lost in the woods while she giggled about them with her sister, safe in their bedroom. "Did you have a love affair with him too?"

"Who wasn't in love with him?" said Sonja, pulling out a tube of mascara. "It was hard not to be in love with Doran Baruch."

Emily pushed herself off the counter. She'd hoped for a no and a retelling of one of the lodge love stories, she'd wanted her aunt to say that he was certainly in love with her—that was how they all started. "Who is this guy that you put mascara on for him?"

"He's miraculous. He got to Canada first and then to the States from Communist Russia, and he came all alone. I want you to like him, Emily. No matter what else happens in your life, you have to love him." Sonja pressed her mascara pen to her eyelashes.

"He's been missing for so long."

"Where has he been?"

"You know."

"I don't. And anyway that makes no sense. You can't just automatically love someone."

Sonja just blinked at the mirror, her eyes flashing wetly. "The heart has two ventricles," she said, "the left ventricle and the right ventricle. And each of the ventricles holds an equal amount of love."

"The ventricles hold blood," said Emily. "They're part of a pump system."

"We need two ventricles for love, because everyone has at least two kinds of love in their life."

"That's just not true."

"You have your opinion and I have my opinion. We could argue until the end of the night and who would be right?"

"I took human biology courses in university." Emily pushed out of the bathroom. "I would be right."