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The Journeyers

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THE JOURNEYERS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts

in

The Department of English

by

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Abstract

On May 3, 1932, Minnie Zenkel's Original Yiddish Puppet Theater, located in the heart of the Lower East Side's "Yiddish Rialto," burns down under mysterious circumstances. The police suspect arson but there are no persons of interest, and the theater's namesake, a twenty-year old female puppeteer, disappears just after the fire; some believe she has stolen the theater's original scripts in an act of revenge. Eighty years later the successor puppet theater once again finds itself without a home, when it receives word that developers want to raze the theater, now in Tribeca, and construct a forty-foot hotel.

In the context of this backdrop we meet Jorie Goldman, who has been laid off from her long-time associate position at a prestigious law firm and finds temporary employment with a land-use lawyer hired to stop the developers. Like the neighborhood she is fighting to save, Jorie struggles with her own questions of identity. Bisexual and single, Jorie hasn't yet fully "come of age," in part because of her tumultuous childhood; at age thirteen, Jorie's younger sister died of leukemia, prompting her parents' divorce.

In attempting to save the puppet theater from destruction, Jorie will be forced to confront her past and the related fears that prevent her from finding success in her career and a lasting love. Centered on the changing physical landscape of New York City and incorporating elements of puppetry, Broadway, Yiddish, and law, this is ultimately a journey of self-discovery. On this journey, Jorie will meet a cast of characters related to the future of 31 Desbrosses Street who also wrestle with self-identity. Susan Fiske, a Korean adoptee raised by white Connecticuters, is the chairwoman of the zoning board that has the ultimate say over the fate of the building, yet she also has an undisclosed

personal interest in the outcome of the case. Biz Colton, the current owner of the building and a famous Broadway actor, bumps up against ghosts from his own past when he decides whether to sell his interest in the property. Finally, Jorie finds a love interest in Ella Leider, an academic and member of the puppet theater, who is searching for Minnie Zenkel's lost scripts.

Chapter 1

Until now, Jorie Goldman didn't question why Weber scheduled her annual review on the twenty-first floor rather than her office. She remembers in her first year when they instituted the rule. Year-end reviews are always to be held in the associate's office. It was meant to make the associates feel more comfortable, so they would be on their own turf when any "constructive feedback" was given. Constructive feedback, law firm-speak for *stuff you screwed up*.

Not surprisingly, she finds the room empty. Weber is never on time. It's usually only the associates who get last name treatment, but Weber is different from the other partners: ever since Jorie joined the firm six years ago, Weber has always been Weber. Eyeing the long conference table, she sits at the head. She has sat at this table a million times, though never in this spot. Often she gets lost somewhere in the middle during marathon-long business meetings, when the opposing counsel's voice booms from a speaker that looks out of the center of the table like a big black eye.

Track lighting showcases the modern-art copycats that adorn the walls, mostly white canvases with squiggles of color and free-floating geometric shapes. In this room they talk corporate lawyer-speak, language that would never make its way into a legal drama because most people would fall asleep mid-sentence. A partner might say, "The clause will need to be modified to include for the contingency we've baked into Section 3.2," and Jorie will nod. She is fluent.

Today the room is quiet, intensifying the gurgling sounds coming from Jorie's stomach. Too nervous to focus on any of the work she's brought with her, she looks out the window. Usually she's too preoccupied to enjoy the expanse of Central Park from this

vantage point. The horses line up on Fifty-Ninth Street, a yellow-painted carriage leading the others. Jorie remembers reading how a couple months ago activists stormed the West Side stables and freed the carriage horses. After being transported to a farm upstate, they died months later from neglect. The “farm” turned out to be a ramshackle plot of land that the owner inherited from a great uncle. The owner let the horses loose before he went on a six-month trip around South America. An activist was quoted as saying, “Better for the horses to die free than live a life enslaved, carrying around fat tourists all day.” Now Jorie can’t help but laugh when she spies a heavy-set woman toting two FAO Schwartz bags as she squeezes into the back of one of the carriages, where two boys wait.

Jorie barely hears the whoosh of the doors as Weber enters. He looks very much as he did when Jorie first started at the law firm. Then, he was still a junior partner, with a full head of hair and a reputation for being a gunner. Rumor has it that he graduated number one in his class at Columbia, and was the youngest to make partner at Hoover Carrington in almost twenty years. His blond hair has thinned in places, but he’s tall and fit, still in shape despite the punishing hours of the job. With his broad face and wide-set eyes he remains handsome, a solid crush of many young associates.

Jorie has worked with Weber for the better part of five years and slept with him for one. Because of this, she knows his peculiarities well. He orders his suits from a tailor in Venice and wears leather slippers in his own office, leaving his shoes in the hallway, much to the annoyance of other partners on the floor. In the winter he wears a hunting cap in the style of Ignatius P. Reilly. In all, though, he’s not much different from the rest of the partners. They have souls—this is not a John Grisham sort of firm where you sign your name in blood— but the golden handcuffs, as they’re often called, have some

bearing on why people stay here so long, despite the fact that the job doesn't afford any semblance of a well-balanced life. Six-figure salaries. Late-night dinners at The Palm, on the client. Sedan rides home, if she works past eight. Seeing her client's name in the papers announcing major deals that she drew up paperwork for. The freedom she might have craved as a young associate is replaced by a gnawing feeling when she's not working. She'll be tagged as unproductive. She'll be warned about her hours.

Weber puts a thin manila folder on the table. Jorie has her legal pad out, ready to take notes. He covers her hand to stop her from writing. She almost recoils from shock alone; he has made every effort not to make any kind of bodily contact in almost six months, a true model of partner/associate propriety. Yet now, his hands are on hers.

"Jorie," he says, drawing out the syllables of her name, as if he isn't certain what might come next. "You've been a real asset to my deal team, I hope you know that."

She searches his eyes for any sign of their old familiarity, the way she used to believe that he could understand her thoughts just by looking at her. His glassy brown eyes dart around, tired and impatient. Jorie starts to sweat. This isn't the normal start, where they reminisce for a bit about the deals they've worked on, or laugh over an inside joke. Today Weber is stiff, impersonal.

He's acting strange, even for Weber. She should know; she's worked exclusively for him for the last four years. While most associates work for a number of partners, a small few work for one, in the case where a partner garners enough business to keep an associate busy full time. Recently, the firm has been laying off associates left and right, because of the crash. But Jorie hasn't been worried because she works for Weber, a rainmaker. *The* rainmaker. And he is not an easy man to work for. She fields phone calls

at six in the morning and eleven at night because he hates to get a voicemail. It isn't only that. For a short time, she believed he might have loved her.

The night they first kissed, she had sat in his office hours earlier while he waited to find out if he had landed a client—the big kahuna, as it were, an investment bank of a size that would elevate him to the next tier of partnership.

“If you want to succeed in this profession, Jorie, you need to understand that the business model is changing. You can no longer be content with just providing high-quality legal advice.”

He delivered these insights after she spent the afternoon searching out the right kind of tabs for a presentation he was putting together. She had just come back from the sixth Kinko's empty-handed.

“You need to woo your client,” he said. “You need to become an expert in marketing. To be an attorney who will be in business for many years to come, you'll need to anticipate the client's needs before they even know it themselves.”

Then, Jorie wanted to tell him how crazy he sounded. She wanted to remind him that she went to law school, not some circus apprenticeship to become a clairvoyant. But he was excited and, as he spoke, she became excited, too. Sometimes she wondered how she had even ended up in this career in the first place; she couldn't identify a time in her life when she had thought that being a corporate lawyer would be the right job for her. But Weber made her feel as if she were part of something bigger than herself. Spit collected in the corners of his mouth as he talked about the “numbers” and “closing the gap” and “trending.”

Hours later, when he received word that the client had faxed over the engagement letter, he called Jorie back up to his office. He made them both gin and tonics from a small bar tucked into a cabinet, usually closed, and then they went downstairs to the 21 Club and ate steak and split a \$300 Cabernet from Caymus Vineyards in Napa. As they drank, the way he looked at her began to change. Despite the fact that she mostly dated women, she became aware of a crush that had been building inside her for months.

At the bar after dinner, when he moved his chair closer to hers, she leaned in to kiss him. She remembers thinking that it was crazy—she was more than ten years his junior, after all, and he was married. But he kissed her back. His lips were warm and giving.

How was she to know that he conflated her with the rise in his career, that when the market turned around, which it inevitably did, she would be his cast-off when his clients did the same to him?

He says her name again and it gets lost in the empty room. She wishes he would stop. It reminds her of when he used to call in the middle of the night—in the study of his twenty-four room mansion in Amagansett—to talk not about work, but about the way he missed her body, her smell, her everything. Jorie, he would say. Jorie.

“We have to let you go,” he says. “The bottom line and top line aren’t matching up.”

“When did I become a line?” she asks without thinking. She reaches for her water bottle and notices that her hand shakes.

He slides a piece of paper over. She’s familiar with this form of Separation Agreement; she’s drafted many of these herself, never before having taken into account

the person at the other end of the document, the “employee” to be “terminated.” Then, it was part of her billable hour, the words interchangeable with several other documents she may have drafted that day. But now it’s her name in the preamble. She is the employee. She quickly scans the document, as she would for a client. It tells her that she’ll get a severance package for one month, during which time she can still use the firm’s offices to find another job. She’ll continue to receive email at a new firm address, which she can use for interviews, but she’ll no longer get work emails. After the month, the alternate email address will be closed down. Other than in connection with interviews, she shouldn’t present herself as an associate of the firm, unless she first gets permission. A human fading to a ghost, she imagines, as he describes the conclusion of her relationship with the firm.

As she re-reads the document, she knows that, for the second time, Weber is dumping her. This time, on the firm’s behalf. It’s not me, he says, as if on repeat, it’s them. But Jorie knows that “me” and “them” are the same.

Somehow, she plays her role, even though she swore she wouldn’t be in this position again. She promised herself she would be smarter, she would see it coming. “If you’ll reconsider—,” she says, and he gives her a sad smile.

“Let’s be honest, Jorie,” he says, “you haven’t had your heart in it like you used to.”

Jorie holds back a laugh. Few people here, perhaps with the exception of Weber, have real enthusiasm for this kind of work. For the money? Yes. For the work itself? Please. She looks up.

“You didn’t fight for me?”

Weber doesn't answer, but from the way he won't make eye contact she knows that he didn't. This is the way it is here: when your number comes up, when the firm thinks you're replaceable with someone younger and cheaper, a partner has to convince them they're wrong. A partner with power has to give them reasons why you're too valuable to let go. A partner has to stand up on your behalf.

He points at the signature line. "Think of it as an opportunity."

"Opportunity?" Now the laugh escapes. "You *do* know how hard it will be to find a job in this market?"

Weber traces her signature on the page.

"Use this as an opportunity to do something you can put your heart into. Some attorneys come here, and it's clear it's all they ever wanted. But from the time you started..." He walks to the door.

"From the time I started?"

He turns back, and the door cuts off his body as he leans in.

"You never seemed entirely here. Most of us don't get the chance to try something new," he says, and looks down. She sees where the hair has receded in the middle of his head, leaving a lake of baldness.

"The rest of us will be here until they put us in the ground," he says, before pulling the door closed.

On her way out Jorie catches a glimpse of herself in the window. She has grown even thinner in the last few months, mirroring the firm's quest to grow leaner, shave off unnecessary bulk. Her chin-length hair falls around her face, unstyled. Now unconstrained by the firm's subtle hints towards how female attorneys should present

themselves—long hair and skirts are widely applauded—she considers chopping it off completely, as she’s wanted to do for years.

She walks one floor down to her office, stunned. People say hello as if everything is normal. Once in her office, she feels even more alienated. Despite the firm survey that said that quality of work-life could be improved by a more intimate workspace, she has made little attempt to comply. There’s the ceramic rooster her friend Amy gave her from a trip to Guatemala, and a geranium that Weber once had his secretary walk down for her birthday. Several deal cubes sit on the ledge next to the window, those tombstones made of Lucite, which are the sole physical manifestation of the hundreds of hours she spent on each deal.

She decides to leave. No real thinking can get done here, where she’ll be tempted to walk back down to Weber’s office, to ask him if he’s serious, maybe even to threaten him. Tell him she’ll call his wife if he doesn’t give her her job back. These are mistakes she doesn’t want to make given the impossible job market she has yet to navigate. She still needs Weber on her side.

On her way out, she mouths a silent goodbye to a 2,000 year-old beefy Chinese warrior sculpture that stands guard in the lobby, built for the first emperor, as the tag beneath reveals. She walks past the swishing water that patters down the wall near the entrance and tries to be soothed. But already, she misses the golden handcuffs.

If nothing else, at least she was anchored to something.

Chapter 2

Don't bother telling Mim Goldman that the Jews haven't suffered the most. She'll start in 597 B.C. with the forced relocation of Jews from Judea to Babylon. Then she'll work her way forward, one painstaking example of persecution after the next.

Just two days after Jorie received the news from Weber, she listens to her mother complain about Thomas Friedman's latest opinion piece in the *Times*. Light floods the bleached wooden floors of Brooks Bungalow. This Tribeca restaurant is one of three that pays homage to the Jewish Riviera of the mid-twentieth century, the Catskills. Brooks Bungalow attempts to evoke not the fancy hotels that rich Jews from New York City visited during the summers, but rather the bungalow colonies where the rest of the Jews stayed, Jorie's grandparents among them.

They're here for Alexandra Stein's bridal shower. Alex is practically family; her mother, Shelley, is Mim's best friend, and Alex and Jorie have known each other since birth or, as both mothers like to say, in utero. The two women met as recent transplants to Quassaick, just over an hour north of New York City on the Hudson River.

"Friedman's seriously misguided," Mim says to Shelley.

Jorie helps Shelley's mother butter her roll as Mim wonders aloud what happened to Friedman since the days he wrote *From Beirut to Jerusalem*. Jorie knows better than to speak up. Any time she tries to offer a counterpoint her mother will give her a withering look—*You, too?*—and proceed to out-fact her; she not only has an uncommonly good memory, but is better read than Jorie on that topic and enjoys displaying her mastery.

Pink and green balloons float up from the backs of the chairs. Alex ambles over and drapes her arms around her mother, moving the balloon from her meticulously

coiffed thick black hair, straightened within an inch of its life. Only a couple months pregnant, Alex looks radiant in her floral-print dress. The room buzzes with women, young and old. Jorie recognizes Alex's sorority sisters from college, all Alex copycats and, at another table, friends from her MBA program (slightly more diverse, one Asian and one Indian). Jorie desperately wanted to bow out; she hasn't been able to tell her mother yet about her job. Mim is a Class A worrier, and Jorie doesn't have enough energy to manage both her own disappointment and her mother's. But Mim told her in no uncertain terms that she had to be at the shower. "I'll write you out of my will," she threatened.

"There are so few surprises in this day and age," Alex says, giving everyone hugs. "So Rob and I decided not to find out the sex. Isn't that exciting?" The waitress weaves around her as she sets down Bloody Marys.

Jorie stifles a smirk, thinking that getting pregnant by accident and a shotgun wedding would be enough excitement. Catching Jorie's expression, Mim gives her a stern look. She's already told Jorie that she's disappointed with her outfit; Mim can't stand the way Jorie wears buttondowns untucked.

The waitress arrives to take the table's order. Rather than gussy up old Jewish standards—brisket, pastrami, smoked fish of all kinds—the restaurant serves them with minimal adornment. No additions of caviar or truffle oil, like at Kutshers Tribeca. The only nod to the fact that it is not the 1950s is the names of the local farms where the meat was sourced and, of course, the fact that the food is organic. This apparently justifies the twenty-five dollar house-made, hand-cut pastrami sandwich featured on the menu.

After Alex leaves, the women take the opportunity to dissect her choice to not learn the sex. None of them had the option with their first child to know or not know, so they pose a question: what would they have done if they could have found out? Deb, the third member of the Quassaick threesome, speaks up. "I couldn't stand to be unprepared. Of course I would find out. I remember, with Laura, I had two sets of clothes, just in case. It just made a lot of extra work."

Mim moves a large centerpiece of flowers to the side so she can better see Deb.

"I'm with my daughter," says Shelley, as she moves the flowers a few centimeters back in the other direction. "I like the element of surprise."

The women smile; all of them know this is not true. Shelley is the most controlling of the three. She buys jewelry for herself on every birthday because she doesn't trust her husband's taste, and designs her holiday cards in the summer. But far be it from Shelley to criticize her children, even among her closest friends.

"We should all be grateful that she's in good health," Mim says.

"Baruch HaShem," says Deb. "What do you think, Mim?"

"I had the chance to find out with Rosie," Mim says, her voice growing quiet. Everyone, except for Jorie, averts their eyes when Mim mentions Rosie's name. Even after twenty years, Mim hardly ever talks about her younger daughter.

Nobody prompts Mim further, but Jorie knows what Mim would have done. Mim's approach to life can be summed up in one sentence: if there is a precaution, take it. For certain, she found out Rosie's sex.

As usual at these gatherings, Jorie is excluded from the conversation. She understands that the women believe her to be unqualified to weigh in on the subject. They

do a tally in their heads: single, consumed by her career, potentially a lesbian, if the rumors are true. Usually they only include her as a point of comparison—Shelley might bring up the time that Alex beat Jorie in an essay-writing contest in high school to show that Alex has brains, too. Or Deb might ask Jorie what it's like to be single to commiserate about her own daughter's situation. But actual advice? What could she possibly add?

“It would make it a lot easier on us when shopping,” Mim says, flashing a smile at Shelley, “if we knew the sex.” Even Shelley acknowledges this to be true.

“I don't get it,” Jorie interrupts. Mim frowns, but Jorie plows on. “Who cares if it's a girl or a boy? A girl can wear a blue jumper—it wouldn't be the end of the world.”

“Jerry had his hair long at the park once when he was about two and a half,” Deb says, “and people thought he was a girl. I had to correct them all day.”

“Believe me, Jorie,” Shelley says. “When you have children, you'll understand.”

Mim exhales loudly out of her nose. Mim doesn't want to think about whether Jorie will ever have a child, because then Mim will have to think about the condition of Jorie's dating life, which means Mim will have to consider the fact that Jorie is interested in both women and men, which makes Mim incredibly uncomfortable. Mim was okay with the idea of Jorie being a lesbian, so she told Jorie once; she watched the rise of gay marriage in New England and understood that being gay no longer meant that one couldn't have all the things a straight person could. But it was the dating of both men and women that confounded her. She didn't buy into this spectrum idea; if Jorie wasn't born a lesbian, if she could choose between men and women, then why go down the road of being in the minority? “It's hard enough being Jewish,” Mim liked to say. But Jorie never

did find it hard growing up Jewish, other than the pity she felt from her Catholic friends come Christmas.

“Tuck in your shirt,” Mim scolds Jorie.

Ignoring her mother, Jorie looks around the room. Grown women throw expensive gifts at a couple that met three months before on a beach in Thailand. But because Alex’s fiancé is Jewish and he has respectable business-owning parents from New Jersey, then Alex has a party with balloons and expensive pastrami and a tray of cupcakes in the corner, each with alternating green and pink frosting. Jorie gets the message. She has yet to find the right match, but she still smarts from the fact that Mim refused to meet any of Jorie’s ex-girlfriends.

The women move on to discuss the rabbi, who has upset a congregant by not staying long enough at a shiva call. They’re split as to whether the family had a right to be angry. Jorie checks her phone to find one text from Amy, her closest friend from law school, wondering how she’s holding up in “the land before time.” She continues to sip her drink. It’s a strong Bloody Mary; the horseradish burns its way through her nose, and she feels better. Lunch is served and Jorie dives into the matzo ball soup and then the pastrami, which is as tender as advertised, with rye bread just out of the oven.

She feels herself growing tired as the present opening begins, always her least favorite part of these affairs. They’ve got an assembly line set up in the front. One Alex-clone hands the next Alex-clone presents to hand to Alex—making sure to pre-open each gift first. Another fashions a hat out of the ribbons, which Alex will pose with—but not actually wear— after all the gifts are opened. Alex squeals with delight over one gift after the next, whether it’s a negligée or a set of Wüsthofs. How excited can she be, thinks

Jorie, given that she probably picked out every one of these presents before adding it to her registry?

Shelley hands the cupcake tray to Jorie. “How are things going with you?”

“Great,” says Jorie, not quite willing to open up.

“And work?”

“Good.” Jorie pauses. “Really good.”

“I’m happy to hear it,” Shelley says, giving Jorie a warm smile.

After Jorie’s dad left, Jorie lived with the Steins for three months. Jorie loved their meticulous mid-century modern overlooking the river. With its open floor plan and large glass windows, there weren’t many places to hide, and Alex usually holed herself up on the phone in her bedroom. So Jorie spent lots of time with Shelley and Shelley’s mom, who lived with them even then, begging them to tell her stories from when they were young. Shelley would sit with her feet up on the ottoman, clicking her long fingernails together while talking about her childhood in the Bronx. Nana would tell stories about her first few years in America after the war. Because of this time together, Jorie never understood why an unspoken rift developed once she left, but she never felt as comfortable with Shelley again. Looking at Shelley now, as she unwraps her cupcake carefully, Jorie remembers when Shelley felt like a second mother.

“Didn’t you just have your review, Marjorie?” Mim asks. Mim is the only one who ever calls her by her full name. She named her after her favorite character from *Marjorie Morningstar*, a novel by Herman Wouk. Jorie read the book at thirteen and couldn’t understand why her mother would name her after Marjorie Morgenstern, a girl with dreams of acting who later becomes a Westchester housewife. Jorie found the novel

old-fashioned and depressing, but when she questioned her mother, Mim told her that she very much felt a kinship with Marjorie, since Mim also acted despite her parents' protestations. Plus, Mim pictured Natalie Wood, who played Marjorie in the movie. "I named you after a beauty," Mim often said, in such a way that Jorie knew she had not lived up to her namesake.

"It got pushed back," Jorie says, taking another big sip of her Bloody Mary.

"They're talking about partnership." Mim whispers this last word, as she puts her arm around Jorie's shoulder.

"We're rooting for you," Deb says. Sometimes it's hard to know with her mother's friends, which successes they genuinely applaud and which they resent, when their own kids haven't done the same. Deb's daughter has had an ongoing battle with bulimia and only recently has been able to live independently.

Just as Jorie takes a bite of her cupcake, Shelley interjects, "We have some good news. My Brian's just found out he's made partner!"

"Partner?" Jorie says, struggling to swallow. Shelley's son, Brian, is two years older than Jorie and Alex. She knows it's unfair, but she automatically suspects that Brian somehow cheated his way up the law-firm ladder. As a child Jorie called Brian "the snake" because whenever he would start losing a game, which was often, he would change the rules. He was never a particularly good student; he finally buckled down midway through college and it took him several tries to get into a third-tier law school. Yet he always seemed to end up okay.

"Your firm hasn't made anyone partner in your group in two years, right, honey?" Mim asks. Jorie nods, understanding that this is Mim's way of acknowledging the

prestige of Hoover, Carrington & Waldrop, a firm with two hundred attorneys in New York alone, and offices in D.C., California, Milan and Tokyo.

“Well, according to Brian, it doesn’t get any easier once you make partner,” Shelley says. “Brian is already complaining about how he gets no respect.”

“What do you mean?” Jorie asks.

“It seems the associates he used to work with still joke with him a lot, calling him a nickname he had from his younger years, which he hates. And they’re not following the protocols he’s set up. The way he likes to receive documents and so on.”

The vodka has worked its way into Jorie’s head; she rolls up the sleeves of her shirt. “In my experience,” Jorie says, “I think it takes time to earn that.”

“He already has the title and it’s been years in the making.” Shelley’s voice grows slightly higher in pitch.

“I’m sure it will work out,” Jorie says.

“Brian says he’ll have a talk with the associates. Remind them of the hierarchy.”

The women nod solemnly.

“What’s so funny?” says Shelley, still looking at Jorie.

Jorie knows she should just let it go. Out of the corner of her eye she catches Alex holding up a negligée, as her friends squeal around her. “You’re so beautiful, Al!” one says.

Jorie sighs. “I think it’s a horrible strategy,” she says. “If he tries to have a talk with them I can almost promise that they’ll make fun of him endlessly behind his back. You can’t just tell the associates to jump. They respect partners who have power. No one needs to remind them of who feeds them.”

Nana brushes up against her side, and Jorie leans over to help her unwrap a cupcake.

“Mom, that’s no good for you,” Shelley says, as she pulls the plate away. “Brian is a real asset to his firm. Do you know that he already has a \$500,000 book of business?”

“That’s impressive,” Deb says.

“He earned that on his own?” Jorie asks.

“A partner who retired respects him so much that he gave him his two biggest clients.”

“Figures,” Jorie mutters, taking a final swig of her drink.

“What?” Shelley asks, no longer containing her irritation.

Jorie studies these women at her table—Shelley, Mim and Deb, the matriarchs of her youth.

“Your family is the family of lucky breaks. Alex won that essay contest in high school because she cribbed from an article in *Seventeen*. And Brian? He flunked out of every SUNY school before you hired a bunch of tutors who helped him get in shape, one of whom happened to be the brother of an admissions counselor at Ithaca. And today?” Jorie looks around the room. “We’re here today because your daughter got knocked up at a Full Moon party on Ko Phi Phi, but luckily the baby’s grandfather owns an electronics chain in north Jersey.”

The women gape. Nana, not realizing what just happened, reaches again for the cupcake but Shelley doesn’t stop her. As she watches Nana bring the cupcake to her plate, Jorie thinks that Nana had the luckiest break of all. Shelley’s parents were both Holocaust survivors, something that is rarely talked about in public because it’s too painful. It was

the one thing Nana wouldn't talk about when Jorie had her brief stay with the Steins. Nana's husband was a famous klezmer musician and Nana was a singer; they met after the war in New York City. Jorie was obsessed with their story as a child, that there were people she knew who outlived the horrors she learned about in Hebrew school and social studies. She could never fathom how they ever adjusted after what they had gone through.

From the startled expressions on the women's faces, Jorie knows that the women have finally heard her. But Jorie feels no vindication, just nausea, as bits of horseradish and tomato juice linger in her stomach.

Minutes later, Jorie waits for Mim in the restaurant's vestibule. Alex's father stands with his back against the wall, tapping away on his phone.

"I'm on duty," Alan Stein says, when Jorie gives him a quizzical look. "Have to transport all the presents back up to Alex's place."

"Good luck," Jorie says. "I'm pretty sure Alex got everything off her registry."

"How are the ladies today? Shelley was in rare form this morning. Running around the house like a lunatic."

"They're okay," Jorie says, thinking of their expressions after her outburst. "Mim is her usual self. If she nags me one more time to tuck in my shirt, I can't be responsible for my actions."

"Your mother should know better by now. She'll be chasing you off just like your father."

Jorie's father left Quassaick when she was just thirteen—a cowardly deadbeat, according to Mim. Although Jorie never liked Alan all that much, when her father still lived at home he and Alan were very close.

“For all Mim’s strength,” Jorie says, “Mim surely doesn’t possess the power to run someone permanently out of town.”

“I’m not getting in the middle of this,” Alan says, raising his eyebrows. “Not my place to gossip.”

The last time Jorie heard from her dad was on her twenty-fifth birthday. The card was postmarked from somewhere in Europe. Inside, Art had recreated the scene he once painted on her bedroom wall, a mix between a seascape and a moonscape. Mermaids and colorful fish plunged into darker and darker parts of a deep blue sea, until mermaids became astronauts (with ponytails still emerging from their helmets). Jorie’s favorite part of this was the in-between place—the place that was not really underwater and not really outer space. It was a cobalt blue, and her father drew a hybrid figure, with her face. A mermanout, he named it. The mermonaut held a trident in one hand and a moonrock in the other. She had fins rather than feet, but also wore a space helmet. She floated in the backdrop—a mix of stars and coral, fish and aliens. As a kid, Jorie lost herself in that mural time and time again, always struck by the ease with which the mermonaut straddled both worlds. Mim had the mural painted over when Jorie went to college.

Mim won’t even look at Jorie as they attempt to hail a cab. They’re supposed to go antiquing—Mim’s favorite—but Jorie’s not sure whether her mother will beg off.

“I’m sorry,” Jorie says. “I wasn’t thinking.”

“Leave it alone, Marjorie.” Mim’s voice sounds tired.

They find a cab on Hudson, and ride crosstown to the Lower East Side, the neighborhood where Jorie’s great-grandparents first lived when they moved to New York

from Russia in the early 1900s. Then, this area was overcrowded with tenement buildings, the streets pulsing with pushcarts and immigrants, who bargained for goods in a mixture of Yiddish and English. Before she died, her grandmother told her names of streets that no longer exist—Cannon, Louis, and Goerck—all cleared away mid-century for public housing projects. As they pass one newly renovated restaurant after the next, Jorie wonders what this place will look like in another hundred years. Maybe cars will be banned from Manhattan and all of the streets from Allen to Clinton will be razed to make way for an enormous, walkable square, a throwback to days when people gathered in a central place for work and shopping, with their homes on the outskirts. Jorie doesn't come to this neighborhood much anymore—despite the undeniable appeal of many of the establishments, there are too many twenty-somethings trying to reclaim the boozy glory of their college days.

Entering the antique store, sandwiched between two bars offering handcrafted cocktails, they're greeted with an imperceptible nod from the pasty-faced clerk, who continues to read his newspaper. Still not speaking to Jorie, Mim beelines for the back, while Jorie pretends to examine a side-serving table near the front. She has always felt uncomfortable in stores like this, never knowing exactly what she should be looking for. But Mim is confident, known among her friends for her keen eye.

The song playing over the shop's quiet speakers filters into Jorie's ears. She hasn't heard the song in years, and it takes her a moment to place it. It's "The Man I Hope to Be" from *Persephone, in Puppet*, Jorie's all-time favorite musical. At the time it came out, Jorie was twelve. Biz Colton wasn't yet famous, only a young, no-name actor

who up until then had played supporting roles in a handful of Broadway shows. But after that year, everyone knew his name.

“The Man I Hope to Be” was picked up by all of the radio stations. The song was everywhere at the time: in the car, when Mim drove Jorie to soccer practice; or at home, since Mim always left the radio on when making dinner. Finally, she bought Jorie the double cassette for the show and from then on, it became a staple in the Goldman house. So much so that when Rosie was diagnosed with leukemia, and was asked what she wanted to do most of all by a friend who worked for the Make-a-Wish Foundation, she chose to take her family to see *Persephone*. It didn’t matter in the end; Rosie responded so poorly to the last round of treatments that the family never made it. But the friend surprised Mim and Jorie with tickets for the show later. That’s when Jorie got to meet her childhood hero, Biz Colton, in person.

Jorie scans the store for Mim, but can tell Mim hasn’t noticed the song yet. She’s inspecting a clock, and calls for the shop clerk.

“What type of spring does it have?” Mim says.

The clerk raises his eyes just above his newspaper before crossing the floor.

“It has oval loops,” the clerk says. As he speaks about the vintage, the color drains from Mim’s face.

“It’s a beautiful clock,” the clerk states with authority, wrapping up his pitch. But Mim is no longer listening.

Jorie knows the vacant expression well, the same one Mim wore for an entire year when Jorie was thirteen, just after Rosie died and Mim went crazy. This time of year is always hard for Mim—the memories of hospital rooms and sleepless nights in late

December as she watched the illness ravage her daughter, culminating with the finality of January thirteenth. Jorie doesn't have to ask; she knows where Mim is. She's thinking about Rosie.

Chapter 3

There is nothing Biz Colton hates more than to be called an old queen. It's rare that anyone would call him that these days, but Rick Belleza is an old friend, one of the few he still talks to from those early days when he was a nobody from Kansas, pulling up to Port Authority bus terminal with his father's army duffel.

"You old queen," Rick repeats, in his Yves Saint Laurent blue-pinstripe, at the top of Rockefeller Center. "Never say I don't do anything nice for you." Rick pulled strings to get them in between the lunch and dinner service, ensuring that they'd be the only diners. The Empire State Building is visible despite the clouds settling atop the city. Biz hasn't been to the Rainbow Room in years. He prefers not to go to restaurants where he might be recognized, but Rick lured him here with promises of a quiet, late lunch. Even though Biz has lived in the city for almost thirty years, the sight of the Empire State Building always brings him back to those first few days. After Biz couch-hopped for a couple of weeks with friends of his voice teacher in Wichita, he met Rick, and through Rick, Vance. How glad Biz was to be able to shout a big Fuck You to the family back home, those sons of bitches who made fun of him since the time he could understand language, for what they described as his peculiar mannerisms. Even in the darkest times of those first few months in New York, there was always the promise that things would get better, something he never felt in the top of his childhood bunk bed, where his half-brother slept on the bottom.

Rick looks exactly as he did in the early Eighties, skinny as a birch in winter, his curly black hair coated in product, still chain smoking even though it's no longer permitted indoors. Rick claimed to want to talk business, but it's almost an hour into

lunch and he hasn't referred to anything remotely related to his properties. A residential real-estate developer whose aspirations outflank his achievements to date, Rick is known for the stripped down, high-glamor factory buildings he converted into lofts in Williamsburg. Rick models himself after Donald Trump, not only in the earnings he hopes to attain (at least at Trump's highest points), but also with respect to his flamboyant manner and need for attention.

When the waiter pours more wine, it's Rick who reaches out to cover Biz's glass.

"None for my friend." He flashes a big smile at the waiter, dimples appearing on each cheek. The waiter pours the rest into Rick's glass and Biz eyes his empty one. Even though he knows he shouldn't drink, can't drink, not a day goes by that the urge doesn't come.

"Don't think your kindness absolves you from calling me *that*," Biz says. "I am not an old queen."

Rick shrugs, but Biz still cares. The old queen was always Vance, and Biz was the farm boy. Vance would pretend to pout when Biz would call him *that*, sticking out his lower lip, but Biz knew all along that Vance took it as a point of pride that he landed Biz in the first place. Well before Biz hired the media consultants and became a household name, he had radiated charisma such that people were always drawn to him. "Don't misbehave," Vance would whisper to Biz when the two would go out clubbing, as a reminder of Biz's power over others and the dark places it sometimes landed them; when, after hours of drinking and doing lines and dancing, Biz would wind up in a bathroom stall with another guy and Vance would erupt in a jealous rage.

“You may well be Broadway’s darling, but someone’s got to remind you where you started.” Rick clinks his full glass against Biz’s empty one.

“And I presume that’s your job?”

“Who else is left?” Rick asks. He has a point. If it wasn’t AIDS or drugs, then it was the distance that Biz put between him and his old friends. Long after Mineshaft, Studio 54, the Saint, long after he split from Vance and stopped using, Biz walled himself off from the world he had known. He had miraculously been spared the horrible virus that took most of his friends, and decided to pour himself into maintaining the one thing he still believed in: himself. Following the advice of Vance’s longtime friend, Elsie Fenton, a wealthy socialite who sided with Biz after their split, he hired consultants who helped him spin a new image. They put Biz on talk shows and planted stories about him in *The Post*; they got him on a float in the Macy’s Thanksgiving Day Parade, and then into some romantic comedies. One year, he even hosted the Tonys. These media consultants, whom he compensated so well that he had to downgrade his apartment for a time, turned him from a Broadway actor into an actual star.

Biz doesn’t know where Rick is going with this memory lane bullshit, but he knows he doesn’t want to go there today. The past is not where he wants to dwell; for Biz, reliving old times is akin to watching horror movies. He looks at his watch and realizes he actually does have to leave. Arianna, his current publicist, and Elsie Fenton’s granddaughter, has scheduled a meeting for him downtown with some producers who are contemplating a revival of *Persephone*.

Biz gestures to the waiter for the check, then waits for Rick to pick it up once it comes. This is an unspoken deal between the two, ever since Biz learned the hard way that he shouldn't have delegated every aspect of his life to "trusted" advisors.

"But I haven't even warmed up to my pitch yet," Rick complains, as Biz puts his jacket back on. Rick takes a long drag of his cigarette, blowing smoke into Biz's face.

"I need to be downtown in twenty minutes. Meeting with some producers."

"Downtown?" Rick raises an eyebrow. "Well that's just what I wanted to talk with you about."

Biz cuts a swath through a group of tourists and beelines toward the avenue; Rick, a good six inches shorter, struggles to keep up. Tiny droplets hit Biz's coat and he walks faster, worrying about his suede shoes.

"You want me to shout this?" Rick says, and Biz slows down, allowing Rick to catch up. The smell of burning sugar fills the air as Biz narrowly misses a man selling candied nuts from a cart.

"All ears."

"You've still got that property in Tribeca?"

Biz gives him a look. For years, Rick's been sniffing around the property deeded to Biz by Vance. Rick was always envious, arguing that because Biz stole Vance from him in the first place, he should have received an interest as well. Biz would never engage in schooling Rick about his revisionist history—namely that Vance had left Rick long before Biz came on the scene—but he has told Rick time and again that Vance left the property with a caveat: Use it to help artists. This didn't stop Rick from asking about

the property time and time again. At some point, Biz got a break from Rick's persistent harping in the form of a zoning reprieve, when Rick learned that the property couldn't be used for residential purposes.

"It's not for sale," Biz says.

"Not for sale, yes. But would you consider taking on some investors? There are some interested parties."

"And what would investors want in an old factory building?"

"What if I told you that my lawyers found a workaround, and this could be huge money for you if you stay on as a partial owner?"

This stops Biz in his tracks. Rick hasn't brought up Biz's financial woes since he gave him a version of the "I told you so" speech after the Texas billionaire who was supposedly managing Biz's fortune went bankrupt. Months later, after an indictment by the federal government, it turned out Biz was a victim in a Madoff-style Ponzi scheme.

"What kind of workaround?"

"It's a lot of legal mumbo jumbo that's not important to discuss right now. Bottom line is we can build residential, but a new concept. Condo meets the hotel. The owners will get ownership units, but it will be rented out as a hotel for part of the year so the unit holder can make some money. Once all your units are sold, you'll be sitting on a pile of cash."

"And there's an interest for this kind of thing?"

"This project will bring us to the next level."

Rick is no idiot, Biz thinks, contemplating the offer. He's probably done his homework.

“You’ve held onto it this for so long and it’s just sitting there empty, or practically empty. It would be like giving up nothing in exchange for, well, a lot of money.”

Not in exchange for nothing, Biz reflects. In his early years, it was Vance who supported him, both emotionally and monetarily. Even though Vance was a banker and scion of a real-estate family, he was more committed to the idea of the arts than Biz was; Biz was more focused on his own career. But Vance always dreamed about opening up his own performance space, especially for performers that didn’t get the level of attention that mainstream shows brought in. He envisioned the space as an umbrella stage for puppeteers, performance artists, tumblers, and experimental theater of all kinds. Biz laughed at him then, told him he’d been hanging out in the East Village too much. But it was through these connections that Biz got his own first break. He met the puppeteers through Vance. When they were consulted on a new musical that involved puppets, they helped Biz get the audition that gave him his first huge break. Eventually, Vance gave the puppet theater space in one of his buildings, the building he left to Biz when he died.

Biz hails a cab on Sixth Avenue. “Let me think about it.”

“I’ll need an answer soon,” says Rick. “The investors won’t wait around long.”

As the cab pulls away, Biz’s body relaxes. He takes a deep breath. Hurling down the avenue, he sees men and women on every corner trying to hail cabs. It’s that time of day when drivers are switching over from the day shift to the night, and most are off duty.

Biz pities them, the unlucky, who will have to reverse course and take the subway or bus, or walk. He’s always had this ability to stay a step ahead of others, both in his career and in his personal life. Even in Wichita, when he was despised by most, he still managed to get out relatively unscathed—a scratch or two in a fight on the playground,

but nothing like the brutal beating his classmate received for being too effeminate. It's this edge, together with the ability to never be weighed down by self-doubt, which has allowed Biz these victories over time, big and small.

A melody comes to mind. "One day more," Biz sings softly. "Another day, another destiny." He played Javert in *Les Miserables* for two years on Broadway, but he always loved Jean Valjean's solos. This song comes to him often, a reminder to focus on the future. It's been his motto of sorts over the years. Perhaps a cliché, but it has served him well.

The rain dances on the top of the car, harder and faster now. Don't dwell on the past. No more Wichita. No more Vance. No more powerlessness.

The buildings around him shrink after leaving midtown, as do the hordes of people. The sky starts to clear as Biz's cab curves into the bottom of the island. Nearing his destination, he feels back to his normal self. He doesn't need to be held back by a promise he made when he was still a boy, learning how to navigate the freedoms he discovered upon moving to New York.

Instead, there is tomorrow, which might bring another role. And Rick's offer.

Chapter 4

Despite Jorie's change in circumstance, her morning routine is unwavering. Light streams in and Jorie's up as usual—on the subway by 8:45, at the coffee place by 9:16, and at 666 Fifth by 9:28. Once she closes the door to her office, the charade unravels. She clicks on her computer but her old work email has already been turned off. Her secretary Keiko has left a note telling her that they will come for the folders by the end of the day.

She half-heartedly starts a job search, barely able to focus on the dozens of job sites while she types in criteria to match her skill set. There are some open positions but, as she predicted, not many. Her mind wanders back to Weber's words. Should she do something completely different? Backpack around India? Work on a coffee plantation in Guatemala? Volunteer with a nonprofit and see what life's like outside the corporate sector? Years ago, these are things that would have appealed to her, but when she crossed thirty the wanderlust fizzled. On the last vacation she took, with Amy to Costa Rica, she noticed that her appetite for the day-to-day planning of trips—where to stay, what attractions to see—had lessened, and started to feel like a chore.

And a new career path entirely? Jorie had friends from law school who were devotees to public interest law, who took one-year fellowships out of law school and moved between governmental and nonprofit jobs. How receptive would these types of places be to someone who has spent the last six years at a law firm, making over \$200,000 a year, with only a paltry amount of pro bono work to show.

Jorie's computer dings, a reminder from her calendar. Enlarging the window, she scans the details and a sick feeling takes root. Fordham roundtable at two. She completely forgot that she's supposed to present her experience of life at a big law firm to current

law students. She considers cancelling, but with only a couple of hours before she'll have to leave, she'll burn bridges if she cancels now. Plus, if she doesn't show, Amy is likely to worry. She's already called twice, probably to talk about the event, where she's also presenting. Jorie has left the calls unreturned.

When she leaves her office later that afternoon Keiko follows, explaining she has a doctor's appointment. They ride down the elevator in silence, but Keiko gives Jorie a sympathetic smile. Jorie wants to say something, to acknowledge her situation, but words escape her. Most of the secretaries treat the associates as second-class citizens, saving their attention for the partners they work for. But Keiko has always been different. From the start she was kind to Jorie, bringing her a second coffee in the morning and always warning her when one of the partners was on a tear. But they never really became friends, Jorie always unsure as to how to navigate the relationship between attorney and secretary.

As they exit the elevators, Jorie freezes. In the center of the lobby Weber is standing next to a young woman. Jorie recognizes her as a new associate, whom she met at a cocktail party a few weeks back. NYU law and Princeton undergrad. Credentials better than Jorie's. Weber hands the woman a folder but when she reaches for it he tugs it back, a solemn expression on his face. The woman laughs, throwing back her long red hair as if she were in a shampoo commercial. Jorie feels a presence behind her; Keiko has stopped as well. She follows Jorie's gaze and nods.

"Who's that again?" Jorie asks. The secretaries know more about the associates and partners than anyone.

Keiko squeezes Jorie's arm. "The new you," she says.

When Jorie enters the law-school auditorium, she finds she is the last panelist to arrive. Amy is already behind the dais. As Jorie comes onstage, Amy gives a wave.

There are a lot more people than she expected. Given the climate for securing law firm jobs, Jorie can understand why. The articles in the paper have said how recent law school graduates are not getting placements as they used to. But the statistics are more than bleak: one school included graduates who had taken jobs as servers in restaurants or stock room clerks at Home Depot as “successful placements.” Jorie imagines that the students today probably are looking for some reassurance that there are actual jobs out there.

She’s relieved that there’s no room next to Amy—if anyone would be able to tell that things aren’t right, it would be her. They met at a cocktail party the first week of law school, behind a row of plants intended to wall off a section of the veranda for the new students. Jorie had needed a break from the mingling. She and Amy shared a cigarette and peeked through the leaves, guessing the kind of lawyers their classmates would be solely on their postures. Close talkers were litigators. Erect spines signaled corporate law types. Relaxed shoulders, hands in pockets, meant they had enough connections to go in-house. The most sociable, the ones who looked like they were actually enjoying themselves—those probably wouldn’t stay in the law for more than a year or two, but break off to become entrepreneurs or politicians or writers. The few oddballs not fully integrated into any of the conversations were the wild cards.

“They could be geniuses—” Amy said.

“Or won’t last a week.” Jorie said.

From then on the two were inseparable, forming a bond that would last them well past law school and into the start of their careers. In recent years, though, they've drifted. Jorie moved to Brooklyn, while Amy's work with a telecommunications company took her all over the globe. Despite this, whenever they see each other Jorie immediately remembers the intimacy from those years when they were new to New York.

Jorie wedges herself in the only empty seat, between a dark-haired woman and a baby-faced man. The panel begins with a round of introductions from all of the speakers. They're all from the class of 2001 and represent a number of different paths—government, nonprofit, in house attorneys, and law firms, large and small. The moderator then asks a series of questions from different panelists, calling them out by name. Months ago Jorie remembers filling out a survey—it must be from this that she knows whom to target for each.

As her fellow classmates weigh in, Jorie looks at the law students in button downs and jeans, spread out among the vast number of seats. In this same room, Jorie remembers the three-hour orientation during the first week, when the head of the law school told them that they would have the power to make great change in their professional lives. A palpable nervousness pervaded the room. Pencils tapped against fresh legal pads, keys jangled in pockets, people whispered and snickered and glared. They had all read the *One L*. They had all watched *The Paper Chase*. They all pretended that they were braver than they felt. When the head of the law school admonished them about the responsibilities they might bear as practitioners, it occurred to Jorie that she had no idea how she ended up there. Of course, she took the LSAT and wrote essays and paid a \$50 application fee, but when did she actually decide on this as a career? Law school

could have been substituted with Med school or Grad school or any other Important Post-Collegiate-Sounding School, and she would have felt just the same.

Yet here she is today, speaking about the results of that decision. The moderator tells the panelists she will move on to more focused questions.

“A number of you have worked at large firms and some, like Jorie and Megan, still do,” the moderator says. “What the students are most interested in are whether you believe hard work propels you to the top, or if there are other factors that lead to someone making partner. Jorie, let’s start with you.”

Jorie freezes. A week ago, she might have said it was hard work, all the way. She had exceeded the targeted billables every year. But with her termination, can she still say this in good faith? *Don’t hold yourself out as a representative of the firm*, Weber had told her just last week. If this gets back to him, she could lose the small severance she’d been granted. Possibly even lose Weber’s recommendation.

“I’d say it’s a number of factors,” Jorie says, playing it safe. “Certainly exceeding billables are a big part of staying on. But there are soft factors as well—whether you have connections that might lead to new firm clients. How well your group is doing overall and the balance of partners to associates in the group. And...” She pauses, and looks out at the students’ eager faces.

“And there is a good bit of luck involved. People hitch themselves to the right partners. Those partners champion them, and continue to help them over time. As much as the firm tells you that you’ll all be judged the same, in reality, I don’t think it works out that way.”

“Can I offer another viewpoint?” The woman to Jorie’s left speaks up.

“Yes Megan,” says the moderator. “You’re at Knowles and Gillibrand. Tell us about your experience.”

“At my firm, at least, it’s all about work product. The better product you deliver, the better you do. We have a system of review where no partner can exact undue influence on an associate’s future.”

Megan has the confidence Jorie has seen in many of her female co-workers. Their speaking style starts to resemble the men they work with—they assume an authoritative tone and no longer end their sentences in the questioning up-talk that marks many a female junior associate.

“I’ve no doubt that the firm has policies in place to be fairer,” Jorie interrupts. “But in reality, is that how it always works out? Are there no favorites?”

Megan blushes as she resumes talking with fervor, bandying statistics about who left in her class year and who stayed on. “Honestly,” she says, “the only people I know who have ever felt sidelined by the firm’s decision were people who didn’t want to understand how they were performing. They intentionally put up blinders, and then they cried like babies when they were let go. Personally, I don’t have much sympathy for them.”

As the moderator asks another question, Jorie absorbs the sting of Megan’s words. Should Jorie have seen it coming?

Amy grills Jorie as the two approach the Coliseum Bar, named for the convention center that used to be across the street. The windowless rectangular eyesore was torn

down when Jorie and Amy were in law school and in its place the Time Warner Center now stands.

“What was that about?” she says.

“Drinks first,” Jorie says, and they descend into the bar, which had a makeover as well. In law school you could find members of their class on any given night dancing in front of the jukebox, while a recent Irish transplant named Mickey served them shots of bottom shelf tequila and two dollar beers. Today, the place has votive candles on the tables and Christmas decorations throughout creating a warm, festive atmosphere. Gone are the low lights, the floor that would stick to your feet when you made your way to the bathroom.

“Okay, so why were you so hard on Megan?” Amy asks, as the bartender sets down two glasses of wine.

“Do you even remember them having a wine list?” Jorie asks, as she swirls her wine and inhales. “I remember two flavors: red or white.”

Amy gives her a hard stare. “Are you going to tell me what’s going on?”

Jorie pauses, not ready to hear Amy’s opinion on her current situation. Amy’s two most distinctive traits are strange bedfellows—she’s an insecure know-it-all. She enjoys tearing a person’s argument to shreds, making them feel completely incompetent, but then seeks reassurance that she is indeed right. When Jorie had told Amy about Weber after the first night they kissed, Amy warned her against it like a sensible friend should, speculating that it would only hurt Jorie in the end. Jews or Protestants might actually leave their spouses—Amy said, with authority despite never having had an affair herself—but the Catholic never would. In typical Amy fashion, she wouldn’t let up until

she had made her point in several different ways and Jorie had to concede she was right. She reminded Jorie of Mim in this way, so wrapped up in being right that she loses sight of Jorie's feelings.

But Jorie knows it's time. As she begins the story, it takes on a dimension of reality that it hadn't before. The telling makes plain the facts: Jorie has to find a job; Jorie doesn't know what's next. Amy's face falls when Jorie mentions seeing the more impressive version of herself in the office lobby. She comforts her and talks her through the next steps. She even says she might be able to get her an interview in-house at one of the TV networks, through connections at her job. Her positivity is such that after two glasses of wine, Jorie feels energized, wondering why she hadn't called Amy right away.

Two hours later, though, Amy's good vibes have worn off as fast as Jorie's buzz. She trudges up the stairs to her apartment, a one-bedroom walk-up on the edge of Carroll Gardens. She moved to the area before it became fashionable, back when her building was still predominantly Italian, when the social club two streets over wasn't another overpriced cocktail bar, but a place where neighborhood elders sat outside on the sidewalk in the middle of the day.

She puts the pile of mail on her kitchen table and throws her jacket atop a stack of other coats abandoned throughout the prior weeks. When she enters her bedroom, piles greet her everywhere. Piles of papers from the firm. Piles of clothes she's been meaning to give away, the pieces that have started to feel too girly and frilly. Piles of books she means to read, but never has enough time for. When she first moved in five years ago, after living with a series of roommates in Manhattan, Mim helped her set up. Jorie

insisted on a black and white color scheme, so Mim found the black-stained oak bed and the fluffy charcoal area rug covering much of the hardwood floor. She also picked out the soft gray paint color on the walls. Looking around, Jorie wishes she put as much into the upkeep as Mim put into the decorating. She keeps her apartment clean—you couldn't grow up in Mim's house without internalizing her penchant for cleaning—but she slacks in the less visible areas. Large dust balls gather under the bed, and if you were to run your fingers down the blinds over the windows, a thick streak of dust would stick to a finger.

Getting in bed, she checks her personal email, where Amy has already sent a cheerful message. Out of habit, Jorie tries to log in to her work email, but the system won't let her, so she opens up her new work email. There's a message from the "new" Jorie, whose name is Sharon Alonso. Sharon asks if Jorie properly saved all the drafts of a particular document because she can't find some changes that were supposed to have been made.

Instead of replying, she goes to the firm's homepage and scans for her name. She's momentarily relieved to find she is still there. In her thumbnail she is grinning so hard it looks as if she might be a patient on a psych ward. The woman behind the camera had told her to hold her smile when she first sat down, but it took at least ten minutes for her to get the equipment working. Jorie's hair is long in the picture. Stick straight, as always, but past her shoulders. Her ears peak out, like they have in every photo she's had taken since she was a kid. She usually wears her hair down for this reason.

She clicks on the new girl's profile. Sharon Alonso has a perfect smile. Not toothy, not withholding. She looks kind, but competent. As if Sharon knows she's lurking, Jorie's computer beeps again, with a second request. She asks a second question and

imparts that she really needs the information because Weber wants a re-draft of the document by midnight.

Seeing his name on screen, Jorie wishes she could punch Weber. It dawns on her that the only contact she'll probably have with him from now on is through a screen. She can search his name and look at his law-firm profile. She can pull up that one picture of him hunting whitetail deer with a friend in the Rockies, which comes up on his friend's blog when searching his name. He came back from that trip so proud, "conqueror of the outdoors," he called himself. He told Jorie about his great success, as evidenced by the antlers that hung over the wall of his study. The more she thinks about Weber, the more she seethes.

She knows Weber's wife's email address by heart. She often wrote to his wife when they worked late, well after his daytime secretary was gone for the day, and he had to relay an important message: Won't be home tonight. Give the kids a kiss. Jorie has heard his wife's small voice ask, "Who is this?" in a foggy sleep, when Jorie would call Weber late at night with an important question.

Long after Weber had told her it was over, seriously over, he came back. Not crawling, exactly, but humbled. He stopped by her office one night, when everyone on her floor had already gone home, and asked if she wanted to get a drink.

"You're working hard enough," he had said. She didn't know why she went, but she was curious, really. Jorie had never had an affair before Weber. It was a mystery to her what would happen next, just as it was a mystery that he ended things in the first place. But as they sat there at the bar, the same one where they'd gone that first night, he talked breezily about his work and his home life, and Jorie sensed what he was leading up

to. The bar was empty, more dingy than she remembered. Rather than being clandestine, like a New York City speakeasy, it was old and fusty, with worn carpet and the faint smell of old books. When Weber stumbled off his stool to use the bathroom, Jorie suspected that he had fixed himself a drink in his office before he came knocking on her door.

After another round, he looked at her earnestly and it almost brought tears to her eyes—that look—but her stomach would not stop stirring; she knew she could not make the same mistake twice. And so, when he leaned in this time—life is so fleeting, he'd said earlier—Jorie pulled back. She watched his face contort, the separation of his lips, how his eyes resonated surprise.

“I understand,” he said, when she explained how she didn't think she could get into something again. While this gave her some solace in the moment, the ability to say no, she still felt angry and wished she wasn't afraid to speak her heart. What kind of fool do you think I am, she wanted to say.

“It's probably for the best,” she said instead, still afraid to disappoint.

He smiled. “Of course.”

She would receive her notice not more than three months later.

Jorie pictures Weber, safely ensconced in his carpeted office, slippers on his feet, scribbling his strategies to build a legal empire on his whiteboard. There sits Sharon Alonso, furiously taking notes while trying to decipher his actual requests from his ramblings. His office is spotless, not a speck of dirt on the carpet. His shoes, those shiny Italian-made leather loafers with tassels, are tucked on the small mat outside his door.

She opens a new email message and types his wife's name. The message takes only minutes to write as the words have been in her head for months: Your husband is a cheater. I know this because ~~he had an affair with me~~ we had an affair for almost a year. I always thought you had the right to know. ~~I'm sorry.~~

Her finger hovers over send.

Chapter 5

As much as Jorie hates going home, or to the place she still refers to as home despite having lived in the City for over ten years, the ride to Quassaick is always an anodyne. Leaving from Grand Central, the express train shoots up the east side of the river, providing passengers with majestic views of the Hudson Valley.

Today is Rosie's yarhzeit. She and Mim will go to the cemetery, as they have every January on the anniversary of Rosie's death.

At the station, Mim is late. Jorie waits for her on the steps leading to the platform, watching one person get picked up after the next until she is the only one. Mim's tardiness used to drive her father crazy. It got to the point where he would take his own car, sometimes with the girls, and let Mim dawdle on her own. Sometimes Jorie would stay behind with her mother, taking pity on her last-minute compulsion to pick up things around the house, or fold that final load of laundry while it was still warm. On some level Jorie understood Mim's stalling, the anxiety over leaving her comfortable home for an unpredictable social engagement.

"This is how you leave the house?" Mim says, when she pulls up. She takes in Jorie's jeans and silk-screened t-shirt, visible under her sweater.

"Good to see you too, Mom," Jorie says, as she leans in to kiss Mim on the cheek. "I'll have you know it was the cleanest shirt in my dresser."

Mim sucks in her teeth at Jorie's admission; in Mim's house they did laundry at least once a week, she and Jorie taking turns. Jorie might push back against Mim's criticism, but only so much. Heading toward the cemetery, she's reminded of the time she pushed too hard, when Mim landed an extended stay in the psychiatric unit of a local

hospital. They had had a fight after they got back from the performance of *Persephone* in the city. They never made it to the show when Rosie was alive, but they later went at the urging of the Make-a-Wish representative, who was an acquaintance of Mim's. The performance was magical, but meeting her childhood idol was a letdown. Biz Colton seemed out of it and thought that Jorie had leukemia, perhaps having had received some bad information from the scheduler. When they got home, Jorie broke down and told Mim what had happened. Mim offered some comforting words, but for Jorie it wasn't enough. She shouted at her mother, told her that even though Rosie was gone she still needed a mom. A few weeks later, Mim would wander away from home. They found her at the cemetery and brought her directly to Quassaick General's psychiatric inpatient unit.

The Jewish cemetery is located in the old part of town, where Main Street once bustled with energy until the shopping mall opened up on the other side of town. Now the businesses are all shuttered, the old homes neglected. A fitting place for a cemetery, Jorie thinks, in a neighborhood that has crumbled.

Mim uses a key, borrowed from the temple, to let them in. She tells Jorie that Shelley will come to the house later. Jorie is relieved that it will be just the two of them. Plus she hasn't yet apologized for her behavior at the shower.

The two walk in silence to the plot, which has adjacent space once intended for Mim and Art. It's morbid, but whenever they come Jorie wonders if she will take her father's place, the three Goldman women reunited in death. She knows better than to say this aloud.

Mim reads from a prayer book as Jorie stares at her sister's plain stone. Her mother picked out a quote from Rosie's favorite book as a child, the *Little Prince*. "Only with the heart can one see rightly. What is essential is invisible to the eye."

In the distance, Jorie can make out the building where she, Mim and her father gathered before the burial. The rabbi instructed them that they could view the body if they wanted. In Jewish tradition, there was no open casket, but the family could choose to identify the body before burial. Mim and Art, standing on either side of Jorie, both agreed that they did not wish to see the body. It was the one thing that they had agreed upon in months.

"I want to see her," Jorie spoke up. Her parents shook their heads, but Jorie insisted. It still didn't feel real, that Rosie didn't come into her room before school, and model her outfit in Jorie's full-length mirror. That she and Rosie wouldn't ride their bikes to the town courts and play tennis on the weekend.

And so the rabbi opened the casket and Jorie alone peered in, her parents just behind her. It wasn't a sheet around Rosie, like in a childhood game they played, but a white linen dress, something Rosie had never worn. Fear grew when she realized that despite Rosie's body being there, Rosie was not, the body a shell for the sister she once knew. She closed her eyes and dove into her mother's side.

Twenty minutes later they pull up to the one-story ranch house where Jorie spent all of her formative years. After her father left, Jorie always assumed they would move. But while Mim constantly protested that she wanted to leave—that, in fact, she could not stand the starter house that Art had bought for her, sight unseen—she never once took

Jorie to an open house, always inventing one excuse after the next why it was a bad time to move.

Getting out of the car, Jorie tries to picture her mother seeing her future home for the first time. The l-shaped house with cedar shingles was unlike any of the other two and three-story white colonials nearby. Set back from the street by a large front yard, it must have been a big change from the Bronx, where Mim grew up on Walton Avenue. The story Jorie grew up hearing was that Mim met Art at a community theater in Manhattan. Mim was a fledgling stage actress (apparently she had no speaking lines in her role in the play) and Art designed the set. She ignored him for most of the run of the show, attracted instead to the lead actor, but finally paid attention to Art when he told her that her fly was down when they all went for drinks one night after a show. Having come from a home where no one ever said what they were truly thinking or feeling, Mim appreciated Art's forthrightness. Years later, after he left, she would admit that she put too much stock in honesty. "I could have heard less about what he really thought of me."

When Art proposed, Mim accepted, on the condition that they move out of the City, a place she had grown to loath. She wanted a more wholesome environment, imagining weekend hikes with her family. Her backyard would be a lavish garden, where she could pluck tomatoes and would no longer have to rely on supermarket produce. Instead, she found herself indoors at McDonald's and roller-skating rinks for children's birthday parties on the weekends. And, as for the garden, Mim discovered that despite spending a fortune on flowers, she was no match for the local deer and rabbit populations. She would always be city girl at heart.

On the way into the house, Jorie notices that the shingles, blackened in spots, could use a cleaning. But she doesn't comment on it to her mother, but instead follows Mim inside and to the kitchen.

"Did you bring home your laundry?" Mim asks.

"I haven't brought home my laundry since law school, Mom."

"Just trying to be nice," Mim says, putting on the coffee.

"So, honey," Mim says, once they settle at the breakfast nook. "I'm worried about you."

Before coming home, Jorie finally told Mim about being let go. She felt it would be too hard to tell her in person, especially on such a heavy day, so she told her on the phone one night, after spending a day binge-watching TV shows she never had time for while she worked.

"Shelley mentioned something about a potential job," Mim says.

"Is there anyone in Quassaick who doesn't know?" Jorie says, pushing her coffee away.

You shouldn't look a gift horse in the mouth, Marjorie. It's Brian who offered. Something about zoning law."

"That wouldn't make any sense. I practice corporate law. Asking me to be a zoning lawyer is like asking a psychiatrist to do brain surgery."

"I wasn't saying you should take it," Mim says. "Just that you don't need to be so dismissive. Hear her out."

When Mim sees the despondent look on Jorie's face, she softens. "You'll be fine, honey. You've got all that great experience. I'm sure you'll get an offer soon."

Jorie refills her mug, not wanting her mother to inspect her too closely. But her mother knows her well.

“Is everything okay, honey?” Mim says. “You don’t seem right.”

“Everything’s fine, Mom.”

Jorie lets warm water wash over her hands at the sink, while she washes Mim’s breakfast dish. She contemplated for a long while whether to email Weber’s wife. One week ago, she pressed send. She tried to justify it in her head—that Weber’s wife had a right to know what kind of monster she was living with—but Jorie was no good at fooling herself.

Unfortunately, she didn’t think through the consequences of her actions. Without Weber’s recommendation, it would be very difficult to get another law firm to take her. While her résumé might get her an interview, the firm would always want to talk to the partner she worked for. Standard protocol.

Mim continues to talk to Jorie while she washes dishes, filling in Jorie on the latest temple gossip. Jorie half-listens as Mim walks about how the *alta cockers*, as Mim refers to the seniors who comprise the executive committee of the temple, no longer sanction the Purim festivities because they believe it has become too much of a scene. Last year, the combination of the bounce house, trained performers from a traveling circus, and a karaoke machine (the words projected on a billboard-sized screen so that passersby could roll down their windows and join in) proved too much for the older congregants.

Seeing Jorie’s disinterest, Mim suggests they go for a walk, since the day is warmish for January, but Jorie excuses herself to her bedroom, claiming she needs to

spend some time on her job search. When she closes the door behind her, she takes down the photo albums from the place they're stored inside her closet. At first, she's not even sure what she's looking for. But as she looks through the sequence of photos—the girls in Disney World (pre-illness), visiting Mim's parents in the Bronx (pre-illness), the beach trip to Wildwood (just Mim and Jorie)—she starts to understand what she hopes to find in the faces of her family. She's looking for something to help her reconnect to her father. In the weeks since Alan's comment she's come back to the idea that there's a lot she doesn't know about her father and, in turn, her mother.

When she was twelve, her parents sat her down to tell her about Rosie's diagnosis. They didn't use overly clinical language, but explained the battery of treatments and testing that Rosie would undergo. She listened to the words, but couldn't quite put out of her mind the other events of the evening: Why did she feel so icky when Jeff Cannelli stuck his tongue in her mouth during that stupid game in the closet?

They asked her if she had any questions about what they had explained. Jorie only had one question: Will Rosie be okay?

Tears filled both her parents' eyes. "We hope so," her mother said.

Hope turned out to be complicated. For Mim, hope meant if she wanted something badly enough it would have to be so, and so she researched every angle of the illness until blast cells and platelet counts and induction therapy became the most used words in her vocabulary. For her father, hope meant providing for the family while Mim took Rosie in for appointments and treatment. For Jorie, hope meant treating her sister as normal, because to do otherwise would be akin to admitting defeat.

But even then the chaos of Rosie's disease, the spiraling ups and downs from week to week, day to day, were a force greater than any of their versions of hope.

Looking at the old photos, Jorie wonders what Mim could have done to make Art leave, as Alan insinuated. She tries to remember what it felt like to have her dad around, but nothing comes easily to mind. She finds one photo of him playing tennis with Alan, the two wearing short shorts. Art has his arm around Alan's back, but Alan isn't smiling. Alan was notoriously competitive; Art must have won the match.

The story Mim always told Jorie of why Art left was simple: he couldn't handle Rosie's death, and so he ran. Jorie knows this was true for a time—he went to Seattle for a couple months after Rosie died, but he also came back. He took an apartment in a neighboring town, and Jorie began regular visits with him. But his job took him on the road more and more—he would travel around to various opera companies across the States for work. The visits to Quassaick became fewer and fewer as Jorie got older. Mim said it best—Art was the kind of person who couldn't stand confrontation, and as Jorie found her own voice, she found that he stayed away more often. Later, he went back to England, where his mother lived.

An hour later, Mim knocks to let Jorie know that Shelley is coming with Chinese. It's tradition that they order take-out from Rosie's favorite Chinese restaurant, which has changed names three times. Mim looks surprised to find Jorie on the floor, with the albums scattered around her, but she doesn't say a word. Jorie has given up on talking to her mother about her father, why he left at the beginning, why he stopped calling altogether. Before Jorie goes downstairs, she stuffs all the old postcards into her

backpack. She'll look at them later, and Google all the addresses. Perhaps something will come up.

When she hears the doorbell she joins the women in the living room. Shelley brings way too much food for three people. Mim goes to get the dishes, and Shelley busies herself with a copy of Audubon's bird drawings on the table. Mim took up bird watching a couple years back. The hobby faded as quickly as it surfaced, as most of Mim's hobbies did.

"I've been meaning to apologize," Jorie says. "Those things I said about Alex and Brian. I hope you know that—"

Shelley interrupts. "It's okay. It seems you've had a lot going on." She leans over to give Jorie a hug. Shelley's always been more affectionate than Mim, sweeping the girls up in hugs since they were little.

"Did your mother may mention that an old colleague of Brian's is looking for an attorney? I think he plans on sending you an email."

"Like I told Mim, zoning is not really my area of expertise."

"Take it from me," Shelley says. "You take the help where you can get it."

"That's what Mim said."

"It's like this story my mother used to tell me about the camps. She was in Latvia, worked at a factory, making batteries. You know this?" Jorie perks up; it's the first time Shelley's ever told her about her mother's experience there. Shelley picks at her long fingernails as she talks.

Jorie shakes her head. "I never knew that."

“Apparently it was the birthday of her supervisor, and my mother came up with this idea to make a puppet show because her supervisor performed all over Poland with a troupe. The other women thought it was too dangerous, but my mother thought—‘here is a chance to make nice to someone, we should do it.’” Shelley imitates her mother’s thick eastern European accent.

“My mother told me how she made the puppets, cutting small pieces off their own uniforms and using bits of thread from their kerchiefs. She scrimped and scraped as they could. She convinced a few others to perform the show using whatever they could for a stage—bedding, I think, and they kneeled behind a table.”

It’s hard to picture Nana, well before her stroke, in a concentration camp putting on a puppet show another lifetime ago. Jorie had no idea things like that even happened in places like that, having seen the black and white films in Hebrew School of the liberation of the camps, all those walking skeletons.

“The play was so popular,” Shelley says, “that my mother performed it a second time after other people in the camp heard about it. The supervisor was overjoyed, and so thankful, but several weeks later her demeanor changed. At this time they were being harder on the supervisors because they said the women weren’t working hard enough. So they put pressure on them. The supervisor became very angry and started mistreating all of the women under her, my mother included, finding fault with her work. But she would always slip a little extra food to my mother at the end of the day. My mother said it kept her alive.”

“That’s an amazing story.”

“The saddest part is that the supervisor was killed right before the war ended,” Shelley says. “When they knew they would lose the war, they killed anyone who was under eighteen or over thirty before they evacuated the camps.”

Jorie gasps. “Why?”

“They moved everyone far from the camps,” says Shelley. “They only wanted those who were strong and able to make the walk.”

After Shelley leaves, Mim and Jorie go to a movie. They settle in to old, comfortable routines, sharing a popcorn and large soda. When they get home, they both change into pajamas and retreat to the sofas in the living room, where each takes a different couch and they curl up with their books. This ritual started when Jorie had night terrors as a teen, so Mim suggested reading together until they both were tired enough to go to bed.

Jorie falls asleep, a restless sleep, and dreams of Rosie. They sit on the bridge, like Jorie did in high school. The art students at Quassaick High School were introduced to the Hudson River school painters in the ninth grade. For one assignment, they looked southward from the bridge, where the sloped curves of Breakneck Ridge and Storm King Mountain appeared to meet at a narrow bend in the river. For the whole time they were there Jorie’s sketchpad remained untouched. Jorie had never been as good a painter as Rosie, who took after their father, with an eye for color and detail. But Jorie kept at it anyway. After Rosie died, it felt more important to get better, as if she had to hold up the end of some bargain with her sister. *I will live for both of us*. But that day on the field trip, staring out between the holes in the fence, Jorie couldn’t bring her brush to the page. The

achy blues and greens, the shimmering surface of the river on that spring morning—they rendered her incapable of doing anything other than staring. In the dream, Rosie chastises her for her blank canvas. “Jorie,” she says, “it’s time to finish the painting.”

Jorie wakes in a cold sweat, and finds her way to bed.

Chapter 6

Jim, the General Counsel, hovers at the Chair's door before knocking. His cheeks are flushed, as always, some skin condition he once explained, unsolicited. As he takes a step inside, Susan Fiske minimizes her screen.

"I wanted to give you this, Chair," he says, sliding a thin accordion file on her desk. "Case file you wanted." Once all of the paperwork comes, Susan can expect that the folder will more than quadruple in size.

Jim lingers. He's not cowed by Susan's brusqueness, as applicants before the Board of Standards and Appeals have described her, although she would take issue with this categorization. Susan has never been a sycophant or a suck-up—that's not how she made her way to the top of this agency. Rather, she's a hard worker. But she's also not naïve. She's well aware that the Mayor had hoped to fill her position with a minority. She, Korean-born, fit the bill. This type of casting doesn't bother her per se; no one makes it in New York City politics without appreciating their strengths, whether they are familial connections or membership in some closed-door Columbia fraternity.

"I also wanted to let you know I got a phone call from DOB," Jim says, referring to the Department of Buildings, a sister agency. While the two agencies work together, mostly cooperatively, it can be awkward at times, since the Board has the power to review DOB decisions.

"Yes?"

"Something might be coming down the pike. A property in Tribeca. An as-of-right hotel, somewhere around forty stories, but the neighborhood's getting itchy."

"Do you know the address?"

“31 Desbrosses. DOB has already issued a permit to excavate, but if I know that community board we’ll be hearing from them soon.” Looking at the address, she remembers reading about the property somewhere, but it was a developer she didn’t know much about. Sometimes unfamiliar applicants waltz in and think that the Board is as it once was, a cozy playground for rich white men.

“Thank you again, Jim.”

He doesn’t budge. “You think it’ll be as big as Little West 12th?”

“That’ll be all, Jim,” she says, her voice sterner than intended. When he leaves, she opens up her screen again. She rarely uses her work computer for personal business, but she just received an alert that a message had come through on a dating site she recently joined. From the correspondence she’s received thus far, Susan doesn’t get her hopes up. She’s received no serious offers yet, and for good reason. Because of her public position, she refuses to put up any pictures. She has decided that if she finds anyone interesting on the site, she’ll initiate contact and send pictures later.

This is the first formal attempt at dating that she’s made in over six years, since her divorce. Her ex-husband was Jewish, also from Connecticut; she met him while studying abroad in London her junior year. Dan’s favorite story to tell about her was that he introduced Susan to kimchi, having tried kimchi long before she ever did. He thought of this as a great mitzvah on his part, as if somehow he was solely responsible for connecting Susan to this important piece of her past: a love of pickled cabbage. He always left out the fact that once she did try kimchi, she found that she hated it. This proved to be true of her ex as well: even still, six years later, when she happens upon a memory of him, perhaps how he liked to curl up against her most mornings like a small

boy against his mother, the same feeling surfaces within her as when she ate kimchi with a meal: a sour taste in her mouth that lingers for hours, unresponsive to even the strongest antiseptic.

Susan was adopted at age one by a white Christian family living in Connecticut, yet it was Dan who tried to get her to connect to her Korean roots. He made it out to be for her own good, of course, but he was the one to always bring it up, as if not knowing her birth mother somehow made her incomplete. What this harping taught her was that while her husband loved her because she was foreign-looking, she was not foreign enough. She beat Asteroids in sixth grade just like him. They both had the Connecticut accent, often swallowing their t's. Her ex had since remarried a woman of the same name, but this time a Korean-born woman whose family had moved to the U.S. when she was eight. She imagined that Susan Hong, his new wife, made kimchi at home.

Her eyes hover on the email and, as expected, it's from a person with a poor grasp of English who asks her if she wants to "go to resturant and have some fun." She wishes she could meet someone in a more conventional way, but she hasn't had much luck. Just last week, at the retirement of the City Planning Commissioner, Susan met a colleague only a few years younger than her, who seemed to be interested. They talked for over an hour about the New York City streetscape, both excited about the newly designed High Line on the old West Side railroad tracks. But at the end of the night, when he suggested that they continue the conversation over dinner, Susan brushed him off. She doesn't want to meet any more Dans, but even another Dan would be better than compromising her public position by dating someone who might come within her purview as chair.

The Board of Standards and Appeals occupies half of the seventh floor of 334 Whitehall Street. The hallway adjacent to the elevator banks sees heavy foot traffic due to the function of the other half of the floor: a series of small courtroom-like chambers, where appeals from actions of all of the City agencies are first heard before they make their way up to the state courts of New York. If you happen to take a wrong turn and go into the agency by accident, you would encounter slow decay agency-style: peeling veneer on the faux-wood desks; tired fluorescent lights that sputter and hum; an off-off-white, nubby carpet that's worn into valleys from the footprints of almost thirty commissioners over the course of five administrations.

People in the know call it the BSA. Susan has a small staff: only seven people full-time, including two application administrators, three examiners, one secretary and a general counsel. The agency doesn't create zoning laws, but has a much more circumscribed role related to land-use. When a city zones a particular parcel of land, the courts have deemed that this effectively constitutes a "taking" of a citizen's property without just compensation, as proscribed by the takings clause of the Fifth Amendment. This is where the BSA fits in. In instances where a citizen can demonstrate that due to the City's zoning the property will be unusable, the agency can grant a land-use variance and, in effect, override the property's zoned restrictions. Among other things, the BSA also hears appeals from decisions of the Department of Buildings.

The overseers of this body are a group of commissioners who have past experience in various aspects of land-use and city development. Comprising the Board are one engineer, one urban planner, a CPA, and a long-time developer, who is also an attorney. At the top is Chair Susan Fiske, an architect by training.

She turns back to the case file on her desk and the handful of news clippings Jim has included about the new project. Susan's well acquainted with both Community Board 1 and Tribeca's active civic groups. Knowing them, and seeing the scale of the project, Susan guesses they'll challenge the building, and it very likely might end up in her agency. If it does, it will be a high-profile case, possibly exceeding the media frenzy about Little West 12th Street. As the level of external scrutiny on the agency increases, this inevitably results in increased investigation into Susan's own life. During Jane Street, a battle over the height of a commercial building just next to the High Line, one reporter camped outside Susan's apartment in the West Village and approached her for comments while she was walking her dog. That level of attention scared her. Susan logs out of the dating site, considering the possibility that if an appeal is filed she'll suspend her limited profile altogether.

Her job is too important. For now, it's all she has. Dan used to pick on her for her Puritan work ethic, as he called it, the punishing schedule she kept with her architecture firm. But the truth was, it never felt punishing to Susan. Work was the one constant that gave her pleasure. Susan had always loved to draw, but was turned off for a time when her art teacher in high school insisted that they focus on abstract art. For Susan, this was tantamount to jumping off a cliff blindfolded; she left the class distraught, convinced that she didn't have it in her power to imagine something that didn't exist. But in drafting, the only other class she could switch into to fill the same requirement, she discovered the tools that would save her: the t-square, the protractor, a compass. Defying her expectations, the structured drawing freed Susan up to imagine bigger things. To this day, there is nothing she likes more than being given a set of limited parameters within which

to invent solutions. Her current job suits her in this way, too. Though her friends told her she would probably be happier at Landmarks, she feels that in this position she gets to serve people, not just buildings. While many big developers grace her doorstep, there are a lot of smaller guys, too: a synagogue in Brooklyn that wants a bigger parking lot for its congregants; the family that has lived in a humble bungalow in Breezy Point since the 1920s and finally has enough money to build a two-story home. For these people, she can grant relief.

She closes the folder on 31 Desbrosses, and starts researching the project online. This can be dangerous—she doesn't want to discover things about the site or the developers that are not relevant to what will come before the Board. But today, curiosity overcomes her. She reads for twenty minutes and, by the end, she's ready to place a bet. In her judgment, Susan predicts this will be bigger than Little West 12th Street.

Chapter 7

She assumed it was a done deal, the way Brian and Shelley had talked about it, but the more questions Eric Stephens asks, the more Jorie realizes that she doesn't yet have the job. At least she had the smarts to wear a suit, she thinks.

She and Eric sit on the ninth floor of Twenty-Eighth and Madison. There are no stunning views from the law firm's conference room, but large black and whites of famous New York cityscapes cover the walls. This room isn't so much a conference room as a second office; the lights are warm LEDs, homey enough to feel non-institutional. Eric periodically pats his head with a handkerchief as he asks Jorie questions. Even after the exchange with Shelley, Jorie still wasn't sure she would call. It wasn't until she saw the effect of her email grenade to Weber's wife—the silence from the few law firms she had interviewed at all transformed into resounding “no's” by the week's end, as if she were blacklisted—that she made the appointment.

The moment she understands that she might not get the job Jorie does the exact opposite of what she should do; she starts to clam up. Her sentences, once smooth, meander and become peppered with questions and doubts. It gets so bad that when Eric asks about the neighborhood she lives in, she freezes completely.

“Carroll Gardens?”

“Carroll Gardens. Tell me what you know about its evolution as a neighborhood.”

“Well... The thing is, it's totally overrun now. With stores. And bars.” She pauses.

“Different than when I first moved there. Even near my end, by Red Hook.”

Eric stares at her and Jorie knows she needs to pull herself together.

“Ms. Goldman.”

This is the main reason she didn't choose to go into litigation in law school. In her first year, they all had to participate in oral arguments. That was the one assignment Jorie failed altogether. No matter how much she practiced, she never liked the feeling of being grilled, one question after the next. On the corporate law side, it was different. She worked for one partner at a time. She wasn't expected to speak extemporaneously. The stakes felt lower.

"I'm sorry, it's just, I haven't prepared for this." Something about Eric reminds her of boys she knew in law school—the ones in her study group who, despite their smarts, she could never actually imagine practicing law because they seemed too nice. Perhaps this is what allows her to be honest. "I didn't realize from Brian you'd be interviewing me today."

"No?" Eric says. "Well, this isn't a formal interview or anything, but I did want to get a sense from you as to why you want this work. I mean," he says, picking up her résumé, "it doesn't look like you have any land-use experience. And you're a friend of Brian's, so I obviously wanted to meet you out of courtesy to him. But I've got to be honest, I don't automatically trust big firm experience. I need someone who is motivated and hungry, not content just to sit back and read documents at a desk for ten hours a day."

Jorie takes a breath. "I'm a really hard worker. I've worked at Hoover, Carrington and Waldrop for six years and I've had nothing but good reviews there. And I don't mind doing grunt work of any kind. I'll work hard, and I'll read up on land-use law. And the history of Carroll Gardens."

This gets a laugh from Eric.

“I’m not all that interested in the history of Carroll Gardens. The reason I ask the question is that in all of the cases I handle it’s important to keep in mind the context of the neighborhood, and the history. How the neighborhood got to be the way that it is. That’s the soul of this practice. When we study property we’ve got to go beyond the lot in question to take in the surrounding neighborhood. And how does one determine the character of a neighborhood?” This is his specialty, he tells her, putting his pulse on the life of the neighborhood as it is today. This is a talent that one must cultivate.

“If you call yourself a land-use attorney,” he says, taking a soda from a mini-fridge and drinking straight out of the can, “you’re either pro-development or anti-development, and probably you’re pro-development. This is because at any one time there are many more developers willing to spend money on attorneys than there are community groups or other interested citizens who want to stop development.”

Jorie listens, taking notes.

“An attorney who is pro-development has a certain mindset about what the zoning laws represent,” he says. “Essentially, they believe that your property is your property, and you should be able to build on it however you wish. With this understanding, any rule that regulates how one can build is an imposition. It’s like a kid whose parent tells them they can’t have ice cream for dinner. The kid is hungry, wants ice cream, and is not interested in the parent’s wiser assessment that ice cream will be no good for them. The kid wants ice cream. The kid should get ice cream.” Jorie doesn’t interrupt to point out that already in Eric’s description he has already demonized the other camp to be children. This single-mindedness is something she has seen in lots of lawyers.

“On the other side,” he continues, “are the people who support the zoning laws and believe they represent a collective compromise: I will not build a factory next to your home because that is bad public policy. But the subset of this group who will actually fight new developments?” He holds up his thumb and his forefinger less than an inch apart. “Miniscule. Not only does this tiny subset support these laws, but also they are skeptical of any development that will affect the character of the neighborhood. These are the people who make up my client base: community groups who mistrust developers and, for the most part, want to keep things at the status quo.”

As they shake hands, Jorie feels certain that she’s crossed a major threshold. Even more, she’s excited. This could be her chance to actually effect change, just as the dean foretold.

Practically anticipating her thoughts, Eric cautions her. “It’s important not to get too self-righteous about what we do. We almost function more like a public watchdog, helping to defend the neighborhood against an onslaught of the most powerful interests. But we’re trying to preserve something that will eventually change—all neighborhoods do—and, as often as not, we’re representing some people with money against people with more money. This is how the zoning laws started, in effect, in the early part of the twentieth century. They coincided with the construction of the Equitable Building on 120 Broadway. The owners wanted to build the tallest building around, and all of their neighbors—mostly banks—complained about how their own property values would go down because of the shadows the building would cast. Thus zoning was born.”

They stop at his office on the way out so he can give her some paperwork. While he digs around his desk for the appropriate forms, she notices a picture of him scaling a large rock. Based on looks alone, she wouldn't have pegged him for a rock climber—he's on the shorter side and doesn't have an athletic build; not fat, exactly, but blocky. One of Jorie's ex's was a dynamo, the first girl she dated. They spent a summer bouldering and climbing up in the Hudson Valley, where Jorie had grown quite proficient, but eventually left it behind after they split. It was the kind of sport where you needed a partner as spotter.

"I want to do the Nose in El Capitan," Eric says, catching her looking at the photo. "Yosemite."

"Tough climb," she says.

He tells her he can't offer her much money, at least initially, but it's enough that Jorie can meet her expenses. Also, he mentions that she'll be subject to a thirty-day test period, just to make sure that they work well together.

"I wouldn't worry about it," he says, reading her expression. "So long as you're able to follow instructions you should be fine. I had a nightmare situation a year or so ago. I took on a temp associate and he almost lost a hearing because he didn't stick to the deadlines."

He pauses for a moment. "Obviously I'd also like to vet you with your former partners first. Just to make sure you haven't bluffed your way here."

"I'm sure HR can confirm my time there. The firm is quite reputable, I'm sure you know."

“I’m well aware of Hoover’s reputation and I know some of the partners quite well. That being said, I’d still like to speak with someone who knows you. Can you give me a name?”

When he smiles, he looks younger.

Now that she’s relaxed, her mind works quickly. “Remember your metaphor? The child who wants to eat ice cream for dinner?”

Eric nods.

“Well, think of the partner I worked for as one of those children. Who wants to eat ice cream for dinner.”

“And?” Eric asks.

“Let me put it this way,” she says. “I told him he couldn’t have it anymore, and he didn’t like it.”

Chapter 8

Her first day at the new practice Eric comes to Jorie's make-shift office, which doubles as the conference room, and piles two heavy books on the table next to her laptop.

"These," he says, "will become essential in your practice."

Eric explains that one book contains Title 27 of the New York City Administrative Code, which contains the Building Code for the city, and the other is the New York City Zoning Resolution.

"Consider the Zoning Resolution to be your new best friend," he says.

Jorie wipes a thick line of dust off the side.

"It's online nowadays," he says.

He instructs her to start with those texts, and a primer on zoning law, so that she'll be up to speed in no time. As with many legal practice areas, an understanding of zoning law in New York City starts with the statutes themselves; the area of law grows around the codified words of the legislature. A law school professor once likened statutes to the Bible, while court cases were more similar to tractates by religious scholars who dig into the statutes' meanings and analyze how the language plays out in real life.

She settles into a routine fairly quickly. Ten-hour days. Half an hour for lunch. Not much disruption while she's working, for the most part. When Jorie goes to the bathroom, or leaves for lunch, she passes Eric's secretary, who is almost half a foot taller than Eric, with saggy skin and a thick mask of foundation on her face, a shade lighter than her actual skin color judging by her neck. Jane barely nods at Jorie when she passes. She'll answer Jorie's questions with one-word answers, with little inflection. Jorie notices how Jane reapplies her lipstick throughout the day, and once caught her spraying perfume

on what looked like a pad of message notes. Jane's iciness reminds Jorie of Keiko's warm, protective manner.

Eric's style is completely different from anything she had experienced at the firm. Even the laid-back partners there expected her to update them regularly and in a formal manner. A gag email circulated once among the associates: Report from the Twenty-First Floor Men's Room on the State of Lowly Associate's Stool. Eric, on the other hand, is much more casual—he'll stop in to see what Jorie is working on throughout the day. At first she is taken aback by speaking off the cuff about what she's researched, or asking questions even if she hasn't read everything she can get her hands on about the subject, but slowly she starts to trust herself.

This experience leads her back to the skills she learned in law school, when each day would involve tackling unfamiliar areas of the law. When she thinks about the narrowing of her career since those days, she starts to understand the limitations of specialization within the profession. In some sense, as she moved deeper into corporate law, working with public companies doing '34 Act filings, she became less well rounded, not willing to explore other areas, instead deferring to other experts on certain statutes. But now she's opening these doors anew; at Eric's one-man shop there's no one else to ask for help. She had been taught by her old job to avoid going past the bounds of knowledge walling her in. But as she begins to poke, the membrane is more soft and pliable than she had imagined.

“Got exciting weekend plans?” Eric asks at the end of her first week.

“Nothing much,” she says. Whether she should contact her father still occupies her, but she doesn't know Eric well enough to mention it. After a bit of searching she

found her father's address in London—she thinks it might be her grandmother's house, if she's still alive. Though she's played it out in her head several ways, she's having a hard time deciding what to write. Being a lawyer has taken out any of the spontaneity in writing—she can't help but think of the letter as a request for specific action, but she hasn't yet identified exactly what she's asking for.

“I'm climbing at the wall on Sunday. Once the weather gets nicer, I'll be back out at the Shawangunks.”

“Does your wife climb with you?” Jorie asks.

“Kate? God no. She thinks I'm nuts.” Eric grins. “But I've been training inside for months. Stir crazy at this point.”

Unlike Weber, Eric talks about his wife, but in a kind way. He mentions how they watch football together, an activity Kate has grown to enjoy over the time they've been together. Jorie wonders if she'll ever get the chance to meet her.

In her third week, Eric calls her into his office and tells her it's game time. She'll be given her first case. In law school they called this recitation of details that make up the beginnings of a case the fact pattern. As a student, she was charged with spotting the issues lurking beneath. As a practicing lawyer, she not only has to spot the issues, but is also expected to advise the client how best to proceed.

“There's a building in Tribeca,” he starts. “A five-story factory building they used to call ‘store-and-loft,’ where goods would be stored and then shipped out.”

“You're a historian, too?” Jorie asks.

“As a land-use attorney, it behooves me to know. Plus, I had Larry Kahn as my mentor. He is the walking textbook on New York City zoning. He always says that to understand the present you must understand the past. In Tribeca, these store-and-loft buildings were constructed in the mid-nineteenth century back when West Tribeca was a commercial hub. Washington Market, a few blocks south, anchored this part of the city as the wholesale food capital. Years pass, and then Washington Market shuts down in order to build the World Trade Center. The market activity moves up to Hunts Point. The area declines and then, who comes in?”

He pauses for Jorie to answer.

“Artists?”

“Half right. Artists *and* entrepreneurs, who both see potential in these large loft buildings, but for different ends. The artists want cheap places to live where they have space to make their art, and the entrepreneurs, well, they want to develop the area into high rises. Or they envision that Wall Street will grow north, and investment-banking firms will pay beaucoup bucks to take over their properties. For a while, the artists are winning. But in recent years, the tide turns. The neighborhood is definitely more residential nowadays than manufacturing, but what’s still up for grabs is the scale. Will it be all luxury high-rise buildings, or will there still be a nod to the history of the neighborhood and the artists’ loft style that developed in the Eighties?”

He paces, but doesn’t make her feel anxious the way Weber did. Jorie suspects he knows as much about his area of the law as Weber knew of his, but Eric doesn’t use the information to make Jorie feel small. Instead, he seems excited to share it.

“Our present controversy is 31 Desbrosses Street. A fairly typical building for the area. They still call it the Sweet Factory, even though it hasn’t pumped out any candy for decades. Most recently, a Yiddish theater group has used the bottom two floors. Apparently the troupe has been formally evicted but they’re still occupying the building, squatting. While the developers have a permit to excavate, they’re still waiting on their building permit from the Department of Buildings. It’s an M1-5 zoning district, which means no residential, but they’re seeking a permit to build a transient hotel. Any questions so far?”

“Just that I’ve always wondered how to say the name of that street. Desbrosses. I assumed it was something French.”

Eric smiles. “It’s a tricky one. Desbrosses was a merchant in the eighteenth century and played a role at Trinity Church. You’ll be saying it a lot so get used to it. No silent letters. Des. Brah. Ses. Emphasis on the second syllable.”

“Got it.”

“So the developer is allowed to build a hotel on this lot as-of-right.”

“If it’s as-of-right, that’s a good thing for the property owner, right?” Jorie asks. The term “as-of-right” was one of the first she learned. The Zoning Resolution divides development into three major use groups: residential, commercial, or manufacturing. When a property owner builds as-of-right, it means that the Zoning Resolution allows the type of use contemplated by the owner. Plans still have to be approved by DOB, but as far as use group goes, the owner has to seek no further relief from the zoning code.

Eric slides over two wrinkled pieces of paper. Each advertises new luxury condos in Tribeca. Unsurprisingly, the address is 31 Desbrosses. A couple clinks champagne glasses on a balcony, and the Hudson River serves as backdrop.

Jorie studies the picture and the words under it. “But this says condos? And you said residential wasn’t permitted?”

“Indeed.”

“So they’re saying to the Department of Buildings that they’ll build one thing—a hotel—but advertising condos?”

Eric nods. “Sneaky, huh?”

“Does DOB rescind permits?”

“My guess is that in this case the developer is more savvy. They’ll talk their way out of this. Claim it was an error by some over-zealous marketing agency to hawk their units. But we don’t have to speculate—we’ll hear about it first hand tonight.”

“What’s tonight?”

“Community Board meeting. Your introduction to the circus.”

They arrive at the cafeteria of the Borough of Manhattan Community College after the meeting is already in progress. People fill the seats, hastily put together in rows, and some stand around in the back. Jorie takes a mental tally: about ninety people are present, including the board members.

Eric points out their client, Miles Diamonte, a determined activist for the preservation of Tribeca and the head of the Tribeca Partnership, a one-man operation despite its more expansive title. Eric explained that the mission of Miles’s group is to encourage the expansion of residential zoning in Tribeca while limiting how high

developers can build. Miles nods from the front and Eric gives Jorie the run-down on the usual suspects. Present are fresh-faced aides from an array of public offices, state senators and assemblymen, city councilmembers, including the speaker. Then there are the more seasoned board members themselves, these holders of coveted volunteer positions, who weigh in on community concerns of the utmost importance: the power to grant a liquor license, approval of sidewalk cafés, permission to paint a mural on the side of a building. From looks alone they appear docile, mostly over forty and professionals of various ilks, but Eric challenges their image. The appetite of any of these board members—fifty in total—is voracious, he says. They’re often derided as curmudgeons for meting out their approval only after being triple-assured that nothing will change for the worse.

The chairwoman calls the final order for the evening. “Thirty-one Desbrosses,” she says, in her smoker’s voice. “We’ll hear from the developers first, since they have limited time.”

Two attorneys walk to the podium, while a younger, dark-haired woman sets up a single photo for the community to view before she sits. She looks familiar, but quickly moves behind the photograph so that Jorie can’t get a good look. The image is blown up, and features a sleek, glass tower. The building is tall with little to distinguish it, but somehow it still exudes presence, the authority of a building that belongs. The attorneys are not dissimilar; two white men, in their forties and fifties, who wear expensive-looking gray suits.

In soft voices, mostly directed to the board, the older of the two begins his presentation of the Caelum, which they explain is Latin for the heavens, as well as a

sculptor's chisel. They describe the features of this elite hotel, which will have luxury elements yet retain a youthful edge, as evidenced by the rooftop pool and nightclub, towering forty stories with breathtaking river views. They then attend to more mundane details, showing a schematic of the floor plans.

The chairwoman, at least twenty years older than the lawyers, interrupts them mid-way. "Excuse me, gentlemen. We've heard rumors that this isn't a hotel at all, but an apartment building."

"Oh no," the lead attorney says, and waves his hand for the woman behind him to stand up. She comes to his side with a large stack of papers. "That's incorrect. There will be individual owners, yes, but the rooms will be rented like an ordinary hotel."

Murmurs rush through the room, and the chair speaks again. "I don't get it," she says. "Isn't the whole point of a hotel that no one individual owns the rooms, but that they're rented out?"

The shorter of the two moves to the microphone, slightly edging his partner out of the way. "If I may," he says, his voice booming. "It's a newer breed of building called a condo-hotel. The rooms are owned, and the owners can stay there if they wish from time to time, but they'll also be rented out." The murmuring resumes and some snickers come from the back.

"So you're saying it's both a residence and a hotel?"

"It's not a residence. It's a condo-hotel."

Eric whispers that he's heard of this concept before. In the ones he's heard of, some units are reserved for hotel use while others are purely condo. This seems to be different in that all units will be owned and rented. Later, he explains that since the

developers are not calling it residential, they won't need a variance to build. They're going to build as-of-right.

Another board member, younger than the chair, signals she has a question. "So let me give you a hypothetical example. Let's say on a Friday night the owners want to stay there, and someone wants to rent it. Who gets to stay?"

They wait a beat until finally the taller one steps forward. "We don't have that kind of specific information at this time."

The two men present some additional information about the project, including the fact that they are able to build to forty stories because they bought development rights from a neighboring plot. But, when pressed, they refuse to put a name on the owner of the building or the money behind it, other than to provide the name of a limited liability company. When asked if they have anything to add, the shorter attorney notes that there will be conference and banquet facilities on site, something that the neighborhood could use. The entire room boos them away from the microphone. Eric and Jorie don't participate.

The two men leave soon after, while the young female attorney stays as Miles delivers his argument that further investigation into the legality of the project is necessary. Miles is an assured speaker. His conviction is conveyed in every gesture, and he modulates his voice like a dramatic stage actor.

Miles refers to the building a Trojan Horse. "While it's presented as a hotel," he says, "we all know it's really a residence. If we can learn anything from the Greeks in this instance, let's not trust the packaging." The room erupts in cheers at Miles's colorful analogy.

He raises his arm to the crowd. “All it takes is one building like this,” he says, holding up his pointer finger. “One building to change the entire character of this neighborhood. Then the rest will fall like dominos.”

The board prepares for its vote on Miles’s resolution that the Department of Buildings should investigate the legality of this proposed building, and quiet sweeps the room until the chair announces the vote.

“Out of thirty-five members in attendance, all thirty-five oppose the project,” she says. The crowd claps and hoots, as the meeting is called to a close. Eric and Jorie stand, and listen to the murmurs of the crowd around them. People are outraged, talking about the preposterousness of the project, the arrogance of the developer. But there’s also a level of excitement in their voices as they unite around a cause.

Eric talks hurriedly to Jorie as they walk to the front. If they’re building as-of-right, they don’t have to appear before the board. It’s only a requirement if they are contravening the zoning laws or seeking a special permit. So they’re doing this meeting as a gesture of goodwill, never having expected to get support from the community board. If that’s the case, then they likely already have support for the project from elsewhere. While community boards have some influence, they can easily be overridden by a powerful politician or any number of city agencies, including the Department of City Planning, the Department of Buildings, or the Board of Standards and Appeals. Eric poses a question that will occupy him and Jorie for weeks to come. Who does this developer have in their pocket?

The next day Eric tells Jorie he wants her to begin researching possible avenues of appeal with the Board of Standards and Appeals.

“You’ll need to spend time with the statute. But first, you’ll need to review the file. I’d like you to have a memo in about two weeks. Become comfortable with how a transient hotel is defined in the statutes, and start thinking about how we can pitch the current project as something other than that.”

Jorie’s palms are wet as she grasps the folder, doubt building inside her.

The final piece of Jorie’s first assignment is to determine who the actual owner of 31 Desbrosses Street is. This is important, Eric explains, because he often galvanizes momentum for his case based on the character of the building owner. “There are some developers that everybody hates,” he said. “So if there’s one member of that LLC who is a known liability, like a Ratner or a Trump, I want to find out, and exploit him. Also, the public has the right to know the character of the developer shaping our neighborhoods.”

Although it seems like this should be easy to discover, turns out it’s tricky. On the application to the Department of Buildings for the permit to build, the group is listed as Lux et Umbra LLC. Jorie googles the Latin and comes up with “light and shadow.”

She locates the paperwork that Lux et Umbra has filed with DOB for the permit. The person who signed the papers on behalf of the limited liability company is Rick Belleza. Although Belleza signs the papers as President of the LLC, this doesn’t necessarily speak to his ownership. An LLC can have many members, and offers a way for members to hide themselves from public scrutiny; they don’t need to state their membership in any public documents. She also goes back to the property records, the deeds she can find online, from the last five years. The owner of the deed is Lex et

Umbra, and no change in ownership is listed. She asks Jane to order a copy of the deed—perhaps there will be a name and address there that will lead her to the owner.

Jorie follows another avenue: the number Eric has left her for the theater group. Over the course of the next week, she calls Minnie Zenkel's Second Original Puppet Theater at least two times a day. She leaves three messages on the machine, presided over by a woman who, by the volume of her voice alone, sounds as if she has just learned how to use voicemail. These calls have gone unreturned.

Coming up blank, Jorie decides to check with Jane, arbiter of the phone system, to see if perhaps she has forgotten to deliver a message. This is a polite way of putting it; in the two weeks Jorie has been here, Jane hasn't gotten any friendlier.

When Jorie approaches, Jane is watching a video, with the volume up. Jorie hears a child's giggles and, as she gets closer, discerns a cat grooming a sleeping dog. Even as Jorie stops in front of her desk, Jane doesn't bother to pause the video, or even lower the volume. When it finishes playing, Jane looks up, blinking slowly as if emerging from a catatonic state.

"Did you happen to receive any messages for me?" Jorie asks.

"No."

She refreshes her screen, and the video starts anew. Jorie raises her voice over the child's giggles. "Perhaps you didn't understand the message," Jorie says. "They could have been speaking in Yiddish for all I know."

Jane sighs. "This isn't a five-star hotel with room service," she says, her eyes still glued to the screen.

When Jorie doesn't move, Jane pauses the video. She looks up at Jorie, and smacks her gum.

"In other words," Jane says, the words coming out slowly, as if Jorie were hard of hearing, "you've got to get out there and hustle."

Tribeca is not a neighborhood that Jorie knows well. Still smarting from Jane's comments, Jorie again feels like a rube when, exiting the six train at Canal, she's unsure which direction to go. Awnings in both English and Chinese fill Jorie's sightline, not helping to distinguish which side of Canal she's on. She remembers coming here once with Amy during their first year of law school, back when she was new to the City. Amy was determined to buy knock-off handbags from one of these stores, which hide their illegal business within the legal one, the fake bags separated from the legitimate goods by an interior door, a false wall, or a flight of stairs that might lead into a narrow basement. One day in those claustrophobic stores was enough to keep her away for some time.

Jorie finally orients herself by signs that point east toward the Manhattan Bridge, and begins to walk south. Circus-colored clothing hangs from shops on every corner, and the pungent smell of garbage, overflowing from trashcans, follows her down the street. As the building numbers go up she passes the former factory buildings described by Eric, more intricate and ornate than she imagined. One has tall Corinthian columns, which stretch the distance of each floor, separating one over-sized window from the next. Further down, the street becomes more desolate and uninhabited, the cobblestones wider apart such that she has to walk more carefully when crossing. Once she reaches Washington Street, only one block from the Hudson River, the wind picks up, charging

down the street with nothing to play interference. Jorie pulls up the collar of her jacket as she walks through the remaining snow banks, now turned to brown slush.

Number thirty-one is a lot less ornate than the others. From her preliminary research Jorie found that this part of Desbrosses was outside of any of the Landmark Preservation Commission's historic districts. Jorie walks around the six-story building, the brick a grayish-yellow. The first floor stretches the expanse of the lot while the upper floors are almost half the size. Eric has mentioned that there are still some rent-stabilized tenants occupying those units, who are also fighting the eviction. Some of the upper windows are boarded over while a few others have air-conditioning units, a telltale sign of occupancy, hanging over the ledge. Only one apartment has a flowerbed hanging outside the window.

The main door of the theater is locked, with a sign that directs Jorie to the number at which she's already left all her messages. An eviction notice is slapped onto the front door, and blue scaffolding shrouds the front. Glancing down the street she notices a silver steel door that is propped open about twenty feet down from the main door.

Remembering Jane's acerbic words, she slips inside. She wanders down a long, dimly lit hallway, following a reddish glow pulsing out from underneath a door at the end. The building is cold and cave-like, a strong smell of earth emerging from the walls. She reaches another door, which is also locked. She knocks a few times—at first quietly, and then starts to bang—but no one comes. Overcome with the sense that she's not supposed to be here, she scurries back out.

When she emerges on the sidewalk, the sunlight strains her eyes. She chides herself for her failed attempt. How can she establish a relationship if the theater folks

won't even meet her? She stares up at the building as if it will give her an answer. It's not until her eyes return to street level that she notices the writing on the wood tacked up to the scaffolding, spray painted black.

Miriam Zenkel's Second Original Puppet Theater presents Bovo-Buch 2.0: A Chivalric Romance in Modern Times. February 27th.

Jorie looks at the calendar on her phone. February 27th is one day away.

Chapter 9

On the inside, Minnie Zenkel's is more like a cluttered thrift shop than a theater, with curios on display throughout the lobby. The trippy seventies wallpaper—olive-green flowers interlaced with purple and navy vines—is covered over in places with faded posters from old Yiddish plays.

“I told you it wouldn't be sold out,” Amy whispers as they approach the ticket booth, which is no more than a folding table. When a man hands them two small ticket stubs, Jorie asks whether he works for the theater but he urges her along. A large fishbowl on the table asks for donations to help out with the theater's operating expenses. Jorie throws in a five.

Hanging from the lobby's ceiling are globe-shaped orbs with theater memorabilia suspended inside. Jorie stares up at them, trying to discern one object from the next, while also navigating the eclectic mix of patrons that crowd around—elderly men and women and twenty-somethings with face piercings and dyed hair. She pauses in front of one orb, which holds a scroll. It states it is a Yiddish theater text from the 1700s. Farther down, a marionette occupies another orb. Jorie is drawn to the puppet, maybe a rabbi, judging from the beard that trails well below his chin, and the ritual fringes that hang from his shirt. He leans at the waist as if he were praying, his mouth slightly agape, and his eyes, a steely black, are large and ominous. The paint on his face is cracked, betraying his age.

Amy pulls her along into the theater. “This place gives me the creeps,” she says, as the usher points to the leftmost of three bays. Jorie hesitated on whether to invite Amy, but Amy had been very supportive of the new job. Initially, she argued that Jorie should

hold out for another big firm job, since it wouldn't be easy to transition back to a big firm after she made the switch to a small firm. But Jorie hadn't told her about the email she had sent to Weber's wife.

The usher points them to vacant seats, the stuffing exposed on one. The theater is small, maybe about two hundred seats. As Jorie looks to the stage, now empty, thousands of dust motes swirl like fairy dust as her eyes adjust to the brighter stage lights.

"I would have picked up a breathing mask if I had known," Amy says.

Jorie has done some research on the theater before coming. The website was well designed, which surprised her after the voicemail fiasco, and featured videos of the members at various performances. The program lists the same information she saw on the website. Ilan Asher is a performance artist, born in Israel but raised in Brooklyn. Ella Rhodes is getting her PhD Theater at Columbia in Theater Studies by day, dancer and director by night. Nadia Derby, a puppeteer, is an alumna of Bread and Puppet in Vermont. Peter Klipnick is a puppeteer and actor, and the only member fluent in Yiddish. These are the only four permanent members, but judging from the collection of Youtube videos, the troupe collaborates with other performers, puppeteers and politically active theaters around town.

When reading about the group, what intrigued Jorie the most was the result of a search on Lexis Nexis, a scan of newspaper articles about the theater dating back fifty years. The theater received a lot of press in the Eighties for working with the cast of *Persephone, in Puppet*, apparently helping the actors learn to use puppets. The puppeteers of Minnie Zenkel's were involved from the beginning, when *Persephone* was sowing its seeds in a small workshop in the East Village. She read through the articles

with a mixture of amazement and sadness, remembering her own childhood obsession with the show.

Amy and Jorie make room for two older women wrapped in matching pink pashminas, who share Mim's curly-hair and prominent nose. Jorie often wished her grandparents on her mother's side were still alive. Nana, Shelley's mom, was the closest she had come to ever having a grandparent. Given what Shelley told her about Nana's puppeteering back in eastern Europe, Jorie thinks that Nana would enjoy this.

The lights dim and the narrator enters center stage. A diminutive man in leather pants and a white t-shirt explains that the play is the troupe's annual Purim shpiel, or Purim play, in reference to the time-honored tradition among Jews to dramatize the Book of Esther in the month of Adar. From his American-Israeli accent, Jorie figures he must be Ilan. He gives the audience more context for the performance they are about to see. Titled "Bovo Buch 2.0," the play is an adaptation of one the earliest Yiddish secular texts, written by a German Jew turned Italian-expat named Elia Levita in 1507 and based on one of the most popular adventure stories of the Middle Ages. Although the play is a traditional hero's journey, the Yiddish version has a wry narrator, who likes to poke fun at the audience. When Ilan explains that the cast will have a Q&A after the show to explore the narrator's role as keeper and organizer of memory, Amy fidgets in her seat. Jorie has promised martinis.

But from the minute the play begins, Jorie is enthralled. Though it feels a lot rougher than the productions she's used to seeing—the cast shares their own jitters and missteps with the audience—an intimacy and sense of the unexpected emerges that she has rarely felt in Broadway productions. Bovo is played by a girl, who cross-dresses as a

boy cross-dressing as a girl. The narrator and cast banter back and forth, each outwitting the other. There are two puppets shaped like mallets on rockers, twice the size of an average person, each representing a warring kingdom. A staged fight ensues until one finally bursts, a ribbon of blood spilling out in the form of a red carpet. Bovo's paramour, a sassy woman whose hair is black at the roots but fades to purple at the ends, struts as if she's at the anti-Oscars, with make-up smeared over her face and her gown torn to shreds.

They speak both Yiddish and English but yet it's never confusing, the mix of visual clues enough to propel the story. The sound of the Yiddish—a hybrid of German and Hebrew—is far more beautiful than Jorie expected. She grew up loathing the sound of German, associating it with the Holocaust. How many assemblies and lessons had she sat through watching Jews recount the untold horrors, starting with the boarding of the cattle cars from their hometown train stations? And then the horrifying photographs that she couldn't shut out from her mind's eye long after the lesson ended—the piles of Jewish suitcases, shoes, eyeglasses that the Nazis collected when the Jews disembarked into the death camps. All of these commonplace objects took on new meaning when clumped together, as if they never belonged to individuals who once might have cherished their purchase. For Jorie, German equaled Holocaust equaled nothing she wanted to listen to. But the Yiddish words don't sound harsh; and the actors soften their guttural “ch” sounds in a pleasing way that the kids in her Hebrew school, studying for their bar and bat mitzvahs, never could.

As fast as it starts, it's over, and Amy is back to complaining about the uncomfortable seats and how badly she needs a drink. She begs Jorie to slip out before the Q&A, but Jorie insists she'll have to stay. The whole point of the excursion, after all,

is to connect with the troupe members. Much to their credit, they keep the session to twenty minutes before the lights come up and the theater clears.

They wait in the lobby until an usher kicks them out, and then they stand on the sidewalk, Jorie hoping that the cast members will come out. Amy blows on the tips of her fingers to stop the cold, and after half an hour tells Jorie she'll meet her at the bar down the street.

Seeing that the side door is still propped open, Jorie decides to enter. It's the same hallway from the day before, but this time she tries a different door, one to the left, which she finds unlocked. She walks until she hears voices; someone sings a drinking song and others talk. Approaching the sounds, she reaches an open door and peers inside. The four cast members sit around a plastic folding table and take shots of vodka from a large bottle in the middle of the table. The woman with short black and purple hair locks eyes with Jorie but doesn't say anything, just stares at Jorie as if Jorie were a mirage. She looks like an ingénue from a twenties film: round eyes and long eyelashes. Jorie is captivated by her full pink lips even as she adjusts a small ladybug barrette.

"I'm Jorie," she says, walking into the room. "I called three times."

"No fans back here," says Ilan, trying to stand up but having a hard time of it.

"I'm not a fan," Jorie says. "I mean, I am, but I'm also a lawyer, and I wanted to talk to you about the proceedings against you."

They stare at her blankly, and then at one another. "The eviction?" she says, suddenly unsure if she is the one who should be confused. The older man stands. He wears a black beret and offers his hand.

“We don’t have any money, that’s why I didn’t call back. I’m Peter. Chief Puppeteer. And errant office manager.”

“I know you,” says the ingénue. “You were on the video yesterday.”

“Naughty girl’s been spying,” Ilan says, moving his bushy eyebrows up and down like Groucho Marx.

“Fuck you, Ilan,” the woman says. “Since we’ve been evicted I like to monitor who sniffs around here. I assumed you might be one of the bad guys.”

“Maybe I wasn’t clear on the phone. My firm’s already been retained by the Tribeca Partnership, so you won’t need to pay. But we’re hoping you’ll hel—”

Ilan staggers to his feet, holding a tissue to his nose. “A lawyer who doesn’t want money,” he says. “Be still my heart. I don’t believe it.” He clutches his chest, as if he’s acting to the crowd. The woman who played Bovo laughs, but the ingénue scowls.

“Don’t be an asshole, Ilan.” She stands up and grabs his arm, trying to push him back down, but he frees from her grip.

“Excuse me while I use the rest room,” he says, bowing. “But I wouldn’t trust this one. Lawyers.” He shakes his head, wagging his finger at Jorie. He continues to blow his nose as he walks down the hall.

“You didn’t have to call him an asshole,” says the blonde, and pours herself another shot.

“Why don’t you sit?” the ingénue says, pointing to Ilan’s chair. “Looks like a spot’s freed up.”

The others introduce themselves. The ingénue is Ella, and Nadia has the wild blond mane, along with three hoops through one eyebrow. They pour her a shot of Polish vodka in a small plastic cup.

“Tastes good with apple juice,” Ella says, although there’s nothing on the table other than the vodka. Jorie says no after one shot, but Ella keeps on pouring.

Jorie waits for a moment to interject but the cast seems distracted, likely from the alcohol. They laugh about inside jokes Jorie doesn’t get, and eventually Ilan re-enters, prompting another round of shots. Jorie starts to grow dizzy from too much vodka on too little food. She takes in the room, which is not much bigger than Jorie’s old office. Two large metal filing cabinets are pushed up against one wall and above is exposed piping that’s been covered over with pieces of tire and a clamp. White banker’s boxes are piled against the walls, where a radiator hisses. Jorie thinks of the time she’s wasting, of Amy at the corner bar.

Beneath the joviality Jorie senses something darker, and it starts to gnaw at her. She stands abruptly.

“I’ve got to go,” she says, buttoning her coat, “but I was hoping to get some information from you about the history of the building and the owners before I leave.”

“We’ve been here for fifteen years, and they send us one bloody piece of mail to tell us we’re persona non grata. It’s bullshit,” Nadia says.

“We’re trying to celebrate tonight,” Ella says. “Not think about that mess.”

“You’re out of luck, lawyer,” Ilan says, laughing derisively, and Jorie stifles the urge to utter her own “fuck you.”

She looks to Peter, who seems to be the most in charge. “Can you tell me who the owner is?”

“Honestly,” he says. “We’re not in touch with the owner.”

“Where did you used to send your rent check? That could help,” Jorie says. She wonders how these people were capable of putting on such a great performance when they seem so disorganized.

“Our circumstances here are kind of odd. A benefactor has always paid the rent on our behalf, although we don’t know him directly. We’re in touch with one guy, who used to be a puppeteer here in the old days. But that’s all. He basically handles any concerns from the owner.”

“Can you give me his name?”

“Ugh,” Ilan shouts, lifting his head from where it rests on the table. “If you think I’m an asshole, this guy is ten times worse.”

“To be honest, he’s pretty strange,” Peter says.

Looking around, Jorie can’t imagine how much stranger he could be than this dysfunctional family.

“He’s super private,” Peter says. “Let me talk to him and I’ll get back to you.”

“Okay. Anything you can give me would be helpful at this point.”

Ella takes out a card from her wallet and scrawls something on the bottom. “I can give you some history of the theater,” she says. “History is my specialty.”

She winks at Jorie, and Jorie stares at the card before putting it in her pocket. Out of the corner of her eye, Jorie sees Ilan roll his eyes. Eleanor Rhodes, the card reads, along with her phone number. CALL ME, XOXO ELLA. Jorie places the card gingerly

in her pocket, careful not to mix it up with the receipts and Post-it reminders that have collected.

Peter walks her out, apologizing about not returning her calls. And, also, for Ilan's ungracious welcome. "He can be a bit temperamental," he says.

"What's his deal?" Jorie asks.

Peter sighs, the way a father might about his prodigal son. "He's got a lot going on," Peter says. "And," he pauses, "he was dating Ella, but it seems they have broken up. Again. Not good for business."

Once outside, she walks quickly. When she gets to the bar, a small sign reads "Barbershop: Open," a red and blue pole spins outside. Throwing the door open, Jorie is greeted by two sallow-faced men playing pool, who immediately look away. The stretch of stools by the bar is empty. When the bartender emerges from the back, Jorie is about to ask him about Amy when she sees the empty martini glass on the bar. The program from the show serves as a coaster.

She sends Amy a text before she gets on the train, apologizing for being so late. As she travels back alone, the unsettling feeling from inside the theater stays with her. Her mind circles back to the anonymous owner. In this day and age, how does someone avoid being found? And why would they want to stay hidden? Peter's talk of this odd fellow from the theater's old days jogs her memory of one of the articles she had read. It talked about a mass exodus from the theater in the early Nineties, when the cast completely turned over. Peter confirmed as much tonight; none of the same cast members remain. The turning point for the changeover seemed to coincide with a small obituary that appeared in a Queens local paper. Two years after *Persephone, in Puppet* debuted on

Broadway one of the puppeteers died from a drug overdose. Maybe she'll ask Ella about this. If nothing else, it could help her statement of the facts, when she writes her memo to Eric with a discussion of the building's history.

It's close to midnight when Jorie arrives back to Brooklyn. When she checks her phone, there is no reply from Amy.

Jorie wakes with a terrible hangover. Between the vodka shots on an empty stomach and a nightcap at her local bar, her body is rebelling. She opens her computer to find an email from Eric. He's meeting with Miles on Monday morning and he wants her to tag along. He also asks her to bring her research to date. Jorie's head pounds as she considers the work she has yet to do.

In the late morning she leaves a message for Ella explaining that she'd love to get any leads from her about the theater owner. Two hours later her phone pings. *Do you drive stick?* After Jorie responds yes, Ella tells her to meet her Sunday morning at the corner of Twenty-Eighth and Eighth. Jorie starts typing a text saying she can't meet up for more than an hour. Even with the research she's begun she doesn't have nearly a good enough grasp on the subject area to wing it. It'll take the whole weekend to prepare. But.

She thinks of Eric, who has been so laid back, not to mention that meeting up with Ella is indirectly related to the project. Ella might have more info about the owner, or ideas on where to look. Her final thought is of Ella. It's a feeling she hasn't had in a while, but she is excited. Powerful, sexy Ella telling Ilan to fuck off. She erases her draft and starts again.

Will we back by four? Jorie writes. An ex once told Jorie that she was too withholding, that even from the first minute, when most people are apt to fall deep, she never fully dove in to the relationship.

Sure thing, Ella writes.

Where are we going? Jorie asks.

Road trip, Ella responds.

For the remainder of the day she alternates between her legal research and writing the letter to her father. She re-reads the last paragraph.

What I'm going to tell you now is a betrayal, but I'm going to tell you anyway, because if you want to understand me, you need to know this. Mom would flip out, no seriously FLIP OUT if I told you. But I didn't have a say in any of this. So I'm telling you my version. When you left, Mom turned into a zombie. You might laugh when I write that, the word zombie is so ridiculous, so fantastical, but that's kind of what she was. She looked like Mom and smelled like Mom, but she was not Mom, or a mom at all, really. Remember that game we played on Atari where when you were wounded your player would blink? You would always go "gotcha" when it happened, even though I wasn't out of the game yet. Mom was on blink for ages. Like six months. The whole time you were in Seattle. When I say blink, I mean, I could talk to her, but she wasn't there. She didn't complain when I didn't scrub the toilet and she let me walk around with my shoes in the house without saying boo. I didn't tell you any of this then—I was afraid if you knew you might do something. She as always so paranoid about the power you had over us. One time I smoked a cigarette I got from Jared Nugent at school in the living room just to see if she would say anything and you know what she did? She came home and said it stinks in here. And that was it. No grounding. No conversation about what might have prompted me to smoke. Just blink. Blink. Blink. And then around Passover, before Rosie's unveiling, actually two days before, I remember it exactly because Shelley was over and we were playing Rummikub and I had asked her what happened at an unveiling. When she said that the stone would go up, so it would be a more official grave, I told her I didn't want to go back to that cemetery, it gave me the creeps. Then Mom stood up in our own living room and walked right out of the house. She didn't come back all night, and we sent the cops after her the next day, and they found her sitting on top of Rosie's grave. You might remember that you need a key to get in, but she just scaled the walls. Her hands were bloodied because there were those prickly

things on top of the fencing but she just went right over anyway. I didn't see any of this, but Shelley told me later. That's when she went into Saint Matthew's, where she stayed on the psychiatric unit for a month. You were on tour the whole time. I was sure someone would tell you, but I don't think anyone ever did.

Jorie wants to explain what it was like to visit her mother in that hospital day after day, where Mim stopped combing her hair altogether. She always loved her hair, yet for that month it remained matted to her head. Jorie didn't pity her mother, but started to hate her, a small seed forming in the pit of her stomach, expanding a bit every time she signed into the psych unit's waiting room with Shelley and Nana. The more she remembers, the less she wants to.

She checks her phone to see if Amy's written back, but there's still no response. With Amy, Jorie knows it's best to send an apology and wait for her come back on her own time.

Before most of the people in her neighborhood are even getting ready to go out, Jorie crawls into bed, turning her television on. She's done enough for one day.

Chapter 10

Rick calls on Saturday afternoon and complains that the Department of Buildings has rejected their building permit application once again, pending more concessions. For the umpteenth time, Biz tells Rick he doesn't want a play-by-play of the hassles he's been having with the bureaucratic Rube Goldberg-like machine that is New York City government. He doesn't want to be involved at all, other than at the time that the money is distributed. He prefers to be silent, unseen, unnamed. This he learned from Vance, whose family shrouded their holdings in corporations and limited liability companies and trusts. Lux et Umbra.

“Didn't I tell you I don't want to hear this stuff?” Biz says.

Biz is getting his nails manicured. The service sends a different woman to his apartment every week. From the way they barely acknowledge him, he assumes they don't know who he is. Usually they speak Chinese, or maybe Korean, but this woman knows some English. She gave him a long look when she entered, coolly appraising the apartment as she set up at his coffee table. He sensed her silent scrutiny at his few furnishings—the oak bookshelves designed by a North Carolina furniture-maker, the glass coffee table he picked up at an estate sale upstate. He rarely has visitors anymore, preferring nights to himself, and finds the idea of sitting on a \$30,000 sofa by himself depressing. It's also the one thing he admired about his mother; her house was always tasteful and refined, despite the fact that she had little to spend on decorating. She didn't clutter up her shelves with chintzy collectibles or commit some amateur decorating error. He admired her aesthetic, penny-pincher chic.

The manicurist files his nails to the point that she's grazing his fingertips, and Biz pulls his finger away. "Enough," he mouths. But she doesn't acknowledge it, just continues on with pushing back his cuticles.

"Plus, who else am I supposed to complain to?" Rick asks, concluding his recitation of every slight by the buildings department to date.

"Your boyfriend?" Biz asks.

The woman doing his nails looks up.

"You think he cares about these details? He's worried about when I'm going to charter us a plane to Miami."

Rick persists and Biz listens on his Bluetooth now that both of his hands are occupied. Rick says that because of the zoning code, the building can't be a regular condo. Instead, it's this condo-hotel hybrid, for people with multiple homes. But as far as DOB goes, the unit owners will only be able to legally occupy the space for a number of days out of the year. They can't have kitchens. There will have to be a lobby downstairs, where the keys are kept. It's all in one document, but DOB keeps sending it back with changes. The deal breaker right now is language that says if the unit holders don't comply, the permit or the certificate of occupancy of the entire building could be revoked.

"It's insane," Rick complains. "One old man stays an extra night in his unit and the whole building will lose its certificate of occupancy? Sometimes I think this place is worse than Cuba. So many rules."

"Did I miss something? You grew up in Jersey."

"You want any color?" the woman asks.

Biz tilts his chin to the clear bottle on the table.

“You need to be more zen about this,” Biz says. “It’ll all work out. Our people have had conversations with the mayor. Elsie Fenton’s known him since he was in his diamond-encrusted diapers. He knows that this will be good for the city’s tax roll.”

Rick argues, saying that it’s not the way it used to be. You can’t make handshake deals over power lunches anymore, he insists, because everyone is too paranoid they’re being recorded.

While Biz lets Rick vent, he’s too preoccupied to give Rick his full attention. He goes into rehearsals in days for his role in the *Persephone* revival. He was ecstatic when his agent called with the news. As the wizened Geppetto, this will be a perfect role, and possibly a magical end to his career. He’s getting tired of the lifestyle, has been thinking about giving up acting for a while now. Since Rick’s project might provide him the needed cash, the stars could align. When he really dares to dream, he imagines finally getting the Tony for the show he started his career on. A perfect circle, coming to a close.

At some point, he can’t take the blathering any longer. The manicurist has gone to wash up.

“Just think of this as a bunch of loose ends, incidental to the important agreement that has already been made,” Biz says.

“Your idea of loose ends is very expensive. Do you know how much money we’re losing in the interim?”

“Are you finished venting?” Biz yawns.

“Is there anything you do want to hear about this project? I’ll try to keep it in mind before I bother your royal highness. Or should I say, your royal anus.”

“Be nice, Rick.”

“You’re so absent from this thing I can’t stand it. I need a partner here.”

“You know I can’t go public.” Biz has already explained how disastrous this could for his career, to be tied to a project like this. While it’s well known that the Tony nominating committee focuses on talent, it’s equally acknowledged that the eight hundred members that vote are steered by money. They want to increase box-office and touring sales, and if too much mud gets slung on a lead, it won’t bode well for Biz’s prospects of a nomination.

“Listen, Rick, tell me when the permit is approved.”

“You’ll be at the groundbreaking?” Rick says.

“Adios, Rick.”

No way he’ll be at the groundbreaking, but there is still the matter of Frank, the only living person who knows of Biz’s promise to Vance. A couple years younger than Biz, and straight, Frank was Biz’s first real platonic friend in New York. Frank has kept the promise for Biz all these years, liaising with the puppet theater since Vance’s death. He’s tried to call Frank to talk about what’s been happening, but Frank won’t take his calls. They haven’t spoken in almost thirteen years, since Vance’s funeral.

But when the permit’s issued, he’ll have to pay a visit. Just another loose end to tie up.

Chapter 11

In 1925, two brothers, emigrés from Lodz, founded Minnie Zenkel's Original Yiddish Puppet Theater for the bohemian, intellectual Jews of the Lower East Side. It's rumored that the theater was hatched on a dare, when a well-known poet publicly chastised the brothers where the literati gathered, the Café Royal. Of the many defects listed—among them an inability to hold their liquor and their inattention to the art of dress—the poet accused them of being hacks. They contributed nothing of value to this Lower East Side's artistic epicenter, yet they spent most of their time cutting down artists of true merit with their sharp tongues and scathing critiques. The poet, as the story goes, challenged them to actually create something. He told them that if they met with any success, he would write an apology and publish it in his weekly column in *Forverts*. By the time they held their first puppet show just a couple of years later, the poet had given up his column and moved to live with his grandson in Boston. It didn't matter, though, the theater won rave reviews in *Forverts*, *Morgn Frayhayt* and *Der Tog*.

The theater was on Second Avenue, in the heart of the theater district. On the nights of performances, the social club that housed them would sell special memberships so that they could hold the performance, as was required by law. The brothers would stand outside before the show and insult passersby in Yiddish. To those who responded, the brothers would offer them a drink, for they contended that only men and women with sufficient egos were suitable for their audience. The theater already pushed against boundaries within the Jewish community since the idea of a Jewish puppet theater was sacrilegious within itself. The Torah forbids the creation of graven images, thus the puppets were considered false idols.

Ella tells Jorie this on their way upstate, to a location she still hasn't disclosed. Jorie enjoys hearing Ella talk as they traverse familiar terrain; after all, she's driving towards home. They ride up the Palisades, passing scenic views of the river from New Jersey until tall trees form a canopy on either side. Then they move onto the thruway, the road becoming hillier the farther they move away from the City.

"So you're a history buff?" Jorie asks.

"A professionalized history buff. I study theater at Columbia, and I'm writing on Yiddish theater in America during the 1920s and 1930s, which led me to Minnie Zenkel's. I formed a friendship with Peter after I had interviewed him for some chapters I was writing. My dissertation advisor is a real star in the field—well-published, hard act to follow."

Jorie picks up on hesitation in Ella's voice. "That's good for you, isn't it?"

"It could be good, except she's making my life a living hell. I've thought about dropping out lots of times. It's just not worth the abuse."

"This might be a weird question, but are you Jewish?"

"I'm used to that—No, I'm not, but I've always felt an affinity for Judaism, I can't explain it."

"Funny," Jorie says. "I *am* Jewish and I've never felt connected to any of it." She remembers those years her mother forced her to attend synagogue, that depressing, squat building with its outdated Seventies decor. When Jorie turned sixteen, her mother finally relented, and told her that she could decide for herself whether she wanted to attend.

"For what it's worth," says Ella, "I could care less about anything English. The land of my people."

“You mean you couldn’t care less,” Jorie corrects.

“Huh?” Ella asks.

“You said you could care less, but that wouldn’t make sense. You couldn’t care less.”

“Seriously?”

Jorie notices how straight Ella’s teeth are as her jaw hangs open. “I’m sorry, you might be a history nerd, but I spend all day thinking about words.”

“How about this: I could not care less about the peasants in northern England from which I am descended. Better?”

Jorie makes a face, pretending she’s not satisfied, and Ella swats at her with an empty water bottle.

As they work their way into Orange County, Ella tells more about the brothers. While it’s not completely relevant to the Jorie’s work, she is interested in the history, in part because of the way Ella tells it. Her voice sounds like a radio voice.

“Aaron was cantankerous and loud, while Ben was thoughtful and quiet. Aaron was the artist; he created the scenery and designed the puppets for all of their shows.” When Ella describes the sets, Jorie thinks of her father and wonders what he might be working on now. She knew from his last card that he was traveling around Europe, working on various productions.

Ella focuses on the other brother. Ben was the writer and the jokester; it was his touch of humor and satire that brought the theater its first glowing review. They both took turns acting and puppeteering. Their theater took hold at the height of the Yiddish theater in New York City, although their style of show—satirical, political, comedic and filled

with the grotesque—was quite different than most other Yiddish playhouses at the time, which performed in a high-level Yiddish dialect and prided themselves on their elaborate sets, fine costumes, and the pedigree of their actors. Zenkel’s, on the other hand, was indiscriminate about the kinds of materials they used for their puppets and sets, and were not even tied to narrative plots. They aimed to make a point, or several points, and they hoped to make people laugh.

For years the theater was a success, garnering crowds that rivaled the high-end Yiddish theaters that crowded the district.

“But then,” Ella says, “In the early Thirties, things started to break down. First, there were ongoing arguments between the brothers over the future of the theater. Aaron wanted to continue with more of the same, while Ben thought they should cater to the increasing number of English-speaking Jews. It was rumored that the two brothers fought over a woman, as well—Minnie Zenkel, the woman they named the theater after. It’s unclear from the records what she did for the theater—someone named Mel Zenkel is listed on some of the programs, but that’s about it. In 1933 the building went up in flames. It was said that the brothers were too distraught to rebuild, or couldn’t agree on how. Ben moved to California to try writing for the movies. His body was found six months later on the side of the Pacific Coast Highway after a fatal motorcycle accident. The other brother, Aaron, moved to the Catskills, where he quit making art altogether.”

“Presumably this ties into our trip?”

“Keep on driving, Matlock. Where was I?”

“Depressing endings.”

“Right. So through the Holocaust and well into the Fifties the theater remained dark. Puppet theater on the whole was less popular in the United States; Zenkel’s was no exception. In addition, there were hardly any Yiddish speakers left in New York. Many of the children of Yiddish speakers abandoned the language entirely for English. The first generation was long gone. The second generation, who knew enough of the language to speak it to their parents, didn’t want to saddle their children with those consonants that got lost in the back of the throat, which labeled their parents in the tenements on Orchard Street “green.” Finally, the third generation was fully assimilated. For many Jews, Yiddish became a relic, a dead language, only remembered in some words that had entered the English vernacular, used most often for vulgar expressions or to convey a heightened sentiment.”

Yes, Jorie thinks, this would be my mother.

“And then,” Ella continues, “there was an awakening. A director, Hal Greenberg from Canarsie, wanted to bring back some of the Yiddish plays. He found an old playbill from a Zenkel production while he was doing research, and in the late Eighties he made the trip up to the Catskills to get the rights to use the name. A puppeteer that he knew from Canarsie was connected to a real-estate mogul, who let the theater live on for next to nothing in an abandoned factory that he owned.”

“The Sweet Factory?”

“Exactly.”

“And the puppeteer—is that the crazy guy Peter alluded to?”

“Yeah. I’ve never met the guy, just heard the stories. I think he might be kind of famous though.”

“Can you find out his full name?” Jorie asks. “I know Peter was reticent, but...”

Ella squeezes Jorie’s arm, which sends chills up her back. “You bet. Do you want to hear the rest of our sad story?”

“Shoot.”

“So I found detailed notes from the founder about how the theater was trying to keep the spirit of the old in performing protest plays designed to wake up the social conscience of the city, but with humor. It was the Eighties, not too hard to find things to protest with Reagan in office. But then the theater continued to morph, as two performance artists joined in the last five years. One left, creative differences, and now only Ilan is still here.” When she says his name, she doesn’t sound angry, but a little wistful.

“We’re in a bit of a crisis, right now,” Ella says, with a seriousness Jorie doesn’t expect. “Aside from the eviction.”

Jorie assumes that this was what Peter was alluding to the other night. As if on cue, a gong sounds from Ella’s phone.

They drive in silence for a while—interrupted by the gong and Ella texting back. With the break from Ella’s storytelling, the “should” voice in Jorie’s head gets louder—*You should be working on your memo.*

“What’s going on?” Jorie says, after some time.

“Fuckhead wants his car back.”

“This is Ilan’s car?”

“Whatever,” Ella says. “He owes me.”

This puts both of them in a sour mood. Ella props her seat back and closes her eyes. When they pass exit 16, close to Jorie's hometown, Ella sits up. "Shit," she says. "We missed the exit."

You missed the exit, Jorie wants to correct her.

They get off at the next exit and, from the road, Jorie can see the decay of her hometown: the mall, built when she was just six, which could barely support a major clothing chain up until she moved away; the row of economy hotels that sprang up in the Eighties and are now the town's center of commerce. Once the factories closed, the town known for its Hudson River views crawled into hibernation. It became an exit number on the thruway, made more important when two major roadways merged. They head west, away from Quassaick.

After some time they pull onto a quiet, two-lane road with fewer cars than the highway. The trees seem taller here, hugging the road on either side. They must be out of cell phone range as the gongs from Ella's phone cease to sound off. Jorie's legs stiffen up from the drive; she asks Ella how much longer she thinks they'll be.

Without the constant texting, Ella's mood seems to have improved, and she assures Jorie they're almost there. "Ready for the coolest part of the story?" she asks.

"Like every theater," Ella says, "this one has its ghosts. Nobody knows what happened to the theater's namesake. Remember the fire I told you about? The night of the fire, Ben was out of town, trying to gauge interest about bringing their show to other cities. When he returned, he found the theater completely destroyed, and all that remained were the few puppets he had with him. But the biggest loss was the scripts. Unlike many theaters at the time, the brothers were meticulous about keeping their scripts, hiding them

behind a false wall in the theater because they worried that the written material might put them on the watch list of the House Committee of Un-American Activities. It was first assumed that all of the scripts were burned in the fire. *Forverts* wrote a news story about the fire, with a reward offered by the brothers for information. A week later an eyewitness came forward, who said that he was coming down Second Avenue at midnight and saw someone emerge from the theater. He remembered it particularly because it was a woman, and she was carrying two large boxes. His story was somewhat suspicious, though, because he said that when he asked the woman if she wanted any help, she flashed teeth at him that were sharp as scissors. He swore she had the body of a woman but the face of a wolf.”

She pauses dramatically. “Some days later, when the police went to question Minnie Zenkel, her parents told her that she had left, with no note. Some say she went to Europe before the war and never made it out. Others say that, torn between the two brothers, she went crazy and became homeless, eventually dying on the streets of New York. One other account says it was impossible to trace her because she married and changed her name. For all intents and purposes, Minnie Zenkel disappeared. But the scripts still remain lost, and it’s unconfirmed whether they went up in smoke.”

“Forgive me for being daft, but why do you care so much?”

“My advisor thinks they’re gone. But if I could find them it would resolve so many important questions in our field. The most important question is one of authorship. It is well known that the two brothers wrote most of the plays, but from other accounts I have read it seems that Minnie Zenkel had a much greater role in the theater than she is

given credit for. I think if I could find the scripts, it would revolve some of these questions. Not least, to see if scripts were written by different people.”

“I assume your advisor doesn’t sanction this hobby of yours?”

Ella gestures that Jorie should pull off onto a dirt road at a faded white sign with brown letters reading ‘Wine,’ with a gap between the ‘W’ and ‘I,’ and then another gap between the ‘N’ and ‘E.’ “Weinbergers,” Jorie says. She has heard of this place before, one of the old Catskill retreats. Tall pines line the steep climb as they wind their way up the road.

The guy who owns the place, Ella tells her, is the son of Aaron.

“So what exactly are we doing here?” Jorie asks.

“We’re going to find the lost scripts,” Ella says, putting her phone away at last.

With gray hair that stands out from his head like the top of a dandelion, Nathan Ashkenazi reminds Jorie of her old sleep-away camp director. After Rosie died, her mother sent her off to camp in the summers. She was too old to be a camper so instead was placed in a counselor-in-training program, which basically means she was an unpaid babysitter. She learned to sing the Israeli national anthem and how to make macramé plant holders. The directors of these camps were always grizzled old Jewish men who projected themselves as Peter Pan-types, not quite grown-ups, content to spend summer after summer presiding over the camp color wars. But there was also a whiff of menace about her director, something she couldn’t put her finger on, but convinced her to keep her distance.

Nathan wears a red horn around his neck. Over the phone he told Ella that he knew nothing of the missing scripts, but in cleaning up the now-defunct resort for renovation he came across boxes of his father's old stuff from the theater. Initially, he was resistant to allowing Ella to come up, but when she told him that she would write articles about the renovation and pitch them to the magazines she published in regularly, he relented. She didn't bother to specify that the only magazine she publishes in regularly is Columbia's alumni circular.

Nathan greets them in front of a four-story Tudor-style home, paint peeling on the front. In the distance is an unattractive, box-shaped building, which Nathan tells them was built well after the original buildings to meet the increasing crowds during the Borsht Belt's heyday. All of the trees and bushes are overgrown leading Jorie to believe that this hotel is a far cry from its glory days.

"You girls are in for a real treat," Nathan says, shaking their hands. Jorie tries not to bristle at being called a girl. Without taking a breath, Nathan launches into a full-scale personal history, both of himself and his family's tenure at the hotel. He talks about the full-scale renovations he'll be overseeing and his plans for the future of his resort, which his great-grandfather bought from the original owners in the 1920s.

At first, his exuberance is contagious. He walks them around the grounds before taking them inside, occasionally blowing the contraption around his neck, which he explains is intended to scare away bears, though it sounds like a kazoo. The scale of the place is intense. When Grandma Celia was alive, she would tell Jorie stories about waitressing in the Catskills in her twenties. Celia had always envied the people who stayed on these grounds, the upper crust of Jewish New Yorkers.

Ella appears absorbed by Nathan's self-aggrandizing stories, but Jorie has a hard time telling whether she's faking it. As a lawyer, Jorie is used to hearing clients digress, wanting to talk about whatever's on their mind. She admired the deft way that Weber could always bring them back to the deal, or the complicated provisions they never wanted to focus on. She tries to employ Weber's method, asking direct questions to steer Nathan back to the scripts, but with each question he finds another aspect of the renovation to talk about. When she mentions the imagination and creativity that must have gone into creating a puppet theater at the time, he puts his hand over her eyes like a blindfold.

"Can you imagine what this place will be like when I bring it back to life?" he says. His hands, slightly sweaty, leave behind the scent of onions.

They enter the lobby at long last and a dank, earthy smell greets them, making it hard to breathe. "We've got a bit of a mold problem," Nathan says. Jorie covers her mouth with her coat, and hands Ella her scarf since Ella left hers in the car. This is how they walk through the most famous of the Catskill retreats, as if they are visitors to a toxic dump. At some point Nathan hands Jorie a postcard of how the lobby once looked—a large, airy room with windows on all sides and large, green plants placed all over, giving it the feel of a greenhouse. In the postcard, lithe, dark-haired singles mix, one in tennis whites and the other dressed for golf. The room is still cavernous, but it looks nothing like the picture. The walls, once white, now have streaks of black running up and down, and the plaster has crumbled in places. The tiled floors were ripped up and are now covered with a blue tarp, but in spots where the pieces of tarp don't align a greenish-black film oozes. As they cross the floor, Ella and Jorie tiptoe gingerly as Nathan points

out the remnants of a check-in desk on the far side of the room. The first detail Jorie is able to fully absorb is the one element of architecture that still shines: a teak ceiling, divided into squares. It, too, is warped in spots, but overall retains the majesty that one might have experienced when this place was still a going concern.

Quickly, Nathan's rosy picture starts to feel optimistic in light of the current state of disrepair. Jorie rolls her eyes at Ella when he asks them— for the fourth time in a span of fifteen minutes—to close their eyes and picture what it will look like.

Nathan leads them to the indoor swimming pool, also housed in a cavernous space. The terra-cotta floor is still intact and, for the first time, Jorie can imagine how it might have felt to relax here. The spell is broken as they get closer to the pool itself where, in the deep end, chaise longues the color of clay rest in a few inches of dirty water.

When Nathan stops to take a call, Jorie leans into Ella, close enough to smell jasmine in her hair. “This guy is nuts, huh?” she says softly.

“This place is amazing,” Ella says. Jorie follows her eyes to the bottom of the pool, where I WUZ FUCKIN HERE is spraypainted across the slope of the pool. Jorie looks at her watch. They've already been here for an hour, and haven't even gotten to the boxes yet. Jorie thinks of her own research she has yet to read.

“C'mon, sourpuss, we'll get to business.” Ella pulls Jorie around the pool.

With prodding from Ella, Nathan takes them to his makeshift office, set up in a trailer on site. Jorie is relieved that they don't have to spend more time in the mold building. Nathan's office is in a complete state of disarray, but he points them to some boxes. “It's all a bunch of junk, anyway,” he says. “Just don't touch anything on this side of the room.”

“This side of the room” refers to piles and piles of paper, enough to make Jorie cringe. Nathan leaves them to dig through the memorabilia—old ticket stubs, flyers for shows, and stacks of drawings. Aaron was prolific; he obsessively drew each puppet from varying angles. She comes across drawings of the rabbi puppet she saw in the theater and gets excited, remembering the magic of the show. They spend an hour sifting through the paper, although it’s hard to tell what’s what. Ella’s beginner Yiddish lessons leave her to sound out a word here and there, but she’s not able to fully translate any of the materials. They sift through each box, but there’s no sign of anything resembling a script. Disappointed, Ella leaves to find Nathan and tell him they are packing up.

While waiting for Ella to return, Jorie moves a pile of accordion files off a chair and sits. A wave of tiredness comes over her; she hasn’t been sleeping very well, between the stress of the new job and the bad dreams about her father. She picks up one of the files again; it reminds her of the folders her mother still has in the house containing photos and documents of her grandmother’s. Something in Yiddish is written on top, with the familiar curves of Nathan’s father’s script. It’s not tied shut, but when she opens it the paper practically crumbles. She peers inside and sees a stack of letters, still in their envelopes. Taking one out, she inspects the addressee. Aaron Ashkenazi, with the Catskills address. On the top left corner there is only an address, 110 E. Tenth Street, but no name. The dates on the postage range from 1932-1933, which, from Ella’s history lesson in the car, are the years just before the theater burned down. She pulls out a letter, curious now. She can’t read the Yiddish writing, but traces her fingers on the yellowed paper, the ink still intact. She scrutinizes the characters in the signature line. Yiddish

script uses the Hebrew lettering system, which she learned during her short time in Hebrew school. She recognizes that the first letter is a ‘mem,’ the m sound.

She can hardly believe it. Could she have found the letters of Minnie Zenkel?

When Ella returns with Nathan, Jorie shows them what she’s found. Nathan, mouthing off about a contractor who has quoted an impossibly high price to remove some debris, is not pleased when Ella asks if she can take the letters with her.

“You can read whatever you want here, but you can’t take anything off the property,” he says.

“Do you have a copier?” Jorie asks.

He shakes his head. “But there is a copy center in town. If you want them that badly, I’ll take you over there.”

Two hours later, they’re back in the car. The copy center only had one working copier, and Nathan was insistent that he make the copies, fearing the “girls” wouldn’t be as careful with the papers as he would be. Jorie and Ella sat patiently as he stumbled again and again with the copier functions, and listened to his soliloquys about his father, who he described as a real miserable bastard. Apparently the Weinberger side of the family never fully accepted their son-in-law, convinced that he had never really loved their daughter and only married into the family for money.

As Ella and Jorie journey back to Manhattan, conversation between the two of them flows easily, as if they’ve known each other much longer. They stop to eat at a small diner, and Ella begins to confide in Jorie, telling Jorie how she and Ilan had been friends first, having met during Ilan’s performance in a play at Columbia. When they first

met, she said, he was only halfway full of himself, with ample confidence that read as sexy. The change in him started when he won a coveted grant.

Jorie, in turn, divulges her complicated dating history, starting with her anti-climactic coming out in college over two dollar pitchers at Applebees. For years, she had hid it from her mother, she tells Ella, afraid that it would cause undue stress for her, but her mother found out from the good old fashioned game of telephone. It was Alex who told Shelley who told Mim about spotting Jorie at a Manhattan bar kissing another woman.

“So now you only date women?”

“Mostly, yeah. But I still call myself bi, although I’m not sure if that’s even the right word.” Recently Jorie was at a singles’ mixer where she had to fill out a nametag and include her identity. A list of possibilities was on the table, with a caveat that they were not meant to be limiting: lesbian, high femme, butch, soft butch, fierce femme, transmasculine genderqueer butch, femme, bi/queer tomboy femme, femme dyke, stone butch, two-spirit, lesbian/not butch/not femme, gender fluid transwoman, jock tomboy, low femme, bisexual, somewhere on the spectrum, gay, queer. Jorie left hers blank. The choices were dizzying, but she couldn’t find one that quite spoke to her. Different days she felt different things. Maybe a handful fit.

“Identity is complicated,” Ella says.

Back in the car, Jorie mentions how crazy it is that they found the letters at all. She could have just as easily not sat down at that chair, or not opened the folder.

“I don’t think it’s crazy at all. It’s *bashert*, meant to be.”

“You don’t believe that, do you? That some force actually willed it that way?”

Ella tucks her hands into the sleeves of her shirt. “I do,” she says. “You wouldn’t believe all the work I’ve done trying to find out about Minnie Zenkel. I’ve tried all of the local Yiddish organizations—YIVO, *The Forward*. I even reached out by email to folks at other places, including the Yiddish Book Center up in Amherst. All I’m trying to do is find people who actually saw a show at the original Zenkel’s. But each interview proved more disappointing than the last. These old New Yorkers wanted to reminisce, telling long, winding stories only tangentially related to the theater. They would start with an autobiography, including a recitation of the family tree and its most successful members. Rather than getting to the good stuff, I only learned how Benny, *baruch hashem*, died from influenza in 1919, or how Michael was the highest paid lawyer in all of Detroit. At the end of hours of conversations, it turned out that nobody knew Minnie Zenkel. And then, today, I come here with you, and you find them. You must be my good luck charm!”

Ella unfolds a hand and puts it on top of Jorie’s.

Around the time when red streaks fill the sky, a gorgeous winter sunset, Jorie finally feels ready to broach something she’s wondered about all day.

“Do you think you’ll get back together with Ilan?”

“Honestly?” Ella says. “I’m not sure. Knowing him opened me up to a lot of things.”

“Like what?” Jorie asks.

“For one, I’ve started the process of converting to Judaism.”

“What?” Jorie asks, turning her head to gauge Ella’s seriousness.

“It’s not as crazy as it sounds,” Ella says, and laughs. “I’ve always been drawn to Judaism and Jewish history as a subject. And the faith part just followed naturally from it, I guess.”

Jorie tries to process this news. In the city, at any time, she has one friend on some new spiritual or life-altering kick. One’s doing a thirty-day vipassana retreat. Another pays beaucoup bucks to go to weekends at a hotel with the Landmark Forum. But Jorie has always been skeptical. Established religion or not, these sudden adoptions of faith always seemed like cries for help for friends in crisis.

“Did Ilan ask you to do it?” Jorie asks.

“He might have planted the seed, but it’s always been for myself. He’s not overly religious. Secular Israeli, you know?”

Jorie nods, still not sure how to respond. Considering conversion? Jorie remembers reading a book in college about secular Jews who decided to commit themselves to orthodox Judaism. “Ba’al teshuva” were what they were called. One of the women in the book described the arduous nature of it—classes with rabbis over many years, studying Jewish texts. The road for the non-Jew must be twice as hard. As a child, Jorie desperately wanted to believe in God, like her mother, like friends of hers. Her father would stay home on Friday nights and watch television until Jorie, Mim and Rosie returned from temple. But Jorie didn’t want to be like him. She would pray in temple with her mother next to her, and wished she would feel something, anything. But always there was a deafening silence. Faith was this concept that nobody could ever adequately explain. If you didn’t have it, how could you get it?

“I’m from a long tradition of faith,” Ella says. “I grew up Catholic and, although I don’t like many things about the Church, I always felt immersed in the act of group prayer and religion generally. So it’s not that much of a stretch.”

Jorie imagines what would be her mother’s response to Ella. In the past, she had objected to more than one of Jorie’s potential partners on the grounds that they weren’t Jewish. Jorie could read the subtext, that if they were male she might not have the same objection. But she smiles as she thinks of bringing Ella home.

“You’re laughing at me?” Ella says, as she tugs on Jorie’s arm.

“No, not at all. I admire you is all,” Jorie says. “To have all that conviction.”

After they park the car in the garage they both linger outside, pacing up and down the block, neither ready to head to their respective subways and say goodnight. Finally, after both are too cold, Ella tells Jorie she’ll call soon.

“Would you want to help me out some more? You’re so good at sleuthing. Plus I like having you around.” Ella smiles.

“For my wallet?” Jorie picked up the tab for the copies and dinner since Ella left her wallet in Brooklyn.

“I’m going to pay you back! We’ll get together this week.”

The two hug goodbye, Jorie squeezing Ella tightly.

Jorie returns to her apartment exhausted. It’s almost eight, so she makes herself some tea, promising that she’ll spend a couple of hours on research before bedtime. Feeling the tickle of a cold coming on—wasn’t Ilan sniffing that first night she met him?—she takes a preemptive dose of Nyquil. As she settles into her couch, thoughts of the day kept running through her head—the look on Ella’s face when she brought her the

letters, the smell of citrus that clings to the scarf she borrowed. She tries to stop herself— Ella is just barely out of a relationship and hasn't even said she was into dating women.

Jorie closes her eyes, intending to rest just for a minute. But she wakes at six, still groggy, catapulted from bed by the noise outside. Located next to the Fort Hamilton Parkway, her apartment is host to a highway morning symphony, including truck drivers that throw on their ear-splitting Jake brakes before the sun's come up, and helicopters that circle during rush hour to report on BQE traffic patterns. But she has to get up. Before the meeting with Miles, there's work to be done.

Chapter 12

Jorie arrives at the headquarters of the Tribeca Partnership at nine on the dot. She's buzzed in through the intercom, and ascends the stairs to the third floor. After passing one unmarked door, she finds another, this one slightly ajar, with the partnership's logo stickered to the front, a gray trapezoidal shape representing the neighborhood as bounded by Canal, Broadway, Vesey and West Streets. Within the borders the word TriBeCa is spelled out in red, blocked out in three neat lines.

She has been curious to talk to Miles after his fiery speech at the Community Board meeting. But in real life, he's less personable than he seemed in front of the audience. He's over six feet tall, with remnants of high school acne and a hair color somewhere between red and purple. After giving her a firm handshake, he leaves her at a large table in the center of the headquarters' only room and goes next door.

"Not now, Ma," he says, loud enough that she can hear him through the door. Eric had told her that Miles's mother, a ceramicist, was one of the early artists to the area, in the late sixties, when it was still rough-and-tumble. It's easy to see why these buildings are coveted. The space is enormous for a New York City apartment, with brick walls, light wood floors, and enormous windows—but the most arresting feature is the maps and posters that cover one wall, a veritable history of the neighborhood. One poster, from 1978, celebrates the opening of Washington Market Park. From next door, Jorie hears a crash, as Miles lets out a run of expletives.

Jorie looks through her notes as she waits. She tried to cram this morning but the after-effects of the cold medicine had slowed her brain, and left her unable to make sense of anything. Now she attempts to read her scribbles and scolds herself for not preparing

more. Her only comfort is knowledge gleaned from prior experience; no partner has permitted her to speak at her first meeting with a client.

The buzzer rings again and Miles returns. Either Miles has done a costume change or she was too focused on his height to notice his outfit before. He wears bright blue pants, which stop just above his ankle, and a houndstooth button down. As Eric enters the room, he gives her a warm smile, which puts Jorie at ease. From the way he fumbles setting his suitcase down, he seems a little distracted.

“I have some news,” Eric says, as the three find places around the farmhouse table.

“Just heard,” Miles says. “I broke a mug trying to get to my phone.”

Jorie looks to Eric for an explanation. “Rick got the building permit,” Eric says.

“So we’ll get our final determination and appeal it to the BSA,” Jorie says. This is the strategy they had agreed upon to challenge the project. Appeal the issuance of the building permit in front of the Board of Standards and Appeals. Jorie would take a stab at the first draft of the appeal.

“How are we going to position this?” Miles asks.

Eric takes a notepad from his briefcase. “Before I came down I received a copy of their Restrictive Declaration.” He hands a copy to Miles and then to Jorie. “On its face, it doesn’t look like it meets DOB’s own requirements. It’s missing some language they’ve said is mandatory, so we’ll lob a challenge there.”

Miles crosses his arms. “Right,” he says. “But what about their deception? Their ludicrous advertising?”

“Of course, of course,” Eric says, in the same voice Jorie has heard him use to placate Jane when she gets bent out of shape over the poorly-cleaned, shared bathroom

facilities on their floor. “Necessarily we’ll have to focus more on the type of building Belleza has proposed, and whether it meets the definition of a transient hotel. I’ve actually had Jorie begin research on this issue.”

“And?” asks Miles. Both Eric and Miles look to Jorie.

“Well,” says Jorie. “I’ve really just started.”

“It’s okay,” says Eric. “I’ve had her look into basic definitions across the statutes of what a transient hotel is,” he explains to Miles. Eric gives Jorie an encouraging smile. “Just give us the broad strokes.”

The broad strokes, thinks Jorie. Right now there are only unreadable squiggles up and down her notepad. She stares at them, hoping that something will jump out at her. Anything.

“Well, there’s the Zoning Resolution, which defines a transient hotel as”—she scans her sheet for the definition but has a hard time reading her handwriting—“as a hotel that has living or sleeping accommodations used primarily for transient occupancy, and may be rented on a daily basis—“

Miles interrupts. “I don’t need the whole definition, just what we’re going to argue.”

Eric doesn’t speak, so Jorie continues. “Okay, there’s also the Building Code, obviously, but also there’s the Multiple Dwelling Law, which governs the use of buildings, the Rent Stabilization Code and certain laws governing hotels.”

“I’m quite familiar with the body of laws,” Miles says. “But what are we arguing?”

“Well at this point there are some different definitions that make it hard to say with any conviction what the actual definition of a transient hotel is.”

“So you’re going to argue that there is no standard definition?” Miles asks. Even though Jorie is the only one speaking, Miles directs his attention to Eric.

“We’re just at the preliminary stages, Miles,” Eric says. “We’ll get back to you by the end of the week with our internal memo and then we’ll take it from there. But I have some questions I want to get your input on first.”

Miles examines the Restrictive Declaration Eric handed him earlier, first putting on his glasses which he takes from his breast pocket. “I’m worried about this, Eric. If you think it’s too big for you, I can loop in Cooper Levin. I don’t want this to go the way of Little West 12th.”

“I hear you, Miles. We can handle it. Let us map out our strategy in writing. If you’re not happy with our work, we’ll talk about alternatives, but now—”

“If they get away with this,” says Miles, “This will mark the beginning of the end. I wasn’t just blowing smoke up the community board’s ass when I presented a few weeks back. The celebrities are one thing—we all get that the property values have gone up. But turning Tribeca into a tourist hub? We don’t want to be Soho south.”

Eric nods solemnly while Miles paces the room, recounting one blow to the neighborhood after the next. Eventually he stops before one of the maps on the wall.

Miles runs his hand over the map of Tribeca. “Soon, we’ll all be priced out.”

Jorie wonders how anyone can take Miles seriously with all his dramatic bluster, but when she looks over at Eric, he refuses to make eye contact. She already can tell what he thinks of her performance.

Her stomach grumbles, now hungry for the bagel she nibbled at on the train, and fear begins to set in. Her test period is not yet over.

Even after lunch, Eric's still hasn't returned to the office. Eager to clear the air from the morning, Jorie asks Jane if she knows when he will be back from his other meetings.

"Your guess is as good as mine," Jane says, handing Jorie a stack of mail.

In the pile she finds a copy of the deed she ordered. She's excited, hoping she'll finally find the name of the building owner. But the name on the deed is the same limited liability company as before, and the signature is impossible to read. There is an address, which she googles. It's an apartment on the Upper East Side that seems to belong to a woman named Elsie Fenton, who she later finds is deceased.

Disappointed with her sleuthing, Jorie spends the afternoon working on the memo. This is the place she will build Eric's trust. Even in law school, she excelled in legal writing, always getting the highest grades in her class. Eric told her to focus on the kind of building that Belleza has proposed, the "transient hotel."

She re-reads the definitions she has already looked up, but the more she reads, the more she realizes that this morning she was right, the definitions are unclear. Starting with the most important definition first, she focuses on the Zoning Resolution. It defines a transient hotel as a building in which living or sleeping accommodations are used primarily for transient occupancy, and may be rented on a daily basis. This reminds her of the common sense definition of a hotel, where people spend a night or several nights. There are also other requirements in the definition that fit with normal hotel usage, including common entrances for all sleeping units, twenty-four hour desk service, and other hotel-like services, such as housekeeping and the furnishing of linens. Belleza's

condo-hotel meets the later parts of the definition fairly readily, as the plans show that they will have a lobby and housekeeping, along with a laundering service. So she returns to the first part of the definition, an accommodation used “primarily for transient occupancy.” What does the word transient imply?

She starts with Black’s Dictionary first, the most ubiquitous gift to recent law school graduates. While courts won’t necessarily look to the legal dictionary if a term is clearly defined in statute, the plain meaning of a word can often be used to supplement a statute’s definitions. Black’s defines transient as “that which is temporary.” The definition continues: “Synonymous with transitory, fugitive, fleeting, momentary.” In thinking about Belleza’s condo-hotel, this definition doesn’t fit with the concept that individuals will own their own units. Ownership is a sign of permanence, of settling down. On a gut level, something doesn’t jibe with the idea that there will be owners, but Jorie knows she needs more than her gut to build a compelling case.

She looks back at the brochures, and reads these in connection with the restrictive declaration that the developers signed, which circumscribes what the owners can do with their units. In the restrictive declaration, the developers promise that no owner shall occupy their unit for more than twenty-nine days in any thirty-six day period, or for more than one hundred and twenty days in any calendar year.

She returns to the word transient. While Black’s defines the word, the Zoning Resolution doesn’t. There is the insinuation, though, that renting it on a daily basis would be considered transient. She consults some of the other paperwork. In the permit issued by DOB, the occupancy group includes buildings that are primarily occupied for the shelter and sleeping accommodation of individuals on a day-to-day or week-to-week

basis. This might bump up against the current structure, which permits nearly month-long stays. The Multiple Dwelling Law has a more specific definition of transient, which says it's "more or less [the] temporary abode of individuals or families who are lodged with or without meals." The brochure for the spaces is vague on this term; it says that the architecture firm will design world-class living spaces, but doesn't say whether this will include kitchens.

The definitions start to make less and less sense the more that she reads, so she turns instead to prior case law. If she can find another instance where the Board of Standards and Appeals or DOB have examined this condo-hotel structure before, this could be helpful. She scans the search results. One case involves a building in the Meatpacking District. The building, at 848 Washington Street, was issued a permit to build a transient hotel, similar to their case, but the building permit was revoked. Jorie starts to read faster, becoming excited at the similarities. DOB revoked the permit because they found there were residential uses at the site, in addition to hotel uses. She becomes slightly deflated when the differences between this case and hers become distinguishable: at 848 Washington the owners explicitly called less than fifty percent of the units residential, so there was no controversy over what qualified as transient. But then, she hits upon a gold mine, language that is very direct and speaks to the feeling in her gut. DOB states in their revocation letter that "in order to develop a transient hotel, units may not be made subject to lease, sale or other arrangements under which they would not be available for transient occupancy." She looks at Belleza's brochures. Since the owners have contractual rights to stay there then technically, on some nights, the units might not be available for transient occupancy.

Jorie jumps up. She wants to run the idea by Eric before she sets it down in writing. Looking at the time, she realizes it's later than she thinks, already after five.

She missed a text from Ella on her phone.

*Part II of Adventures of Ella and Jorie. Ready for your first Yiddish lesson?
Tonight at 7PM.*

Will try to make it, Jorie writes, then puts the phone away. The prospect of seeing Ella is thrilling, but she knows she should focus on her job. The thing she should have done yesterday, instead of playing Watson to Ella's Sherlock.

Jorie prints out the Washington Street case and highlights the appropriate text. Carrying it down the hall, she passes Jane's desk. Jane is already gone for the day; her coat is absent from the back of her chair while her screensaver, a cat riding on top of a Roomba, scrolls on her computer.

A light is on in Eric's office, but his door is closed. Jorie knocks softly.

"I wanted to show you this," she says, opening the door. She hands him the photocopy. "Are you familiar with this case on Washington Street? Another condo-hotel? I think it'll be really good for our case."

He gives a small nod, but not much else.

"It's not exactly on point, but close, and I think you'll like the language."

"Sit down for a minute," he says, with a frown.

Jorie's stomach knots up. Is she going to be fired for the second time in one month?

“I meant to say sorry for this morning. I don’t know what happened. I guess—I guess I wasn’t clear about your expectations. But I am really sorry. I promise it won’t happen again.”

Eric doesn’t say anything, but picks up the picture of him climbing.

“When I first started climbing, I met this guy Joe, one of the owners of the gym, and he gave me a brief intro to the sport. He was probably in his mid-forties and had been climbing for years. Of course he talked me through all the bouldering basics since that’s what I was interested in starting with. The usual beginner stuff—how to spot someone else, bring a crash pad, have lots of chalk, pay attention to the difficulty of the route. But there’s one piece of advice I remember most of all. He told me that I should never expect someone else to tell me what the conditions were, or what level of difficulty I could handle. I needed to know my own strengths and weaknesses well enough before I started so I could diagnose what was ahead. And if I wasn’t absolutely sure, one hundred percent sure that I could handle the climb, I shouldn’t do it, even if someone else told me they thought I could. Or even if I knew another guy who did it. At the end of the day, it was only me who was responsible for me.”

Eric pauses to replace the picture on his desk.

“It’s not going to get any clearer than this,” he continues. “If anything happens like that again, you’re fired.”

Chapter 13

White letters spell “Workmen’s Circle” in both English and Yiddish above the rounded archways that span the building’s brick front. Jorie is early, having walked here, the nonprofit only blocks from her office. She takes the elevator to the fourth floor as Ella had instructed.

The woman at the front desk tells Jorie that Beginner Yiddish meets in room four. Entering the brightly lit room, where several students have already organized their desks into a circle, Jorie is disappointed to find that Ella isn’t there yet. She’s beginning to sense her lateness might be a pattern.

A middle-aged man with thick black eyebrows invites Jorie to join the circle. He introduces himself as Joshua, a rabbi from Long Island, who is studying Yiddish to better communicate with some of his aging congregants. The others extend greetings as well: two of the women are European students enrolled in a modern Jewish studies course at Yeshiva University, while a fourth man wants to learn Yiddish so that he can translate his grandfather’s poetry.

Jorie didn’t realize that Ella was actually inviting her to a Yiddish class. From the playfulness of the message she assumed it would be something more informal, a Yiddish movie, perhaps, or a chance to hear Ella talk more about the Ashkenazi brothers and Minnie Zenkel. Truthfully, she was holding on to hope that it might be more of a date. But everything about the room—the buzzing fluorescent lights, the whiteboard in the front with Yiddish script scribbled on the front—is decidedly not date-like. Jorie considers leaving, texting Ella that she’s not quite up for a Yiddish class after her hellish day, but before she can pack up her things the teacher arrives.

“Gutn ovent,” she says sweetly, with a wide smile and a stack of handouts. Perl wears a red flower-print dress. A native speaker from birth, Perl tells the class that she learned Yiddish from her parents, who took special pains to teach their children Yiddish by moving into a building in the Bronx with two other Yiddish-speaking families. She welcomes the students in English, but tells them that the lessons will be conducted primarily in Yiddish. She starts with an introduction about The Workmen’s Circle, which Jorie appreciates, since Ella offered no context (and still hasn’t even arrived). Perl says that the organization was founded around the turn of the twentieth century by Eastern European Jewish immigrants, and has always been more of a cultural group, with a focus on social and economic justice. Jorie marvels that she’s never even heard of this place.

Perl transitions seamlessly to teaching basic greetings. In ten minutes, Jorie is able to introduce herself and say the date. To her surprise, she enjoys mastering these building blocks of communication. Her working life is so focused on probing for deep layers of meaning that she experiences a palpable relief in the simplicity of the instruction, in being given a circumscribed list of questions to ask and set answers to respond with. Jorie also begins to notice the peculiarities of this new language, which manifest themselves in even the most elementary greetings. Perl says that another way to ask “How are you?” is to ask “What’s the news?” Unlike English, where the responses might range from “Fine” to “Okay,” an acceptable response in Yiddish is, “What should be the news?” Even though her mother speaks no Yiddish, something about the construction reminds her of the way Mim easily deflects a question by putting the pressure back on the question asker.

Midway through their review Ella bursts in, slightly out of breath and with flushed cheeks. She takes a seat next to Jorie and apologizes for being late.

“Oyf Yiddish,” Perl warns.

“Zeyt moykhl,” Ella says, before turning to Jorie.

“I’m sorry,” she mouths to Jorie. As Ella takes off her jacket, Jorie inhales a mixture of Ella’s perfume, that orange-lemon scent still on Jorie’s scarf, and a muskier odor, her sweat from running late. Jorie knows she is already in trouble, cataloging Ella’s smell.

“Gutn ovnt,” Jorie says.

Ella raises an eyebrow, taking out her notebook. “Gutn ovnt.”

The rest of the hour passes quickly and the group says their goodbyes until next week. Ella tells Jorie she needs to stop at the front desk to collect messages. As they walk past a large community board on the wall, Ella points to one of the posters, featuring a picture of a theater marquis with Yiddish writing.

“I put this up to encourage people to call me if they had any info about Minnie Zenkel.”

In the lobby, Ella embraces the women behind the desk, whom she introduces as Jenny. As the two talk, Jenny apologizing that she has no new contacts for Ella to interview, Jorie notices an older woman in the corner of the lobby, reading a book. The woman keeps pulling down her glasses and staring in Jorie’s direction. From the way she narrows her eyes it seems as if she’s giving Jorie a dirty look. Confused, Jorie cranes her head around to spot the source of the woman’s discontent, but only she, Ella and Jenny are left. Maybe they’re talking too loud, Jorie thinks.

When they head to the elevator, Jorie nods in the direction of the old woman.

“What’s up with her?”

“Oh, that’s Malke. She likes to give me the stink eye. Most of the older people here, they are so happy to see me. All they want to ask me is, ‘Where are all the young people?’ But not Malke. I asked her if she would let me interview her since she’s lived in the city her whole life. But she said no. And from then on, she always looks at me like I’m a thief.”

“What have you come to steal?” Jorie asks, taking in the sour look still etched into Malke’s face.

“Some of the native speakers are put off by a younger generation speaking Yiddish and performing Yiddish plays, as if we’re going to corrupt it. But honestly, I get the sense she thinks I’m here to steal her story. From the way she freezes up when I come around, you’d think I’d threatened to take the actual words from her mouth.”

“That’s strange,” Jorie says, but thinks of her mother when she asks her questions about her father, the topic itself so painful that it causes a physical reaction.

“You ready to get out of here?” Ella says.

“Thought you’d never ask,” Jorie says.

They head to a dive bar Ella knows where the jukebox blares Seventies rock. Even though smoking has been banned in the city, the bar still retains the smell, as if holding up its middle finger at Bloomberg.

“There aren’t too many like this left in Manhattan,” Ella says.

“Hey love,” the baby-faced bartender says. Ella reaches over the bar, her necklace slapping the edge, and gives the bartender a peck on the cheek. He plays it cool but Jorie can tell that he enjoys the attention from the way he self-consciously adjusts his shirt.

“The usual?” he asks.

They take their drinks: for Ella, a gin martini; for Jorie, an IPA. As they walk around the pool table, two skinny bearded guys look up, mostly at Ella, but she ignores them and continues on to a small alcove in the back.

“I’m exhausted,” Ella says, sliding into a side of the booth. “We’ve started doing inventory of our stuff at the theater. That’s why I was late.”

“I’ve had a pretty shitty day, too,” Jorie says, thinking about the meeting with Miles. Ella doesn’t ask for more details, which is okay by Jorie. She’s not keen on sharing her work mess.

Ella talks about how hard it’s been to go through all of the theater’s detritus, which has amassed over the years they’ve been in the space. After a bit, the bartender brings over a second martini and for Jorie, a second beer. He accepts no money from Ella, but gladly swipes the ten that Jorie puts out on the table.

“He’s a sweetie,” Ella says.

With the second drink, the conversation starts to flow. At one point Jorie scares herself when she realizes how much she wants to reach across the table and kiss her; she’s always been slow in love, so tentative, but something about Ella emboldens Jorie. She feels her cheeks grow hot.

Ella doesn’t appear to notice or, if she can see the admiration in Jorie’s eyes, she does a good job of hiding it. Her posture loosens and she changes position, putting her back up against the wall and stretching her legs out the length of the bench. At some point, she leans over and grabs her toes.

“I used to dance,” she says. “I was going to be in the ballet.”

“What happened?” Jorie asks.

“When I was in ninth grade”—she says into her knees—“I was at a very prestigious dance school in Pennsylvania. I’d been dancing for years at this point, when I get called into the dean’s office. I had done a few bad things there, like smoke pot once or twice. And we snuck into the boy’s dorms a couple of times. What good that did us. Male ballet dancers?” She smirks. Sitting up, she narrowly knocks over her martini as she swings her arms up to grab the stem of her glass.

“So she calls me into her office. This famous former dancer. ABT. Had her own company for a while. Blah blah blah. I’m super-nervous. And she smiles at me, and says, ‘Eleanor, we have most appreciated your attendance at the school. Unfortunately, your body type is not quite right. When we admitted you, you hadn’t finished your growing, but now, it’s quite evident.’” Ella bites her lip and shakes her head. “Nope,” she says, “nope, you’re not quite right.” She smiles, but it doesn’t fully mask her genuine sadness. For the first time, Jorie sees the real Ella.

“It must have been hard.”

Ella shrugs. “It was at the time, but when I think of all the places that that school led me, it’s not so bad. Because of my dance background I was easily able to critique dance performances, which is partly what led me to study theater critically. In its own way, I think it was meant to be.”

“So we’re back to that,” Jorie says. “Who means it to be that way?”

“Ye of little faith.”

“Me of no faith.”

“Really?” Ella says. “You don’t believe in anything?”

Jorie pauses, not wanting to continue the religion conversation again. The more she thought about Ella's conversion, the worse it made her feel, in part because it reminded her of Ella's connection with Ilan.

"Can I ask you something?" Jorie says. She has been down this road before, with crushes in college, women who would befriend Jorie, knowing she dated women. These women would spend days and months getting to know Jorie, the intimacy growing stronger, before they told her that they weren't interested in *that*. They flirted with the possibility, but then were too scared to follow through. If this is Ella, Jorie wants to know it.

"I don't mean this to come out rude, or weird, but what are we doing here?"

"What do you mean? Talking?"

"No, I mean you and me."

Ella's eyes widen and Jorie kicks herself. Maybe she's spoken to soon? But then, Ella's lips curl into a smile.

"Let's go back to my place," Ella says, reaching for Jorie's hand across the table.

People always say that if you really want to get a sense of a person you should consult their bookshelf, or their record collection. But for Jorie, there's only one place to begin to know another person: the bathroom. She starts with the medicine cabinet, specifically the pills. Not just for names, but dosages, too. Mim had been on phenelzine, but that was the Eighties. Jorie has watched her mother's pills change over time. She's gone through phases where she's less depressed, where she quits therapy and coasts on whatever SSRI is in fashion.

There are drugs that are outside of Jorie's immediate purview but she knows all the names. For schizophrenia there's Risperdal, Zyprexa, Haldol. For bipolar, Lithium and Depakote. For depression: Zoloft, Celexa. She's not too worried by beta blockers, she's taken these at times for panic attacks. What she discovers in the medicine cabinets of potential lovers does not leave her judgmental of whatever deficiencies the human body and brain has drummed up, but this allows her to calculate. How much fear will she have to hold, how much worry that the person she loves will become someone else tomorrow?

In the psychiatric unit where her mother stayed, a not unfriendly place, they called her mother by her full name, Miriam. Mim didn't have the wherewithal to correct them, which undoubtedly she would have done had she been of a sound mind (just as Jorie does when anyone tries to pull out Marjorie—not cool). But this is how Jorie always remembers the hospital: the place where her mother went by an alias.

Pills are a useful start, but then Jorie moves on to questions of hygiene. Is there floss in the medicine cabinet? How often does it appear used? (It's helpful to examine whether crust has accumulated around the edges.) How beat-up is the toothbrush? Has it been changed in the last year? Are there basic medical treatments, such as headache medicine, something for cuts, cotton balls? A thoughtful groomer and a stockpiler of home remedies might err on the side of a compulsive, but she prefers this to an impulsive person. Impulsive is her father.

Finally, she'll finish up her inspection on general bathroom cleanliness. Is there a brown watermark inside the bowl, reflecting irregular toilet cleanings? Does the base

have a layer of grime? The level of cleanliness is of least importance, but she can't help checking. For Mim, the bathroom is an altar.

Of course there's the issue of privacy. Some lover have accused Jorie of being a snoop when Jorie attempted to casually ask about bouts of depression, as if it were a thought that just came to her from thin air and not from a thorough bathroom inspection.

But when faced with accusations like this, Jorie doesn't care. Better safe than sorry.

Ella doesn't have any floss in her cabinet, but she does have a water pick, something Jorie recalls seeing in Nana's bathroom. On the whole, there are minimal pill bottles, and even then, just the usual suspects: Midol, Advil, Allegra. The bathroom sink is a bit grimy, so she's not a cleaner. This is consistent with the toothbrush, whose bristles are on the frizzy side. No red flags just yet.

She finds Ella on the windowsill, blowing smoke rings onto the balcony. A bottle of wine is open on the table and Jorie pours herself a glass. She gets comfortable on the couch, which looks like a hand-me-down from a fraternity house, stuffing about to pop from the worn corduroy fabric.

"Do you get paid at the theater?" Jorie asks.

Ella laughs, stubbing out her cigarette. "You've never been in the arts."

"So what do you do for money?"

"I get paid a stipend for teaching at Columbia."

Ella joins Jorie on the couch. There's still a considerable gap between them.

"What do you think you'll do when you finish?"

“Get a professorship. That’s the plan, at least.”

“From what I’ve read those jobs are pretty hard to come by.”

Ella shrugs. “Yes, but my program is one of the best. And I’m in a narrow enough research area that I have a good chance.”

Jorie wonders where all this confidence comes from. Ella has told her a bit about her family life. Ella grew up just outside Baltimore, in Catonsville, in an ordinary nuclear family—mom, dad, brother, all healthy. The only time Jorie has registered any family strife is when she asked what her parents thought of the conversion. Ella told her that her father was okay with it, but her mother was still working through it. Jorie was envious that Ella’s mother would work through an issue, rather than just bury it, as Mim tended to do.

“Do you like teaching?” Jorie says.

“There’s good and bad. The students are smart, but entitled. But overall it’s a good gig. I get to think through lots of the issues I’m writing about in my dissertation. Plus my students are a fascinating study of humanity. I’ve gotten pretty good at figuring out people.”

“Really?”

“Yeah, really,” says Ella. “I’m good at people. For instance, I know what you want right now.”

Jorie laughs. “I’m sure it’s fairly obvious.”

Ella leans in, and closes the gap between them.

From the way that Ella tears at Jorie's clothes, not slowing down to check in, Jorie wonders whether Ella's ever been with a woman before. She hasn't said either way, but there's something aggressive about the way she grabs that causes Jorie to wonder if Ella is copying gestures she's seen elsewhere. Jorie relates to this; for much of the time she has dated women she's felt inexperienced, that she's missed some cultural lesson that would prepare her for success in the bedroom. One woman she dated threw out terms she had never heard of with regularity—topping, tribbing, daddling. The words only served to make Jorie feel more incompetent, as if she didn't even understand the language of sex. But over time Jorie has realized that the vocabulary, or any concept of what defines sex between women, matters less than being present in the moment, having the ability to pick up on and match her partner's energy.

Ella is scattered. She won't talk much while they kiss; she's distant in a way that Jorie didn't expect. Because of this, Jorie becomes more aware of her own power. She starts at a safe place, exploring Ella's mouth with her own, understanding how she uses her tongue—this is the place where the conversation begins. With the first kiss, Jorie is back in the place of all her first kisses. In Jeff Cannelli's basement, playing seven minutes in heaven, consumed with whether he can taste the pepperoni hot pocket she inhaled before she got roped into the game. She is at sleepaway camp where she first kissed a girl, Lauren Berkowitz, by the lake. She finds her way back to the wide-eyed ingénue who has made her feel more dizzy in one week than all of the lovers she has known over the course of her life.

Jorie begins to play, using her hands to find the places on Ella's body—behind the nape of her neck, just inside her elbows—that make her relax. Ella's frantic energy

dissipates as her mouth becomes soft and pliable and her body opens up. Jorie spends time here, goes slow. It's in the building of anticipation that she always feels the most connected, the most able to expose herself.

They spend an hour like this, Jorie paying careful attention to Ella's body, the small murmurs and shifts in her breathing. Ella gives over to Jorie's assured hands, the steady pressure. They finish, and lie facing each other, so close that Jorie can feel Ella's breath on her face. Jorie wants to ask Ella how she feels, but stops herself.

They're quiet until Ella speaks. "When you have sex, do you ever use a strap-on?"

"Why would you ask that?"

"I thought it might feel good." Ella closes her eyes.

Jorie's used dildos before, but never liked them very much. The question makes her worry, though. Was the sex not good for Ella?

"Have you ever—"

"What?" Ella says.

"Been with a woman?"

"A couple of times."

"And?"

Ella smiles playfully. "I'm having fun." She flips onto her back and looks up at the ceiling. "I'm really happy right now. But I just got out of a long-term relationship. Ilan and I have been together for three years."

The sound of his name silences Jorie. After a beat, Ella speaks up. "Are you okay with that?"

"Sure."

“That doesn’t sound very convincing.”

“No, of course I get it. I just really like being with you, and wondered what this all meant.”

“I like you, too. But you know what it’s like, to just get out of something. It’s like your head is on backwards, and you’re just starting to relearn the world again without someone by your side. What’s the longest relationship you’ve ever been in?”

Jorie knows that Ella asks this to establish some commonality, but the question embarrasses Jorie.

“Not very long.”

“Two years? A year?”

Jorie doesn’t answer.

“It doesn’t matter,” Ella says. “But I need to take it slow. We wouldn’t totally want to be a lesbian cliché, would we? Sleep together once and then move in together?”

Jorie smiles, but something in Ella’s tone grates. Does she think Jorie is a cliché for wanting this to be more than a one-night stand?

Eventually they fall asleep, pressed close, but Jorie wakes often, startled by dreams that terrify her, reminding her of what she might lose when the sun comes up. At some point an alarm goes off, and Ella says it’s time to get up. Jorie presses her lips over Ella’s. She hopes it isn’t the last time.

Chapter 14

Susan waits for Myung-Ki at one of the small tables in Bryant Park. Although it's a public place, at lunchtime so many people cross the Park's pathways that faces become indistinguishable, one stranger morphing into the next. She likes the anonymity.

She wishes she could have been here to see the park in the mid-1800s, when the adjacent land was a state-of-the-art reservoir, raised forty feet above street level. At that time, the New York Crystal Palace was built where she sits now, after the success of a similar exhibition hall in Hyde Park. If she remembers correctly, it wasn't named Bryant Park until the late 1800s, after the death of the famous journalist. Later, Robert Moses elevated the park, taking it off the street-level to create a more peaceful spot, but anyone who lived here in the Eighties knows what became of that. Susan was new to the city then, just in college. The warnings from more seasoned city-dwellers were explicit: Stay away. Yet now, twenty years later, the park booms, in part due to better planning. More entrances were created to make the park more accessible; concessions were opened on site, along with the public bathrooms, some of the best-kept in the city.

Myung-Ki is late, but soon enough she sees him crossing the center of the park in the odd manner he has of walking, his legs moving so quickly that it looks as if he's being chased. She thinks of the stacks of books below Myung-Ki's feet, the great collection of the New York Public Library.

She and Myung-Ki embrace awkwardly, more of a side-pat than a hug, their arms colliding. That Myung-Ki is her half-brother does nothing to ease Susan's general discomfort, especially since they've only known each other for just under a year. Susan suspects that despite Myung-Ki's stint at Wharton and his numerous business trips to

New York, his reticence to touch is more cultural in nature; he was born and raised in South Korea, a place that is as mythical to Susan as Oz, although she was born there, too.

Since Myung-Ki moved to the United States they've met a handful of times. The first time Susan chose the Korean restaurant on the south side of Thirty-Second, closest to Sixth, her ex's favorite Koreatown haunt. Susan thought Myung-Ki might be more comfortable there, given that most of the owners and waitstaff spoke Korean. What she hadn't accounted for was that this would cast her as outsider, having no knowledge of the language herself. Not even enough to remember the restaurant's actual name.

"I've brought some pictures," Myung-Ki says, as he sits and takes a sip of the tea that Susan has brought. His mouth tightens and Susan remembers it's the green tea he prefers. Unfailingly polite, he thanks her anyway, while placing the tea at arm's length.

It's cool for mid-April, the temperature hovering around the fifties. Susan wraps her hands around her own cup to keep warm. As she does this, Myung-Ki takes out his planner from his bag. He opens it, eager to show her pictures of the family she never knew, but Susan interrupts.

"Let's talk first," she says.

He avoids eye contact and closes the book. Susan doesn't mean to hurt his feelings, but looking at the pictures require something of her that she is not yet ready to give. Susan is in a good mood, and determined to keep it that way. The week had a rough start, when the young city planner that she had been dating abruptly told Susan that he wasn't interested in seeing her anymore. Kevin had said that she was too hard to talk to. She chided herself; she wasn't sure she should go out with him in the first place, having explained her aversion to dating anyone in government. But he had persisted, asking her

out by email, phone, and finally in person, when she bumped into him while walking her dog. Even then she was prepared to say no, but she thought of her defunct online dating profile and knew she should take the offers where they came. Plus, she genuinely enjoyed the many conversations they had had; he shared her love for all things urban planning.

Despite the rocky start, the week brightened considerably when a new case crossed her desk, an appeal. True to Jim's predictions, the Tribeca Partnership finally filed their appeal. She knows that many on her staff are eager to clear their desks, blow through the applications as fast as they can, but the anticipation of a brand-new case file still excites her. She savors each one, especially when she's unfamiliar with the issues at stake, knowing that there are layers of complexity she can't even see yet but will tease out over time.

From her bag, she pulls out bags of sweets she purchased at Dylan's Candy Bar. "I brought these for the girls," she says.

"And, for you..." Susan pulls out two Yankee t-shirts. As she holds one up next to Myung-Ki and sees how giant it is, she starts to laugh.

"I wasn't sure of your size."

The first time they met she didn't bring a gift, while he gave her a box of Asian pears. She didn't bring a gift the second time either, and he presented her with a six-pack of a ginseng-filled energy drink. The third time she picked up on his cues, and brought him a beautiful vase from a glass blower in Hudson, New York. In the way that he thanked her she quickly realized her mistake; the gifts were meant to be small things, not expensive, carefully selected pieces. Since then, it's been a back and forth. She's bought him books from The Strand, cupcakes from the original Magnolia Bakery in her

neighborhood. He's bought her another fruit gift basket and four Korean movies that sit on her bookcase, unopened.

Myung-Ki thanks her for the presents and takes out a box, but doesn't give it to Susan just yet.

Susan sips her tea. "How is everyone?"

"Everyone is well, Seung-Hee, the kids."

"And you?" She notices his clothing, often immaculate and cleanly pressed, looks wrinkled.

"I'm fine," he says, without elaborating. His eyes dart around at the passersby. "Tell me, how are things with you?"

"Work is fine," she says. He looks at her expectantly, but she won't expand; work is a demarcated zone. At their first meeting she had told him that she was an architect, but wasn't specific about her current position. He seemed excited by this. "Maybe we'll get to work on a project together someday," he had said. She had known from his letter that he worked for an investment company in Korea, but she hadn't realized that the company primarily invested in real estate throughout the United States. He'd been sent to the U.S. to oversee their investments in New York. She didn't encourage the conversation further, deflecting his questions to talk about their mother and other extended family, his wife and kids. But by their second meeting, he had apparently done his homework.

"You didn't tell me of your prestigious role," he said.

She cut him off before it went too far, and told him that it would be better if they didn't discuss work. "I wouldn't want there to be any conflicts of interest that would impede our getting to know each other." Given her public role, she didn't talk about her

work among non-colleagues at all. She was mistrustful of people's motives. This brand of skepticism likely stemmed from her teenage years—the rude awakening that occurred in tenth grade, upon the release of *Sixteen Candles*, when the girls she had known forever asked her if she wanted to marry Long Duck Dong.

Of course, some of the commissioners recused themselves from cases every now and then if they had a personal tie. But she didn't want to open the door to any claims that she, the Chair of the Board, was biased. If word got out that she had close familial ties to a real estate investor she feared it would make a mockery of the entire proceedings. There were already plenty who maligned the Board's work at every turn. Either they were in the pocket of the Mayor, or of a particular developer, or of all developers. People loved to bandy about the statistic from the outdated March 2004 study by the Municipal Arts Society, which cited the Board's high approval rate of variance projects, over ninety percent, as evidence that the Board favored developers. But Susan knew the things that were left out, all of the back-and-forth between the Board and its applicants that led up to a variance case going to hearing and decision, how many applicants withdrew their cases before this point, knowing that they would be denied. For her, this was a point of pride in the efficiency in her process; namely, that she doesn't waste city resources by holding hearings on cases that clearly don't meet the legal requirements necessary to obtain a variance. But people only saw what they wanted to. She didn't blame them entirely. For most of its years, the Board had a history of cronyism. But she was the new face of it: a distinctly non-white, non-male face.

“Tell me about the girls,” Susan says, reverting to a neutral topic. “What are they up to?”

“They’re finally settling in now, and not missing their friends so much. Jeong-Ah is enjoying her science courses. She’ll be the doctor.”

“That’s terrific,” says Susan.

“She came home just last week telling us about spiders they studied in her science course. She was very disturbed to learn that some species of female spiders eat their male mates after they procreate. She can’t stop talking about it. She asks her mother if she’s ever considered eating me.”

Susan laughs. “I think it’s because the females are hungry afterwards and the males are the closest version of take-out.”

“I wouldn’t go into those details with Jeong-Ah. Then she’ll be asking me why the female should be hungry.”

“It’s not just the female spiders that eat the males after mating,” Susan says. “But sometimes the male spiders eat the female ones, too. Perhaps that will comfort her.”

“Americans are so free in talking about this kind of thing,” he says. “In Korea, you wouldn’t be discussing these mating habits at all. Especially not in the classroom. Jeong-Ah went to the International School, of course, but even there there were boundaries.”

Myung-Ki opens the album again. “I want to show you some photos. I had my father send some more.”

Susan would prefer to have a rain check, but Myung-Ki finally seems to be relaxing. Moving his chair closer to hers, Myung Ki takes out his planner, a bulky thing, and sets it on the table. He flips a few pages to where the photos are lodged in the middle. His breathing is heavy and irregular.

He pulls out the first photo, one of their mother when she was likely just about twenty, in her wedding clothes, a short blue satin jacket and a high-waisted red skirt. Her mother looks innocent in the way of a new bride, with her open smile. This was only a couple of years after she gave up Susan, when she became pregnant out of wedlock.

In the second picture, her mother is holding Myung-Ki on her lap. They are at the beach, and her mother wears a one-piece swimsuit with a bathing cap. Susan feels a pang of longing, seeing this attention lavished on her half-brother. It's her own fault, she thinks, having gone on the quest to find her birth parents so late in life. She was in the early wave of adoptees, and many people she had met in college who were in a similar situation made the decision to reconnect during that time, when they finally had some freedom from their adoptive parents and the opportunity to tap into people with real knowledge of Korean culture. But she didn't have anything tugging at her to connect with her birth country. What was there for her to discover? She had always struggled with the terminology of how to describe herself. She wasn't a Korean who lived any significant time in Korea, and she didn't identify as a Korean-American, as some of her friends who were raised in the United States by Korean-born parents called themselves. To Susan, her Korean features were more of a mask. But covering what?

Everything changed when she and Josh split up. Bewildered by the rapidity with which their marriage devolved, and Josh's accusations that she was a cold and inattentive wife, she turned to her mother for comfort. But her mother insinuated that she didn't try hard enough. It only took a glance at her own parents' marriage to understand why her mother acted this way, as if Susan's decision not to fight for her marriage somehow implicated her mother's decision to stay in a loveless one. But after the fog lifted and

Josh moved out for good, a big space opened up inside of Susan, and she wondered whether she had missed out on some source of wholeness by not finding her birth mother.

She contacted the agency in Korea and many months went by with no word. Finally, she received a letter, which informed her that her birth mother had died. No other information was offered. It would be another five years before she received the letter from Myung-Ki. He would be in New York on a business trip in only a few months. Would she be interested in meeting?

Myung-Ki starts to take out another photo, but Susan has had enough for today.

“I really need to leave,” she says, consulting the time. Her staff will be preparing for their afternoon meeting.

“Just one more,” Myung-Ki pleads. At first she’s annoyed by his behavior, what she reads as a kind of neediness. But when he flips the page and she sees him smile she softens. The third picture is of Susan’s mother with her husband and Myung-Ki, at Myung-Ki’s own wedding. In this photo, Myung-Ki’s wife wears traditional dress, but he explains that she changed into a white wedding dress after the ceremony.

“This was the year before mother passed,” he says. She had had an advanced form of ovarian cancer and died relatively quickly, in her fifties. Myung-Ki told her that before she died she spoke of Susan, but by her Korean name, Sue-Kyung, the baby that she would only ever meet again in heaven. When Susan looks up at Myung-Ki, it looks as if Myung-Ki is fighting back tears. This outpouring of emotion startles her; she has become accustomed to his even, detached persona. He begins to speak, but then stops himself.

“What’s wrong?” she says.

He shakes his head, but she persists. “Please, I’d like to help.” It feels good to say these words—words she rarely hears when she struggles to express her own feelings.

Myung-Ki moves the third picture out of the way but continues to look down at his planner.

“Is there something I can help with?” she asks. Susan follows his eyes down the page. His hand trembles as he directs her eyes to a piece of paper, the letterhead of his firm, written in both Korean and English. She scans the sheet, confused at first, since most of the writing is in Korean. But towards the bottom she sees English. First, there is the address, 31 Desbrosses Street, along with a series of figures, large negative numbers, circled and highlighted by an impatient pen.

“My boss has put a lot of pressure on me lately. He wants to know why the costs are so high. I explained to him about the appeal, but he doesn’t understand.”

Susan pulls away and Myung-Ki slams the briefcase closed.

“It’s not good for our family, for the children. They worry. They see their parents fighting and they think bad things will happen.”

From the way he won’t address her as he speaks, she knows he’s ashamed. Those first few words, asking if she could help, were easy, but the rest of what he’s told her leaves her mute.

Flustered, Myung-Ki grabs his things, stuffing the bags of candy into his briefcase. “I’m sorry,” he whispers, before he leaves.

Susan sits there, stunned, and starts to gather her own things. She sees the box he left, presumably a gift. A sticker on the front shows that the gift is from the Chuncheon Puppet Theater. She remembers seeing an advertisement for the Korean puppet theater,

now touring in the United States. Susan unwraps the box to find a small hand puppet inside, nestled into white tissue paper. It's not lost on her that the Korean girl, who wears the traditional women's wedding dress that Susan saw in the picture of her mother, is a much nicer gift than all the others that preceded it. Susan traces the eyes of the puppet, rounder than any Korean that she's ever seen. They look more similar to what Susan used to wish she saw in her own mirror. She packs up the puppet and throws out the tea.

As she waits for the subway minutes later, still in a state of shock, she notices a spider crawling on the yellow warning strip by the platform edge. The screech of the subway car warns passengers to step back, yet a burly man in a Carhart jacket steps close to the edge, squarely on top of the spider. The subway doors open; the spider has been reduced to a mere smudge. Susan boards the train as the automated conductor's voice warns of the closing doors.

Chapter 15

Careful not to tear her new leather jacket—the one Ella helped her pick out on their two-month anniversary—Jorie sneaks through a hole in the fence that runs the circumference of the lot. She ignores the signs that read Work Zone: Do Not Enter.

She walks gingerly, still groggy from the early morning phone call. Even after Jorie had explained to Ella that it was Eric, that she had to go into the City for work, Ella wrapped her legs around Jorie's, attempting to trap her in bed. "You promised me pancakes," she fake-pouted. With assurances that the Saturday morning pancake tradition would indeed be fulfilled, Jorie was out the door.

Eric and Miles are just inside the property, now fully razed. Jorie hasn't been to the site since the morning of the building demolition. She came with Ella and the rest of the theater troupe to say goodbye to their home of many years. They were joined by community members, and the troupe sang some mournful-sounding tunes, which, Ella explained, are not that hard to find in the Yiddish repertoire. That same day, Peter drove a van filled with all of their puppets, paperwork, and scenery to a temporary home in the East Village.

On the site itself, some construction workers talk with Belleza and an Asian man wearing an over-sized Yankees t-shirt, who points to a large hole in the ground. As she approaches Miles and Eric, Miles is smiling ear-to-ear. It's a bit off-putting to see him so happy.

"Ready for this?" Eric says. He's dressed in a blue reflective shirt, some kind of wicking material, and loose pants.

“I don’t think you should attempt to climb down,” Jorie says, noticing the carabiners hanging off the belt loops of Eric’s pants.

“Very funny,” he says. “I’m off to the gym after this.”

“Why aren’t they working?” Jorie asks.

Two cranes are frozen in place; one looks as if it was stopped just before hitting the dirt. In the months since Eric and Jorie filed the appeal, construction on the building has been somewhat stop and go, although the community rumor mill says that the developers are trying to get the building up before the hearing. They hope that once it’s built the BSA will be less likely to require them to take it down.

“They’ve stopped work,” says Miles. “They were issued an order this morning because they hit bones.”

“Bones?” Jorie repeats.

“Actual human bones,” Miles says. “It happens more often than you’d think, especially down here in the oldest parts of the city. The Federal government had this issue twenty years ago when they were putting up an office building just blocks from here. That’s where the African Burial Ground is today. Held up their project for a while.”

“No way,” says Jorie. Her eyes scour the lot, but all she sees is upturned brown earth. Ella’s not going to believe it, Jorie thinks. She always contended that the site had some mystical energy about it. When she performed, she said she would walk into pockets on the stage where she would get really cold or really hot, similar to how it feels swimming in the ocean.

Miles sips from a water bottle.

“How long do you think they’ll be stopped?” Jorie asks.

Miles shrugs. "Hoping at least a few weeks."

From the satisfied look on Miles's face, she's tempted to ask if he planted the bones there himself, but realizes it's the first time he's addressed her, almost as if she were an equal. Usually he'll just aim his comments to Eric, even when she's in the room. She's undecided as to whether he's a misogynist or just a snob.

The three watch as the man in the Yankee shirt shouts at a worker in a hard hat, thrusting a stack of documents at him.

"And that guy?" Jorie asks.

"With the developer," says Miles.

"What does this mean for the building?" Jorie asks. There's no prohibition on building while the appeal is pending, and Eric has advised that construction will continue at the site through the hearing, slated for early June, up until a decision comes down, which could be anywhere from two to three months after.

"They're behind schedule as it is," Miles says. "They were supposed to excavate months ago, but had some funding issues, so I heard."

"The City will probably require them to try to identify the bones and excavate the rest more carefully, with more sensitive equipment."

"So no more building until the order is lifted?" Jorie asks.

"Right," says Eric.

"It's a sad day when the discovery of human bones feels like a victory," Miles says. "But it does just the same. Should cost them a lot, too, since the developer will have to pay for their re-interment and other burial costs."

The three watch as the Asian man storms off the lot, his paperwork rolled up tightly in his hand. He slows when he notices them staring.

An hour later, Jorie returns to Ella's and finds the apartment a disaster zone, running clothes and shoes and scarves strewn all over the floor. She tries Ella's cell but gets no answer.

Full of energy from the morning's discoveries, Jorie begins to straighten up. This is a division of labor they have settled on in the past few months: Ella cooks during the week and Jorie cleans on weekends. Jorie tends to stay at Ella's most nights since Ella works from home most days, other than when she has to go to Columbia to teach. Jorie is okay with this arrangement. She sleeps better at Ella's anyway, away from the noise of the Fort Hamilton Parkway. The only sounds at Ella's second-floor walk-up, just blocks from Prospect Park, are the birds on the sycamore tree outside her window.

But today the apartment is messier than usual, perhaps because Jorie worked through the prior weekend and was only able to do a cursory clean last Sunday. Jorie has never thought of herself as a neat freak, but in her house growing up there were rules. Shoes were to be taken off at the front door. Beds were to be made before breakfast. Mim would do the laundry and vacuum the house but Jorie was responsible for cleaning the bathrooms once a week.

She starts in the bedroom, making the bed and folding Ella's clothes, and then moves on to the bathroom. In the living room, she collects the empty wine bottles that cover the coffee table. When Jorie first started to visit Ella's, the way Ella lived seemed charming and bohemian. The apartment always felt as if it were on the verge of an

impromptu party—incense burning, candles in every room, a wine bottle uncorked. Ella liked to keep the windows wide open, even on cold days, letting air blow in through the long curtains she had hung above the windows. In those heady, first days, Jorie liked to imagine that they were in a cabin in the south of France, a place she had never been, but Ella's apartment, Ella's life, felt so different from her own, chaotic but comforting. When Jorie would wake in Ella's bed, especially in those early weeks, she would inhale the scent of Ella's bergamot-scented conditioner, permanently woven into the pillows and sheets, and wondered how she ever got so lucky.

She assembles the pancake batter and lets it rest, then decides, after trying Ella's phone again, that she'll stop by her own apartment, since she hasn't been home in days. As she walks, she realizes just how long it's been since she's been alone—the past few months a dizzying mix of work and dating. Between Jorie and Ella, it's been an endless conversation, in the exchange of stories, the search for strands of commonality, and their active sex life. The few nights she's been away from Ella she's made time to see old friends. Amy finally forgave her, although she nursed the grudge for longer than usual. Even her old law firm friends have come back around, once they learned that Jorie found work.

It seems odd that one could unlearn how to be alone, but Jorie feels uncomfortable, almost twitchy, as if she's has suddenly found herself without a drug. Her mind wanders; she thinks of the invitation she extended to Ella to come home with her to Quassaick, which Ella still hasn't responded to. She remembers the letter she finally sent to her father, which has gone unanswered for several months.

In twenty minutes she's passing the bagel place on the corner of Smith, then her dentist's office on Court, a neighborhood standout for its black-and-white brick. The receptionist is outside smoking and she waves at Jorie, a regular face in the neighborhood. Once in her apartment, Jorie opens up the windows. In her absence, the apartment's grown stuffy.

She sits on her bed and attends to her mail. As she sifts through the catalogues and bills, a greeting card flutters out and falls to the floor. Jorie picks it up and studies the handwriting on the front. The letters are not fully formed—there's a dot missing over the 'i' in her name—as if the letter-writer was under extreme duress and didn't have time to finish.

She knows who it's from without having to open it. "With handwriting like that, you should've been a doctor," her mother once said about her father. She tears the paper to find a canned greeting card, not her father's style, but when she looks inside she gets the gag. It's a birthday card for the year after he last sent her a homemade one, with the mermonaut.

I'm so glad you wrote me, I have a whole stack of these I never sent after my last card was returned.

At first she's confused, but then she gets it. How could she have been so dumb? She never gave him her address when she moved from Manhattan to Carroll Gardens.

She sits on her bed and reads. His writing covers both sides and even the back. *I think of you every day, or at least every other day if I'm being one hundred percent honest.* Jorie smiles; she knows where her obsession with precision in language comes

from. *I miss you. Do you still snort when you laugh really hard? Do you still prefer black licorice to red?*

He fills her in on what he's been doing, still hopping around Europe and working on shows. That's why he took so long to reply, he says, because he hadn't been back to London in some months. He tells her again how glad he is that she reached out, and eventually he responds to her question about Alan Stein's cryptic comments.

There are things you don't know about that time. Give me a chance to tell you.

Before signing off, he includes his email address.

When she returns to Ella's, the apartment is still empty, so Jorie stretches out on her couch. To silence her mind, she re-watches an episode of *Buffy* and falls asleep.

Jorie wakes when she hears Ella's keys in the door.

Outside it's still light, but Jorie's stomach growls. She realizes she hasn't eaten anything all day, the pancake batter sitting in the fridge.

Ella stumbles as she enters. In partial deference to Jorie she takes off her shoes, but kicks them messily onto the area rug.

"Where were you?" Jorie asks, rubbing her eyes to see the time.

"I had brunch with Cass and then we went to the movies. I tried to call."

Jorie picks up her phone to find that her ringer is off. "I called you a million times when I got home."

"We lost track of time," Ella says, and goes to the kitchen. "You know Cass," she screams. Jorie doesn't especially like Cass; she's never been welcoming to Jorie, always bringing up inside jokes with Ella when the three of them hang out.

“But I promised you pancakes and, implicit in your acceptance, was the idea that you would be here to eat them.”

“For god’s sake, Jorie, I left you a note.”

“No, you didn’t.” Jorie sits up, listening to Ella’s pad around the kitchen. She returns with two glasses, looking forlorn.

“I meant to leave you a note?”

She sits next to Jorie and puts the glasses on the table. “I’m sorry, Jor. I really did mean to leave a note.”

For all the shared things that they’ve discovered about each other—a love of candy for breakfast, obsessive re-watching of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*—their differences have started to emerge. Unlike Jorie, who checks in with short texts throughout the day, Ella sometimes disconnects for hours at a time.

Ella pours from a bottle on the table. “I didn’t mean for it to turn into an all day thing, but it started with brunch. You know how brunch can be.”

“Just Cass?” Cass first introduced Ilan to Ella. They were friends from Bard, where Ilan had attended college.

“Yeah,” Ella says. She reaches over and kisses Jorie on the lips. Jorie pushes back at first, but then relaxes. Ella holds up the wine glass.

“Take your medicine.”

“I’m not in the mood.”

“Please,” she says, moving the glass closer. “Drink the wine, Jorie.”

Ella starts rubbing Jorie’s shoulders and kissing her neck. “This will help, too.”

Jorie feels herself melt into Ella's hands. She lets Ella dig deep into her muscles, to help relieve some of the tension in her back.

"I meant to tell you," Ella says. "I finally found someone to translate Minnie's letters."

"Someone from Workmen's Circle?"

"No, they totally flaked. But I have another friend and we'll meet her in a week or so." Ella continues to work on Jorie's back. She studied Thai massage some years back, and it's evident in the careful way she penetrates Jorie's stress. "How was your day?"

"Well, I cleaned," Jorie says, focusing on Ella's purple Doc Martens in the middle of the floor.

"Don't be mad," Ella says.

Jorie turns to face her. "I just can't understand why you wouldn't have called me, or if you didn't hear from me, then come home. We had plans for breakfast—"

"It just slipped my mind."

"I'm sorry, El," she says, squeezing her own head between her hands. "I don't know what's wrong with me. I feel like a crazy person."

"You're not crazy."

"Well what is it, then?"

"You're falling in love, silly."

"And you?"

"Me what?"

"Are you falling in love, too?"

“I’m already in love,” Ella says, kissing around Jorie’s mouth until she settles on her lips.

Chapter 16

Miles comes to the office unannounced mid-week. Even though work is still stopped on the site, he's turned into a nightmare client, an impatient child on an interminably long car ride.

"I think we should push harder," Miles says, settling into his seat in the conference room. "Writing a letter to the city asking for an independent investigation of the bones hasn't done a thing."

Although DOB has still not re-issued the permit, Belleza shipped the bones to a university upstate, where a researcher is studying the origins. Eric frowns—his patience with Miles has started to wear thin with the frequent phone calls, the constant nagging.

"There's nothing more to be done," Eric says. "We have to wait and see."

"But years ago—"

"Years ago was different, the facts were different. The city found the bones under its own site, and suspected it was an African burial ground. It would've been horrible press for the city to do anything else but investigate and commemorate what they found. Here we have a private landowner, and the bones might be from some Mafia cleanup job for all we know."

"It'd be nice to know if the researcher could confirm that," Miles says, not content to let Eric have the last word. "But she won't return any of my phone calls."

"Sounds like someone else I know," Miles adds, when Eric doesn't say anything further.

Miles gives Jorie a sidelong glance, but Jorie ignores him. She's definitely not taking his side over Eric's, even if Eric does seem more absent than usual lately. He's

started giving Jorie more and responsibility, but sometimes he'll disappear. He won't respond to emails, or provide necessary guidance when needed. Just last week he took off to Boston for a few days without telling Jorie in advance. Passing by Jane's desk, Jorie overheard Jane giving him directions over the phone. "You can tell him I almost missed a filing deadline for the Schoonmaker case thanks to him," Jorie said. Jane gave her a dirty look and continued talking in hushed tones. But Eric didn't even mention it when he came back, as if it were normal to take off a couple days and not tell one of two of his employees.

"Let's discuss where we're at," Eric says, leaning forward on the table. "There's been some good coverage in the papers because of the bones. We've been putting pressure on local officials for their support at the hearing. You already told me that you believe the Manhattan Borough President will show up and, of course, a rep for the Community Board, but we're still waiting to hear from the Deputy Mayor and the City Council Speaker. Do you have any updates?"

Jane interrupts to offer them coffee. Jorie notices that she has changed her lipstick from fire engine red to a coral color, and generally seems a bit more cheerful. Jorie swears that Jane winks at her before leaving the room.

"They'll be able to build the whole damn thing before we even get our day in court," Miles says. "Assemblywoman Hester and the Chair of the City Council's Zoning Committee signed our original letters, but they aren't responding to me when I ask them if they'll attend the hearing."

Eric sighs. "Looks like Belleza's taken the lobbyist route. His law firm has deep connections to both Democrats and Republicans in this city. I'm sure they've been

holding meetings. It's not going to be a slam dunk. Far from it. You knew that from the beginning. The BSA tends to side with city agencies, it's always the way."

Jorie knows that what Eric's saying is technically true, but she wonders why he's saying it to Miles. From all that she's witnessed, Miles needs to be coddled, even at the expense of truth. Eric mops at his head with his handkerchief.

"Let me go make some phone calls," Eric says, standing up.

After Eric leaves, Miles ignores Jorie and taps messages out on his phone. Becoming restless, he puts the phone down and pages through a stack of documents in front of him. It surprised Jorie to learn from Eric that Miles was older than she thought. She pegged him to be in his forties, maybe early fifties, but Eric says he's more like late fifties. Other than some wrinkles around his eyes, he's still in great shape. From a magazine feature she found on the Internet from years back, Jorie learned that the Partnership under his direction was responsible for writing artists' lofts into the zoning law in the first place. It's hard to imagine that he's been fighting this same fight since the Seventies.

"Can I ask you something?" she says.

Miles looks up from the paperwork.

"Were you always committed to preservation, or is this something you kind of stumbled into?"

"Both, I guess," Miles says. "At first I just attended a couple of community board meetings, but over time, as I watched the neighborhood start to change, I became more invested."

"How come?"

“You wanna hear my sob story?”

“If you want to tell it.”

“Growing up in Tribeca, I came to know a certain kind of community. You have to understand—we were pioneers in the neighborhood. It was like we lived in a post-apocalyptic zone. Empty storefronts. Abandoned buildings. Playing hide-and-seek in an old warehouse was our playtime, and our own homes were halfway between real apartments and industrial spaces.” Miles pauses, running his fingers through his hair.

For the first time, Jorie notices he has a small lisp when he says the letter “s,” which he usually corrects when he speaks.

“In my building there was a freight elevator we would use to go up and down. On my block, the trucks would back up into loading docks and take up half the street while they unloaded. You’d have to go around them, but sometimes on foot we’d just run under the truck to cut down on our walking time. But as I got older, things started to change. It became more and more residential, those old hide-and-seek spots taken over by developers wanting to build fancier and higher. I noticed that once the buildings started to change, the neighborhood unraveled too. I wasn’t sure what came first—whether it was the rehabbed buildings that drew the people or the other way around. But friends I knew moved away and started to be replaced with new people, strangers. It was as if our DNA were tied up in those commercial lofts. To keep the neighborhood somewhat intact I came to believe very strongly that we needed to hold on to the architecture.”

Miles picks up his vibrating phone and checks another message.

When he sets the phone down, Jorie continues, “I know this might sound naïve, but what do you think will happen to the community if the building goes up?”

“That’s something I don’t want to think about.”

“But you kind of have to, don’t you?”

His mouth takes on a twisted smile. “There’s more than one way to skin a cat. We all do what we have to to ensure our needs our met. Eric, he’s in this business because he needs a fix for his ego. And you? You’re here because you need a job. I’m looking out for my neighborhood and my family. Make no mistake about it, we’ll get something out of this. That’s one lesson Carlotta DiSalvio taught me.”

Before Jorie can ask who Carlotta DiSalvio is, Eric comes back in the room looking aggrieved.

“The Deputy Mayor’s not going to push our case. Fucking guy. It’s like he’s Robert Moses up there, but instead of pushing people out with highways, it’s taller and taller buildings.”

Standing, Miles pats Eric on the back. “Thanks anyway for looking into it. We’ll talk soon.”

After Miles leaves, Jorie follows Eric to his office.

“Who’s Carlotta DiSalvio?” she asks.

Eric snorts. “Oh geez, she was a real piece of work. Former head of the community board. Made a lot of deals for Tribeca and Little Italy, and also a few for herself. She served some time for embezzlement after her tenure. Think she stole around \$200,000.”

“Did you know her?”

“Not really, knew of her. But people who know her worship her. They say she was the best advocate that Tribeca ever had.”

As they make their way into his office, Jorie picks up climbing ropes from the guest chair, noticing the practice knots throughout.

“You learn this one in Boy Scouts?” she asks, holding up the rope.

“The double bowline, yeah, I use it all the time.”

Jorie’s girlfriend used to warn her away from that knot, because she said it was difficult to tell if it was tied properly without thorough inspection. Instead, she was encouraged to use the figure eight, more difficult to untie but safer.

“Why all the interest in Carlotta?” Eric asks.

Pulling at the knot in her hands, watching it unravel, Jorie places the rope on the floor.

“No reason,” she says.

After work, Jorie heads to the East Village. She’s picking up Ella at Zenkel’s new theater space on Fourth Street before dinner. An anonymous donor has given the theater money to float them in the interim, so they’ve taken up space with another local theater while they search for more permanent digs. Jorie thinks the two theaters are somewhat strange bedfellows, as LaMama’s critiqued Israel pretty harshly in a recent production. But Zenkel’s doesn’t seem bothered by it.

“Art is a form of inquiry,” Ella said, when Jorie asked about it. “Inquiry alone isn’t negative on its face, is it?” Jorie took Ella’s point, but she could imagine what the Quassaick trio would have to say about it.

When she arrives, Ella’s on the phone in the office, so Jorie waits for her in the lounge. Jorie settles into the threadbare, velvet couch that made the trip across town.

Looking around the room, Jorie marvels at the strange oddities that have also made the trip: the fake mustaches and beards set up against a wall on the far side of the room; the rack by the door, where taffeta, satin and polyester costumes fall off hangers; and, on the sole desk, the jar with a floating sheep's eyeball (given to the cast for good luck by a traveling puppeteer from Minsk). Then, of course, are the puppets. Peter constructs most of the puppets offsite, but there are remnants from shows here. Hand puppets and marionettes hang on the wall, some human, some animal, some more representational in nature.

She pages through work she brought, but is distracted by voices that emerge on the other side of glass windows that separate the lounge from the hallway. Peter walks by with a man wearing wire-rimmed glasses. Noticing Jorie, Peter tugs on the man's arm and says something, prompting him to look up. The man glances through the window, a hard expression on his face, but continues walking.

Minutes later, Peter enters and gives Jorie a hug. She's spent a good amount of time at the theater in recent weeks, and started to form friendships with both Peter and Nadia. Ilan hasn't been around much; from Peter, Jorie learned that he wouldn't be renewed for his grant, and is having a hard time figuring out what to do next. From the current state of the theater, though, it sounds as if none of them is sure what's next. Having to leave their space was only the tail end of a litany of problems. Peter explained that a few years back they were a lot bigger, but their funding was knocked down to nothing with volatility in the financial markets. Once they slimmed down, the energy of the group dissipated. Ilan and Ella brought in a new wave, but with their break-up the group has faltered once again.

Peter looks especially tired today. “I’m too old for this,” he says.

“Did you get some bad news?” Jorie says. Your friend didn’t look too happy.”

“Rumor has it he last smiled in the Eighties. Except for on-camera. He’s in Cecily’s World. Kid’s show. Actually...” Peter pauses.

“What?”

“I feel bad telling you this, because I wanted to help you. That was the guy I told you about, who might have information about the old building owners. I tried to get him to meet you, but he hightailed it out of here, told me he didn’t want to talk.”

Jorie’s stomach drops. Someone who might have been able to help with the case was ten feet from her, and now is gone.

“Aside from his poor bedside manner, what’s his deal?”

“Not sure, really. When I first started at Zenkel’s he was peripherally involved, would come to shows and stuff. He hasn’t been involved in the theater for years, though. Shortly after the eviction he just showed up one day with a fat check. We’re grateful, don’t get me wrong, but he gives me the creeps. And I don’t get the creeps too often.”

“What’s his name?”

“Frank.”

“Frank what?”

“His stage name is Frank Monday, but I tried to look him up once and couldn’t get further than his agent.” Peter shivers, as if brushing off a bad spirit. “Something’s not quite right with him.”

Chapter 17

“Is there room?” Ella whispers, as she and Jorie make their way to the front of the synagogue. The cantor’s high soprano chants the opening lines to L’cha Dodi, the words welcoming Shabbat as if she were a bride.

Mim clears her pocketbook and jacket from the seats next to her, as Jorie and Ella slide down the row, past Shelley and Alan, past Nana, past Deb and her daughter. Mim squeezes Jorie’s hand as she sits.

Ella finally agreed to join Jorie for a night in Quassaick. Normally Jorie would have chosen Saturday, to avoid having to come to temple, but Ella wanted to attend the Reform shul’s services. Now that they’re here, Jorie wonders if it was such a good idea. This is the first time Mim has ever met one of her girlfriend’s. Maybe she should have suggested a coffee or dinner in the city.

Jorie tunes out for most of the service. It’s always been difficult for her to sit in temple. At some point in her youth she came to enjoy the rabbi’s sermons, his prepared words offering something to reflect upon. But the communal prayers, recited in the same order and with same cadence—this has always felt off-putting. The repetition got to her, but even more than that it was the content. Even though the Siddur has been revamped since Jorie was a kid (all references to “Kings” and “Lords” are gone, replaced by more gender-neutral, but still hierarchical terms, such as “Rulers” and the “One”), Jorie finds the prayers themselves alienating. She tires of their obsequious nature, the constant requests for forgiveness and pardon, the reaffirmations that the supreme being is the only one of its kind.

Their rabbi once told her to explore what bothered her about this, as the discovery might lead to greater understanding. But Jorie never finds a good reason, just that it feels anathema to her inner core. Repeating the prayers make her feel false, like being in a play, with lines she must recite and impart meaning to.

When they get to the Amidah she listens to Ella and Mim chant. “Eternal God, open up my lips that my mouth shall proclaim your glory.” Her mother has told her that if the meaning bothers her so much, she should try to focus on other aspects of the experience. For Mim, it’s the community that keeps her coming back. The words are less important than the feelings it stirs up, a sense of belonging when everyone prays together. Something she can’t get from her television set. Something she didn’t get from her husband. Jorie understands why Mim feels that way, but she can never move past the words.

They return to Mim’s house for her traditional Shabbat dinner—homemade challah, roasted chicken, mashed potatoes, a side of broccoli. Mim has never been a gourmand but she executes simple meals well, never overcooking the chicken, adding just enough lemon to make the greens pop. Dinner conversation moves smoothly, better than Jorie could have anticipated. Mim is fascinated by Ella’s conversion and her questions about it take up most of dinner. For Jorie’s sake, Ella deftly leaves out any mention of Ilan, but says that it was her studies that started it all. As they clear plates, Jorie’s stomach clenches when Ella teases Mim about the ancient potholders in the kitchen, falling apart at the seams. There is no way for Ella to know that this was the last gift Rosie ever gave to Mim. What would have otherwise been a throwaway item, a last-

minute gift purchased from the school store, now claims a hallowed place in the kitchen, more sacred than functional.

After dinner, Jorie takes Ella to her bedroom to settle in, while Mim puts on hot water for tea and dessert.

“It’s going pretty well, huh?” Jorie says, closing the door behind them.

“I’d say,” Ella says. She inspects high school pictures of Jorie tacked up on a bulletin board and Jorie comes up behind her. Ella takes one picture down, of Jorie at a track meet, captured mid-sprint.

“Nice legs,” Ella says, untangling herself from Jorie and flopping on the creaky bed. She pulls out a brochure she took from the synagogue from under her back, advertising weekend Torah study.

“I could never go to a reform synagogue, I don’t think. It lacks some essential spirituality. You’re reading Hebrew words that nobody understands, and the English translations are hard to connect to. And then the rabbi’s sermon? It could’ve been given to a class of college freshmen—it didn’t even talk about the Torah portion.”

“I think they all lack spirituality,” Jorie says.

“Where I go in Brooklyn is great. There’s just something about learning the actual prayers and saying them all in Hebrew that I find more rewarding. You should come sometime.”

Jorie opens her backpack and unpacks their clothes.

“You don’t have an opinion?” Ella says.

“My mother likes going there, that’s all I know.”

“But didn’t you feel... I don’t know, that something was missing?”

Jorie understands Ella's critique, even agrees with it, but somehow it rankles her, as if Ella had come into her house and criticized her mother's curtains.

"I'm just not that interested in tearing apart my mother's synagogue."

"Well," Ella says, closing her eyes, "I'm still learning and thinking about the things I like and don't like about my practice."

"Is religion supposed to be something you like? I must have missed that lesson in Hebrew school."

"It's an obligation, yes, but also a reward."

"You really think so?"

"You don't?" Ella says, now sitting up.

"Jesus, no. I've never felt rewarded at any service. At my sister's funeral, the one time we're supposed to be most comforted by our religion, the rabbi didn't know the first thing about her, yet he stood up there and talked as if he did. The whole thing couldn't have been more inauthentic. We're standing around, all wanting to be somewhere else, and all he can say was the most generic thing—how vibrant she was. Is there any eleven-year old out there who is not vibrant? He didn't say anything about how she had a horrible singing voice, or how she ate all the chocolate chips off her pancakes first. He could've been talking about anyone."

"I'm pretty sure that's the most you've ever told me about your sister."

"It's not something I like to talk about." Jorie changes into her sweatpants and t-shirt, not sure she can account for her change in mood, but suddenly she wishes she hadn't been so insistent on inviting Ella to Quassaick.

Ella changes the subject, perhaps sensing Jorie's discomfort. "In my limited experience of Judaism, it tends to be the kind of thing that, like any relationship, you have to tend to in order to get the reward. The more that I learn, the more I can appreciate why we do stuff."

"Well I already have things like that in my life."

"Like?"

"Buffy."

"Buffy is not a religion."

"Why not?"

"She's a television character."

"A whole lot realer than anything I've read in the Torah. And with a more believable story arc. And one that doesn't make me gag." Jorie hands Ella her pajamas.

"Believable story arc? She's a vampire slayer?"

"There's that."

"You know, Jorie, I don't really care whether you go to my temple or not, but just because you refuse to believe in anything doesn't make you smarter than me. It just makes you more scared."

"I'm not scared."

"Oh, please. Since I've known you you always bristle whenever I mention anything about my faith or that there are reasons things happen in the universe. I get why you feel like that—if my sister died and my father disappeared, I'm sure I would have that baggage, too. But every authority figure you meet in your lifetime isn't destined to disappoint just because your father did. And just because I believe in something doesn't

mean that I think I'm in safe in the world. I get it—the world's not safe. But that's not going to stop me from being close to people or believing in things.”

Jorie keeps quiet and busies herself with the track picture, re-affixing it to the bulletin board. The whistle of the tea kettle filters from down the hall.

“So that's it?” Ella says.

Jorie shrugs. “Sounds like you have me all figured out.”

“Well does anything I say resonate?”

Jorie faces Ella. “What do you want me to say, El?”

Ella stands open-mouthed, waiting for Jorie to say more. But when Jorie doesn't, Ella tosses her pajamas on the bed and goes to the door.

“I'm going to take your mother up on that tea.”

After she's gone, Jorie lies down on her bed, still warm from where Ella sat. She hears her mother and Ella in the living room and tries to imagine what they're talking about. It dawns on her that she can't remember the last time she heard voices from this bedroom. Rosie would always get up before her—she and Mim would be in the hallway, Rosie telling her mother about the outfit she had picked out, excited about her new combination. Jorie would put her pillow over her head, wishing they would just be quiet so she could go back to sleep. She didn't know then that the house would become quiet, so quiet that Jorie put on her tape player in the mornings, the soundtrack of *Persephone*, *in Puppet*, just for the company. Now there is noise again, the unmistakable sound of animated voices.

She hears Ella's throaty laugh and this irritates her, as if she didn't just dump a whole pile of shit onto Jorie. Jorie rejects Ella's assessment entirely. She's not scared;

she's just realistic. She doesn't refuse to believe in God because her father was a failure. She doesn't believe in God because she's never been given any evidence that God exists, or that things in life work out for the best because some force deemed it that way. The way that Ella framed it, though, it's as if Jorie can just turn on faith like a light switch. Snap, and she will believe. But she can't will herself to believe in god, or other people, just because Ella says so. Ella may have her relationship with faith, but for Jorie, the only faith that has come easily is faith in herself.

She reaches for her father's card, which she put in her bag before she left her apartment. She hasn't yet worked up the nerve to write him back. In part, she wants to tell her mother first, so it won't be thought of as a betrayal. But it's hard to bring up. From her bedside table she finds a set of old headphones. She presses play on the Walkman and, within seconds, Biz Colton's opening soliloquy begins, calming the noise in her head.

Late the next morning, Mim takes Jorie and Ella back to the train. Ella is supposed to rehearse with some other performance artists that night for an upcoming show.

Even though she slept okay, Jorie still can't shake the bad feelings from the previous night. Ella woke her up when she came to bed and told her how much fun she had talking with Mim. Jorie had been so worried that they wouldn't get along that when they did, it surprised her. It's childish, but she felt left out, the two of them bonding without her.

"So, Jorie," Mim says, "Ella says she's going to take you to her temple sometime."

Jorie swivels back to face Ella, who smiles from the back seat. “I’ll get her to come sometime.”

“Are you guys in a cult I don’t know about? Creepy.”

“Not funny, Jorie. But it would be good for you to go with Ella. It actually sounds like they talk about stuff you’re interested in.”

“Like Buffy?”

Ella tugs on her hair, but her mother misses the joke.

“I was just saying,” says Mim.

“Don’t meddle, Mom,” Jorie says, as they pull onto the bridge.

“I’m not meddling. Is it so wrong that I care about your well-being?”

Jorie gives Mim a doubletake. “Is that right?”

“Well, of course,” Mim says.

Jorie pauses. “I got a card from Dad.”

Mim’s fingers tighten around the wheel until they turn bone white, but she doesn’t say anything.

As they approach the EZPass, the screen doesn’t clear the car for entry, but instead shows that there’s a problem with Mim’s tag.

“Goddamit,” Mim says. “I keep having problems with this thing.” She reaches up and re-angles the EZPass. After a minute, a guard comes over and tells her that she’ll have to pay the old-fashioned way, but Mim insists on explaining the problems she’s been having with it. Unmoved by her explanation, he says that they’ll have to pay the toll and work it out on the phone later.

Mim refuses to open her wallet. “It’s not my fault it’s broken,” she says.

Jorie reaches over with the dollar and he waves them through.

“I wish you wouldn’t have done that,” Mim says, as they exit the bridge.

Again in silence, Jorie works up the nerve to return to the subject of her father.

“Dad says there are things he wants to tell me. About when he left and—”

“It’s not that complicated. What’s to tell?”

“I don’t know, you tell me,” Jorie’s voice rises. “I’ve only ever heard your version.”

“Version?” she says. “There’s no version—there’s what happened.”

“It can’t hurt to hear what he has to say. He obviously wants to clear something up.”

As the river comes into view again, Jorie stares at the choppiness of the water.

Mim drives another a mile in silence, before making the final turn into the station.

“You’re right,” she says, as she slows the car down. “You don’t need me meddling in your life, and you should respect the same when it comes to mine.”

Putting the car in park, she wishes Jorie and Ella a safe trip home. Ella gets out and Jorie waits a second, hoping her mother might soften. Instead, Mim reaches across Jorie’s lap and unlatches the door.

Chapter 18

Biz has his publicist finagle him a visitor's pass to Steiner Studios in Brooklyn right after Rick tells him that the permit's been re-approved after the discovery of bones on the site. To get the pass, he used a connection of Arianna's, an ex-boyfriend who works as a sound engineer and still hasn't given up the ghost that she'll come back around. These are the things Arianna can do: get him reservations at fully-booked, Michelin-starred restaurants; find unlisted telephone numbers; grant him backstage access to a show that is notoriously tight about visitors. He makes a mental note to send her a gift certificate to a spa.

After his car goes through the gate, they run Biz through a detector and confiscate his cell phone. It's fitting, Biz thinks, that he's meeting Frank in a gated complex shut off from the outside world. This is what Frank once accused Biz of doing, holing up on the Upper West Side and shielding himself from the reality of everyday life.

Of course, Frank doesn't know that Biz is here. After Rick told him that the permit was about to be issued, he tried to contact Frank at work but had no luck. Biz resists emailing; he doesn't want to have his words in writing. His image consultants taught him that early on. So Biz decided to come to the one place Frank was guaranteed to be: his job as a puppeteer on *Cecily's World*. Once Frank hears him, and sees him face-to-face, Biz is convinced he will sway his old friend. After all, how long can someone hold onto a grudge?

A bored-looking security guard at the information booth takes a look at his paperwork, makes a phone call, and then a woman appears, wearing pants too tight for

her age. She introduces herself as Katherine. As they walk to the studio, she tells Biz that she's the "right hand" of the producer of the show.

"He doesn't like disruptions of any kind. But of course, you're no *ordinary* guest," she says. "So all possible accommodations will be made." They weave through hallways that link the myriad studios, and Katherine waxes on about his performance in *Les Miserables*. "Unforgettable," she says, as if she were asked to do a video reaction for promos after the show.

"You're all set for your new role?" Katherine says, pausing just outside a heavy steel door as she checks her watch.

"Pardon?" Biz says. At this point he's only half-listening to Katherine, as the thought of what's to come occupying his mind.

"Your publicist? We spoke and she told me you're here because"—Katherine lowers her voice—"you're brushing up on your puppet skills."

Biz widens his eyes.

"It's true, isn't it? You're going to be in the revival of *Persephone*?"

He pats her shoulder, gently moving ahead of her into the studio. "Our little secret," he says.

The studio buzzes like a hive, the crew communicating with each other in a familiar routine as they ready the next segment. Cameras are positioned in front of the playground set and the puppeteers are in places. Some staff members fix the puppets' hair and take direction from another set of people behind screens, who help guide them for the

optimal shot. Katherine ushers Biz into a row of folding chairs and whispers that she'll be back at the end. He'll have to get to Frank before she returns.

He almost doesn't recognize Frank; he's aged since Biz last saw him, almost fifteen years ago. While Biz has a coterie that ensures he ages in a manner befitting a star, with trainers and personal chefs and the occasional plastic surgery that most Hollywood stars avail themselves of, Frank has aged, more or less, as expected. His ponytail, once black, is now speckled with gray. His skin looks softer; his cheeks sag. As a twenty-year old puppeteer who worked for an avant-garde puppet troupe and waited tables at Veselka in the East Village, Frank was known for his boundless energy and his mischievousness, always up for a prank or an early morning trip to Coney Island to watch the sun rise. Now, he has a dull expression on his face, as if he had used up his lifetime share of cheer.

When the director yells, "Rolling," Frank manipulates a blue fleece puppet, a girl with over-sized, crooked glasses and thick black yarn for hair. She stands apart from the other puppets; it's clear she is the outcast. Biz watched the show once, long after Vance died. He was impressed with the show; *Cecily's World* was more unpredictable than he expected, especially in their decision not to hide the puppeteers from the audience. This is on display now, as Frank talks directly to the puppet, both captured on camera.

"Vos hert zich?" Frank's puppet asks.

"What should be new, Montik?" Frank says. Biz notices a difference in Frank's features as he gets into character, playing both Montik and a more animated Frank. He was always a superb actor in addition to being a puppeteer, able to bring a dynamism to the character separate and apart from his own self.

“Please don’t say my name, Frank,” the puppet says, fake-sobbing. “You know how much I hate it. Why would my mother name me for the most-dreaded day of the week? And in Yiddish? They all think I’m weird.” The puppet glares at the other puppets. She speaks in the voice of a New York City Jewish grandmother. Biz knows the inspiration for the voice is Frank’s neighbor growing up in Canarsie, an older Jewish woman who watched him after school while his mother worked at the post office. Frank used to talk in this voice all the time; it was one of the puppets he created at the workshop where Biz met him, when preparing for the role of Harry in *Persephone*. Frank trained Biz using Montik, or a then-version of Montik, a little more spunky and less neurotic than the puppet on-screen.

The sequence continues, and Montik, initially afraid that the other kids don’t like her, eventually finds one friend who likes the same things. It occurs to Biz that vis-à-vis Frank, he has the opposite problem: most people adore him, except for Frank. For some reason, Biz still cares what Frank thinks.

When the director yells, “Cut,” Biz approaches the stage, but Frank is so wrapped up in handing Montik over to someone on staff that he doesn’t see Biz. Frank jokes with the staffer, continuing to talk in Montik’s voice and reminding the woman that Montik only likes to be touched in certain places.

“Terrific performance,” Biz interrupts, and Frank looks up, startled. Immediately, his face returns to an expressionless mask.

“They let anyone in here these days,” he says.

“I see you’ve met our star,” Katherine says, joining the conversation. It’s unclear whether she’s talking about Frank or Biz, but Biz takes the opportunity to begin making amends.

“I was just telling him how fantastic he was. We’re old friends.” Frank’s face flickers for a moment in anger.

“Well, if the two of you want to catch-up—”

“There’s no need—” Frank says, but Biz talks over him.

“I’ll find you when I’m done,” Biz says, giving Katherine a wide smile.

The two men sit in a box-sized cubicle, both on aluminum folding chairs. It’s clear that the studio does not spend a lot on furnishings other than those used in set designs. The room is mostly bare, unlike dressing rooms Biz is used to. The only signs pointing to Frank’s occupancy are a full bio on Montik in the *Sunday Magazine*, which is taped to a wall, and a bumper sticker on the mirror, VOTE PUPPET. The room, small as it is, would be more comfortable if the door were closed, but Frank doesn’t shut it. It occurs to Biz that this might be intentional. The last time Biz saw Frank was at a gathering after Vance’s wake. Frank tried to pummel Biz in his very own living room, levying all sorts of accusations. Perhaps Frank fears that Biz has come for a reprise.

“How are things?” Biz asks.

“You’ve come at an excellent time,” Frank says, picking up another puppet on the other side of the couch. It’s a stunning replica of Frank, right down to the ponytail and thick eyebrows. “I’ve just found out that my car needs thousands of dollars worth of work. Some yahoo stopped short on the BQE this morning, and so, through no fault of my own,

I rear-ended him. My insurance will skyrocket, of course. That, and my child-support payment are both due at the end of the week. It's been a bang-up day. Ba dum chuh."

"You have a daughter?"

"That's what my ex tells me."

"Katya?"

Frank pauses. "I've already heard about the theater, if that's why you're here."

Biz watches as Frank runs his puppet through exercises, manipulating his mouth and the hand rods to create various poses. Frank taught Biz these same exercises years ago; from the looks of it, the order remains the same.

"I'd had no way of knowing since you didn't respond to any of my phone calls."

Frank holds up mini-Frank in front of his face. "This guy really can't take a hint, huh?"

Biz expected a little obstinacy, but also assumed Frank would have put some of the past behind him.

"In any event, it seems like your career's going well. The Montik bit. People love her. I read that when it came out." Biz points to the article pinned to the wall. "Just terrific work."

Frank puts the puppet down. "Aw, Biz, you came all the way here to tell me that? You're the bestest."

"I may have a way to help with some of your difficulties."

"Help from you always has strings. I'm not interested in being *your* puppet." He shakes mini-Frank at Biz; mini-Frank looks offended.

“I’m not asking you to do anything for me. Rather, I want to do something for you. The theater will be converted, but I promised you the space years ago and if you want, I can find another space. Rick has lot of contacts and I know he would be happy to help.”

“Oh, the two of you. It’s despicable. Taking Vance’s memory and putting up an eyesore smack in the middle of a beautiful neighborhood. Just so what? So you can have more money? It’s been too long since you’ve looked in the mirror, but in case no one’s told you lately, you’ve gone Frankenstein.”

Biz takes out the envelope from his inside jacket pocket and stands. “I’ve also come to give you this.” He puts the envelope down on the vanity. “I know you’ve been giving the checks to the theater, but I wanted to give something to you.”

Frank takes the puppet off and puts it back in the corner. Picking up a script from the show, Frank thumbs through it.

“Blood money? You can go now,” he says, not looking up.

Biz knows he should leave, but he still wants to explain. With Frank, he always wants to explain. For a few years, Frank was his best friend. They seemed to connect on another level, both obsessed with performances by Laurie Anderson and Spalding Gray; they would talk for hours about the contours of performance and the art of storytelling, boring everyone else around him. Vance took to calling Frank his replacement, but Biz knew he was comforted that Frank was straight, always in love with some Russian girl. To Biz, finding Frank was like finding the other half of himself. It was around the time that Biz started using drugs that the divide between them started. Frank could never understand how Biz grew so attached to the drugs. And then Frank’s protégé overdosed while hanging out with Biz and his friends. For this, Frank has never forgiven him.

Frank continues to read his script as if Biz were not in the room.

“I’ve got nothing to apologize for,” says Biz. “I’ve never claimed to be perfect, but I’ve always lived the best way I could with what I understood about myself at the time. I know you’ve never understood the power of addiction, but try.”

Frank looks up and his eyes soften for a moment. “Sounds like the therapy mumbo-jumbo has sunk in deep enough. I didn’t ask you to come here, if you’ll remember.”

Biz stands up to leave, irritated now.

“I hope at least you’ll be discreet,” Biz says. “My involvement in this project is minimal.”

“I have no interest in showing the world what a fraud you are. But I will say this. No matter how much money you throw at me, or how tall you build that building, you’ll always be responsible for the ugliness you brought into this world. You’ve never once apologized for what happened to Danny. He was just a kid, Biz. And it was your fault that he died. The blame will stay with you, and I can’t tell you what awaits.”

That was always Frank, thinks Biz, his Catholic mother’s fear of God probably transmitted to him in the womb. He follows Biz to the door, lays a hand on Biz’s back.

“If you never own it, Biz, it’ll follow you to your grave.”

Chapter 19

When they arrive in the lobby of the W, Sheva is already on one of the white couches. She lounges against the block-shaped pillows as if she owns the place, with an array of tea and cookies set out in front of her on a low coffee table. Ella hasn't told Jorie much about this translator, only that she's a bit of an amateur Yiddishist, but knows more than Ella. She also speaks Hebrew.

Sheva squeals when she spies Ella, and gives her a warm hug. The bangles up Sheva's arm clamor together as if in celebration. Sheva insists that they try the petit fours. "To die for," she says.

Things between Jorie and Ella have been strained since they returned from Quassaick. The trip to Mim corresponded with their three-month anniversary and, as if on cue, their relationship become saddled with markers of transition. Whereas before they might have been content to let things slide, to chalk up misunderstandings as another stage in getting to know each other, now every difference, every slight, assumes outsized importance. Ella accuses Jorie of pulling back; Jorie has yet to persuade Ella to be less flaky. Jorie complains about the mess of the apartment; Ella wonders why she always must cook dinner. For the time being, though, they've put talk of god and religion out of the way. Some things neither are ready to tackle.

Wearing a leotard tucked into a long, flouncy skirt, Sheva could be featured in an upscale bohemian clothing catalogue that offers worn-looking denim jackets for \$700 a pop. Jorie knows she probably smells good, without even getting close. She's just one of those people. Seeing Sheva's sense of style makes Jorie cringe at her own. She's been going through a wardrobe crisis as she rides the line between women's and men's

clothing, but the men's clothes are all too baggy, the undersides of the shirts billowing under her arm, while the women's are too tight, hugging her body in places she'd rather not accentuate. Today she wears denim jeans that are more fitted than she'd want, and a button-down that is looser. The tie, she notices in the mirrors that line the walls, is a little too wide, making her look as if she's auditioning for a role on *Saturday Night Live*.

Yet Sheva seems to barely notice Jorie at all, and instead grills Ella about what she's been up to. It's unlike Ella, but she is reticent to share, preferring to turn the questions back to Sheva. After some time, Jorie clears her throat, loudly enough so that both notice. Ella, picking up on her signal, asks about the letters. Sheva adjusts her long, loose curls to one side before picking up the stack in front of her.

Jorie hasn't seen the letters since the day that she and Ella first went to the Catskills. Sheva examines the first letter and starts to nod, as if remembering. "You'll owe me big for this, Ella. Yiddish cursive is so difficult to read."

Sheva takes out a notebook from her bag and puts on her glasses. "I've written down some notes so I can let you know what the letters say, but I might as well start with your big question. I'm pretty sure Minnie took the scripts."

"No way!" Ella says, leaning forward.

"While Aaron's in the Catskills for the summer, she gives him notes on a parody of the story from The Book of Esther. It's a little hard to follow, though, without the original text. But then she talks about the scripts. From what I can tell, I think she was the one who actually transcribed the scripts—she makes a joke about her handwriting. But later she talks about carrying them. Maybe she took them from the theater?"

"So they didn't burn in the fire?" Jorie says.

Sheva shrugs.

“What else is there?” Ella says.

“She’s fairly clear about her feelings for Arke.”

“Arke?”

“Aaron,” Ella interrupts. “It’s a pet name. Of course she likes the bad guy. The other brother was the sweet one. Aaron was arrogant.”

Sheva squints at Ella. “Is that why you’ve gone soft on Ilan? He’s always had a big mouth.”

Ella folds her arms, giving Sheva a look.

“You should call him—he misses you.”

Watching Sheva study Ella, Jorie’s body grows hot. She wishes she could take off the tie, which now feels as if it’s closing in around her neck. She waits for Ella to respond to her question or at least explain what’s going on, but instead Ella picks up some letters from the table.

“So what does Minnie say about Aaron, exactly?”

Sheva eats another petit four, then returns to her notes. “Apparently Minnie became involved with the theater on a whim—she happened to be walking by one day when she heard them practicing. But her parents were not pleased that she was hanging out with the puppeteers. She says that her Uncle Shmuel warned her: ‘*Az men shloft mit hint, shteyt men oyf mit fleh.*’”

“Which means?”

“If you lie with dogs, you’ll get up with fleas,” Sheva says. “Their relationship took a while to develop, but it got hot and heavy. Minnie pressed him to get married, but

Arke wasn't the marrying type. She delivers an ultimatum and tells him she'll have to leave him if he won't make a respectable woman of her. I'm pretty sure that's what it says. I could be missing something here or there."

"How long have you studied Yiddish?" Jorie asks. She means for it to sound innocuous, but it comes out accusatory.

"For years. Why?"

"Just wondering. I've heard how difficult translation can be."

"The yentas at YIVO are always going on about how we twist it around, but it's not really that hard if you study. Anyway," Sheva says, shifting toward Ella, "from the tone of the letters it seems Aaron had a reason why he wouldn't marry her."

"Which was?"

"She thinks he's afraid." Sheva nibbles on another cake. "Sound familiar, El?"

Ella gives Sheva a look, but again doesn't respond.

"Ima still wants you to come for Pesach. Remember how fun it was last year? We're definitely going up to the mountains again."

"What are you talking about?" Jorie says.

"Ella dated my brother."

As Sheva says this, Jorie sees the similarities between the two—the wide forehead, the angular chin.

"And then she broke his heart," Sheva adds. "Apparently she is off with another guy."

Ella wears an expression Jorie's never seen. She looks almost fearful.

"She is with someone else," Jorie says, "but it's with me, not some other guy."

“What?”

“I’m sorry,” Ella says, not looking directly at Sheva or Jorie. “I didn’t think this would come up. In my email, I said I didn’t want to talk about it—”

“I didn’t know you were gay now,” Sheva says, starting to laugh. “Oh my god, I’m so sorry—“

“I’m not gay now—”

“Well, then what—?”

“And it’s not funny.” Ella says.

“I didn’t realize,” Sheva says.

“I need to use the bathroom,” Ella says, standing up. Trying to avoid her own embarrassment, Jorie picks up a letter and studies it, but can’t read a thing.

“So if Minnie took the scripts,” Jorie says. “The question still remains as to what she did with them.”

Sheva’s eyes are unfocused, but Jorie’s question snaps her out of it. “I don’t really know. To be honest the letters were hard to translate.” Sheva says this sheepishly, as if Jorie had called her bluff.

“There was something about baking or cooking, which I know sounds weird, but wasn’t there a fire?”

“Yeah, there was a fire at the theater just after these letters were sent.”

“So maybe she started the fire?” Sheva asks. “All in retaliation for Aaron’s inability to commit?”

“I wouldn’t blame her,” Jorie says. “Sounds like he was just stringing her along. Plus if she really was going to steal her lover’s scripts and burn down his theater, she’s not going to announce it to him. Or stick around for the aftermath.”

On the far side of the lounge, they watch Ella cross the floor. Jorie gathers up the letters and puts them in her bag, not wanting to sit any longer.

“Minnie must’ve been pretty mad, though,” Jorie says.

“There is one strange thing,” says Sheva, as Jorie stands up. “Even in the last letter, she calls Arke ‘my love,’ and she refers to the theater as *mein kind*, or my child. Would a woman that devoted really set fire to the scripts, her babies?”

Ella stays at Jorie’s place and they both fall asleep early, but the helicopters start up when it’s still dark, and Jorie turns on her reading light. Opening her book, she tries to still her mind, but when she’s read the same line for the fifth time without comprehension, she gently shakes Ella.

“I just keep on turning it over in my head and I can’t make sense of it. How could you not tell me about Sheva?”

Ella takes her glasses from the bedside table and sits up, turning on her own lamp. “I knew you were going to freak out. That’s why I didn’t say anything.”

“I felt so stupid.”

“I can’t even mention his name without you getting all twitchy. If you don’t want to hear about him, fine, but you can’t get mad at me for the same reason.”

“Do you still talk to him?”

Ella throws the sheets off. “Sometimes. But like I said to Sheva, I told him to stop calling.” Ella hesitates. “Honestly, today brought up some stuff for me, too.”

As Jorie waits for her to continue, the noise from the helicopter gets louder and softer, as if a soundtrack for Jorie’s stomach.

“I’m just not sure what we’re doing here, Jorie. Things have been strained lately, and it’s led me to think about what we’re doing. I’m not sure I’m ready to be monogamous again.”

“You say this now? I know things have been weird, but you were the first person I ever brought home. And we’re practically living together.”

“I don’t want to end up hurting each other.”

“You mean you don’t want to hurt me?”

Ella is quiet.

“You’re talking in circles. One minute you tell me you love me, and the next you’re hiding the fact that you’re even with me. I’m confused, I don’t know what you want. I know I’ve pulled back, but I do want to be with you. Are you breaking up with me?”

“That’s not it,” Ella says, now crying. “I mean, not exactly.”

Jorie covers herself with the sheet. She and Rosie would play a game, they called it mummy, long before Rosie ever got sick. After seeing a funeral scene on TV, they would take turns covering each other with a top sheet and playing dead. Morbid, certainly, but death wasn’t real, just something that happened to people on television. Jorie always liked being the dead one best, the way that she felt taken care of as Rosie smoothed out the sheet on top of her, cool cotton on her body, the practice of being still.

Ella's voice penetrates the memory. "Talk to me."

But Jorie keeps silent, not sure what more she can say. The words on her tongue, *I love you*, have been preempted by Ella's need for space. How did she let herself get so close to someone who's not sure, who wants to back away?

She keeps her eyes shut, while Ella breathes quietly. Eventually she falls asleep again. Rosie is with her, the two are wrapped tightly in one sheet. They're warm, at first, and Rosie is speaking to her, but her words are only noises; it's the familiar texture of Rosie's voice, gravelly even at nine, but the meaning is unintelligible. As Jorie strains to hear her, she grows hot, too hot, and when she opens her eyes daylight is streaming through the sheet, Rosie's voice now replaced by city buses and garbage trucks outside.

As she extricates herself from the sheet a chill dances over her skin, the way it always did when she and Rosie switched places.

She turns to where Ella lay, but Ella's already gone.

In the following weeks, neither Ella nor Jorie steps in to close the gulf between them. They can't stay away from each other completely, though—they're still connected virtually, through text messages. Jorie calls once, leaves a message, which Ella doesn't return. Paranoid, Jorie scours Ella's Facebook page and Twitter feed for clues as to what she might be thinking or doing, but Ella's pretty quiet. For Jorie, though, reminders of Ella are everywhere: the references to the puppet theater in paperwork she prepares; Minnie Zenkel's letters, which still sit in her bag; the memories that follow her home at night, when she returns to being alone.

Jorie throws herself into work, something she did at her old job out of the need to reach a certain number of billable hours so she could make her bonus. But with this job, she actually succumbs to the distraction. Work has re-started on the site and so they move toward preparing for the hearing. Through the long nights, the two have become closer. Eric's confided into Jorie about some of the own challenges in his life. He tells her that he and Kate are struggling to conceive. She has considered adoption, but he's not so sure. It partly explains why he had been distant for many weeks.

He continues to encourage Jorie's progress, reminding her often that she is an important part of the team. And there is much for the team to handle: the press they've received on Desbrosses has resulted in a steady stream of new client phone calls and meetings. At The Law Offices of Eric P. Stephens, business is better than ever.

On Sunday afternoon, Jorie receives an email from Jane. The subject line reads: EMERGENC. Even though she's become less frosty, Jorie wonders why Eric ever hired her; she doesn't seem to possess any social graces and can't spell to boot. The email says that Jorie should call Eric's wife, Kate. There's no explanation. Just a phone number.

Kate's line goes straight to voicemail. But minutes later, Jorie's phone buzzes back.

"Hi, Jorie, sorry to meet you like this," Kate says. She says the appropriate words, but her voice is tight, almost monotone.

Kate continues. "There's been an accident. I—" Kate struggles to finish. "Eric's had a fall on his climb this morning. I'm calling from Poughkeepsie—we're in a local hospital."

"Is he—"

“He’s stable, but still unconscious. They say he’s suffered some serious injuries. I don’t know that much just yet, but the doctor is supposed to meet with me shortly.”

“Oh, Kate, I’m so sorry.”

“I know he’d want you to keep everything going the best you can while he’s here. He’s—” Kate starts to cry but the sound is slightly muffled. For a moment she disappears completely.

“Kate?” Jorie hears another sob, and then Kate returns.

“I’m sorry, I’m just—”

“It’s okay.”

“I’ll call you when we get more news.”

“I appreciate it.” The phone is silent again. “Kate?”

“Yes?”

“Do you know what happened? I mean, how it happened?”

“Everything was fine, his partner said. Until he heard something fly out, a piece of equipment and then saw Eric sailing down.” Kate pauses. “The doctors said we got lucky, very lucky. The fact that he’s alive—they say that it’s a miracle.”

Chapter 20

Jorie leaves her apartment. She's not sure where she's going, but her thoughts are too big for the contours of her one-bedroom and she needs to walk. She thinks about calling Mim but holds off. Walking down Clinton and up Ninth, pausing on the Ninth Street Bridge, she leans over the edge and pictures Eric, lying in a hospital bed and hooked up to all kinds of support. She chastises herself for doubting his ability to climb. If she had told him about the knots, would it have made a difference?

Her stomach seizes up and she braces herself to vomit, but nothing. She stares into the canal and sees the green, fetid water reflected back at her. Almost automatically, she finds herself heading towards Ella's place. Things have cooled between them, but Jorie needs someone to talk to. On the way she texts, then calls, but all she gets is Ella's voicemail. Good to know not much has changed, Jorie thinks. Arriving at Ella's door, she rings the buzzer. After the third buzz, she lets herself in with her key. She'll wait for Ella to return, hoping to find more peace in Ella's apartment than her own.

The place is dark and in more disarray than usual, with clothes and boots and books everywhere. She follows the sound coming from the bedroom, where a bluish glow emanates from a small crack in the door. Jorie pushes it open and is about to step in when the objects she passed in the living room start to make sense: the men's boots, the oversized backpack, the copy of *Infinite Jest* on the table. She finds Ilan on the bed, in gray sweatpants and a white t-shirt, while a fat orange tabby keeps company next to him. Startled, he pushes his computer off his lap and turns on the light. Since the last time she's seen him he's shaved his beard, and because of it he looks much younger.

"Where's Ella?" Jorie says.

Ilan grabs his phone off the side table, atop Jorie's copy of *Time Out*, which she left the last time she was here.

"She's supposed to be back soon," he says, scrolling through his phone. "Was she expecting you?"

Jorie glares at Ilan and swipes her *Time Out*, turning to leave.

"Wait," he says. "I'm just crashing here for a bit. Me and Ari." He gives the tabby a good scrub. "I had a fight with my landlord."

"I can't imagine why," Jorie says. "Normally you're so pleasant."

He arches his eyebrow, about to say something, when his face softens. "Are you okay?"

He stares at her shoes. In a total fog she must have put on two different sneakers, both Converse but different colors. Suddenly, she feels tired, an aching tired, as the adrenaline she's churned out since she received the phone call finally reaches its limit.

"Do you want to sit?" he says, and gestures to Ella's side of the bed. She acquiesces, if only because she can't find the energy to go back out on the street just yet.

"Ari, *zooz*." The cat scampers away, somewhat begrudgingly, as Jorie takes his place. Jorie looks around the room, which is even messier than the living room. A suitcase is open on the floor, presumably Ilan's, and clothes spill out. All of the work Jorie put into keeping the apartment clean was for naught—take-out containers and empty water glasses are stashed on the windowsill, while next to them the fern wilts.

"So you're just staying here temporarily?" she says.

"Yeah, I think I've found a place near Fourth and Seventh Street."

Jorie picks up the copy of *The Great Bridge* on Ella's nightstand, a book about the building of the Brooklyn Bridge that Jorie had given her. She opens it up and the bookmark is in nearly the same place she remembers it weeks ago, somewhere in the middle. "Was she this slow at reading when you two were together?"

"She never finishes books."

"I've noticed," Jorie says, returning the book to the nightstand

"How long have you been here?" she says. "Did you wait outside, just hoping I'd evacuate the premises, and then the minute I left, just march up here with your dirty sweatpants and your entire book collection?"

"It's not like that," he says, rubbing his chin. "She was helping me out. I'm sure she would've told you if—"

"If what? She might have told me if she ever called me back, which she hasn't." Jorie snatches her shoes from the floor, not stopping to put them on.

"You both deserve each other," she says, as she leaves.

She swears she can detect the tiniest smirk on Ilan's face.

When she exits the building it's dark. Jorie realizes she's hungry—it's been hours since she's eaten. On her voicemail is a message from her mother. She's about to put the phone away, mentally exhausted, but craves something familiar. She hits dial. Her mother can keep her company on the walk back to Carroll Gardens.

Mim answers on the first ring.

“You’ll never believe this news about Alex,” Mim says. Great, Jorie thinks, just what she needs right now, to find out Alex received a promotion or won the Nobel Peace Prize.

“Alex says she’s not going to circumcise the baby.” Mim is silent, waiting for Jorie to react.

“This is what you can’t wait to tell me?” A cute girl wearing a brown motorcycle jacket passes Jorie and gives her a thumbs up, glancing down at her shoes. This cheers Jorie for a minute, as she crosses the desolate strip of Fourth Avenue, home to gas stations and open-aired bars with cheap drinks.

“It’s shameful, what she’s putting Shelley through. Have you heard of such a thing?”

“Mom, we’re not living in the shtetl. Lots of people nowadays don’t do it. You remember that Seinfeld, with Kramer? Also, don’t doctors say that it decreases the man’s sexual pleasure? That’s what I—”

“Well, that’s what she was saying. How it’s equivalent to female general mutilation.”

“Genital—”

“That’s what I said. Genital. And she said she’s found a rabbi who will perform the bris without doing it. It’s unheard of. You can’t have a bris and not remove the foreskin.”

A part of Jorie wants to be with Mim on this—after all, at long last Alex has done something that has upset all of the women. A first, Jorie thinks, as her phone beeps. She doesn’t check to see who’s calling. Maybe Ella has returned to her apartment.

“Where are you by the way?” Mim asks. At present, Jorie is walking through the middle of a housing project—a 3,000-unit public housing development that separates two neighborhoods with multi-million dollar brownstones.

“I’m almost home.” Jorie lowers her voice, suddenly aware that there’s no one around.

“Can you believe she would do this to her poor mother?” Mim continues. “Her grandparents practically died in a concentration camp so that she can change all of the rules of Judaism?”

As much as she wants to join Mim’s outrage, Jorie’s mind flashes to Eric, and she is weighed down by sadness, too much to delight in Alex’s gaffe or fight her mother’s crusade against the defecting younger Jewish population.

“Her grandparents lived, Mom. And if they did die, it wouldn’t be so they could be martyrs for the religion,” Jorie says, crossing the front of one of the buildings. Two teenagers sit on a railing outside, eyeing her as she walks past. One jumps up, which startles Jorie, but then the two boys run off.

“It’s not like any Holocaust victim boarded the cattle cars in defense of their religion,” Jorie says. “Hitler was an insane—”

“It’s no way to honor their memory, Jorie. Of course they didn’t choose to go, but ultimately their death was a sacrifice for the rest of us.”

Jorie knows there’s nothing more to say to her mother on this score.

“Anyway,” Mim says. “It’s really upset Shelley.”

“I can imagine,” Jorie says.

“What’s wrong with you? You sound strange.”

“It’s Eric,” Jorie says. “He’s been in an accident.” Jorie explains what she knows of the fall. Mim offers to come to the city, so Jorie knows she must sound bad.

“It’s okay, Mom. I’ll be okay,” Jorie says, finally crossing back into familiar sights, the bagel place on the corner of Smith, four-story red brick buildings.

“I’m worried about you,” says Mim. “I always worry about you.”

At this moment, she is grateful for her mother. She can’t help feeling slightly guilty about the email she finally received back from her father after replying to his card. He told her that he would be coming to New York soon, and would love to see her.

“I have one thing that will cheer you up,” Mimsats.

“What’s that?” Jorie asks, as she approaches her street.

“They announced the Tonys tonight. Biz was nominated, as well as that fantastic lady we saw in *Next to Normal*.”

“That’s great,” Jorie says, her voice lacking enthusiasm.

“Biz Colton always cheers you up.”

She’s not wrong, Jorie thinks. Biz Colton’s voice has always been a comfort to Jorie. But right now, even Biz Colton’s voice can’t soothe the nagging feeling inside her.

Later that night, under the covers and the darkness of her apartment, she finally checks her phone. It wasn’t Ella that called, but instead a familiar set of digits appears, one she hasn’t seen on her phone in months.

It’s the main number for Hoover, Carrington and Waldrop.

Chapter 21

Arriving at the office the next morning, Jorie finds that the front door is already unlocked and the lights are on. She anticipated an empty office, some space to figure out what to do next. But once inside, she's relieved to know she's not alone. Already the office feels different, as if it, too, has the knowledge that its occupant is in trouble. Kate had told her in no uncertain terms that Eric wasn't coming back to work any time soon. "Handle it," she said, "until..." Nothing followed 'until.'

From the entrance, Jorie can see Jane's glowing computer screen, the sound of her fingers typing at a furious pace. She's not sure how to approach Jane; she wants her to know that she has been put in charge. But when she spies the pile of crumpled-up tissues on the ledge, she knows she doesn't need to say anything. Jane looks up at Jorie; she's left her "face" at home. No blue eye shadow, no thick mascara, no lipstick. Jane is human after all.

"I'm making a list," Jane says, "of all the active cases. I figured that would be helpful. I'll just print it now. You can get it over there." She gestures to the printer in the hallway.

Jorie waits by the printer, comforted by the familiar hum of workday sounds. The printer spits out a few sheets and Jorie walks the warm paper to the conference room, but Jane's voice stops her.

"I've set you up in Eric's office," she yells. "I figured you might be more comfortable there."

Jorie flips on the light and finds that the desk is bare; Jane has filed the stacks of documents that normally fill Eric's desk. Sitting in Eric's chair feels strange so she switches out his souped-up, ergonomically correct chair with the guest one.

The list has twenty active matters on it, but Jane notes in brackets that only four have deadlines or meetings in the next couple of days, at least according to Eric's official calendar. One is a filing due to City Planning, two are special permit applications before the BSA, which Jorie had already been drafting, and the last is a new client meeting. Jorie's not sure what to do about that one. She's been with Eric for almost five months, enough time to understand the broad landscape of the practice, but not necessarily enough to advise a new client on her own. She brackets that and focuses on the other three matters.

For the next few hours she makes good progress, and realizes she's learned a lot more in the last few months than she thought, maybe more than she learned all six years at her old firm. Near lunchtime, Jane appears in the doorway.

"I've been looking through Eric's emails, just to see if anything important came up over the weekend, and Miles sent him an email, saying he was trying to get in touch."

Jane hands Jorie Miles's number although Jorie already knows it by heart. She can't call Miles without a strategy. If she gives him the information about Eric without a plan, he's bound to fire her on the spot.

"I'll need all of the paperwork on Desbrosses," Jorie says to Jane. "And I'll also need to see any emails from Miles."

By three, she's ready to talk.

“Eric!” Miles says, likely seeing the law firm’s number on his caller ID. “Tell me you have some good news. It’s been a shit day.”

“Actually Miles, it’s Jorie.”

“Oh,” he says, not hiding his disappointment. “Did you need something? I can get Clara if you do. Clara!” He hired a new assistant not too long after Jorie started working for Eric.

“I don’t know how to say this, but yesterday Eric was involved in a climbing accident. He’s in the hospital and in stable condition.”

“Jesus,” Miles says. “When will he be out?”

“I don’t really know much else.”

“What do they say is wrong?”

“I don’t have that—”

“Jesus, Jorie, you’ll have to give me something here. We’re scheduled to argue this case in a month and you’re telling me my counsel might be in the hospital.”

Trying not to get tangled up in the insensitivity of Miles’s comments—both on Eric’s account and her own—Jorie chooses her words carefully. If she tells Miles him what Kate’s implied, that it will be a long, slow recovery, he’ll go to an other firm, which he’s been threatening anyway. She wants to give him just enough information so there’s a chance to keep the firm retained.

“I’m sorry, Miles, I really don’t know yet. But the good news is that I am prepped on the case and certainly can step in if—”

Miles doesn’t miss a beat, as his voice rises in pitch. “We’ll need to bring on someone else.”

“You don’t. I wrote the draft of the brief. I researched all of those issues. I’m confident I can argue them frontwards and backwards.”

“No offense, Jorie, but you don’t have the experience for this.”

“That’s true.”

“You agree with me?”

“Yes, but—”

“I’ll want a copy of the files for—”

“Can you let me finish?”

Miles sighs. “Yes, dear.”

“I’ll try to ignore the condescension in your voice,” Jorie says. “Because what I’m going to say is important. I researched and wrote that entire appeal, under Eric’s supervision, of course. If you bring in a new firm now, they’ll take time to get up to speed, which of course is your call, but time for you means more money, which I’m well aware has been a concern in the past.”

There weren’t too many surprises in Eric’s emails, but Miles has an obscene number of overdue bills and, in some instances, he’s fought with Eric on the numbers.

“That’s really not your business.”

“In any event,” Jorie says, “in addition to my thorough understanding of the case, I’ve already lined up another mentor, the best mentor, so there’s no need for you to take on anyone else.” In her time with Eric, Eric cited the “zoning guru” at least once a day.

“And who would that be?” Miles asks, exasperated.

“Larry Kahn.”

For the first time since she’s known Miles, Miles is silent.

Jorie approaches the doors of 666 Fifth, trying to keep cool, but to little avail. All of the memories of that final day, and all the ones that came before, flood her as she walks into the cool marble lobby. Everything is just as it was the last time that she was here—the statues, the fountains, the mustached guard at the desk. The only thing different is her.

When she enters the firm's reception area, the familiar scent of vanilla potpourri wafts over her. A male receptionist that she doesn't recognize greets her as she approaches the desk. She waits on a brown, backless, leather banquette while the receptionist places the call. Inhaling deeply, she tries to appreciate the experience of being here as a visitor without any of the responsibility that she had when she worked here. Unfortunately, she concludes, it's just as nerve-wracking to be a visitor, if not more. At least then this felt like home base.

Larry Kahn emerges from behind a glass door. He looks austere in a dark gray suit. She offers her hand, which he ignores, then motions for her to follow. He doesn't use his own key card to regain entry into the hallway, but clears his throat. The receptionist fumbles for the button to buzz them through.

While at Hoover she had heard of Larry Kahn, or at least had seen his name on firm emails, reporting about compensation or recent hirings, but she had never actually met him. This is not uncommon in this kind of mega-firm, where each specialty is its own pod, rarely interacting with attorneys from other specialties.

Once inside Mr. Kahn's corner office he offers her a seat at the small conference table. Some of the partners, such as Weber, went off-script and chose their own décor,

but Mr. Kahn has stuck with the firm's traditional set, a tobacco-brown desk with matching bookshelves, and a small glass side table. His secretary offers her coffee before shutting the door, but Jorie declines, too jittery already. This meeting is important. She's secured her place as chief counsel, but only on a gamble: she still needs to convince Larry Kahn to agree to supervise her.

"Is that yours?" Jorie asks, as she points to the one personal touch in the office, a framed painting of a brown wooden-framed home, with a steep sloped roof.

"It's the Wyckoff House," Larry says, dryly. "The first landmarked house in New York City. It was built in the mid-1600s."

"Of course," Jorie says. "I was kidding."

"I've only got about twenty minutes," he says, looking at his watch.

Jorie remembers Eric describing Larry Kahn as odd, but he didn't mention how unfriendly he was.

"I know you said there was no need for me to come down—"

"Right, I don't want to become too involved in Eric's affairs. He wouldn't want it that way." In the voicemail he left for Jorie, he said he was calling to find out how Eric was "faring." When she returned his call, he sounded rather cryptic about how he had heard about the accident in the first place, and when she asked him whether he had spoken to Kate he told Jorie that he didn't think it was appropriate to call her. This was news to Jorie—she'd always understood Mr. Kahn to be a mentor to Eric, almost like a second father. After working for Eric for some time, when she learned of his relationship with Larry Kahn, she surmised that Eric probably called him after her interview, when she declined to use Weber as a recommendation. As a member of the Executive

Committee, he could have pulled Jorie's old reviews, which would have been admirable, if not glowing.

"I appreciate that under normal circumstances you wouldn't be involved in his cases, I do. It's just—I'd like your help with something."

"I'm sure Eric wouldn't—"

"At this point it's sort of moot whether Eric would or wouldn't want me to ask you, seeing as he can't even breathe right now without the help of a machine."

Mr. Kahn cringes slightly.

"Forgive me if I sound insensitive, I'm not trying to be. I'm sure you know a lot more about me than I do about you,"—Jorie looks for a sign of recognition—"but what I do know about you is that you are the best zoning attorney there is. That's something Eric has said to me on more than one occasion. And even if my reputation here didn't always reflect it, I'm serious about my work, and I want to do the best I can and keep doing the best work for Eric."

Mr. Kahn sits back and doesn't speak for a moment, mulling over her request. Eventually his face relaxes. "What exactly do you need?"

Pulling out her notebook, her hands graze the stack of Minnie Zenkel's letters still in the side pocket. She hasn't been able to remove them, as if carrying them around somehow means that she hasn't completely lost Ella. It's silly, she knows, but in this moment it helps ground her, acts as a talisman of sorts.

Jorie has practiced this part of her speech in front of the mirror enough times that she doesn't need to refer to her notes. She takes charge, desperate to avoid the early pitfalls of her performance with Miles.

“I understand some of the weaknesses from my research, but I have little practical experience before the Board. I’m hoping you might provide some input there.”

Larry encourages her to go on.

“In our brief, we outlined four major objections with the project. The first is a bit technical, stemming from the definition of transient. As you might know, the zoning permits a transient use, and they are going ahead with a hotel. What the developer is doing, though, is selling units in the hotel, but imposing contractual restrictions on how long the owners can stay. In essence, we argue that these length of stay requirements violate the Zoning Resolution and Administrative—

“That will be a difficult one,” Mr. Kahn cuts her off. “The Board won’t easily overturn DOB’s interpretation of a definition, and it seems they have already decided that this constitutes a transient use. I see why he might choose to lead with that, though, as it’s rooted in statute. What’s the next objection?”

So consumed with the fear that he might say no, she hadn’t prepared herself for his actual input. She takes down some quick notes before continuing.

“The second is that individual ownership of the units will violate the Zoning Resolution, because individual ownership implies permanence, not transience. And their only use group as of right is for transient occupation.”

“Interesting. Do you have any case law to back that up?”

“Nothing specifically tied to this, but from a common-sense perspective, we argue that ownership may tend to induce occupancy, as distinguished from a purely transient use, like a hotel, where nobody would claim that they have rights to a room.”

He waves his hand, as if shooing away a fly. “The Board never likes speculation. Three?”

“But we do have a case where DOB denied a permit when the stated use was incompatible with the regs.”

“This seems distinguishable,” he says. “Three?”

Jorie starts to wonder what Eric saw in Mr. Kahn. Maybe he is a genius, as Eric said, but he has about as much personality as the bowl of fake fruit sitting on the table.

“The third objection has to deal with enforcement. We find the Restrictive Declaration to be unenforceable because it doesn’t contain certain language that is required by a LPPN, a Legal Policy and Proc—”

“Yes, I know what an LPPN is.”

“And we also argue that the owners will be limited to monetary penalties, and not a lifting of the permit.”

“Does the Restrictive Dec flatly forego certain penalties?”

“Maybe not outright, but they specify—”

“Four?”

Jorie starts to lose steam. She wanted the critique, but with Eric possibly not waking up, ever, she was hoping for more in the way of support. She takes a deep breath before the last one.

“The final claim is that there is precedent that goes the other way, a case in which DOB refused to grant a permit for a transient hotel based on the fact that some units would be specifically designated as apartments.”

Mr. Kahn sits quietly, tapping against his notepad. His fingers look like something out of a ghost story, white and spindly.

“We have some other arguments,” she starts, talking faster than before, but he quiets her with a wave of his hand.

“Timing.”

Jorie waits, assuming more is coming. But when he says nothing further, she repeats it back. “Timing?”

“Your main problem is timing. I tried to explain this to Eric months ago, but he wouldn't listen. The forces at play with any big zoning dilemma, such as this one, necessarily lead to a calculation of the landscape of the city at any given time. As with any decision that will affect the city, we must examine who wields the most power at the time of decision. This happens time and time again.

“When you go back and study the beginning of zoning in this city, you'll see that much of the impetus for adopting the zoning resolution came from wealthy city merchants who wanted to curb the building of skyscrapers on Fifth Avenue. But the merchants alone did not wield enough power. There were also the garment makers, an important part of the local economy. Beyond these forces, there were also the structures already in place. The tax structure, for one, which taxed lots on their full potential, not solely at what existed on the lot at any given point in time. This encouraged property owners to fully exploit their lots, building higher and higher, just to keep up with their taxes. It also led to people combining lots, because the larger lots could command higher tenant revenues due to more favorably configured floor plans.”

As Mr. Kahn speaks, she can hear Eric's voice delivering this mini-history lesson.

“All these factors put pressure on the city to change the zoning, and nobody with any power opposed the limitations, in part because they were not particularly restrictive, only putting some limits on height and adding setback rules after a certain height. Do you see my point?”

“Not exactly,” Jorie says, shifting her legs.

“You seem impatient. That’s not going to help you with your case. You need to be both backward and forward thinking in order to assess the motives of each party involved, and use that to frame your approach.”

“Again, I don’t see what that has to do with the matter—”

Mr. Kahn slams his hand down on the desk. “This is the matter.”

“I’m really sorry about Eric,” Jorie says, seeing the pained look on his face. “He thought—” Mr. Kahn blinks and Jorie corrects herself—“he thinks of you like a father.”

Mr. Kahn pauses before putting his jacket back on. “You need to start thinking beyond the statutes, and start paying attention to the players. Have you heard of Brendan Gill? Former writer for *The New Yorker* and a preservationist?” he says. Mr. Kahn continues before Jorie can say no. “Gill once said, ‘Corruption is like a great aquifer beneath the city.’ Corruption, meaning dissolution of the constitution that makes a thing what it is. What all the people in this case have in common is that ultimately they are corruptible. The politician comes into office and says she wants to help the neighborhood. A developer proposes a building and promises to take into account the community’s concerns. They’re not lying when they proclaim these things, but over time other needs start to press on these convictions and eventually dismantle them. The politician, at her core, wants to be loved, and wants to turn that adoration into power. The developer wants

to take over the land and make money in the process. They're not making decisions based on what's best for the community, rather, they're making decisions based on what's best for themselves, which sometimes they'll frame in terms of what's best for the community, but that will always be limited by their own point of view." Mr. Kahn takes a breath.

"Okay," says Jorie, "so what are the forces in play now?"

"Right now, our city is in a state of crisis. We're in a recession and the job market is in the toilet. What the city needs is money, and in this instance this comes from a developer building a skyscraper and luring foreigners, untouched by market machinations, to dump their beaucoup bucks on our shores. Emma Lazarus's ode to New York might as well be scrubbed off and replaced with a gold-lettered invitation to the recession-proof, those still suckling on the Euro. The only thing that will sway this case in your favor is for one of the forces to fall. Your arguments are sound, but ultimately not winnable. What's left is how badly the city needs the money, or more pointedly how well Belleza can convince the politicians who, by helping him, he'll help later. Remember, too, that in some sense Belleza speaks on behalf of all developers. If you can break that tie between Belleza and the politicians, you might have a shot."

Jorie sighs. "And how would I go about doing that?"

"A diversion, for one. Something that makes them all have to regroup."

This reminds Jorie of what Eric hoped to find initially, to expose the underbelly of the developer such that no politician in her right mind would support it. There were the bones, of course, but Belleza moved them out of the media's attention as if he were performing a sleight of hand. Could there be more to this building's story?

“Do you have any relationships with either the city council speaker or the borough president? Could you call any of them on my behalf?” Jorie asks.

Mr. Kahn’s phone buzzes and his secretary’s voice booms from the speaker. “Five minutes until your meeting.”

Jorie looks at her watch, surprised that time has gone by so quickly.

“We’ll have to wrap things up, I’m afraid. Really,” he says. He stands as Jorie gathers her things from the table. “I assume you can show yourself out?” he says.

“Of course,” Jorie says and holds out her hand.

Mr. Kahn demurs. “I don’t do handshakes.”

She slings her bag over her shoulder, wondering why she thought she could ever pull this off. It’s clear he wants her to go, but she’s not sure she got what she came for.

“Is there any way you might send an email to Miles on my behalf? At least letting him know we talked?”

Mr. Kahn takes a Kleenex from a box attached to the wall. “I’ll certainly consider it.”

“It’s not just for me,” Jorie says. “But for Eric.”

Using the tissue, Mr. Kahn holds opens the door for Jorie.

“For Eric,” he repeats, before branching in the opposite direction.

At the elevator bank, Jorie stops before pushing the button. There are a couple of work friends she could see while she’s here, but that would require her to go upstairs to her old floor. And then she’d have to pass Weber’s office, or risk running into him in the hallway. Is she willing to take the chance?

Mulling it over in an adjacent open staircase, Jorie hears two male voices from above.

“There’s no way he has the book of business he claims,” one says. “I’d be surprised if he could lure half those clients here.”

She freezes. She could recognize that voice anywhere. It’s the voice that guided her around these hallways for six years. Sometimes, it was the last voice she heard before she went to bed.

Stuart Mendelsohn rounds the bend and shoots Weber a glance, but Weber doesn’t notice, just continues ranting.

“Don’t get me wrong,” Weber says, turning the corner.

It’s not possible but Weber looks even younger than when she last saw him. His face is tanned and has thinned out a bit, as if he’s lost weight. It reminds her of when she first met him, in the days when her crush had just started. This Weber is worlds apart from the sallow-faced man who delivered her last rites.

From the way his expression doesn’t change he doesn’t seem to see her, but stops at the bottom of the stairs and gives an appraising look.

“What brings you here?” he says, after a pause.

“I had a meeting with Larry Kahn about a case I’m working on.”

Perhaps sensing the awkwardness, David Mendelsohn excuses himself, says he has to get some files before the hiring committee meeting. It clicks in Jorie’s head. This is why Mr. Kahn was so adamant about ending early.

“You’ve found a job.”

“Don’t sound so disappointed,” she says.

“What should I say, Jorie? That I’m happy to see you?”

More footsteps patter down from above as two associates descend. One is Mark, whom Jorie worked with for years, and the other is Sharon Alonso, the not-so-new Jorie.

“You’re back!” Mark says. At first Jorie thinks he’s talking to her, but then realizes it’s directed to Weber.

“Hi, Mark,” Jorie says.

“Holy crap, Jorie, I didn’t recognize you. Your hair looks different.” Mark gives her a warm hug, then focuses on Weber.

“How was St. John’s?” Mark says.

Weber’s face brightens. “Four days of amazing weather and food. I have not a single complaint.”

“Just back from vacation?” Jorie says.

“My wife and I got back last night,” he says, stiffly.

“She feeling well?” Sharon says.

“Great, yes.”

“Is everything okay?” Jorie says.

“What?” Weber says, confused. “Oh, yes, she’s fine. We’re fine. Actually, we’re expecting. She’s due in three months.”

Weber is smiling now, ear to ear. “Funny, yeah, I guess you wouldn’t have known. She got pregnant just after you left.”

The last words she wrote to his wife. *I’m afraid you don’t know your husband as well as you think you do.*

“Good to see you, Jorie,” Mark says, and he and Sharon take off, leaving Weber and Jorie alone.

Once again, she is speechless in his presence. Jorie had always assumed his wife was older, around his age, but maybe it was because of how he described her—mocking her early bedtime, lamenting her dowdy clothes. The way he smiles now, practically gloating, she wonders if he’s even talking about the same person. He would sometimes narrate fights they had—how his wife was upset that he had decided to spend so much money on a piece of artwork. He laughed it off to Jorie, told her that his wife had no taste in fine art, couldn’t distinguish a Diebenkorn from a Rothko from a Barnett Newman. At the time, hearing these stories made Jorie feel less guilty; after all, Weber and his wife were incompatible; she wasn’t coming between them so much as confirming something Weber already knew. But now, she questions what she thought she understood.

She pictures them after his wife got the email. Maybe there were tears on her part, apologies on his, as he attempted to talk his way out of his transgressions. She could imagine how he must have described Jorie—a lost associate with daddy issues, a confused lesbian. Maybe he framed it in terms of himself, said he was lonely. And then the two of them, in the catharsis of the moment, came together and made a baby.

He lets out a loose laugh. “Amazing how life can change so quickly, huh?”

She nods. “Amazing.”

Minutes later she walks down Fifth Avenue, deciding to skip the subway and just head back to the office on foot. She has a full workload she needs to attend to, and for that she needs a clear head. Tourists in capris and tennis shoes through the sidewalks, ogling jewels in the Tiffany’s window as they walk from Rock Center up to Central Park.

The people who work in the area stand out by the scowls on their faces as they deftly weave around the tourists, the sidewalk a life-sized video game. In a daze, Jorie bumps into a woman. The woman clutches the hand of a young boy, who tries to pull her in the opposite direction.

“I want to go ice skating,” he complains. “Like we saw on TV.”

“Don’t be silly. That’s only in the winter.” The boy’s face clouds and he wrangles his fingers from his mother’s hand.

“But on TV.”

“We’re going to the toy store,” she says.

The boy’s disappointment hangs over Jorie, bleeds into her impromptu reunion. She thought she would feel relief upon finally seeing Weber after all those months of silence. Or, if not relief, than that she would have some kind of epiphany. In her mind, two versions of Weber existed: Weber the lover and Weber the former lover. What the two versions had in common were an emotional core, one tied to immense feeling and one tied to trying not to feel. But today, from him, there was an absence of feeling altogether. Only coldness, possibly hatred. And a sense that, to Weber, Jorie no longer existed.

Jorie realizes that she had the email to Weber’s wife all wrong. It wasn’t Weber’s wife who didn’t know Weber. Rather, it was Jorie.

Chapter 22

Letty Green dangles the microphone in front of Biz. She's had so much work done that it's difficult for Biz not to stare, even though he's no stranger to the knife. Plus, with her makeup, she barely looks human. He hopes that his own makeup, applied by a make-up artist sent over by Arianna earlier this morning, fares better on screen.

She interviews him in front of the Broadway Theater where *Persephone* runs in revival. The red carpet has been set out on the sidewalk in anticipation of the Tonys, though they're blocks from Rock Center where the actual awards ceremony will be held. Occasionally a homeless man passes by, ambling over from Port Authority, but otherwise Times Square is quiet, the workday not yet begun. Biz can make out the cameraman just behind the lights as he sticks his neck out, impatient.

"I'm sorry, can you repeat that?" Biz asks Letty. This is one of the softballs, he knows. Letty's known for her distinctive interview style, luring interviewees along before dropping zingers that catch even the most seasoned celebrities off-guard. They're still in good cop land, but Biz struggles to answer. He woke up in the middle of the night, startled by a dream that he was still in his childhood home, his father whacking him on his shins for supposedly looking at his half-brother the wrong way. "I can see you," his father said, in the dream, "all that ugliness inside." Biz couldn't fall back asleep until dawn.

Letty gestures to stop rolling.

"Haven't had your coffee yet?" she says to Biz. Her natural speaking voice is deeper than she sounds on television.

"Thought you were buying."

“I’ve weaned myself off the stuff.” Letty signals for the cameraman to start up again.

“It’s been twenty-five years since you first starred in *Persephone*, in this very theater,” Letty says. “Then, you played the masterminding puppeteer, Harry, for which you were nominated for a Tony. Now you’re back in a different role as Geppeto, the elder statesman, and again you’ve been nominated. Tell the viewers a little bit about what the return to the play has been like for you.”

“It’s strange,” he says, “to have originated a role in this musical that has become so important to American musical theater. I can’t tell you how excited I am to be back in the play. And to be in a new role. Now I’m the voice of reason as opposed to the Prospero-like puppeteer who thinks he can control the world. I hope the Tony committee will take more kindly to my second performance than they did my first.” Biz lets out a Santa-sized laugh.

“It’s been a while since you’ve been on Broadway. How does it feel to be back?”

“It’s a miracle to wake up in my own bed every day. Especially at this age. It wasn’t so bad when I was younger, traveling to regional theaters and the tours. But I’ve become too accustomed to my own creature comforts, I guess. Don’t get me wrong, I’m grateful that I get offered so many parts nowadays.”

“*Older than the hills...*,” she trills a line from one of his solos. “Not so bad up here, is it?”

A playful look crosses Letty’s face; Biz hopes that this is it, she’ll tease him about his age for a bit and they’ll be done. Letty never vets her questions in advance, as most of the other reporters do. He’s ready for this kind of joking, though. Unlike Julie Andrews,

he'll talk about how grateful he would be to win. He won't reject the award as Ms. Andrews did after being similarly snubbed. And if the building goes as Rick has projected, he'll be able to get a second place on the coast of Spain in that port town Vance once took him to.

“Do the cast dynamics feel similar to how they felt then? Or have the years since the original production changed the feel of the show?”

“That's an interesting question, Letty, Did you see the original?”

“Now, Biz, you know I'm way too young for that.”

“Of course, I only imagined you might have been a little thing. Sitting on your mother's lap.” Biz can't resist the dig, giving Letty's hefty body a once-over.

“I'm kidding, of course,” Letty says. “I loved the show, as did all the critics. All those big name stars—Melinda Carrolls, Jay Gerber. And of course, the show was nominated for twelve Tonys and walked away with eight.”

“I was only twenty-five when I was in *Persephone* the first time, and a bit more wild then. Now, it's early to bed and lots of care for my vocal chords.”

“And the cast?”

“I get along with all of the cast members now, but I'm not as involved in their lives as I was then.” Vance would have had a laugh at this. Involved in their lives back then meant sleeping with more than one of the other guys in the ensemble. He begged Vance to tune out, blaming the intensity of the work environment, and all the adrenaline chugged up from performing a three-hour play once ten times a week. This sat well for a while, but, for him and Vance, his time in *Persephone* marked the beginning of the end.

Out of the corner of his eye, Biz sees a man stop just beyond the sidewalk. Bundled up, and wearing a skull cap, the man lingers by the red carpet. Biz can make out the quality of the man's raw-looking skin.

"As viewers know," Letty says, addressing the camera, "Biz Colton is up for a Tony for his role in *Persephone, in Puppet*. The awards show will be broadcast in just three weeks. Before we say goodbye, we have one more question. Okay with you?"

"You bet."

"We've gone down memory lane for you," she says, as Biz's chest tightens, "and what we've come up with is a puppeteer who worked with you on the original run of the show and helped train you for the arduous puppeteering required of the role. You remember Frank Monday, don't you?"

Biz averts his gaze.

"There was one thing he mentioned," Letty says, "that you would remember in particular. One night that stood out to him as exemplifying your time with the show."

"Right," Biz says, his mouth dry.

"I'm sure you know what I'm going to say."

Biz blinks.

"He remembers a speech you gave on opening night, with all of the actors and puppeteers on stage before the curtain went up for the first time. He said that some of the other actors resented the puppeteers and the way that the director deferred to them on some of the staging, but that you were always kind, going so far as to befriend them. You had a mature confidence about you, Frank said, so people listened. Frank mentioned there was one younger guy in particular whom you took under your wing. And then you gave

this speech before the show started, the show that would catapult your career. You said...”

Letty pauses. “You said ‘We’ll always be a family, long after this show opens and closes.’

Those words still resonate with Frank. Do you remember that moment?”

“I appreciate those kind words,” Biz says, “but as you pointed out when we started, Letty, I’m older than the hills.” He puts his arm around Letty; she seems to shrink as his chest puffs out.

“Honestly,” he says, looking straight into the camera. “I don’t remember much.”

After the interview, Biz buys himself a coffee and heads for the subway. He has some hours to kill before the evening performance and seeks the solace of his apartment. Heading down Broadway, he marvels at the sanitized circus this whole area has become. At Forty–Third Street, he looks right. He usually avoids walking this way, but today it feels as if someone else is controlling him. If he had answered Letty’s questions honestly about what he remembers most from his first run in *Persephone*, the Hotel Carter would be right up there. The sign for the hotel flashes red fluorescent light halfway down the block; he’s heard that it still holds the reputation for being one of the filthiest.

On autopilot, Biz walks down the street. In front of the hotel, he looks up. The building recedes out of view long before it reaches its height of twenty-four floors. He peers into the front lobby as hotel guests stream out, speaking anything other than English. As he enters, he finds the lobby has been remodeled, or at least the carpet has been replaced with one that looks as if it had been taken from a Chinese restaurant, with a dark red-and-gold pattern. Despite the change in décor, the depressing aura of the place washes over him, just as it did then. A security guard approaches and asks for his key.

When he says he's just looking, the guard tells him only registered guests are permitted inside.

The last time he was here he berated a dealer who wouldn't sell him drugs on credit. He hadn't meant to develop a crack habit. Of course, that sounds obvious, hardly anyone intends to become an addict, but for many years he never even flirted with it as some guys he knew did. They used recreationally, on nights the theater was dark. But Biz rarely joined them. He came to New York with a singular purpose, and Vance was distraction enough.

But after five years, Biz started to tire of the routine. The relationship with Vance began to remind him of the things he hated about his family life in Kansas. Vance became more critical of Biz, like Biz's father; the two started having more nights in, where they barely crossed paths in Vance's spacious apartment. Their relationship evolved into a kind of domesticity that made him feel more claustrophobic than safe. He started staying out later, not telling Vance when he'd be home. Eventually, a friend from *Persephone* coaxed him into doing speed balls. Biz was shocked at how much he liked it; a bomb went off in his head, shutting out all the worries about his career, about Vance.

He had been in *Persephone* for almost a year and a half when the addiction took over. All his money went to drugs; he was evicted from his apartment for nonpayment of rent. He'd do a show, then come to the Hotel Carter or Bryant Park to get high. For about a month, he'd sneak back into the theater after dark and sleep in his dressing room.

The guard eyes him carefully as he leaves the lobby. Biz stands on the sidewalk again, not quite ready to move on. The last time he spent the night here he was almost beaten to death. Out of cash, he complained to the dealer that he needed his fix. The

dealer responded with several expertly placed kicks, some to his body, one to his head. After a couple of hours Biz managed to get up, exiting the hotel just before daylight. Outside, there were two cop cars and a fire truck, lights blazing.

“A lady was pushed out a window,” a man said, limping towards Biz. When Biz looked around for the body, the man clarified. “She fell in the courtyard.”

That should’ve been the end for Biz, the wake-up call, knowing that it could have just as easily been him dead in that hotel room, one too many kicks. But it took another few weeks, when he botched his performance so badly that the producer of the show forcefully removed Biz from his dressing room afterwards and wrangled him straight into rehab.

He rubs at his face as he walks back down the street, as if that will remove the nightmarish memories of those early years. When he takes out his Metrocard minutes later, he finds the remains of his make-up artist’s handiwork: the concealer she so expertly applied, now smeared over the cushion of his palm.

Chapter 23

Over the next several weeks, Jorie performs triage with Eric's practice. She deals with last-minute zoning emergencies for old and new clients alike. She files documents she had never even heard of before she sat down to draft them. She convinces clients that Eric will be back soon, but that she can handle their needs in the interim.

Each time she speaks with Kate, the calls become less emotional and more practical. Although Eric broke his back when he fell, the prognosis is much better than what the doctor originally thought. Jorie learns that the cause of the accident was due to a malfunctioning piece of equipment, and not due to Eric's own negligence. Kate says that Jorie can come visit Eric, and Jorie promises she will once her workload clears up.

With the hearing three weeks away, the pressure intensifies. Jorie prepares her remarks, and starts to consider the questions that the Board will ask her, as prompted by Larry Kahn. In the midst of all this, Jorie's father writes again, letting her know the definitive dates he will be in New York. Just her luck, these dates coincide with the week and a half leading up to the hearing. Jorie holds off on responding.

The only saving grace for Jorie is that ever since Miles got the email from Larry Kahn, saying he would assist Jorie in any way possible, he's stopped calling as much. If he calls, it's only to discuss the upcoming protest he's planned. He's brought in other local community groups for planning purposes, among them Community Board 1, Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, SoHo Alliance, Friends of Hudson Square, and some local block associations and condo owners. Miles intends to invite every public official, even those who haven't offered support. He'll also invite reps from the Municipal Art Society and four Community Boards in Manhattan. Miles is in charge

of bringing the people; Jorie files the necessary paperwork to get a permit, as the city requires one to use amplified sound.

One afternoon Miles sets up an interview for Jorie with New York One. He's convinced that highlighting the legal fight will bring more legitimacy to their cause. The reporter, a cheerful woman that Jorie's seen on-air many times, arrives with her cameraman. They set up in the conference room, which Jane has made considerably warmer with some plants and softer lamps. Sitting in front of Eric's law books, which cover the entire wall, Jorie channels the confidence she's seen Eric display as she relays the major legal aspects of the case. It's different from talking to Larry Kahn because she's able to paint the case in broad strokes, much as Miles would. She surprises herself by the sound of her own voice, more articulate and passionate than she remembers sounding in years. Gone is the version of her who was scared of oral arguments in law school. In her place is the same Jorie who defended her mother after Rosie's death, when all the kids whispered about how her mother went crazy. Maybe Weber's assessment was correct—maybe at Hoover she was always on autopilot. Jorie enjoys the role, settles into it. Despite Larry Kahn's warning, she feels optimistic.

Hours later, Miles calls to congratulate her (first time ever) and, following that, another request comes in from *The Forward*, a Yiddish daily newspaper. Having heard her refer to Minnie Zenkel's puppet theater, they wonder if she'd be willing to answer some more questions, as many of their readers were familiar with the old puppet theater. When Jorie gives her the firm's address and tells her to come by anytime, the woman laughs.

“It so happens I'll be around the corner. Would you be willing to meet me there?”

Jorie meets the reporter at the Workmen's Circle at 6:30. The interview proves difficult because, being in that space, Jorie can't help thinking about Ella. Just as she relaxes she sees someone at the periphery of her view, the older woman from the night of her Yiddish lesson. At first, the woman stays back, almost appearing to be disinterested, but at some point she comes closer. She doesn't look hostile, more curious than anything else. As Jorie speaks to the reporter, the woman dabs at her eyes with a handkerchief. Once they finish up the older woman approaches Jorie.

"I'm Malke," she says. It sounds as if she's carrying marbles in her mouth. "I need to talk to you, but not here."

Jorie excuses herself briefly to go to the bathroom, and on her way back Jorie runs into the receptionist, Ella's friend Jenny.

"Malke's been waiting all night to talk to you."

"I can see that. Any idea why?"

Jenny shakes her head, but smiles. "Malke never wants to talk to anyone."

When she returns to the elevators, Malke insists that Jorie come to her apartment for tea and kikelech. Intrigued (and hoping that kikelech isn't Yiddish for serial killer), Jorie follows. Although Malke's shoulders stoop slightly, she walks at a decent pace. When she grabs Jorie's arm as they cross the street, Jorie is enveloped in her powdery perfume.

The apartment is on the second floor of a doorman building. After Jorie steps inside, Malke double bolts the door and puts up the chain. Jorie recognizes the layout; it's the same layout as her law-school apartment. The front door opens into the living room,

and the kitchen branches off to the left. But other than the layout, any similarity with her old place ends. She could imagine that her place might have looked like this had she stayed for her entire life and never thrown anything away. Two unmatched sofas line one wall, across from three orphaned parlor chairs. A cloying smell pervades the space, something between Metamucil and mothballs.

In the efficient way Malke takes Jorie's coat and points to the dining room, she reminds Jorie of Mim. They pass a large china cabinet filled with an array of tea sets, both cups and plates.

"Royal Albert," says Malke. "My mother started me on that collection. I have all of her things. You should see the files of paperwork I gave offer to YIVO. My mother was a real *packferd*. Pack horse, I mean."

Malke brings a plate of cookies to the table.

"I can't eat them, so you must," she says, somewhat sternly. "The coffee will be ready soon."

A pile of catalogs covers one placemat, and recipes are stacked next to the setting where Malke must sit, given the James Patterson book propped up with a holder. As she encourages Jorie to eat, Malke pats the top of her strawberry-blond hair, which doesn't give at all. Jorie suspects Malke is one of those grandmothers who visits the salon once a week.

It becomes evident that Malke won't talk until Jorie eats something, so Jorie finishes three cookies. Satisfied, Malke puts on her glasses, which hang from a lanyard around her neck.

"You talk about Minnie Zenkel?"

“You heard the interview?” Jorie says.

“And you’re friends with that meddlesome girl?”

“Ella?”

“I don’t know her, but I’ve seen her posters. She asks a lot of questions.”

“We’re both interested in the theater but for slightly different reasons. I’m a lawyer representing the community where the theater is located, but she’s a member of the theater.”

“But she’s the one with the posters all over *Arbeter Ring*?”

“Yes, she’s trying to find out what happened to the missing scripts.”

“For what reason?”

Jorie is put off by Malke’s tone, which seems to question Ella’s motives.

“You know that the theater still performs, right?”

“Uch,” Malke says, waving her hand. “It’s nothing like it used to be. I went to a performance once and it was half in English. Who ever heard of a Yiddish play half in English? Also, there were no puppets, no humor. There was a lot of screaming about something, I remember that.”

Malke dabs at the side of her face, though there’s nothing there. “It’s not like it was.”

“So you went to the original theater?” Jorie asks.

“It burned down before I was born.”

“But you’re familiar with it?”

“Of course,” Malke says. “The fire was two years before I was born, but it was a very big deal.”

“And after the fire Aaron Ashkenazi, one of the owners—” Jorie stops herself as she takes in Malke’s face. “Did you know Aaron Ashkenazi?”

Malke narrows her eyes. “I don’t like him.”

“Okay,” Jorie says. “But I’ve heard that Aar—this man—he was upset after the fire because he thought the scripts burned down with the theater. But then there was this rumor, you’ll tell me if I’m wrong, that a woman came the night before the fire and took the scripts. Actually, in the letters—”

“Letters?”

Jorie explains to Malke about the trip to Zuckerman’s Catskills retreat, how Aaron’s grandson now runs the place. Malke’s shoulders stiffen when she says his name again, but it’s impossible to continue without acknowledging him, so she presses on.

“We found letters belonging to Minnie. From Minnie to Aaron.”

“*Redstu Yiddish?*” Malke asks.

Jorie shakes her head, confused.

“If you don’t speak Yiddish, how could you read her letters?”

“Oh, we had a translator.”

“What kind of translator?”

“This woman,” Jorie says, not wanting to think about Sheva. “A friend of Ella’s.”

“She was good?”

“She studied a couple of summers in a row.”

Malke sucks in her teeth. “It’s good that the young people want to learn *mame loshen*, but within two minutes they all think they’re experts. You give me the letters. I

can tell you what Minnie says. There is so much you wouldn't understand—couldn't understand—about Minnie's world.”

Malke gets choked up and excuses herself to the bathroom. Jorie thinks of Sheva and how she complained about the older Yiddish speakers. In some ways it reminds Jorie of any generational divide; the sense from the elders that the younger are perverting the language or somehow not living up to how things were done in their day. But with Yiddish, there seems to be additional pressure since the fate of the language is so uncertain. Nowadays, the ultra-religious Jews speak it, but otherwise the numbers among Jews have dwindled precipitously. Ella had told her that in the late twenty-first century, there was a rebirth, as many universities started teaching the language. But with the rebirth, old conflicts have resurfaced. Even though the group of original Yiddish speakers is small, they hold onto whatever old gripes or territories they had before. Sometimes Ella would be confronted with people who didn't want to share their memories, or would only share them when they thought she was going to publish a book about them (this was how she described her dissertation). If she suggested she might be aligned with a Yiddish scholar they disliked, they would clam up or, worse, go on a tirade about why that person should never be listened to.

Ten minutes after Malke has disappeared, Jorie wonders if perhaps she should knock, make sure she's okay. But soon the door opens, and Malke stops in the kitchen before coming back to the table. She puts a plastic bag down on the table. Breaking off a small piece of cookie, she gestures to the plate.

“You like the kikelech?” she asks.

“Very much.”

“You’ll take some?”

Jorie hesitates, trying to think of a way to re-ingratiate herself. She puts a cookie in the bag, then another.

“Can I ask—” Jorie says, placing a third cookie in the bag. “What do you think happened to the scripts?”

“There was a fire.”

“So you don’t think that Minnie might have taken them?”

“Minnie? No. There’s no way that Minnie would have taken them.” Malke’s eyes flash and she shakes the cookie as she speaks. “She would never take things that were not hers.”

“How do you know?” Jorie asks.

Malke sits up straighter in her chair, chewing slowly.

“How can you be so sure?” Jorie repeats.

“Well, of course I know Minnie Zenkel,” Malke says. “She was my aunt.”

Malke proceeds to tell Jorie the story of Minnie Zenkel. Minnie grew up with Malke’s mother, Clara on a building on East Tenth Street, with their parents, two immigrants from Russia.

“Of their escape from the Pale of Settlement, my Grandmother Rokhl used to say, ‘There are two kinds of journeyers. One kind looks forward, his eyes on what’s next, and the other looks back, head in the past.’ They were the former. My grandfather’s story was legend in the Lower East Side. As a teenager he made hats in a small room above a shop on Clinton Street but quickly figured out it would never pay to be at the bottom. With his self-assured manner, he sourced some lenders to trust him with their money, and grew to

have a small factory, about sixty workers, who provided most of the hats to Milliner's Row."

Jorie learns that Sheva was partly successful in her homegrown translations. Minnie met Aaron when she defied her parents' wishes and joined up with the Ashkenazi brothers' theater. It was true that Minnie was in love with Aaron, and that he refused to marry her. The part that Minnie did not reveal in her letters, the part that Malke tells Jorie in hushed tones, as if the ghost of Minnie Zenkel would come to haunt her if she spoke too loud, is that the reason Aaron wouldn't marry her was because he had already married someone in Poland before he had left, and he had promised to bring his wife over. He had always said he was desperately in love with Minnie, but he couldn't marry her until he told his wife and broken things off. He had heard of others who came over and just remarried, but he had once loved his wife. She was also a puppeteer, but she didn't come over because she took care of her sister's children after she died, and hadn't yet secured the means to bring them all over.

"But then," Malke continues, "Minnie was heartbroken. She felt she lived between worlds. My mother and her family hated her involvement in the theater. They thought it beneath her. They were doing well, and they didn't think much of Aaron either. His *yiches*, they said, were not up to hers."

"Yiches?" Jorie asks.

"Social class. Pedigree."

"So what did Minnie do?"

"She didn't want to stay here—she needed a break. So she boarded the *Mauritania* and went to Europe. She paid her own way from money she made at my

grandpa's business and stayed with a cousin living in France. My mother felt betrayed; they were best friends. On the trip she met a man, whom she later married. He wasn't Jewish; it broke my grandparents' hearts. But she was never quite like them. She and her husband moved far away. California. They wrote screenplays together. It was hardest on my mother. She so wanted to be close to her sister, but her sister moved on. Minnie only came back a handful of times over the years."

Malke pats at her eyes as tears well in the corners. "Then Minnie died in childbirth. I think she already had two kids at the time. It was the third. My mother said the family mourned her when she passed. Whenever she would talk of her, you could understand, in her voice, how much she missed her sister."

Jorie can hear it in Malke's voice; she's taken on her mother's pain, the pain of one abandoned.

"If possible, I want that you should give me the letters," Malke says. "I'd like to read them."

The strain in Malke's voice is evident, the desire to connect with this relative long gone.

"Actually," Jorie says, "I have them here."

She'd been carrying the letters around for weeks, never quite able to take them out. But as she hands them over, she's glad that she didn't.

Putting on her glasses, Malke pages through them, one after the next, and the tears flow freely. When Malke regains a steady breath, Jorie asks if she'll translate the one where Minnie supposedly said she took the letters with her. It was the final letter, she remembers Sheva saying.

Malke thumbs through the brittle paper. When she finds the final the letter she reads through it once silently, and her eyes well up again.

“This is a hard one,” she says. “Now Minnie tells Aaron she is saying goodbye.”

She continues reading, the only sound an occasional laugh or grunt.

“*Oy vey iz mir*. I know what your translator missed.” Malke smiles, satisfied at her own competence. “This is exactly what I mean about getting too big for your belt. In the final section, when she says that she needs to leave, Minnie says she will always carry those scripts with her. But she uses the word *shlep*. You know this word, everyone uses it? But it doesn’t mean a literal carrying here, but more like she carries them in her heart. They are a burden that she will bring with her, even if she doesn’t want to. To literally carry, she would use a different verb, maybe *trogn*, or *aroomtrogn*. Even in her last line, you can still see how much she loved him. And then she says, *Du bist mir ayngebakn in hartzn*. This translates, ‘You are baked into my heart.’ But really, she means that Aaron is dear to her, part of her.”

“So what do you think happened to the scripts?”

“Who knows? *Fartik di fish*.”

Jorie gives Malke a questioning look, but Malke doesn't bother to translate. From her stilted movements as she leads Jorie out, Jorie guesses she must be tired. They pass through the living room again and all of the mismatched furniture takes on new meaning. Of the photographs on the walls, dated by their faded colors, Jorie wonders how many familial connections Malke still has. She mentioned a daughter, but that’s the only living person she’s spoken of all night. Her apartment has become a repository of other people’s things. The letters will serve as yet another marker of a time Malke no longer lives in.

It occurs to Jorie as Malke hugs her goodbye that she had been holding this story in for so long. If she had waited much longer, she might never have been able to see the letters at all. Ella had talked about sending them to a researcher from Poland, who had contacted Nathan Weinberger about his family's roots in Lodz.

"Why didn't you call sooner?" Jorie asks.

"It's a terrible story, not one I like to remember. But when I saw that the building would come down, and my tante's name wouldn't be on it anymore, it made me sad to think that Minnie would just vanish. I'm the only one who knows these stories. For many months I followed the papers, but now it seems Minnie Zenkel's will never come back. Am I wrong?"

Saying nothing at first, afraid to tempt fate by promising otherwise, Jorie feels her heart pound faster. "I hope so."

Malke opens the door and Jorie slips out. She thinks of her father's story, also untold, and his invitation to meet. Turning to leave, she hears the sound of the bolts as Malke twists them in place.

Chapter 24

The remainder of the work week flies forward at a relentless pace. Friday morning, Jorie prepares for a meeting with a client about her eviction from her office building. She ignores the emails and phone calls that pile up, including a third reminder email from Jane that it's time to go over the accounts.

The client's matter should be simple enough. A start-up, whose big idea was to sell high-end online porn (shot cinematically, with pains taken to showcase the art of the filmmakers), is going out of business and can no longer afford the rent. But rather than keeping the landlord in the loop the client has been evading the landlord's letters and phone calls. Jorie will step in to negotiate, knowing that it will be more expensive for the landlord to take her client to court than to settle for a final payment and re-lease the space. If the landlord sues, Jorie will recommend another attorney to handle the litigation. Even though she knows all this, Jorie continues to pore over the lease, as if the words will lead her to another way out. It's an unfortunate aspect of the job: the clients that come calling often have already found themselves in problematic situations.

Jane comes in, holding a stack of folders.

"We've got a problem," she says, while setting her Cat Mom mug down on the desk.

"Houston here," Jorie says, but Jane doesn't smile, just circles a number on a piece of paper.

"The billables are way down." She delivers this news in an even voice, but Jorie knows what she's not saying. If no new business comes into the firm, there'll be nothing to pay their salaries, or the overhead.

“I know,” Jorie says. “I get it. I’m working on it…” Jorie studies the information that Jane has compiled. After looking at it for a minute, it doesn’t add up. She’s billed more than enough hours for the Desbrosses case that they shouldn’t be in the red.

“Miles still hasn’t been paying,” Jane says, as if reading Jorie’s thoughts. “I’ve been in touch with him, but usually Eric—”

“I’ll take care of it,” Jorie says, but Jane continues to sit. “Is that all?” She notices that Jane’s back to wearing her day-glow lipstick.

“I really think you should talk to Eric about how to handle this. We need to figure out a long-term plan, depending on how long he’ll be out,” Jane says. “Kate mentioned you haven’t even gone to visit once yet.”

“I’ll take care of it, Jane,” Jorie says again. Her voice shakes and she sounds like her mother, the exasperation uncorked.

Jane looks offended, but gets up slowly from the chair, straightening her clothes as she stands.

“If we win the case,” Jorie says, “Miles will surely pay us. Plus, look at all the attention we’re getting.”

Jane looks as if Jorie has just told her that she still believes in the tooth fairy. “If you don’t sort this out,” Jane says, “I’ll have to consider my options.” She grabs the files off the desk and a piece of paper flutters out, but she doesn’t stop to pick it up.

Jorie knows she’s in over her head; she doesn’t need Jane to remind her of the ways she’s failing. She doesn’t know the first thing about how to get new clients, or how to get old clients to pay. It’s hard enough just to keep up to speed with the workload, let alone worry about collections. At her old firm, the partners were required to present

yearly business plans where they outlined their strategies for luring potential clients. They would hem and haw over the wording used in these, the font, the layout, before they presented them in slicked-up binders. She remembers a copy once on Weber's desk, where he used his marketing speak to talk of how he would "cross into uncharted territory," as if he were an astronaut, to take on roles that lawyers normally steered clear of. It didn't much matter what the plans said, though. Some of the partners were good at getting people to sign over their business to them, and some weren't. Some people were good at asking for money, and others weren't. This was nothing they taught you in law school.

When Jorie looks up, she sees that Jane left her coffee mug on the edge of Jorie's desk. A bright, smudged lipstick mark clings to the rim like half of a demented smile, taunting Jorie. Trying to ignore it, she turns back to the contract, looking for a way out.

The rest of the day Jorie stays in her office and Jane at her desk, each only addressing the other by email and, even then, only sporadically. At the end of the day, she asks Jane if she'll come to the protest.

"I don't work weekends," Jane says.

The protest is scheduled for ten, but Jorie meets Miles and twenty other active supporters of the Partnership an hour early. There's been significant progress on the building since April. In two months' time eight floors have gone up and velvet ropes drape the front entrance, which is flanked by marble columns.

As they set up, it occurs to Jorie that she's never participated in a demonstration. Some friends have given her a hard time about this, for example, when Jorie wouldn't go

to a gay marriage protest by city hall. But Jorie has always hated crowds, and never saw the point of standing around in a crowd holding up colorfully painted banners. “It must be nice to believe you have so much power as an individual,” one friend said. Looking around at the volunteers busying themselves with unloading pamphlets and discussing who will stand where, Jorie can’t completely let go of her old skepticism. Is this going to help their case?

It’s an inauspicious start when a policeman parked on the corner of Desbrosses warns them not to block the entrance to the building as the volunteers put out the AV equipment. He reminds them that they’ll need to station themselves across the street, on the other side of the barricade that’s been set up. Miles takes out his phone and starts recording the officer.

“Put that away,” the officer says.

“This is a public space,” Miles says. “I have the right to film.”

The officer responds by asking for their permit, which Jorie begrudgingly digs out of her bag. He turns his back to inspect it and then barks into his radio, asking for back-up.

“No,” he says into the radio, still looking at Jorie, “I don’t anticipate any trouble.”

The rest of the group has already moved onto their next tasks, willfully ignoring the cop. Miles consults with the head of the Greenwich Village Historic Society to work out the order of speakers, while Jorie helps another volunteer set up the small stage.

Before they’ve even finished getting ready, two men emerge from the building, barking into earpieces. Within minutes four black sedans pull up to the front.

“Goddamit,” Miles says. “They must’ve known we were coming and moved up the time.”

Miles intended that the protestors would be gathered when the developer and his friends arrived for their scheduled tour of the place. As people stream from the cars, Jorie recognizes some of the players. There’s Rick Belleza, in his pinstripes, and the Korean man she saw in the lot that day. “The money,” as Eric referred to him. Two other Korean men follow. From the other cars come a mix of men and women, mostly white, everyone dressed as if they’re attending the opening of a hip new nightclub. Miles points out the attorneys for the developer, who will be present at the hearing although DOB will take the lead. With them is a woman who looks to be about Jorie’s age. They briefly make eye contact and Jorie recognizes her from the community board meeting, but she still thinks she’s seen her somewhere else. Maybe it’s because she’s put together like Alex, with her long black hair, plum-colored silk jacket, and high-heeled boots. The woman pulls her brown leather bag, almost the size of her torso, closer to her, as if cradling a small child. The men with earpieces hold open the doors as guests walk past the velvet ropes. In that moment, with the doors opened, Jorie glimpses an unfinished lobby with exposed cement risers and plywood walls.

One brave protestor whom Jorie remembers being particularly vocal at the community board meeting grabs a stack of the pamphlets and hurries across the street, catching up with the last few people heading inside. She’s met with icy stares, yet she persists in her cheerful routine. “Welcome to my neighborhood,” the woman says, giving them a warm smile, undeterred by the way they band together and quicken their steps, refusing to accept the pieces of paper she thrusts at them.

Just after ten, a crowd appears, almost out of nowhere. Jorie's been stuck behind a giant speaker for about ten minutes, helping Miles adjust the sound equipment. Miles's face registers disappointment—so far, it's not as big as he had hoped. Jorie's not exactly surprised. Lately, attention for the project has waned, as if the neighborhood has already resigned itself to the shadows the new building throws on the sidewalk. But Miles is always determined; he wouldn't have succeeded in his one-man operation if he didn't have the persistence required to ask people for favors time and time again. He gets out his phone.

By ten thirty, Miles's magic has worked. The sidewalk balloons with upwards of a hundred people. The cop returns with another set of barricades, which he sets up in the middle of the sidewalk, penning in the attendees. One person jostles one of the metal barriers.

“If the protestors don't abide by the rules I'll come back and force them all to leave,” the cop says to Jorie. When he says the word “protestors,” it conjures up an angry mob. But looking around Jorie sees that the people gathered here are anything but: they come with homemade signs, small children dangling from Baby Bjorns, and dogs on leashes; some sip coffee out of plastic mugs.

Jorie joins Miles on the small stage as he leads the group in a call and response. A local news station records them pumping their fists in the air and chanting, “Keep Tribeca Beautiful! Boot Belleza.” Scanning the faces in the crowd, Jorie stops on Ella, who stands in the front. Jorie thought she might see her here today, but tried not to think about it. Closing her eyes, Jorie pretends for a minute that they never met, willing herself not to

care. Yet the feeling sours when she opens her eyes and sees Ilan, who stands just behind Ella.

The energy in the crowd grows as more and more people stream in—at this point, Jorie’s lost count. But the group continually shifts, creating space where there seems to be none, as onlookers slip into the barricade and decide to join in earnest. Speech follows speech, and each speaker brings in new themes. Some proclaim the legacy of the neighborhood, while others focus on the future. There are buzzwords: greedy developer, affordable housing, artists’ spaces. But what’s most remarkable is that everyone is gathered here at all. Jorie can go for days without so much as nodding at her neighbors, especially in more recent years as the landscape of the neighborhood has changed so much. Yet here, today, almost two hundred people willingly gather to declare a common vision for this street. This forty-story hotel is not part of it.

As the final speaker, Miles drags out his speech, which Jorie knows is intentional; he hopes that the cadre of developers and friends will stream out the front doors and the crowd will have the opportunity to exact their anger at those responsible. Almost as if on cue, a black car pulls up to the front of the building and the crowd cheers wildly. They continue screaming when the front door of the building swings back open and the woman in the plum-colored coat emerges, escorted by one of the bodyguards. She averts her eyes and hugs her bag, pretending not to hear the chanting. The driver leaps around to open the door, and with his jerky movement the cheers of the crowd intensify.

The woman looks up as she reaches the sidewalk, and in that instant something catches the heel of her boot. It could be the craggy sidewalk, in need of repair, or an old coffee cup left by one of the workers on the site. It causes her to lose her footing

completely. She falls to the ground, her brown leather satchel tumbling off her shoulder. The flap of the bag, which the woman had held down with her arms seconds before, opens. As if to confirm the crowd's worst fears of the group gathered upstairs—elitists, disconnected from the experience of most New Yorkers—a bottle of champagne spills from the bag and rolls down the sidewalk, headed toward the street. It rolls into the middle of the street at a halfway point between the protestors and the building.

The bodyguard rushes to help the girl up, while an excited protestor in the front row, just in front of Ella, attempts to scale the barrier. He wears his sunglasses the wrong way, as if he has another set of eyes on the back of his head, and as he lands on the other side the laces of his high tops tangle with the barrier. He fails to clear the hurdle, and the barricade comes down after him. From the stage, everything moves in slow motion. Jorie watches as the people immediately around him spill out like dominos. It's only a handful of people, but Ella is among them. Jorie tries to follow Ella with her eyes, but Ella quickly gets lost.

Jorie jumps from the stage. As she runs toward Ella, she watches as the protestor kicks off his sneakers and crawls forward on his elbows and knees, much like a recruit might in a boot camp exercise. Once he reaches the champagne bottle, he picks it up with his hand and lifts it over his head, waving it around like a trophy. The crowd cheers.

Just before Jorie reaches Ella she hears a pop. Everyone cowers, but the fear dissipates as they realize it's just the protestor, who stands in the road with the uncorked bottle. He sprays the champagne onto the opposite sidewalk, offering the spoils as a symbol of a changing neighborhood. Jorie huddles over Ella, who is on the ground.

There's no sign of Ilan, but a woman who says she's a registered nurse tends to a wound on Ella's head, putting pressure on it out with gauze from her purse.

"I think that guy kicked her when he jumped over," she explains.

"Should I take her to the hospital?" Jorie asks.

"Ilan went to find help," Ella says, her eyes wide.

"Continue to apply pressure for a bit, and when it stops bleeding she can get up.

But be on the lookout if she appears to lose consciousness or seems to be dizzy or confused."

Ella grabs Jorie's hand and squeezes it. "I'm so happy you're here." She gives Jorie a weak smile.

As Jorie takes over from the nurse, she looks up to see that the sedan hasn't moved from its spot; the woman in the plum-colored jacket still stares, her face frozen as she takes in what's unfolding. Briefly she catches Jorie's eye, and it is then that Jorie remembers. She was the woman from the Fordham law panel, the one she sparred with about the importance of cozying up to senior partners. The woman finally retrieves her bag from the sidewalk. She looks afraid, as if at any moment the protestors will cross to her side of the street and engulf her. Regaining her senses, she runs unsteadily to the car. As it speeds away, the whine of the ambulance sounds.

They spend the rest of the afternoon in the emergency room of New York Presbyterian while Ella waits to have her gash sewn up. Ilan had rehearsal that afternoon, and seemed relieved that Jorie was there to help out.

When Ella is eventually seen, she assures the doctor that she didn't pass out, but the hospital staff worries she might have had a concussion and want to keep her overnight. Ella doesn't want to stay, but Jorie promises the doctors that she'll take Ella home and monitor her for any change in her condition. After some haranguing, they let the two go.

Not eager to return to Ella's place, possibly to find Ilan and his things, Jorie tells Ella she can come home with her. Jorie springs for a cab; they're both too tired and shaken up to deal with the subway. As they cross the Brooklyn Bridge, Ella rests her head on Jorie's shoulder.

Jorie takes her promise to the doctors seriously and stays up while Ella sleeps. She flips on the TV and changes channels for a bit, settling on the news. She wonders whether they'll be any coverage of the rally.

Later that day, an email comes through from Belleza, himself, addressed to Eric and Miles and several public and community officials. In it, he expresses his deep regret for what happened. He explains that there was a mix-up with his PR person, and that he never intended to interfere with the protest. While Jorie wants to discount the email as yet another empty gesture, Belleza tells a story of a protest he attended with ACT-UP on Wall Street. After she reads the email she begins to view Belleza as less of a monster and more of a human.

There's also the invitation from her father. They've emailed back and forth, yet she's waited until the last possible minute to decide whether to see him. He's working on a show at BAM and staying in Brooklyn; she knows she could easily ask him to meet for a late-night drink. The hearing will take over in a few days, with the Executive Session at

the Board on Friday followed by the event itself the following week. But still, something holds her back.

Ella wakes in the early evening and the two order in dinner. Jorie puts on the TV at bedtime, starts to drift off as Ella sleeps next to her. But Jorie is stirred by music from the television. The weekly theater show on New York One forecasts the upcoming Tony Awards. Half-asleep, Jorie watches with vague interest. Usually she and Mim see most of the contenders, but this year they've gone to hardly any. Before Jorie clicks off the TV, Biz Colton's headshot appears on screen, along with the other nominees for 'best performance by an actor in a featured role.' The awards are a week away.

When Jorie wakes Sunday morning, there's a voicemail on her work phone. The message is time-stamped well after midnight. The man slurs his words, so she has to listen more than once. The third time, she finally understands his name. It's Frank Monday, and he wants to meet. He says it concerns the owner of 31 Desbrosses.

Chapter 25

She exits the train at Coney Island, walks down Mermaid Avenue. As a kid, they used to come here to visit Auntie Gertie, her father's aunt. It was a schlep from Quassaick, but Art was Gertie's only living relative in driving distance. Two and a half hours each way they'd travel to visit Ocean View, a squat building with a peculiar odor, the mix of cafeteria food and recycled air, since the windows were all locked shut for the safety of the patients. They used to make fun of the name of the place since the only view from Gertie's room was a parking lot. Gertie's now long dead; Jorie only comes to this part of Brooklyn once a year for the Mermaid Day Parade.

When she gets to Nathan's the smell of grease and sauerkraut makes her stomach turn. She waits on the sidewalk, leaning against one of the takeout windows.

"Can I help you?" a man asks from behind. He wears a white paper hat and green t-shirt, Nathan's emblazoned on his chest.

She shakes her head no, continuing to keep her eye on the street. Even though she set up the plan, calling her father early this morning and arranging to meet him here, she's afraid to be caught-off guard.

She stayed up late, reading advice from strangers online. "What is it like to meet your estranged father?" she typed into the search engine. She found one article, which was an excerpt from a self-help book. It said that the number one rule was to *keep it short and simple*. It also stressed the idea of picking a place outside of your normal routine, which is why she settled on Coney Island.

She sees her father from the side before she's sure it's him. He's waiting in line, not at Nathan's, but next door. What she notices first are his clothes—they don't look

American. The khakis are pleated, the colors too muted. When he turns, she recognizes him instantly, and he gives her a warm smile. He carries a bag of pink cotton candy.

“You used to love the stuff,” he says, handing it over. It’s touching, but strange. She remembers those public-service announcements when she was a kid, the ones that warned her away from adults you don’t know bearing gifts.

She’s not sure if they’re supposed to hug, but what’s “supposed to” in this case anyway? Instead, she leads him to a concrete table just around the corner. As she puts the bag down Art asks if she wants anything, but her stomach won’t bear it, not even a soda. She can’t stop staring.

His hair is mostly gone, just two patches left on either side. This is different.

He still has a crooked smile, a small gap between his two front teeth. This is the same.

When he talks, his voice is higher. Different.

He has a generous laugh, and his brown eyes come close to squinting when he smiles. Same.

He has a mustache. Same.

Neither is particularly good at pleasantries, but Art starts talking, mostly about himself. It’s actually less awkward than she thought it would be. He tells her about living in Seattle, then Europe, working in Milan and Vienna most often, building sets for opera companies. He talks of his mother, her grandmother, who still lives in England. She knows he talks because he’s nervous, but it’s comforting, at least at first, like hearing one of his bedtime stories. He stops to ask about her job, her life. In fits and starts she tells him about working for Eric, but not about Mim or Ella.

After an hour, she asks if she can give him a hug. As a child, she was never particularly affectionate, but for some reason she wants to hug him. He stands, somewhat awkwardly, and holds his arms up. *Don't indulge your fantasy*, the advice column said. Jorie didn't even know she had a fantasy before now. But when he hugs her, really hugs her, she isn't prepared. It's as if the contact alone triggers a lifetime's worth of hugs and bedtime stories. Before he left, he would tuck her in at night. Mim made dinner and bathed Jorie and Rosie, while Art would put them to bed. Rosie would complain that she wanted her mother, but Jorie loved this time best, the way he would do all the voices, the smell of Old Spice that stayed in a cloud over her bed when he left.

They walk along the boardwalk, passing Shoot the Freak and the daiquiri stand. She's never been to Coney Island when it's been this quiet, almost like a dream. Already an hour has gone by.

Watching a homeless man fish bottles out of a trash bin, Jorie is suddenly impatient.

"Are we going to talk? Really talk?"

"Are you ready?"

They pass a video arcade and she asks if he wants to go inside. Eventually they come across a PacMan.

"Want to play?" her father asks.

She points to a row of skee-ball machines instead.

"Okay," he says. They would always play skee ball after Ocean View. She would beat Rosie, but Art would beat her.

After the third round—Art winning every time—he starts talking. He starts with the day he left.

“I went to the mall.”

“The mall? You always made excuses why you couldn’t go shopping.”

“Believe me, I know. I went to get on the highway. I was gonna drive south to stay with a college buddy in Philadelphia. But I got close to the thruway and then chickened out, so I pulled off at the mall. All these people were out for their Saturday shop. Buying clothes for the kids or out for pizza at Coz’s. And there I was, just stopping for a minute before I left. By then things were over with your mom, and that was less hard in some ways. But you.”

“So what made you finally get back in the car?”

“Honestly?”

“Yeah.”

“I can’t remember. I went to Orange Julius, bought a large drink, and then left.”

Sure you didn’t want to stop at Spencer’s? Buy yourself a whoopy cushion for the ride? She wants to say it, but doesn’t.

Don't bash each other or other people.

“So, Orange Julius in hand, that was it?”

He gives her a look, asks for a break. Jorie picks up the ball and starts pitching even though it’s technically his turn. She doesn’t want this to be easy.

“Things with your mom were done,” he says.

Jorie hands Art a ball, but he puts it down, and sits down nearby. Jorie follows.

“We got married because, I don’t know, she wanted out of her parents’ house. She was gorgeous and smart and funny, I would have followed her anywhere. But her charm wore off, and she started picking on me a lot, tried to control me. And when I stopped listening? You know what your mom does when she gets scared.”

Jorie doesn't comment.

“We had problems from when you guys were so young, but we held it together. But when Rosie got sick, things just got so much worse. She’d spend the week at the hospital, and I’d be working. They wouldn’t let me out of the theater when we were working on a set. She would give me full updates about what was happening. We were both under a lot of stress.

“But then, Rosie got really bad. And we started fighting more and more. Do you remember that? We used to have a rule about not fighting in front of you guys. That went out the window.”

The nights spent staring at the Mermonaut, hearing them just outside her door. She’d wished she could be between the ocean and the sky, unweighted.

“The fights started out about dumb things. Who took out the trash more, who did more for the family. But she wouldn’t stop the nagging. Telling me what a shitty husband I was. Telling me I wasn’t doing enough for the family. I told her I was going to move out—just to keep my sanity.”

Her mother’s nagging. She was certainly familiar with that.

“But you didn’t move.”

“No.”

“Why not?”

Art pauses.

“Just say it,” she says.

“When I told her I was going to leave, things got better for a bit. She eased off me. And then Rosie started doing better, at least—”

“What?”

“Your mom came home with these pronouncements that Rosie was going to make it, that it was most important for us to all be together so Rosie could heal. So I stayed.”

Art’s voice gets so quiet that Jorie has to lean in to hear. “Mim started telling me these stories about how Rosie was getting better. I didn’t know they were made up at the time. Hell, maybe she believed them. But when it was all over, I couldn’t stand to be around her. For all those months, she manipulated me, feeding me her bullshit dreams for our daughter instead of the truth. What kind of person, what kind of wife, wouldn’t tell her husband the truth?”

“What kind of husband wouldn’t ask? What kind of man couldn’t see that his daughter was dying?”

He shakes his head. “But she lied.”

Jorie feels sympathy for her mother. She can sense how desperately her mother wanted her father to stay. She remembers her mother crying at night while they both slept on the couches after Art left.

“We were never a good match,” he adds.

She sees her father now. Bald and sixty, a man who’s spent the last twenty years building false worlds because the one he was part of disappointed him. There are three stories from this time: the story of the wife who wanted to hold onto her family; the story

of the husband who wanted out of an untenable living situation; the story of the daughter who felt abandoned by both, but eventually sided with her mother.

Art looks at her now, his eyes wide open. Once, he couldn't see past Mim to remember that there was someone else who needed him, too.

They leave skee ball behind. Returning to the Boardwalk, he asks about her upcoming week and she tells him about work. There's a relief in talking about the mundane.

"I'm sorry," she says.

"For what?"

"For everything."

"You don't have to apologize."

"Don't you?"

He puts his arms around her and gives her a big hug. "I'm sorry I didn't get to see you grow up."

The June sun explodes, but Jorie feels cold. Art tells her he'd like to spend more time with her, and offers to buy her a ticket to come see him in Europe. She tells him she'd like that, though she's not sure.

After they part ways Jorie walks down to the beach. She thinks of how Art described himself and Mim. Not a good match. Can a bad match make a good person? She takes off her shoes, relaxing into the scrub of the sand against her toes. Sliding her feet into the brackish-looking water she sees a couple of swimmers further out, swimming parallel to the shore. When Jorie and Rosie were kids, Jorie would always stay as close to the shoreline as possible. Even when the other kids would run out farther,

Rosie among them, Jorie stuck to the sand. The waves scared her. Her mother warned her against it, with stories of children who were pulled in by the undertow. Like the character Harry in *Persephone*, the waves could take her away from her family. She curls her toes into the sand, gripping harder.

Chapter 26

Susan prepares her files for the executive session. She looks forward to these reviews even more than the hearings themselves. It's an opportunity for the commissioners to air their concerns related to cases on the upcoming calendar without any ifs, ands, or buts from the applicants themselves. By law, the applicants are permitted to attend, and it's a good thing they do, as they often tailor their presentations at the hearing to account for the commissioners' suggestions. What Susan loves most is that the applicants are not permitted to speak. It reminds her of her drawing classes in college, where the professor wouldn't permit the students to respond to critiques of their own work. "You need to practice listening," he would say to them, before demolishing their egos.

Today they will discuss Desbrosses, which is up for hearing next week. As Susan scans through the file, making sure she's not forgetting any of the paperwork, she finds, in the midst of the developer's submission, correspondence from Park Lane Associates about how the ownership of each unit will work. She quickly moves this page to the middle of the folder, burying it between other paperwork that she won't be discussing. She does not need to be reminded of Myung-Ki while she performs the most public aspects of her job.

She hasn't spoken to Myung-Ki since the episode in Bryant Park. That's how she's started to think of it, as an episode, a mere digression from their normal course of getting to know each other. With certain mental gymnastics, Susan finds she can easily overlook, or at least minimize, the importance of the episode, especially since she's taken all necessary steps to insulate herself. She often reminds herself that it was she who had

set the boundaries in advance, and it was Myung-Ki who had crossed the line. But perhaps he finally got the message. After all, he hasn't tried to reach out to her. No phone calls. No email messages. She imagines he's embarrassed to have shown his cards. Once the hearing is over, Susan will call him again. She will not speak of the episode, but will invite him to Bryant Park, where they can sip tea and look at pictures and continue to discover what it means to be half-brother and sister.

Jim knocks at five to ten. "Big crowd out there," he says. "More than usual."

"Oh?"

"I think they're mostly here on the appeal. Brady from DOB, the attorneys for the developer. And then on the community side, Miles is here. And some others with him."

Susan considers the list; it seems about right.

"You've got nothing to worry about," he says. "The applicant doesn't have a lot to stand on."

Earlier in the week she and Jim met, as they do every week, with key staff to discuss the merits of the case file. When they discussed Desbrosses, Susan dissected each of the applicant's arguments so thoroughly that Jim had nothing left to say, which is unusual. Jim always has something to say. Often it irritates her, a small point that she overlooked not out of carelessness but as part of her process, sifting out only the arguments worthy of discussion.

He enjoys this needling, a bit too much for her taste. But it seems necessary for him to get this out of his system. Before she arrived, he worked for his first cousin, who was chair at the time. She understands from others in the office that those days were good for Jim. His cousin wasn't the brightest, so Jim got to play the role of wizard behind the

curtain, having his hand in everything. When she took over, there was an unspoken struggle between them. He tried to belittle her with the years of institutional knowledge he possessed about BSA history and Board decisions. He could call up an obscure case from twenty years before, even remembering who said what. But Susan was patient; she had the willingness to learn and, ultimately, the power. Over time, they've learned how to work as a team and have both come to admire the other's style. It helps that they often see the same way about a case; it's rare that she'll find merit in an argument where he doesn't.

"I think it's a girl arguing the case," Jim says.

"A woman, you mean."

"Sorry, a woman." He rolls his eyes at the floor, but Susan can see him. "You heard about Eric Stephens?"

"The climbing incident, yes." Susan's chair squeaks as she leans back. "I can't comprehend why he would willingly put himself in such danger. It just baffles me."

"He probably doesn't see it that way."

"How do you mean? Rock climbing is an inherently dangerous activity."

"All I mean is that he probably thought he was being careful. This kid practically wore diapers when he first started coming here. I doubt he was being reckless or peacocking. This is the guy who would bring twenty extra copies of everything to a hearing."

"The whole enterprise seems careless to me," she says. "I'm guessing mid-life crisis."

Her computer beeps, telling her that the session is about to begin.

“I’ll be there in a minute,” she says, waving him off. She likes to make her own entrance.

After everyone is seated Susan enters the conference room, ignoring the applicants and attorneys that fill up the folding chairs against the walls. The architect in her detests the layout of the space, but nobody is comfortable in this box-shaped room with no windows to the outside. She has continually lobbied the Mayor for a redesign of the facilities, but her agency is at the bottom of the totem pole. Half the council members think that they should have oversight over her agency’s actions as they do over other mayoral agencies. Because of this, the Mayor deflects her requests: Would she prefer to bring more attention to the Board?

The commissioners exchange nods and smiles around the large black table, occasionally including Jim and the general counsel, who are also present. They begin the session with the Special Order Calendar, or SOC’s, cases in which an applicant wishes to extend the term or modify a previous grant of the Board. Susan is the main speaker, and the others chime in from time to time. Generally, it’s no surprise what the other Commissioners will say. Charles Keener, III, the long-faced engineer, will ask questions about loads and beams and how the building will be affected by the land underneath. Sharon Hoffman, whose every statement is a question, will use her background in urban planning to focus on questions of neighborhood character. With her extensive experience at city planning, she has an uncanny ability to cite appropriate setback, height and floor area ratio regulations for any neighborhood within the five boroughs. Jeffrey Parnell, financial planner, will question the myriad spreadsheets and projections provided by the

applicant to prove that their project will never yield a promising return, always punctuating his statements with a smoker's cough. In addition, he enjoys stating the obvious, which, given the obtuseness of some of the applicants, Susan feels can never be stated enough. Joan Tiller, an attorney and, aside from Susan, the only other minority on the Board, says anything to highlight the fact that she has a better understanding of the statutes. On the whole, though, they follow the Chair's line of questioning, expanding on what she asks. They know that she works harder than any of them and, in exchange for this deference, they have free rein to use their time as they will. She won't raise an eyebrow if they stop for Szechuan after a site visit to Queens, or if they leave the office early on hearing days.

When Susan gets to appeals, she looks up for the first time, noticing who is in the room. Belleza is not present, but she sees three attorneys from the white-shoe firm that he has retained. Then there's Miles, who keeps glancing at his lap, which likely means he has tucked his cell phone under his leg despite the Board's policy. A member of the neighboring SoHo civic association sits on one side of him, and on the other is a young woman, who looks vaguely familiar. The woman stares at Susan with such intensity it starts to feel invasive. From her clear complexion, devoid of wrinkles, Susan guesses she must be at least ten years younger. She wears a man's suit, it seems, from the shape of the cut. This woman's stare unnerves Susan, and she becomes aware of how she must appear to the applicants, in her full-length skirt and button-down. They might misconstrue Susan's own modesty in dress as prudish, or unfashionable.

It occurs to Susan that if she were to recuse herself from the case, this would be the last possible moment she could do so. After this discussion, she will have weighed in

on the case before the public, such that there's no turning back. She invents a story: a distant relative has contacted her out of the blue to tell her he is attached to the project and so she'll have to let the other commissioners step in. Everyone would be surprised, of course, that she didn't know this earlier, but at least she would avoid the implication of any wrongdoing.

Jim taps her arm. "Excuse me, Chair," he says, his hand lingering on her shoulder for a moment too long. "Would you like to move on to 247-10-A?"

"Of course," she says, "we'll talk about the appeal of the building permit for 31 Desbrosses, the site of the former Sweet Factory." She begins by briefly outlining the arguments addressed in the applicant's brief before moving on to her analysis.

"Let me say that, on the whole, I'm not persuaded by the arguments set forth in this submission." Susan looks up to find the young attorney still boring into her.

"The crux of my issue with the applicant's argument centers on their interpretation of the definition for transient hotel. In my opinion, it's quite clear that the developer meets the requirements for this. Section 'a' of the definition in the Zoning Resolution utilizes the word 'may,' and not 'must' or 'shall,' when it says that in a transient hotel living or sleeping accommodations are 'used primarily for transient occupancy, and *may* be rented on a daily basis.' Because of this, I see no problem with the restrictive declaration the owner has signed that will allow people to stay in the hotel for a week at a time. The definition does not say that weekly rentals somehow invalidate the transient status. Essentially, this is DOB's argument, and I'm inclined to agree. Thoughts?"

Susan scans the faces of the other commissioners. Three avert their eyes, as if they're children in a classroom, hiding from the teacher. Finally, Joan jumps in.

"I couldn't agree more, Chair. In legal statutes, 'may' implies permissiveness, and is distinct from 'must'."

"So we're all on the same page," says Susan.

"While I have the floor," says Joan, "I'd like to turn our attention to the court case introduced by the applicant as controlling in this instance, where DOB turned down an application for a transient hotel based on the purported use."

"848 Washington?"

"Right. I find that this case is different than the case at hand, as DOB argues, since in Washington Street the developer actually said they were going to use some of the units for apartments in their application."

"And here the developers haven't said that," says Jeffrey. "It's all hotel rooms."

"Correct," says Joan, although she is drowned out by Jeffrey's cough. She sits back in her chair, cheeks flushed.

Susan waits a beat before picking up. "Then there's the issue of potential use. The applicant alleges that there are no effective mechanisms to enforce that the owners of the units will actually abide by the terms of the restrictive declaration—"

"So conceivably an owner could stay indefinitely, more like a residence," Jeffrey says.

"But as we have said time and time again," Susan says, delighting in the use of Board precedent, "we cannot predict what will happen on a given property in the future, and instead must take the owners' promises on their face."

“Not to mention the lack of fixtures,” says Charles. “There are no kitchen units, or hookups for such. This supports the developer’s argument that they’re not apartments, but more like hotel room.”

The Board continues along this thread for some time, the Chair presenting each of the applicant’s arguments and, with the help of her Board, striking down one after the other, relying upon thorough legwork provided by DOB and the attorneys for the developer. The attorney for the applicant has ceased staring at her and is now writing on her notepad. Now Susan observes her, the scowl on her face. When Susan talks, the woman writes. When Susan stops, the woman looks up with a pained expression. The girl needs to learn how to play her cards a little better, Susan thinks. Miles types brazenly into his phone, not attempting to hide it between his legs.

Finally, Susan asks the others whether they have any other final thoughts. When nobody moves, Susan prepares to move onto the next calendar, the variances. A cell phone beeps and as Susan searches for the culprit her eyes land on the young attorney’s face once again. She loathes the helpless look on her face, the same look as Myung-Ki that day in the park. As if Susan is the only thing standing between her and her victory. She busies herself with the folders, trying to avoid thinking of Myung-Ki. Why, now, at this most inconvenient time? A sinking feeling follows, the sense that she has already committed the wrong, something that could upend her entire career.

“One moment,” she says to Jim, who awaits her go ahead. “I see a note here”—Susan tears a Post-it from the front of the folder—“that reminds me that the applicant’s case is not entirely without merit.”

Susan waits, hoping that any of the Commissioners will chime in, but none makes a single gesture or sound. All sit, seemingly satisfied that they have done their jobs as required and will be free in another hour or two to go about their day as they wish. Only Jim looks confused; he stares at Susan, his mouth slightly agape. This is not something they discussed.

“I wonder if we shouldn’t discuss Matter of 9th and 10th St. LLC, raised by the applicant,” Susan says.

Again Joan takes the bait, moving slightly forward in her seat.

“In this case,” Joan says, “DOB denied a permit for a dormitory because the owner failed to show that they had an institutional nexus. In other words, a connection with a university. We upheld DOB’s finding in this case holding that DOB was reasonable in asserting that the owner needed to be associated with a school for it to be considered school student housing.”

Once Joan finishes, the commissioners look at one another, slightly baffled.

“Do any of you find logic in the appellant’s case,” Susan says, “that perhaps this is similar to the case in front of us?”

“I see some similarities,” says Charles. “Even though the developer has given us floor plans that look like hotels, there was some early advertising that described the building as a condo. Which obviously is a residential use and would not be permitted.”

Susan can see the lawyer straighten up in her seat. Miles, too, puts his phone away.

Jeffrey pulls out another stack of papers. “But as we know,” he says, his tone implying that the rest of his commissioners are falling down on the job, “this project has evolved. In their most recent offering materials, they describe the ownership structure but

note the limitations on residency as have been stated in the Restrictive Declaration. So I would argue that the dorm case is distinguishable because here they have signed evidence that they will use the building for its stated use.”

The lawyers for the developer bend their heads together and whisper.

Susan sits back in her seat and lets the Commissioners spar with one another without interjecting. They seem to relish the relaxed environment. Only Jim looks unhappy. He’s slumped over his notes and doodles on his folder. This is his worst-case scenario; a board that appears so un-unified that they actually debate the issues in public. “This is not the Supreme Court,” Jim likes to say. What’s implied is that it’s better for the Board if they stick together.

As Jim continues to draw, the commissioners begin to run out of arguments and counterarguments and, eventually, stop talking altogether.

Susan nudges Jim. “Looks like we have some more questions for the applicant tomorrow,” Susan says. The female attorney nods as if Susan were talking to her and her only.

“Moving on,” Jim announces. “We’ll now begin discussion of 469-10-BZ.”

Susan removes her notes from the next folder, feeling revived.

“The applicant here,” she begins to read, “seeks relief from the zoning resolution, specifically with respect to the required rear-yard footage in an R-3 district. Shall I summarize the arguments?” Susan asks, barely pausing before plowing forward.

Chapter 27

After the Executive Session, Jorie heads to Brighton Beach. Frank Monday insisted he would only talk to her at his apartment. Jorie doesn't have nearly enough time for this trip—Jane's given her a list of clients to call to enforce the firm's collections—but with respect to Desbrosses she's running out of options. Given the Chair's thorough dissection of her case, Frank Monday might be the only one who can help.

Brighton Beach is a curious place for Frank to live. When she told Ella about the voicemail, Ella had said Frank was one of the few money-making puppeteers who could probably afford more upscale neighborhoods in Brooklyn, or even Manhattan. Yet Frank chooses to live at the edge of the borough, in a neighborhood nicknamed Little Odessa. When Jorie was in law school, several of the boys in her class went out to Brighton Beach and came back with stories of endless bottles of vodka and dancing Russian women. Their description of the place sounded so lurid, as if they were on the outskirts of a red-light district and not at the final stop on the B train, the very same one that Jorie rode to work most mornings.

601 Brightwater Court looks like any other uninspired prewar co-op, six stories, laid out in the shape of a "U." The owners have taken pains to beautify the walkway; there are raised flowerbeds on both sides, overflowing with snapdragons. Jorie approaches the front door, entering a small vestibule where she rings for Frank.

When he comes down she recognizes him at once, from the time she saw him at Ella's theater. His hair is knotted tightly in the back of his head rather than in a ponytail, but he seems more relaxed. They're both quiet on the elevator up. Once inside his apartment, he leads her down a hallway that reveals closed door after closed door, until

they reach an open living room. Other than some glass vases over the mantle, the apartment is relatively spare.

But when Frank pulls back the curtains covering the floor-to-ceiling windows, she understands at once why he passed up a more upscale or edgy neighborhood for Little Odessa. The sun reflects off the infinite stretch of water that is the Atlantic Ocean. Frank gets to return each day to his own piece of calm, the empty beach that lies just beyond the wooden boardwalk.

“You must love it out here,” she says.

“Who wouldn’t?”

Frank offers her a can of iced tea. “I live on this stuff,” he says, as he cracks one open.

The couch she sits on is such a bright white she wonders if anyone has ever sat here before. Frank sits in an armchair across from her. When he doesn’t say anything, she takes a drink. The tea is sickeningly sweet.

Frank has the air of a forgotten rockstar, dressed head to toe in black, hair slick, with a layer of sadness that clings to him like spoiled milk. He’s so reticent to talk that she wonders why he called her in the first place.

“My mother heard you mentioned on television,” Jorie says.

“Oh?” Frank says.

“On Letty Green’s show. We’re both Broadway fans.”

“No kidding.”

“*Persephone* was our family favorite.”

Frank stops mid-sip, but doesn’t say anything.

“I still know all the words.”

“I’ve known Biz Colton a long time.”

“Since *Persephone*?”

Gazing out the window, Frank speaks. “Even earlier. I met him through his boyfriend at the time, Vance. Vance was a supporter of the theater back when I was at Minnie Zenkel’s. He actually owned the building back then.”

“But not anymore?”

Frank pauses. “Vance passed away in the Nineties.”

“Oh,” Jorie says. “I’m sorry.”

“He was a great guy.”

“And now? Who owns it now?”

“In those days, Biz and I spent a lot of time together. I trained Biz, helped him learn the puppet’s capabilities. We were very similar. Obsessive types. Night owls.”

He becomes more expressive as he opens up about the theater, as if he’s actually reliving these times while he tells the stories. But he avoids saying who the owner is, despite Jorie’s leading questions. Instead, he he goes to the kitchen to fetch another iced tea, now chatting comfortably about his days growing up in Canarsie, the odd one out of three brothers.

After a while of his circular talking, she begins to wonder whether he’ll ever come out and say it. But despite his elusiveness her suspicion grows deeper. Biz’s ex, Vance, owned the building. Could her childhood idol be the missing piece?

She looks at her watch.

“I’ll need to leave soon—”

“I was a founding member of the theater in its second incarnation.”

“I know. I’ve heard a lot about the history. My girlfriend—Ella—she performs there now. Was it hard to leave?”

“Nothing’s that hard when money is involved,” he says. “It’s only hard later, when you’ve realized you’ve compromised yourself.”

“So you mentioned on the phone...about the building owners?”

“Let’s go look at the puppets,” he says.

Jorie follows him down the hall, but only begrudgingly, aware of how every second of this wild goose-chase is taking her away from work she should be doing. He takes her into a windowless room with warm tungsten light. The walls are covered with sketches of puppets, some more human-like, others, of origins unknown. Bright colors shoot out from the walls and it’s hard to know where to focus, as if the whole room were a comic strip.

In the middle is an elevated plate of glass. Above, a camera focuses directly onto glass. Frank points to a clothesline that hangs from the ceiling, black figures clipped to it.

“Those are the shadow puppets,” Frank says. “They were my first love. After the other loves disappointed, I’ve returned to them.”

He shuts off the light in the room, but quickly flips on another light, just under the plate of glass. The scene is already set up. A young girl hides behind a house, while inside a family lights Shabbes candles.

Frank gets to work. He turns on the camera, and tells Jorie to take a seat around the other side.

“I’ll show you what I do,” he says.

He manipulates the girl standing outside the house, while also moving the family inside. They're all jointed so that he can move their arms and legs, and even their feet and hands. He takes picture after picture, slightly changing the puppets after each shot. A second later, the photos flash onto a computer that he has propped open on the table.

After a couple minutes, he turns the lights back on and directs Jorie to look at the computer. Moving at a faster speed, the scene he has just created comes to life. The family prays resolutely; the men slightly rock in place as the women light the candles and then cover their eyes. The girl outside moves higher and higher on her toes, practically trying to crawl through the window. Her pain is evident in the way she stands, how she turns away after the blessing and crouches, hiding her hands with her face. She repeats the motion of the women inside, highlighting that while she is one *of* them, she is not *with* them.

“What happens to the girl?” Jorie asks.

“I haven't decided yet,” he says.

“I suppose that's the cool thing about puppets. You get to control them entirely.”

He laughs. “*When the puppeteer ceases to control...*”

It's a line from *Persephone*, at the moment where Persephone exacts her revenge and turns Harry into a puppet.

“Well, for her sake,” Jorie says, “I hope it has a happy ending.”

“I've worked on a children's show for the last fifteen years,” he says. “Probably not.”

When she readies to leave, she gives him one more opportunity. “You wanted to tell me something. I can tell you don't want to, but please know that a lot rides on this.”

Frank stands by the door, combing back his hair with his hand.

“I’m sorry I brought you all the way here. I was angry when I called you, but I’m not sure I can go through with it. It might ruin a career. I’ve spent my whole life building mine, I don’t know that I can do it to—”

“It’s Biz Colton, isn’t it?”

He looks at her, sadness in his eyes. “Vance left him the property in his will.”

“You’re sure?”

“I’m sure,” he says. He pauses, and Jorie sees a glint of anger cross his face. “If this gets out, Biz might not win the Tony.”

She rides the subway back to Carroll Gardens, thinking over Frank’s final words. She and Mim used to watch the Tony Awards as if it were part of their religion, even following the conversations that preceded the show itself. Jorie read about the uproar this year, when the Tony management changed who got to vote. Previously, the 800-plus voters included theater critics and journalists. But this year they became ineligible because the committee said they had conflicts of interest. The joke going around was that the rest of the voters—producers, publicists and designers—have an even greater vested interest, since they reap financial rewards from the success of particular shows. As Frank said, press like this might be bad for Biz’s chances, and the threat of bad press might be enough to get him to bend. And if not, she could always go public. Amy’s always talking about all the connections she has to people at the networks—surely some reporter would want to get their hands on this.

She spends most of the night using the city's online property system to find hard proof of Biz's ownership. Showing up without evidence won't help her make her case. But she hits the same roadblocks she hit the first time she tried to find the property owner. Everything references the same limited liability company, and the address leads back this deceased woman, Elsie Fenton.

The next morning at work, Jane asks if she's okay.

"It's the biggest case in front of me, and my legal arguments are weak. All I want to do is find out who owns the building. I have it on good authority that the 'who' is Biz Colton, but all of the records are hidden and I can't prove a thing. I need a copy of a will that I have no rights to look at, and couldn't get it in time even if I did have the rights."

"A will?" Jane asks.

"Yes, I've searched all of the property records. But there's just one LLC after the next, and I can't track down any member names, just some addresses I've checked that lead me nowhere. I've looked at the deed, and there's an illegible signature. I've searched through HPD records and DOB records and corporate filings and permits and everything, and I'm just coming up blank—"

Jorie crosses the conference room to use the phone in the corner.

"This is a good time to make a phone call?" Jorie asks.

"I was Larry Kahn's secretary at Corp Counsel for twenty years. The secretaries in the city agencies always help each other."

"So you think you can find out who the owner is?"

"Give me an hour," she says. "I'll get you proof."

Chapter 28

Jorie stands with her back pressed up against 1681 Broadway as water streams from the sky, her eye on the unmarked stage door that Biz Colton entered just minutes earlier. She was supposed to visit Eric this evening, but cancelled. She felt guilty—she'd already put off the visit for weeks, but this time at least she had a legitimate reason. This might be her only chance to talk to Biz before the hearing.

“I.D.,” the guard says, before Jorie can pass.

“I’m here for Biz Colton,” she says.

The guard picks up an old rotary phone on the desk, but Jorie stops him. He wears a white shirt with a Showtime Security patch on the front pocket.

“I should be on the list.”

“I’ll still need your I.D.,” he says while he scans the clipboard.

Jorie hands it over, hoping that Frank was able to get her in. After Jane received a copy of the will, which confirmed Frank’s contention, Jorie called Frank right away.

Frank said he would try to get her backstage but offered no guarantees.

“Sorry,” the guard says, handing back her ID. “You’re not on here.”

“Is there someone else you can check with? A man named Frank Monday was supposed to have arranged for me to drop this off.” She pulls out a thick manila envelope from her bag.

“Oh, I think his name is here.” He again consults the clipboard.

“I’m supposed to deliver this on Frank’s behalf.”

The guard eyes her skeptically. He probably hears tall tales all day long—fans hungry for autographs and a brush with fame stand outside this door and plead their cases.

They're more brazen than ever, Jorie imagines, from the amount of information now available online. They probably know what the actor eats for breakfast, the names of his pets, strange sexual predilections. The fans tell stories of how their lives will forever be changed *if only* they can get backstage. Her story might be different in content, but underneath it's no less desperate.

"I'll get you an escort," he says

"No need," she says. "I've been here before."

He shouts after her but she quickens her pace. She doesn't offer that the last time she was here was when she was just fourteen. Her memory of that time is razor sharp. On the tour she took of *Persephone* in 1989, during the show's original run, the backstage hand spared no detail for mother and daughter, even showing them the closet where all the cleaning supplies were kept.

Jorie continues down the hallway, if it can be called that. It's more like an alley, with exposed brick on one side and light snaking its way down from above. Trash dumpsters and stacks of cardboard boxes line one wall. She feels cold suddenly, but the backstage is still as ever, a ghost town at mid-day. No frantic post-show energy, the stagehands running to re-prep the set or return costumes and wigs for the next performance. Jorie peers at one door after the next hoping that the guard isn't watching too closely. One door will lead to a row of dressing rooms, she remembers. Once, she had stood on her tiptoes to peer in, eagerly waiting to meet Biz Colton.

She takes a chance and is rewarded with a long white hallway where well wishes from other Broadway casts line the walls. After a few doors, Jorie arrives at the one that bears Biz Colton's name, etched into a gold placard just next to it.

Taking a deep breath, Jorie hovers just outside. She hears the chants of children's whispers in another language—no doubt meant to soothe. Jorie wishes this music would flow over her and steel her nerves, but she's never been adept at meditation. She lifts her hand and knocks.

Biz's deep baritone beckons from within. When she peaks into the dressing room, she finds him on the couch, a wet towel over his eyes.

"Mr. Colton?"

He doesn't remove the towel from his face. "Thanks, Kathy, but I don't need dinner."

Jorie clears her throat. "I'm not here to bring you dinner."

"I'm meditating and the phone keeps ringing off the hook. Can it wait?"

"I'm here to talk about Desbrosses Street," she says, fully entering the room.

Biz pulls off the towel and opens one eye.

"I represent the Tribeca Partnership," she says.

With this, he sits up. Once he's upright, Jorie can tell how much he's aged in the years since she last saw him. His bulk remains imposing, but his skin is much softer now. Given his smooth face he's probably had plastic surgery, but his beard is grown out, now white.

"You must be confusing me with someone else," he says.

Jorie laughs; it's nerves. For some reason, she didn't expect him to lie.

"That's all you're going to say?"

He narrows his eyes. "How did you get in here?"

Jorie can't help but notice how perfectly groomed he is. His eyebrows form perfect arches, not a hair out of place, and even his beard is clipped just so to give the appearance of a wise sage. Something about his face reminds her of Weber—their features are not dissimilar. From the way Biz stares, she can tell he's scrutinizing her, too. Her hair clings to her face, still wet from the rain.

"Frank sent you," Biz says, putting it together. "His agent called earlier. Said he had something for me. I should have known."

"You can still do the right thing," Jorie says. "And no, he didn't send me here. I'm here on my own behalf. I mean, on behalf of the community."

"If Frank wants to talk to me that's one thing, but I don't know you from Adam." He gives Jorie a once-over. "Or Eve."

She pushes her hair behind her ears.

"I represent the Tribeca Partnership and I'm going to argue their case before the BSA. I'm here to ask if you'd consider offering a modification of your plan for the building. You can return the space to the community. The building is going up, sure, but it doesn't have to be an eyesore that dwarfs the entire community. You can change the direction of this project."

Biz picks up the house phone. "I don't know who you are, but it's time for you to leave."

"But you do know me. I met you in your original run with *Persephone*."

He sighs. "Do you know how many people I've met backstage?"

"We came as guests of Make-a-Wish Foundation. My sister had just died."

At this admission, Biz softens. “Listen. I don’t know what garbage Frank fed you, but he doesn’t know what he’s talking about. He’s held a grudge against me for years. Since you met him you can probably tell...things aren’t right with him. Whatever he’s told you has roots in something long before your time. Best not to involve yourself.”

Jorie’s seen this look of sincerity on Biz’s face before. When she met him onstage after the show, he squeezed her shoulder and told her to never stop fighting. She was confused at first, but after some time she realized his mistake. He thought that she was her sister, still fighting for her life. He didn’t realize that he was meeting the family after the loss, not before.

“Frank might have mixed motives, but he couldn’t possibly invent Vance Deerborn’s will, which shows that you were given an interest in the LLC that holds the property at 31 Desbrosses.”

At the mention of Vance, Biz’s face turns red.

“Surely this is not how you want to end your Broadway legacy? Attached to this project?”

“I have very powerful friends,” he warns.

“You might know the Pope, but I have hard evidence that you’re the owner.”

He grimaces, but doesn’t speak. His silence empowers Jorie.

“I’m not afraid to show the will to someone who might be interested. Letty Green, maybe?”

“It’s time for you to leave,” he says, grabbing roughly at Jorie’s arm. As he edges her out of the room, she’s suddenly aware of how big he is. When she was fourteen he seemed to be a giant, but friendly, not fearsome. With his huge hand wrapped tightly

around her arm it's a different story. She doesn't fight him, but stumbles backward into the hallway. He gives her a slight shove as he releases his hand and slams the door behind her.

The guard doesn't so much as blink at her as she passes back through; he's wrapped up on his cell phone. When she emerges onto the sidewalk, she stops herself. She realizes she can't stop shaking.

Chapter 29

When Jorie gets home, she's greeted by the smell of dinner cooking, baked chicken and roasted potatoes.

"Why haven't you been answering your phone?" Ella calls out.

Jorie throws her stuff down, still rattled from the meet-and-greet. If she's going to get the information to Letty, she'll need to do it quickly. But she keeps stopping herself before she can fully dial Amy's number.

Ella comes out when Jorie doesn't answer.

"Are you okay?" she says, steering Jorie to the couch. While Ella gets her a glass of wine, Jorie tries to reason out the consequences of her decision. She can rat Biz out and see where it lands her. At best, it might create some public stir right before the hearing, maybe convince a council member or two to change their mind and put pressure on City Hall. It might also cost Biz the Tony. But also, as with Weber, it could lead to nothing. Nobody might care, or the only one who might care is Biz. Does she want to be responsible for placing a black mark on his career?

Ella comes back with wine, holding a yellowed newspaper in her free hand.

"Something new about the scripts?" Jorie asks, noticing the Yiddish writing.

"Kind of. My thesis advisor found a copy of this paper, a smaller publication, not one I usually work with in my research. But it talks about one of the shows the theater put on, and she thought I'd like it."

"That's cool," Jorie says. "Sounds like maybe she's coming around?"

"I think it's a diversionary tactic."

"You're paranoid."

“You don’t know the academy.”

Jorie stretches out on the couch.

“What?” she asks, as Ella continues to stare.

“The details about the play are interesting, but what’s more interesting is what happened to the theater after their first year in the space. You know how they were run out of that bar, right?”

“What bar?”

“They shared the space with a bar on the first floor because they didn’t officially have a theater permit. The landlord owned lots of properties up and down Second Avenue. He didn’t like the politics of Aaron and Ben. He was a capitalist, and they were socialists. Plus, his son was an actor, and rumor had it that Minnie Zenkel’s wouldn’t give him a part. So the landlord sent them an eviction notice.”

“History repeating itself, huh?”

“The brothers and Minnie fought the eviction. They showed up to court and put on a case so persuasive that not only did the judge find in their favor, but he became an investor in the theater, up until the fire.”

Jorie’s now alert. “What did they do?”

Ella opens up the paper and points to a photo in the center of the page that shows the three victorious, holding up their puppets.

“They pulled out all the stops. They brought their puppets to court, used them to argue.”

“That’s super cool. Maybe I should do that. Could you imagine the Chair’s reaction to puppets?”

“How was Eric?”

Jorie takes a deep breath. “I didn’t go.”

“What? So why are you home so late?”

“I had—I had to take care of something else.”

“Something that you won’t tell me?”

“Not just yet.”

Ella snatches up the newspaper and Jorie can tell she is hurt. “I’m not trying to be distant, just working something out.”

Ella pulls her hand back. “If you say so.”

“There is something I wanted to tell you, though. A thought I had about the scripts.”

“Okay,” Ella says, unconvinced.

“The other day when I was talking to my dad, I kept thinking about how all those years I listened to my mom’s version of that story. I believed my dad was an asshole because my mom believed it. And even times when I questioned it, it was somehow easier to share her anger than confront whether or not what she was saying made sense. I mean, he did send me cards, and for the first few years, at least, he tried to be close and visit. He’s certainly not the world’s best dad, but he’s not a monster, either. I can’t help thinking that if I trusted myself a little more, I might not have been so quick to adopt her viewpoint.”

“Makes sense to me, but what does it have to do with the scripts?”

“This whole time, you’ve been so focused on the idea that Minnie took them—”

“Which we’ve now confirmed.”

“Right. But you keep on trying to trace down Minnie’s writings as a way to get closer to the scripts. But maybe this story is not just her story. Maybe someone else could help fill in the rest.”

“That’s why we went to the Catskills.”

“But maybe it’s not Aaron’s or Ben’s story either. From all that Malke told me, the closest person to Minnie was her sister.”

“Clara.”

“If Minnie took the scripts, but decided not to hold on to them, who would she share them with?”

Ella gives Jorie a wide smile. “You know, you’re getting better at this.”

“Sleuthing?”

“No, sharing.”

Moving closer, they kiss.

Before Jorie goes to bed, she dials Amy’s number and gives her the information to pass on to her contact who knows Letty Green. It’s what Eric would do in her place. As he said all along, the public has the right to know.

Chapter 30

“Are you nervous?” Ella asks, interlacing her fingers with Jorie’s. They walk down Smith Street towards Brooklyn Heights.

“After seeing my dad, it can’t be that weird.”

“True.”

They stop for coffee and croissants, window shop a little at some boutiques along the way. Looking at a mannequin in the window styled in a bespoke suit, Jorie thinks of Eric in his oversized suit jackets, always a little big in the chest. On the phone, Kate said he was recovering well, but it was hard to picture what he would look like now, bed-ridden for almost six weeks.

Eric moved to Brooklyn Heights in the late Nineties, back when the neighborhood was the only “it” neighborhood in Brooklyn that Manhattanites would actually visit. In the book that Jorie gave Ella about the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, it said that Washington Roebling, who took over the building of the bridge after his father died, became housebound and watched construction of the bridge from his home in Brooklyn Heights. She wonders if Eric, too, can see the bridge from his window.

When they arrive at Eric’s building a doorman directs them to the elevator. Kate greets them at the door, offering them coffee before they’ve even stepped inside. She fills up their mugs and points them to the milk and sugar. Then, she asks if they’d mind if she went out for a minute while they’re there.

“I don’t have many opportunities to run errands.”

Around the apartment, signs of a life transformed are everywhere. A walker is propped up against the wall, next to the front door. Soft mats line the floor along with a

variety of athletic bands likely used for physical therapy. Pillows are propped up on the wrap-around couches in unconventional piles, as if a child played building blocks with them. Just under the sixty-inch flat screen, two “get well” helium balloons lie deflated.

They sit on bar stools, sipping their coffee, while Kate puts on her coat and lets them in on Eric’s progress. He’s supposed to start water aerobics therapy next week, and should be back to work once he can wean himself off the high dosages of the pain meds.

After a few minutes, Kate stands up and looks at Jorie. “Ready?”

“I’ll wait here,” Ella says.

Kate leads Jorie to the bedroom. With her hand on the knob, she pauses.

“I know he’s really happy you’re visiting. Most people send a fruit basket but don’t bother much beyond that.”

She waits another beat. “Things are difficult for him right now, so try to be understanding.”

The door opens to a dark room, with curtains drawn. Light emanates from the television, along with the familiar sounds of the *Law and Order* clang. Kate crosses the room and opens the curtains, while Eric squints his eyes under the brim of his baseball cap.

“Sorry, Jorie,” he apologizes. He doesn’t turn to her, but continues to stare straight ahead at the television. “I would have dressed up, but...” He gestures to the brace on his back.

Kate moves a chair directly across from him.

“He can only look at you if you sit here. You two behave,” she says, closing the door behind her.

Eric's face is wan and tired. It makes her uncomfortable to see him like this, but she puts on her best smile. He smiles, too, and immediately she sees the old Eric, who might give her a history lesson or cajole her to be more forceful with the clients.

"How's it been going?" he asks.

"Okay. It's been a lot, but not as much as I imagine you've been through." She looks around the room, wondering how many hours he's spent in here, watching television or reading books. The sheets are pulled up everywhere on the bed, as if it hadn't been made in ages.

"It's been tough."

"I've been meaning to say how sorry I am. I know I told you on the phone, but..."

"You've had your hands full."

She wonders if he knows about what's been going on, if Jane's been filling him in on what's been going on in the office. Jorie has sent Eric emails, but he only responds sporadically. "Getting a lot of reading done?" She shifts her eyes to the stack of books next to his bed. A civil war history. A spy novel.

"You think I would, but I can barely focus. That's why I've been watching *Law and Orders* nonstop. I can't even watch serialized shows—I'll fall asleep and then have to start over. It's become too annoying."

"Sounds like it."

"Big day coming up, huh?" he says.

"I really can't believe it."

"You feel ready?"

"You going to prep me?"

“I’ve heard you’ve found a replacement.” From his face, she can’t tell if he’s mad.

“Jane told you about Kahn?” She pauses. “I would rather—”

Eric smiles. “I’m glad he’s helping.”

“I wouldn’t say helping. More like making me feel like I don’t know anything.”

“Compared to Kahn, none of us knows anything.”

Jorie’s happy to see Eric’s sense of humor is intact. They talk for a bit longer, as she tells him what’s been going on at the office. But as she gets more specific, and asks him for advice on a particularly tricky client matter, his eyes start to glaze over. Kate had mentioned the pain meds, but it still reminds her of Rosie, the spaced-out look in her eyes after she’d been in the hospital for a few days. He’s only half-here.

As her heart races she wishes she could get up. It’s the reason she didn’t want to visit in the first place. Even though she knows that Eric will make it out, will do fine, this environment—all the signs of a life on pause—brings her back to those days when she would sit at the hospital, waiting for her mother to tell her that visiting hours were over and they could go home. At the time, she knew she should have been grateful that it wasn’t her in that hospital bed. But she wasn’t. She was grateful when they exited the hospital’s rotating doors and got into Mim’s Camry and she knew she had a ten-hour reprieve before she’d have to go back to the hospital.

Suddenly, Eric becomes more alert.

“There’s something I want to talk to you about. I’ve had a lot of time to think since I’ve been here.”

“I’m sure.”

“And—this is not easy for me to say—but I think it’s best for me to close my practice.”

“What?”

He lifts his hand to quiet her. “I have a plan. For you, too, so don’t get too bent out of shape. I’ve talked to Larry, Mr. Kahn, and he’s said there’s room at Hoover Carrington for me. And that I can bring you, too, if you want to go back. He’s pulled some strings. Said he was impressed by your bravado.”

She waits for him to say that he’s kidding, but his expression says otherwise.

“I don’t know why that would be necessary,” Jorie says. “We’ve had some billing issues but I still have a bunch of calls to make good on. I’m sure we can work it out, me and you.”

“You’ve done a great job, Jorie, but we’re not in a good financial position. Jane came over with the books last week, and I don’t think I can make it work.”

Jorie’s stomach drops. “You mean you don’t want to make it work? Surely we can make it work.”

“Kate and I are planning on adopting. It will be more secure for all of us to team up with Kahn.”

“But Miles owes us—”

“Miles was never going to pay our entire bill, Jorie. He’s the kind of client who gets us attention, but not the kind that is our bread and butter. To be viable, we need different types of clients, most of whom have to be financially salient.”

As Eric talks about his vision of the future, Jorie tries to process his words. Go back to Hoover? That place that ungraciously spit her out nine months ago, that she has spent months building herself back up from?

“What do you say?” Eric says.

“I’ve busted my ass for these last three months for you to tell me it’s for nothing? Maybe if you had told me not to focus on solely this case, I would’ve worked harder to collect. But I had no guidance.”

As Jorie’s voice grows shriller, Kate’s words of warning fly through Jorie’s head. “My answer to you? No way. I’m not going back. I will never step back in that building again.”

Jorie stands up, barely looking at Eric. Her eyes drift to the television where a detached-sounding prosecutor asks the judge to punish the client to the fullest extent of the law.

“You’re on your own,” she says.

“Jorie...” Eric says, his voice frail in comparison.

She heads for the door, not stopping to let him finish. When she comes into the living room, Ella’s on the couch, flipping through a book.

“We have to go. Now.”

“We can’t. I told Kate we would stick around until she gets back. What happened?” Ella says, opening a bag of candy from one of the gift baskets.

“I’m not sure you should do that,” Jorie says.

“What? They’re going to miss a couple of licorice twists?”

“I just yelled at my boss, basically told him to fuck off. So yeah, we have to go now.”

“Jorie,” Ella says. “You’ve got to be kidding me. The guy is bed-ridden and you gave him a dressing down.”

Jorie ignores her, and instead goes to the kitchen for water. When she reaches for a glass she sees a large stack of papers piled on the counter. Upon closer inspection she can tell that they’re medical bills. Amy’s older sister struggled with getting pregnant and used to complain about how the insurance companies wouldn’t cover any of the procedures. Jorie has a moment of guilt. Maybe going to a bigger firm is a choice Eric has to make for his family to grow.

“Come sit,” Ella says, when Jorie re-enters the room. Ella flashes the cover of the book. *Understanding Adoption*.

“Maybe this whole accident was a good thing for them?”

“Please,” Jorie says.

“What? Sometimes bad things can be wake-up calls for people. To help them realize what they really want.”

“I can’t have this conversation again.” Jorie holds her head between her hands.

“Why do you hate this idea so much?” Ella says, opening to a page where a white mother cradles a brown baby. “‘Meant to be,’ it’s just something people say.”

“Who means it to be that way? It reminds me of something I studied in Spanish. When they want to say that something is broken, they use the reflexive verb, so it’s not ‘Johnny broke the plate,’ but ‘The plate broke itself.’ It annoys me. Someone broke the plate, but the agency is taken away from the actor by a word that won’t acknowledge it.

Same with meant to be. It implies that there is some plan for all of us, and I just don't buy it."

"What's so wrong with believing that there is a plan for you?"

Jorie snorts. "Who made the plan? God?"

"Maybe, but like an old man in the sky, but more like God as the energy of the universe."

Sipping her water, Jorie hears Eric's TV.

"So for Rosie the plan was that she would die at thirteen?"

"That's not fair. There's randomness in the universe, too. And free will. You've heard of theodicy, right? It struggles with this exact question. If God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and all-good how can evil and injustice exist?"

Jorie pauses, reaching for the bag of licorice that Ella's half-demolished. "And?"

"I think it's complicated for any of us to fully understand what God is—hello, philosophers and religious scholars have grappled with these ideas for centuries—but it doesn't mean we can't believe that there is some order to the universe, or that things work out in ways we don't understand."

"I don't buy it."

"I can see that. You should come with me to some of my classes at the synagogue. This is stuff we talk about."

"I don't want to talk about it. I think it's all a ruse, just so people can feel safe, but here's the thing, nothing in the world is safe, it's all random. The only thing we can depend on are the agreements we make with each other. That's how our 'plan' emerges, not because some deity or life force is pulling us around."

“Sounds like the words of a true corporate lawyer.” Ella grabs the candy back.

“It’s not just about legal contracts. We make agreements with each other every day.” Jorie remembers Ella’s words before she told her she needed space. “You told me you loved me. That was an agreement.”

Ella starts to answer, but just then Kate comes in, looking refreshed. She thanks them for coming, stopping to pick up the empty candy bag on the table.

“I’m so glad you’re eating that junk,” she says. “We have way to much of it.”

Ella raises her eyebrows at Jorie. *Told you so.*

The sky is cloudless, a uniform blue, but as they walk down the Promenade, staring at lower Manhattan, Jorie still thinks about she and Ella’s unfinished conversation from before they broke up. In the weeks since they reunited things have been good, but they haven’t revisited their earlier issues.

“When you told me you loved me, I believed you.”

“I did mean it,” Ella says.

“Maybe. But a couple of weeks later you were willing to abandon it. Maybe we mean different things when we say the word love.”

“I can love you but not be ready for a relationship.” Ella’s voice is brittle.

Jorie stops. “Are you ready for one now?”

Leaning against the railing, they watch a barge make its way up the East River.

“To me love is a description of a feeling,” Ella says. “I said it because I was overcome with how I felt about you. It was way more than just liking you. It was an affirmation of how much I wanted to be with you, how much I needed you in my life.”

“So why would you get rid of something you were so afraid to lose?”

“I didn’t give you up, Jorie. You barely let me in. Someday you’re going to have to let go of the abandoned child routine.”

Not satisfied, Jorie pushes. “I wasn’t there alone, El. For me to open up, I had to feel like you actually wanted me to be there.”

As the barge gets closer, the Dow Chemical logo becomes more prominent.

“I always had the feeling that if I got too close, you would run.”

Although Ella tickles Jorie’s back gently as she talks, Jorie feels the sting of her words. She wants to disagree, to tell Ella she doesn’t know her at all. But she doesn’t. The repetition of Ella’s fingers on the same patch of skin becomes cloying, the skin slightly tender just underneath. Jorie wonders why it’s so hard for her to be close to someone else.

“Did I tell you my dad wants me to come visit him in Europe?”

“What are you thinking?”

“I’m not sure. It seems a little too fast.”

“Might be nice for you. To get away.”

“Yeah, maybe,” Jorie says, disappointed that Ella won’t beg her not to go.

Ella points to the words next to the barge’s logo: *The human element is the element of change*. “What does that even mean?” Ella says, removing her hand from Jorie’s back.

Chapter 31

The hearing room is packed for the afternoon session. Mr. Kahn had warned Jorie that the Chair would not be happy with a circus, but Miles invited everybody he could think of, saying a spectacle was better than nothing. No photographers are allowed in the chamber, but thanks to Amy's connections the story about Biz Colton broke in the *Times* this morning, bringing reporters just outside. It even got a small blurb on the front page. *King of Broadway, Biz Colton, Behind Disputed Tribeca Tower.*

Turning her head, Jorie sees Ella and the puppeteers in back. She and Ella spent the night apart as Jorie wanted to make sure she slept well. Ella waves, and taps Mim's shoulder, who sits next to Ella. Jorie felt a little bit like a third-grader at a school play, knowing her mother would be in attendance, but seeing her now is calming. Ever since she told her mother about her father's visit, Mim has actually mellowed. Maybe it was the fear of Jorie connecting with her father that scared Mim the most.

"I suppose you were right," Mim said. "Everyone's got their own version."

Today, as she looks around the room, Jorie sees this play out fully. On the other side of the front row she sees the representative from the Department of Buildings, an experienced attorney who will argue to uphold DOB's permit. Behind him is the paid opposing counsel. They'll have the opportunity to offer testimony after Jorie speaks, when the puppeteers will have a chance, as well. Megan, the woman from the law school panel, acknowledges Jorie through a tight smile.

Rick Belleza sits with another man off to the side. He glares at Jorie; Biz must have filled him in on who was responsible for the leak. When Jim calls the calendar, Jorie stands. Miles whispers good luck behind her. She greets the commissioners, who fan out

on a raised dais. Mr. Keener and Ms. Hoffman sit to the left of the Chair, while Mr. Parnell and Ms. Tiller sit to the right. Everyone gives encouraging nods. But not the Chair. She eyes Jorie warily at the podium.

Jorie grips the sides, as Kahn advised her to do, to steel her nerves before speaking. She is prepared for this moment, knows the in's and out's of her argument and, because of Mr. Kahn's extra prepping, is ready for the Board's questions. She starts with a recitation of the facts and then moves onto her main line of argument, citing the relevant passages of law. Her arguments have been tightened up since she presented them to Kahn, and she especially plays up the areas that the Chair indicated were the strongest points in her memo, the denial of the permit by DOB in the case of a university dorm, and the deliberately misleading advertising practices on the part of the developer.

To conclude, she urges the Board to overturn DOB's permit. "The Department of Buildings has made a mockery of our zoning regulations. If you don't stop them, they'll lose all their teeth."

Joan Tiller, the only attorney on the board, says, "I've got to be honest, I think you're reading too deeply into the statutes. All of this analysis about what 'transient' and 'primary use' means, and 'day-to-day,' it's just not called for. Do you disagree, Ms. Goldman, that any of the rooms are not for rent, as is implied by the word transient?"

"I understand your concern, but reading deeply into the text is what we lawyers are meant to do. To your question, I think the developers are not complying with the spirit of law." Jorie continues delving into the details, but when she looks up both Ms. Tiller and the Chair look unconvinced.

“I agree with you, Joan,” the Chair says. “I don’t see how all of this niggling about whether an owner can stay a full thirty days in the month of February because of its irregularity as a month has anything to do with whether the use is transient.”

Before Jorie can counter the Chair’s comments, another commissioner weighs in with a critical question, followed by another. For a good twenty minutes Jorie feels as if she’s in a tennis match—just as she replies with an answer they’re back at her, each interrupting the next. As the Chair becomes more vocal, Jorie can tell she takes delight in this, the dissecting of arguments. The tone of her voice is confident and haughty, and she holds nothing back when she deems an argument unworthy of her attention. Suddenly Jorie understands her nickname from the other zoning lawyers. “The Interrogator,” they call her, for the way she phrases statements to imply that she always believes you’re hiding something.

Eventually Jorie gets a slight break, when Ms. Hoffman expresses concern that the Restrictive Declaration as worded could undermine the city’s ability to enforce zoning regulations in the future.

“There are some unorthodox agreements in here, and others might believe that the standard precedent has changed.”

Jorie supports this concern by referencing other instances where private agreements make later enforcement difficult. But even with this late support, Jorie can tell which way the Chair is going. She has one last opportunity to speak when the Chair asks her for closing remarks. Jorie has prepared a statement that reiterates her legal position, but at this point she knows it’s moot. The stronger argument is the extra-legal

one, the one that pulls at the hearts of the panel members that sit before her. The one that indicts Biz Colton.

“I’d like to close by pointing out that it’s bad precedent to allow a developer to not only *not* comply with the spirit of the zoning regulations, but also to actively market the project as one thing and then present something else to you, the Board. We should be concerned with disingenuousness here, and the kind of people we want to encourage to build in our communities. I think it’s very telling that one of the owners of the building, Biz Colton, went to great lengths to keep his identity a secret, as was reported by *The New York Times* this morning. It says a lot about what this project stands for. This actor, the face of Broadway, is afraid to stand by it. If the man responsible for this project hides, for fear of what being associated with it will do to his career, how can any of us stand behind it? But the community doesn’t have the luxury of pretending this isn’t happening. They can’t will away its shadows just by closing their eyes and acting as if the building were never built. We should consider these hidden motives when judging how likely it is that the developers will stand by the agreements they’ve made with the City. They’ve chosen to hide from the public. Nobody should be rewarded for avoiding the public gaze.”

The Chair stares at Jorie as if Jorie’s personally accused her of something. “I think we’ve heard enough,” she says. “Let’s move to the opposition.”

With that, Jorie removes her things from the podium.

An hour later, both Jorie and the representative from DOB have argued and the room grows weary. The clerk announces that the Board will now hear testimony from the community, each speaker limited to two minutes.

A number of community members, including Miles, get up and speak about how affronted they are by the size of the building, especially its height. No public officials are present, their palms sufficiently greased such that they have stayed home, even the ones who early on seemed supportive. It all played out just as Kahn predicted. A man who sits behind the Chair cuts each of them off promptly at two minutes, shouting “time” into a microphone. Miles speaks an extra minute anyway,

Then, the lawyer for the developers gets up, and restates what the DOB attorney said. He also adds that they attempted to approach the community board when they started, but were shot down. The man behind the Chair lets them speak for longer than two minutes, almost five.

But when the puppeteers stand up as a group, Jorie knows in an instant that it’s not going to be ordinary testimony. Ella takes the mic. After stating her name and affiliation, she says she is going to tell them a story about the former lessees of 31 Desbrosses. The Chair looks intrigued.

“Long before our puppet theater ever made home at Desbrosses Street, we were in the East Village. This is many years ago, in the 1930s. At the time, we held shows in a bar. They would give us space on some nights. Puppeteers, even then, didn’t have much money.”

The puppeteers behind Ella all pull out their pockets, which are empty. This prompts laughter from the audience. Even the DOB lawyer smiles.

“A sad state of affairs it was, but we were making important political theater. Commentaries at the time about relevant issues to the Jews of the Lower East Side. Communism. Labor issues. Rent strikes. Palestine. But our landlord, he didn’t care for

our politics. Do you know what he did? He took us to court and tried to evict us on the grounds that we didn't have the proper license. Would you believe it, he tried to evict us on non-compliance with the zoning law! But we went to court, and we argued our case, the only way we knew how."

Ella puts her head down and the other puppeteers join her, heads down. Ella and Peter and Nadia and Ilan, along with four friends, parade out a series of hand puppets, some human, some otherwise. Each puppet represents a different part of what makes Tribeca unique—the store-and-loft building, the merchant, a greengrocer from the old Tribeca market, several artists, even one banker. They begin to perform a modern dance among them, weaving the puppets in and out of each other with syncopation, which sounds like noise you might hear on a typical street. Cabs zooming, buses moving up and down for handicapped riders, pedestrians on their cell phones. The noise is cacophonous but beautiful, familiar to everyone in the room.

When Jorie gauges the Chair's reaction, she sees she's no longer amused, but her mouth has formed a steady frown. She turns to the side, to the man with flushed cheeks. The Chair and the man make eye contact and with one motion of her hand she pretends to slice her own neck.

Within seconds, he's up, standing over the Chair's shoulder, shouting into the mic. "Time. Time. TIME. TIME."

After the hearing, Mim, Ella and Jorie walk to an Italian restaurant nearby. On the way, they run into Miles.

"You did a great job, Jorie," he says. "And those puppeteers? Priceless."

“Thanks, Miles.”

“I’d recommend you in the future.”

“Not sure I’ll be in this game much longer.”

“No?” Miles says.

“No,” Jorie says, without elaborating. “But you could do me one favor.”

“What’s that?”

Jorie knows it’s uncouth, but says it anyway. “You can actually pay Eric the money you owe him.”

Miles laughs. “He and I will work it out, I’m sure.”

He reaches out to shake hands, but Jorie doesn’t follow suit.

“Months back you mentioned looking out for your neighborhood, your family. Well, I’m looking out for mine. You don’t pay him,”—Jorie steps in closer—“and I’m sure I can find something that the media might want to know about you.”

Over lunch, Jorie relaxes for the first time, even though she doesn’t know what’s next. She takes delight in the closure of the case, and the congratulations from her mother and Ella.

Halfway through lunch, Ella holds up her glass.

“To a great day,” Mim says.

“To unlocking secrets,” Ella says.

Jorie gives her a quizzical look, and Ella pulls an accordion file out of her bag.

“I spent yesterday at the archive at YIVO,” Ella says. “I tracked down Malke’s mother’s files. It took a while because they were filed under her father’s name, but I knew I hit the jackpot when they wheeled out several boxes.”

Jorie remembers Malke saying that her mother was quite the packhorse.

Ella unravels the folder and takes out a pile of photocopied papers, as Jorie's eyes grow bigger. The writing is in Yiddish, but from the layout of the pages Jorie can tell it's a script. Character names are centered in the center and bits of dialogue written just underneath, along with fully justified directions just underneath. And there is handwriting all over the margins.

“The scripts?”

Ella nods, grinning ear-to-ear.

“Clara had them the whole time, stuffed in among her father's accounts. But that's not all.”

Ella tells Jorie and Mim that she found more letters in the files—these from Minnie to her sister. She was too excited to wait for a translator and someone at YIVO agreed to help her when she refused to leave the help desk.

“It wasn't Minnie that stole the scripts or set the fire. In a letter dated ten years after the fire, Minnie tells her sister that she visited Aaron in the Catskills, and he gave her the scripts back. He insisted that she have them, since she was the one who was so bent on documenting the shows in the first place. It sounds like he might have made another proposal, but at that time both Minnie and Aaron were married to other people. He admitted to her that he set fire to his own theater. He and his brother hadn't been getting along, and he was so afraid for Minnie to leave him. He carted out the scripts dressed as a woman before he hired an arsonist. From what she wrote, he didn't intend to burn the building down completely—he thought they could control it and it would cause minor damage, but enough to make her stay. He miscalculated on both counts.”

“Wow,” Mim says. “So why did she give the scripts to her sister?”

“In the letter she says that it was too painful to hold onto the memories of that time. But when she thought about what they created, she couldn’t bear to destroy them. So she gave them to her sister for safekeeping, until she could deal with them, maybe donate them. But Minnie died unexpectedly soon after, in childbirth. From all that Malke’s told us, the family had never approved of Minnie’s involvement in the theater, so Clara buried them in her father’s correspondence about his millinery business.”

Jorie finishes the last of her wine. “I wonder why he gave her the scripts at all instead of just holding on to them himself. If he had that much hubris that he would attempt to burn down his theater to get the girl, I would imagine his ego was big enough that he’d want to hold onto his life’s work.”

“Apparently he was knocked down a few notches after the war. His wife died in a camp during World War II. She was the manager of a battery factory in Latvia.”

“Was she a puppeteer, too?” Jorie asks, remembering the story that Shelley told her about Nana in the work camp, the puppet shows she put on for her supervisor.

“I’m not sure,” she says. “But that makes sense. Best part for me is that I now have evidence that Minnie did work on the scripts as well. In the margins, her notes are everywhere. Minnie said to her sister that Aaron told her that he wanted her to keep the scripts alive. He was no longer capable of joy, but he believed she was. And he deeply regretted never marrying her. He said, ‘Show the world that we made one thing worth keeping.’”

Chapter 32

Susan leans over to smell Jeffrey's glass. He swirls it ever so slightly, to open up the scent of the grapes as she inhales. When Jeffrey mentioned going to dinner in Queens, Susan was skeptical. Leaving Manhattan for Italian? But he promised this was the best, and he would know, since he had lived in Astoria for five years.

Though it wouldn't have been her first choice, they hadn't had a bad meal since they'd been dating. She met him at the tail end of the Desbrosses case. Though she didn't discover this until later, it turns out that he and Rick Belleza were friends. He even did some consulting work for him on the Desbrosses matter, though thankfully he wasn't present at the hearing.

Susan had met him online. In the days leading up to the hearing, she restarted her account. She was especially lonely. Lured to her profile by a defense of the Met Life building, which he claimed that only another architect could appreciate, Jeffrey had emailed her within the week. In the time that they had been dating, Susan's learned that he is as systematic as she is—obsessively researching places to eat or day trips to take, keeping files as he conducts his research. At times, he could be somewhat controlling, but she didn't mind it with him. It was nothing like her ex. Jeffrey had a way of being unobtrusively pushy.

For example, dinner tonight. She had thought to order the cavatelli with shrimp, but he stopped her before the waiter came and suggested a food and wine pairing. They would start with the escarole with cannellini beans. Second, a pasta course, lobster ravioli and a casarecce with homemade pesto. Finally, osso buco for the main course, and a fresh bronzino. Putting her menu down, she conceded. He had a way of paying attention to her

such that even if he took over, she still felt part of it. As if he made those choices with her tastes in mind. So far, mid-way through the second course, she isn't disappointed.

When they get to dessert, the waiter brings out a piece of the ricotta cheesecake and tiramisu.

"You were busy while I was in the bathroom," Susan says to Jeffrey.

"Not me," he says, and the waiter interrupts.

"No, this was compliments of another guests." He points to a table in the corner.

Jeffrey pokes his head up, trying to make out the kind benefactors, while Susan slouches in her seat when she spots them. She hadn't meant to avoid Myung-Ki's phone calls in the weeks following the hearing, but she found she couldn't force herself to call him back. While she was thoroughly convinced that she had decided the case on the merits—neither Jim nor any of the other commissioners suggested that the building permit be denied—she couldn't help but feel as if the whole case tarnished her in some way.

Because of this, she did not micro-manage the decision process as usual. Normally she would work through the language with her general counsel, marking and re-marking the Board's resolutions until they were just right. But after giving overall guidance, she didn't have the heart to do it in this instance. Instead, she told Jim to oversee it. She even gave herself off tomorrow, when they will announce the decision to the public. She didn't want to field any phone calls from politicians or other concerned parties to discuss the Board's process. Wait a day for the dust to settle.

She puts her hand on Jeffrey's. "I'll be right back."

Myung-Ki looks better than the last time she saw him, and Seung-Hee practically beams. From what she's heard, the building at 31 Desbrosses is practically complete. He looks so relaxed that perhaps Myung-Ki's used some connections to find out the content of the decision, despite the fact that it hasn't been announced. The three exclaim what a small world it is that they've found themselves at the same restaurant, and Susan thanks them for the desserts. With promises to get together soon, she leaves their table.

When she returns to her own she barely picks at the dessert, and Jeffrey takes care of it for both of them. He asks who sent it over, but all Susan can muster is "old friends." By the way he doesn't push further, she knows he assumes they were friends from her former marriage. It's not her habit to lie to him. In fact, she's been more open with him than anyone, even telling him about her birth mother and half-brother. But she can't begin to talk about the case. She fears that if she starts she might tell him everything, if only to have someone absolve her of the guilt. She's played plenty of mental gymnastics, replaying the events over and over, and she knows that nothing impeded the Board from deciding the decision correctly. But still.

She hasn't been able to completely shake the feeling that it is the beginning of her undoing. At the hearing, everything went well, more than well. The attorney for the Partnership wasn't as experienced as the attorney from DOB, who made Susan's job a lot easier. But then the attorney gave that closing speech, which seemed to speak directly to Susan. Even that could have been overlooked, if not for those puppeteers, who attempted to make a mockery of all that the Board stood for. While Susan had been successful at pushing Myung-Ki from her thoughts for most of the hearing, the sight of those puppets threw her back to the day of the episode with Myung-Ki in the park, and the Korean

puppet that sat in its box in a corner of the office, Susan having felt too guilty to throw it away but equally guilty to display it.

On the way out, she attempts to walk far from Myung-Ki's table, but Jeffrey steers her otherwise.

"I want to thank them as well," he says.

Rather than put up a fuss she follows, and it goes smoothly. Before she knows it, they're back out on the street, the crisp air hinting at fall. He insists on taking a cab because he says Susan looks tired. Susan is relieved. At this point she could use several aspirin and a tall glass of water.

Stopped at a light, Jeffrey grabs her hand.

"That guy looked familiar back there, and I just put it together. I met him through Rick. He was one of their funders. Did you know?"

The back seat of the cab is dark, barely lit by a nearby streetlight, but she can still make out his silhouette quite clear from the corner of her eye.

"Is that right?" she says, attempting to keep her voice distant. "I didn't realize."

She looks away from him, out at the dark street. Assuming Jeffrey stays in her life—which she desperately hopes—it's inevitable that he will formally meet her half-brother. And when he does, he'll remember this night, likely put it all together, because that is the person he is. Attentive, observant—these are the things she likes about him.

Someday, soon, she will be seen.

On a rooftop in west Chelsea, Biz holds court. He places his hand on the young man's leg, mid-story. Jeremy is less than half Biz's age with blonde hair, blue eyes. For

most of the night, Biz has been watching Jeremy, the hunger of a young actor evident in his every story, every gesture. But now Jeremy watches Biz.

“You don’t know the half of it,” Biz says to the group, five men in all.

He met Jeremy at a Tony’s afterparty. His publicist exhorted him to make the rounds. Just stay for an hour, she told him, despite his loss. He couldn’t stand the humiliation, but given the bad press that had followed him around ever since the story about his ownership interest in 31 Desbrosses was outed, she thought it would be good for him to be seen in his proper milieu. He was an actor, not a businessperson. His fellow castmembers pulled him along; they all rallied behind him.

Jeremy approached him midway through. He was in *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*. After a night of mingling with actors and actresses, Biz was tired, but something about Jeremy reminded him of himself when he was younger. The right mix of sweet and caustic.

Biz shakes his head, as the men listen to him talk about Broadway in the Eighties. “They were different times.” From the smirks of the men, Biz knows he sounds like an old man, telling stories of his ascent. But they were different. When every week someone else died from HIV, there was unimaginable terror in all that they didn’t know.

Jeremy leans over. “Would you mind if we smoke?”

On their third night together, Biz confided to Jeremy about his past with drugs. As he talked, he knew he sounded surer about having kicked his addiction than he actually felt. This was his tendency—when he felt vulnerable, he would overplay his hand.

But tonight Jeremy got some red bull from a guy in Jersey, and his friends all want to get high. Biz hesitates. He feels in control—it’s been years since he’s even had a

sip of wine. There's always talk of triggers, but for Biz, the trigger was always a feeling of insecurity. Too much pressure about whether he would get a role, or keep a part. Now, he is almost at the end of his game. He looks around at the rest of the young men, all laughing, excited to get high, and he smiles at Jeremy.

"Sure," he says, giving his leg a squeeze. "I'll be fine."

Jeremy takes out small rectangles of aluminum foil and two bags of brown powder. Biz watches as he curves the foil into a half-circle, then places a chunk of heroin in the center. As he molds the foil around it, he looks to Biz. "Is it true that in the first run of *Persephone* you all would be floating on stage?"

"Who told you that?"

"I don't remember," Jeremy says, placing the foil on the table and takes a small plastic tube from his other pocket. Putting the tube to his mouth, he hands the foil and a lighter to his friend, who starts to heat the powder until it begins to boil.

Jeremy inhales and his friend picks up the conversation. "I wouldn't doubt it. Getting fucked up is the only antidote to the boredom of waiting around between entrances. I heard Samuel L. Jackson almost overdosed on crack during a show because he hated being an understudy. All that waiting and build-up. I can't remember who he was understudy for—"

"Charles Dutton," Biz says.

"Who?"

"He was in a series of August Wilson plays. *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*. *The Piano Lesson*."

Biz watches the faces of the young men as he tries to educate them, but they're no longer focused on him. They don't care that Charles Dutton came up in the theater at the same time Biz did, though they were rarely up for the same parts. Casting was strict then. If a black character was written in the script it could only be played by a black actor. Nobody here would remember the controversy over the casting in Miss Saigon when they tried to put white Jonathan Pryce in the Engineer's role.

Jeremy has closed his eyes. Biz imagines how he feels, how with one hit all stress lifts. The other men look greedily at the tube, waiting for their turn to smoke. While Biz has been telling them stories for the better part of the hour, heroin has taken his place.

But Biz understands. This, too, is the reason Biz turned to drugs. If nothing else, it would upset the monotony of the day, the minor struggles associated with just having to get out of bed every morning. They prepare another round while Jeremy keeps his eyes closed. The friend to Jeremy's left offers the pipe to Biz, but Biz declines.

"You sure?" the friend says. "This is some good shit."

Biz calculates: would one hit be that bad? He's curious about what it would feel like at this point in his career. He's still bitter about the award, but in all, how much can he complain? He'll start to see some money in the tower come next summer, so Rick tells him.

He takes the pipe. Leaning in, he waits for the heroin to bubble, grow darker. He takes a hit and a bitter, burnt taste coats his tongue. In an instant, his mind relaxes.

Reclining on the couch, he, too, closes his eyes. He feels Jeremy's warm body next to him, and he realizes how good it feels to be with someone again. Maybe he and Jeremy will be the next incarnation of him and Vance. Falling deeper into a meditative

state his mind wanders towards the woman who came to his dressing room just a few short weeks ago and upset his life.

Rather than anger, which he has felt since the day he met her, he suddenly feels unexpected tenderness. Seemingly from out of nowhere a memory resurfaces, and he realizes why her visit was so puzzling. As he replays her voice in his head, threatening him, he remembers the day she visited as a child. For him, voices always stick. Plus, it was on the cusp of his breakdown, after which he would be taken away to rehab.

He can see the girl's expectant face after seeing the show, her gangly teenage body before him, while her mother stood anxiously in the corner. Even then the meeting had felt surreal. Nights earlier he had come home to find his apartment deadbolted by the city. The eviction proceeding by his landlord went through and all his possessions, which by then weren't much, were left on the street, already picked through by scavengers of Greenwich Village.

As he walked out on stage to meet the mother and girl his body felt heavier than usual. The adrenaline from the performance waned and all that was left was the soreness from the night before, when Biz had had the shit kicked out of him on the floor of Hotel Carter. The make-up artist spent an extra hour having to repair his face before the performance. In spite of all this, he had one of the best performances he could remember. When he sang the climax of "The Man I Want to Be"—I know what they all think / but I'm more than what they see—the words resonated deeply within. Picturing himself on that dirty hotel floor, the remnants of the dealer's spit, long dried on his face, he sang the song as a plea. Perhaps the audience could absolve him for letting the drugs take over.

The mother and her daughter congratulated him on this performance. He agreed to meet them because the theater manager said something about the girl having leukemia—Biz had a hard time focusing on the words, but of course he said yes. They did these backstage meet-and-greets as courtesies, to kids of friends, to training theater kids, sometimes to sick kids, but in this role it was rare that anyone wanted to meet him, because he played the bad guy. Most girls saved their requests for Demetrius, who attempted to save Persephone. Biz didn't blame them; he liked the actor who played Demetrius, too. They had slept together a couple of times.

But this teenage girl had a manic energy. She had the expected awkwardness of a teenager, but when she looked him in the eyes he also saw deep sadness. Her eyes were soot-colored, almost black. Not only that, but she reacted so strangely to him. The more they talked, the stranger she got. When finally he told her how sorry he was, it was as if she didn't want to hear it. He admired her strength, but something about her response made him uneasy, as if she could sense that he was a fraud, hopped up on drugs. From her recent visit he puts together that it wasn't her that was sick, but her sister, who had just died.

At the time, he couldn't wait to get back to his dressing room and put his street clothes back on. He had no idea where he'd go after—he couldn't go back to Hotel Carter after the prior night but there were other spots. But as he said his goodbyes to the mother and the girl, the mother asked him if he wanted a ride home.

He said no at first. But when she asked a second time, he said yes. As the words came out, he had no idea why he agreed to it. The girl seemed to implore him with her eyes.

After he cleaned up in the dressing room, he came back out and got into her mother's car, double-parked just outside the theater. When he shut the door, the mother asked where he lived. It was the obvious question, a most innocuous question, but when he heard those four words, it almost brought him to tears. Until that moment he had skated by, going from one score to the next, one performance to the next.

"Where do you live?" she repeated. Biz could barely answer, suddenly realizing how much he had lost.

He told her to drop him at a corner in the Village where he knew he had the best chance of scoring. It was payday, after all. On the way down the mother made aimless small talk; the girl was now silent. Even in his tensed-up state, or perhaps because of it, he could tell that something had broken between the two. They sat in the car together—the same dark hair, the same long faces, but almost as strangers. He was glad when the mother pulled over.

But yet, when he got out, he found he couldn't turn away from the car. He watched that little girl, ensconced in her mother's van. He thought, as she stared back at him through the window with a desperate look, that maybe they weren't that different. They were running out of safe places.

Jorie receives word of the Board's decision while packing. When she sees Eric's email, she wonders how he's faring at Hoover, but his message says little other than referencing the attachment. From the typo in the second sentence, she suspects he had Jane send it. As she scans the first few lines, her heart beats faster.

She reads six pages of Board resolutions, each one taking apart an aspect of their argument, scraping them away until not one remains. Eric had once warned Jorie that the language of Board decisions feel overly harsh because the Board tailors the facts and analysis to the verdict they intend to reach. The Board is not the Supreme Court; they don't dwell in nuance. No points are awarded for a clever argument, even if it's a small one. Despite knowing this, Jorie shouts back to the decision as she reads—"That's not what we said," "I didn't concede that," "They're misreading their own decisions." When she gets to the end it feels like a punch in the face.

ACTION OF THE BOARD—APPEAL DENIED.

Five commissioners, all in agreement, decided against the Partnership. Decided against her.

Reading through the decision a second time, this time more slowly, she thinks back to the day of the hearing. It was a victory for her to stand up there and argue her case, yet now it feels so small. And hollow. While practicing corporate law there was always a sense of satisfaction when the deal was done. Even if the client didn't get everything they wanted, the propulsion of a corporate closing was such that the parties all felt that they had accomplished something. Sold a stake in a business. Merged with another company. But this is a loss, an actual loss. She imagines Miles, shouting at his mother in his apartment, bemoaning the changes to come. She wonders what the Chair must feel like. A sense of justice, perhaps, a satisfaction in having the power to steer the outcome.

Shutting down her computer, Jorie looks around the apartment, which looks as if it's been ransacked. It all happened so quickly—buying the plane ticket, finding a

subletter. She shoves the last of her clothes into her backpack and prepares to meet Ella. Jorie still hasn't told her about the trip.

They meet for dinner in Tribeca after not having seen one another for two weeks. This time, Jorie initiated the break. Just after the hearing they were both ecstatic, still high on the frenzy leading up to the event itself. But in the weeks that followed their energy invariably dissipated, as if the strength of their bond was somehow tied up in the momentum of the case. Ella became preoccupied with the archival materials she uncovered. Paranoid that her advisor would try to steal her glory, she spent almost every night poring over the translations and writing a paper on her findings. Jorie helped Jane pack up the office and send letters to Eric's clients, letting them know of the move. Eric tried again to convince her to follow him to Hoover. But Jorie continued to say no. She grew tired of being told what was best for her.

Jorie struggled with what to do next. She felt listless and depressed, not leaving her apartment for days. The light came in the form of her father. After their meeting, he continued to send her emails, almost weekly. He offered to pay her way to Europe so they could travel together. But Jorie wavered. The responsible thing to do would be to look for a job. Press on Amy's connections to possibly go in-house. Work on the relationship with Ella, futile as it may seem. But since she told Eric that she wouldn't go back, something else has taken hold.

Over steak frites and a bottle of wine, Jorie tells Ella about the Board's decision. Understandably, Ella is upset as well. The news casts a shadow over their dinner such that Jorie can't work up the nerve to tell Ella she is leaving.

Once outside, she and Ella decide to walk. They head east, instead of west toward the subway. Even with the breeze from the Hudson it's not bad out. Not like the bitter cold on the night she met Ella, how she and Amy waited outside the theater for almost an hour.

Though neither says where they're going, they walk towards Desbrosses. As they head down the familiar street, Jorie notices things she never did before: how few restaurants and retail stores there are in the groundfloor storefronts; how the bricks of the buildings are the color of deep earthen clay.

At the corner of Washington they stop. They lift their heads at the same time and stare up at the building, a curtain of glass and steel. Jorie is reminded of the promotional brochure she read when preparing for the hearing. It said that the building design was intended to evoke the life of the hotel in relation to its surroundings. It made mention of the clear glass, indicating that the building itself would serve as theater, an entertainment to the community. But tonight, a Tuesday, the street is eerily quiet, only the distant sound of cars zooming into the Holland Tunnel.

"I wanted to tell you..." Jorie says. "I'm going to take up my dad's offer and visit him for a couple of months in Europe."

"Really?" Ella says.

"You're surprised."

"I guess I didn't think you would go."

"Will you miss me?"

"What do you think?"

The two continue to stare upward. The papers have reported that the building opened the first ten floors to owners and guests. But it's been a headache every step of the way. Just last week, Jorie read that Belleza had already been sued by several of the purchasers, who contended that they were duped when they signed the papers. They claim to have been told that the building, despite being under construction, was already eighty percent sold to capacity. The purchasers allege that Belleza provided false marketing materials to persuade them to buy. Jorie laughed when she read this—from those first fliers advertising itself as a condominium, the building has never represented itself truthfully.

“You're running out on us,” Ella says, after some time.

“How so?”

“You can feel it right? We still have a connection. By leaving, you're shutting it down. This time you're playing the one who abandons.”

Before telling Ella her news, a part of her hoped that Ella would urge her not to go. Might beg her to stay. Tell her they were meant to be, part-joking, of course.

“You sound like my mother,” Jorie says.

“Don't pin that on me.”

“You have a lot of insight, El, but you don't know everything. I'm not leaving to escape you. I'm leaving to find me.”

“Same difference.”

“Not in my book. You may be right that I pulled away from you, but you're not exactly a safe bet. You've withheld things from me, lots of times. You can't just relationship-hop, pull people in and then get rid of them when you find something else.”

“I don’t see it that way.”

Jorie pauses. “Looks like you have your own growing to do.”

Ella walks ahead, leaving Jorie behind. Jorie doesn’t hurry to catch up, but gives one last look skyward. The building juts up in powerful, clean lines, ignoring the squat buildings on either side. Jorie imagines people walking by this spot in the future, ten, fifty, one hundred years. Then, hardly anyone will know its story, other than a handful of urban planners or maybe descendants of families that live here now. To understand the present we must understand the past, Eric once said. But at some point, too much focus on what came before becomes unhealthy. This plot of land holds many versions of the past. The story of Biz Colton. The story of Minnie Zenkel. The story of the bones discovered under the site. The story of Miles, Eric and Jorie. Untold stories, which Jorie has never heard.

Towards the top, orange safety netting is draped overtop, covering the few remaining unbuilt floors. Only a handful of units are lit. Most windows are dark, reflecting the inky blackness of night.

Vita

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