

"In accumulating property for ourselves or our posterity, in founding a family or a state, or acquiring fame even, we are mortal; but in dealing with truth we are immortal, and need fear no change nor accident."

Henry David Thoreau
Walden

THE SOCIETY FOR THE BETTERMENT OF MANKIND

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PART ONE

CHAPTER ONE

BARUCH ATA ADONAI

I got to be Dave's girlfriend by default. I mean, he would not waste his time with a woman in a million years. His greatest regret is that he wasn't born Jewish and he's dedicated his life to becoming the first Gentile rabbi. But since I hang around him, everyone thinks we're a couple.

We met in our Principles of Theology class. There's no assigned seating in the sloping lecture hall, so after half a semester of sitting behind him and not being able to concentrate, I decided to make the bold move of taking the seat next to him.

I don't think he noticed me for the first week since the topic was the Hebrew and Greek names for God and he took pages and pages of notes. Finally, one day after class, I just turned to him and said hi.

Then we started talking after every class about whatever had been discussed in the lecture, although, granted, he did most of the speaking since he was the one who had the opinions.

Sometimes I honestly think he just likes me for my name, Ellen Waller, since El is one of those names for God. (That's his blasphemous streak, though, because the ancient Hebrews were terrified to even say the name of God never mind casually calling their friends "Lord", even in jest.)

Right now, in Principles of Theology II, we're in the book of Leviticus covering the ritual sacrifices and I'm getting nothing out of it but Dave loves it. He takes notes with a fanatical glint in his eyes as if he's on the verge of building an altar right there, slaughtering a goat, and making an offering.

"Hey Dave!" I slip into the seat beside him.

"El," he looks up briefly from his leather-bound Bible.

"Whatcha doing?"

"Seeing how many sacrifices Joshua offered."

"Good," I nod. I've learned to take everything Dave says as casually as if it's a comment about the weather.

"I was reading more about the sacrificial system last night in the library," says Dave. "I really don't think we're covering it adequately in class."

"But why even worry about it," I say. "We don't have to make animal sacrifices anymore because Christ is our ultimate sacrifice."

I'm rocking the boat, I know. Dave lives and breathes the Old Testament. But I've got to let him know I'm capable of analytical thought.

"I'm going to do a study into my genealogy." He hasn't even heard me he's so busy flipping through his Bible. "I'm sure I've got Levitical blood."

I almost paraphrase the apostle Paul, "Don't waste your time with vain genealogies." Waste your time with me.

After class I ask him what he's doing this weekend.

"Probably working on my bike," he says. His motorcycle is his only interest outside of theology.

"Really?" I project maximum enthusiasm and interest into the word.

"Yeah, I've got to replace the shocks." Dave is carefully putting his Bible into his Mediterranean satchel. An import from the Holy Land.

"Wow, that sounds like fun." Not an ounce of sarcasm in my voice.

"Wanna help?" he says.

"Yeah, I'd love to."

"How 'bout Sunday afternoon? I'll be in the parking lot."

Dave keeps the Sabbath instead of Sunday so he's never free on Saturday.

"Maybe we can go for a ride too." This comment of his own free volition. It gives me hope.

"Shabbat Shalom," I say getting up to go to my next class. Dave deliberately didn't schedule any classes for Friday afternoon so that he could prepare for the Sabbath.

"Hey El!" he says. "Yeah?" I turn back.

"Ummm, I need a woman."

My heart hurdles.

"It's like, I haven't been keeping the Sabbath properly because I don't have a woman to light the candles."

Why should I have thought it would have been anything else?

"You want me to light candles?" I say.

"Yeah."

"OK," I say. "When should I come over?"

"Sun sets at 6:32 and it's got to be done eighteen minutes before sundown. Come over at 6:00."

I exit the lecture hall and make my way across the common, my heart pounding, a dazed but happy look on my face.

The common is a rose brick piazza with white metal tables and chairs and it reminds me of something you might see in the middle of an Italian village. On a reasonably warm day like today, students outnumber the ants ten-to-one, most of them with tons of books that remain unopened while they catch up on their quota of social interaction.

The majority of students at Union are business majors, and even before I met Dave I was never much into business, so consequently when I look around I only know one girl who was a roommate my freshman year. I slip on my sunglasses to avoid eye-contact with anyone and head for my next class.

At dinner I see Dave in the dining hall sitting surrounded by girls, all staring at him and laughing every time he says something funny. He's got quite the following mainly because of his wavy blond hair and his theological intensity that's often taken personally by women looking for a sign that he likes them.

I'm at my worst when he's with other girls so I go and sit with Ted Stevens, who rumour has it, likes me. It's reassuring to talk to someone who treats every word I say as revealed knowledge.

After dinner I go back to the dorm and to the reasonably messy room that I share with Judith, my roommate and best friend, who is a jazz fanatic and composes music for the

piano. Every morning we wake up to the radio set on a jazz station and for the rest of the day I've got Wynton Marsalis's trumpet solos running through my head. To add to the impact, she has a life-sized poster of Harry Connick Jr. on her side of the room.

I've never kept a Sabbath before so I don't know what to wear and Judith walks in when I'm trying on the tenth outfit.

"Where're you going?" she says.

"To keep the Sabbath."

"Oh." She understands my unorthodox relationship with Dave.

"What are you doing tonight?" I ask.

"Tom and I are going to a movie." She says it as if Tom is taking her to watch pigs mud-wrestle.

"What's the matter?" I ask. I've finally settled on a navy blue sweater and a black skirt.

"I dunno," she says listlessly. "It's like there are so many other things we could do."

I run a brush through my long brown hair. Judith and I are often mistaken for sisters, with our dark hair and pale skin.

"What do you want to do?"

"I want to go to New Orleans."

We're in Ontario.

When I arrive at his dorm, Dave has set up two candles in the lounge and is wearing a muted woven shirt that makes me think of an Israeli shepherd boy.

"So what do Jews do when there are no women to light the candles," I say.

"Oh, a man can light a candle. But it's better if a woman does it. More traditional."

I'm wondering why it's taken him this long to ask me. But Dave's not a man who operates on an obvious schedule. Other couples start going out and after a couple of months are doing everything together. Dave, he sort of moves according to the Spirit.

"Do you have something for your head?" he asks.

"What?"

"Your head has to be covered. Just a sec." He disappears through the door into the bedroom and comes back with a bandanna. "Here. Use this."

He looks at his watch.

"OK. We've got ten minutes. When I tell you, you're going to light the candles and then say, 'Baruch Ata Adonai, Eloheinu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat.'"

"What?!"

"It means Blessed art Thou, O Lord, our God, King of the universe, who has sanctified us in His commandments and commanded us to light the Sabbath light."

"How'm I going to remember all that?" I say.

"I think I've got it written down somewhere." He opens a messy notebook that has been sitting on the floor and starts pushing papers around.

"Here." He hands me a torn half-sheet of paper that has Hebrew writing and the translation.

At exactly 6:14, Dave gives me a box of matches and we both stand up. Since I'm the type of person who has difficulty starting a fire with a woodpile and container of kerosene, it isn't until 6:15 and after four matches that the candles are lit.

"Baruch Ata Adonai," I read.

"Wave your hands," Dave interrupts me.

I look blank.

"Wave your hands over the candles."

"Eloheinu Melech ha-olam," I say, trying to read and move my hands at the same time. I nearly set the piece of paper on fire.

"Asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat."

"OK, cover your eyes with your hands, then uncover them and look at the candles."

I cover my eyes, then uncover them.

"Amen," says Dave.

"Amen," I say.

For some reason we stay standing. The solemnity of the ceremony is over, I sense, so I ask a question I've been wondering about for awhile.

"Hey, Dave," I say. "What do you think of traditional Christianity?" If your boyfriend were an accountant this would be a weird question, but you've got to understand that Dave thrives on this type of thing.

"There's a lot of people with a lot of questions," he says nodding his head as if, yes, that's a valid inquiry. "It satisfies some people."

"Would it satisfy you?"

"Probably not." He smiles. "Too much New Testament."

"Why don't you believe the New Testament?"

"It's not that I don't believe it," he says sitting down on one of the orange and brown fabric couches. The men's dorms are decorated in virile earth tones and the rugged wood and tweedy furniture gives you the feeling of being in a hunting lodge. "I'm sure there was a man named Jesus. It's just that I don't discard the Old Testament. I like Judaism. I like the Jews. I like their conviction and their endurance. Judaism is a lifestyle. Maybe if Christianity were more of a lifestyle it would appeal to me."

Sitting down beside him I think about this because obviously Christianity can be a lifestyle. All you have to do is pick up a Baptist Bulletin or Campus Life to see that. Judaism must have been a calling for Dave otherwise I don't understand his total commitment.

Loving Dave is not a matter of impressing him with my strong convictions -- of which I seem to have none since all I have is journalism which is something I do, not feel -- it's a matter of trying to keep up with him. If anything, my commitment is to love boldly and to never regret it.

"Listen, Dave."

"Yeah?"

"Do you like me?" This question takes more courage to ask than you will ever know.

"Of course."

"No, I mean, do you like me? You could get anyone to light candles for you. Why'd you ask me?"

"'Cos I thought you'd want to do it."

"But am I important to you? Do you love me?"

"Sure I love you," says Dave sincerely, putting his arm around me. "You're my neighbour, aren't you?"

I sigh. I have an idea for the Almighty suggestion box. Make love feel good.

CHAPTER TWO

SAINT HADASSAH

Hadassah Kaufman is sitting Indian-style on the faded blue-carpeted floor amidst rows and rows of books. She's supposed to be working. In fact, when she applied for the job in the library and her supervisor asked her what her greatest weakness was, she replied, "I'm a budding workaholic." What she didn't bother to mention was that she was only a workaholic when the work interested her. Today she's supposed to be working on reference questions and searching out the answer to how many urban Peruvian men die of cancer each year doesn't interest her.

There's a rush of air behind her, a whiff of cologne, and she feels the back of her neck being kissed.

"Stop it!" she says turning to Eddie Prince who's crouched down behind her. "I took a vow of chastity."

"To who?"

"To myself."

She pushes him away with one hand as he tries to kiss her again, her eyes still on her book.

"What're you reading?"

"A History of Jews in Christian Society."

"But you want to be a nun." He stands up -- an instant giant from Hadassah's vantage point.

He's very attractive, thinks Hadassah as she looks up at him. Reminds her of Peter. Maybe that's why she enjoys torturing him so much.

"I know, but I'm still Jewish."

Eddie sighs and randomly picks a faded, yellow-covered book off the shelf called *The Blue Room Murder*.

"You have a major identity problem," he says.

"So?"

Eddie returns the dusty book to the shelf.

"Doesn't that ever bother you?" He stares down at her.

"Of course it does. But so does knowing that, as we speak, people are killing each other in Afghanistan."

Eddie keeps staring at her. It's his way of trying to make her feel uncomfortable, as if she has said something that was logically-flawed. He admitted this to her once.

"Do you know what this is?" she says. "If this were a movie, it would called: The Library: A Story of Mad Passion Amidst the Volumes of Waugh, Wilde, and Woolf, Not to Mention, an Extensive Collection of Outdated Light Fiction."

"You're too postmodern," says Eddie, abandoning the staring strategy. "You know you're going to get fired if you don't do anything."

"Is there a law of physics for that?" she asks, getting up with her book. Eddie is taking a physics class that he hates. "Like the rate at which one works is directly proportional to an employer's vested interest when all the variables are consistent?" She's walking through the aisles of books with Eddie behind her.

"Actually, I think it's more Biblical," replies Eddie. "I'm sure there's a parable about a lazy seed sower."

"I'm sorry, I wouldn't know, that sounds New Testament to me." She is deliberately being difficult. She knows the New Testament better than the Old.

"But you want to be a Catholic nun!"

"I want to be a Jewish nun," she corrects him.

Hadassah's story, if it had a name, would have been called Breakfast By the Sea, a heading she had seen in a New King James New Testament.

The ocean, Hadassah had thought when she was sixteen, was quite sufficient. If she could live in a convent by the endless waters she would be infinitely content.

Peter Cairns agreed. When it came time to join a monastery, he wanted to be by the ocean that he had been raised near.

Hadassah and Peter had met at high school in their small eastern Nova Scotia town and had been drawn together by a mutual need to commit to a force greater than themselves. It would not be enough, Hadassah felt, to lay down her life for a suburban brick house with an adjoining garage that held a Toyota mini-van and a brood of children to fill them all with. She needed to be clutching a crucifix and dedicating herself to hours of prayers, offering her virgin body as a sacrifice to God. Any earthly desire she had, she squelched. She loved Peter with a Godly love and told herself it was not his wavy black hair or emerald green eyes that was so enticing, but his pure soul.

For his part, Peter was not taken by Hadassah's long chestnut-brown hair or creamy skin, but by her deep convictions.

Their carnal school-mates took it as a given that they were a fleshly couple. After all, they had been best friends since ninth grade and they were still together now in their final year of high school. The truth be known, Peter had only held Hadassah's hand when they were manoeuvring the craggy rocks of the Nova Scotian beach that they liked to meditate by.

"God being love," said Peter one day, as they were seated, leaning against a large rock facing the water, "would imply that if God is omnipotent and omnipresent, so is love."

"So do you think that there's love in the ocean?" asked Hadassah leaning forward.

"Yes, I do, because it doesn't swallow up the shore. I believe that it was love that shaped the earth."

Hadassah wrinkled her forehead.

"That's pretty powerful."

"In fact, Hadassah..." Peter was really getting into his point. "It's love that bridges the physical and the spiritual and will help us to understand the mind of God."

Both leaned back, taken by the depth of this new thought. In addition to bodily sacrifice, both were fervently dedicated to understanding the mind of God.

"But how do you love with that kind of love?" asked Hadassah.

"You act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly," replied Peter. "We're human and we look at love from a human standpoint. But God looks at love from a spiritual standpoint. He's interested in whether we love Him enough to follow what He says."

"It's as simple as that? Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly?"

"What more could God want?"

"It's times like this that I feel in harmony," said Hadassah leaning her head back against the rock. "There is nothing negative in me, only peace."

If they didn't go to the ocean, Peter and Hadassah spent many hours at one of the red-and-white checkered tables in Hadassah's uncle's small seafood restaurant, drinking Darjeeling tea, doing homework, and talking.

"When are you going to try to get into the monastery?" asked Hadassah one day after they had finished a series of complicated matrix problems and were eager to think about something else.

"When I turn twenty," he said, leaning back so that the armless red vinyl chair was perilously propped on only two metal legs.

They were both seventeen.

"I'd like to travel a bit first."

"I'm wondering if I should join a convent as soon as I graduate," said Hadassah thoughtfully. "I want to remain as unworldly as possible."

"Are you afraid of temptation, Hadassah?" asked Peter, smiling.

"No, I just want to be perfect."

"But is your perfection worth much if it hasn't been tested?"

Hadassah contemplated this. Certainly perfection was worth more if it could stand up to carnality and the baser side of man.

"Christ was perfect and He lived in the world," said Peter.

"OK, I can see that," said Hadassah running her fingers around the edge of her teacup. "But how do I test my perfection?"

"You don't," said Peter. "You let God test it."

That night, kneeling by her wooden-framed bed, hands clasped on her white cotton crocheted blanket, Hadassah prayed that God would test her perfection. She figured that once it had been proven that she was strong she could get on with her life and devote herself to her prayers.

"Listen," said Peter, the next day after school. "I read about a monastery that's about 50 kilometres east of here and we can get to it by bus. Do you want to check it out tomorrow?"

"Sure," said Hadassah. She had never actually been to a monastery, only once to a convent when she was little.

The next morning Peter and Hadassah boarded the Greyhound bus that would take them to Fine Point, Nova Scotia. Hadassah had packed some food so that they could eat on the way and not waste valuable time looking for a lunch spot once they had arrived.

Peter described the convent as he had read about it. Then, since they both agreed they were hungry, they pulled out the food. Although Peter and Hadassah had lunch together everyday in the high school cafeteria, Hadassah had never actually noticed the way Peter ate before. They had always been divided by a wide chestnut wood- imitation table and distracted by the din of a busy lunchroom. Now they were side-by-side, and Hadassah found herself really noticing Peter for the first time.

"Oops!" Peter dribbled mustard down his chin and they both giggled as he wiped it off with his fingers until Hadassah could find a serviette.

After the sandwiches, he pulled out one of the passion fruit juices, twisted off the cap, tossed back his head and downed half of the bottle.

"His neck moves when he drinks," thought Hadassah and suddenly she felt warm, almost feverish.

"Could you open the window? I feel strange," she said.

"Oh sure," Peter replied. "Here, do you want to sit by the window?"

As they were trading places, their bodies were forced against each other and a strained look appeared on Hadassah's face. She hung her head out the window until she began to feel a bit cooler. She also had to cross her leg towards the window so that her thigh didn't touch Peter's. Peter didn't seem to notice her condensed body position as he was involved with his guide book to the region around Fine Point.

When they arrived and disembarked from the bus, Hadassah was very happy to be able to move freely again and to feel the cool air on her body. The scenery in the distance was ruggedly hilly and the town in the foreground was a well-kept main street of a couple of white wooden stores and a church by the waterside.

"Excuse me," said Peter to an elderly lady about to go inside one of the Puritan buildings. "How do we get to the monastery?"

"Just follow the coast about two miles in that direction," she pointed.

As soon as they were passed the main street, the only way up the coast was a three-foot wide footpath precariously close to the water's edge. As they continued to walk along the tree-lined path, it became apparent they were going up, and what had initially been only about a two-foot drop to the water was becoming somewhat of a cliff.

Knowing that Hadassah was prone to vertigo, Peter took her hand. Hadassah started to feel dizzy anyhow.

"Don't be silly," she told herself. Peter was on the side of the cliff and she barely noticed the edge if she just concentrated on the path. Then she became aware that the dizziness wasn't originating in her head. It was coming from the right hand that was clutching Peter's and it was slowly spreading throughout her entire body.

"Let's talk!" she blurted out suddenly.

"What?" he sounded startled. They had been walking along in comfortable silence for the last twenty minutes.

"I mean, I think it's great that we're going to actually see this monastery," she said. "I mean, this is what you've always wanted and here we are going to look at it."

"You know Hadassah, I'm wondering if there aren't other ways to serve God?"

"What?" she said. She almost stopped walking. "You mean, like not in a monastery?"

"Yeah, I mean, you can pray and stuff. But how can you really help other people?"

The look of panic on Hadassah's face caused him to slightly retract.

"Oh, I'm not saying I'm not going to enter a monastery. I've just been thinking about the many ways that you can live to please God. That's all."

"But to devote your life to God as a living sacrifice must be the most pleasing to him," said Hadassah.

"I don't know. I mean, traditionally, sure. But what good is it to have the love of God and not to do something with it?"

"But you are doing something with it. You're giving it back to God."

"Yeah, but God must have made human beings for a reason. Not everyone can go into a convent or a monastery so there must be other ways to please him."

"Like what?"

"Oh, I don't know. Missionary work?" He laughed and then seeing the expression on Hadassah's face looked serious again.

"Don't worry," he said squeezing her hand. "We're still going to look at a monastery today, remember?"

Something inside of Hadassah was ripping apart.

"Why am I panicking?" she thought. "Why am I panicking? I'm still going into a convent. I'm still going to worship God. It doesn't matter what Peter does."

The monastery was standing placidly at the highest point on the cliffs.

"Just a little bit more to go," said Peter. They had come out of the trees and were now in a grassy area. The footpath had disappeared and it was a matter of trudging up the hill. Peter let go of her hand.

Fifteen minutes later they stood at the front doors of a large but simple square stone building which disappointed Hadassah who had been expecting more of a castle or a fortress. They rang the doorbell and waited.

A greying middle-aged man wearing a long dark robe answered.

"Can I help you?" he asked.

"Uh, yeah," said Peter. "Can my friend and I have a look around? I'm planning on joining a monastery someday and I was thinking about this one."

The man looked at Hadassah pointedly.

"She's going to join a convent," said Peter.

"This isn't a convent," said the man.

"Yes, I know," said Peter.

"You can come through. I'm afraid your friend will have to go around and meet you in the back."

Peter looked annoyed.

"Is that OK?" he asked turning to Hadassah.

"Oh that's fine," she said. She desperately wanted Peter to be able to get inside and feel the spiritual fulfillment that no doubt must permeate the walls of the building.

"I'll just walk around."

The door closed behind Peter and the man. Hadassah started around the building. There was no path, as it was quite apparent that most people did not bring their female friends along to the monastery. The grass was tall and Hadassah couldn't help but notice that there were no flowers or shrubbery. She wondered whether the men ever came outside to appreciate the scenery.

Behind the building Hadassah climbed up some decaying wooden steps onto a small patio that overlooked the water and had a stunning view of the curving coastline. She could see Fine Point and if she looked hard enough, she thought she could see the town that she and Peter lived in.

The back of the building was deserted and Hadassah wondered how the men could stand to stay inside on such a beautiful day. There were windows on the back wall, but most of the curtains were drawn. Something inside Hadassah was twinging. Yes, this was a monastery, but it didn't feel like a monastery. She had expected cobblestone paths and men in brown, hooded robes walking along in lines to mass with some Gregorian chants in the background, maybe bells pealing in the distance to announce prayer time. She expected to feel a holiness in the air, but all she felt was a slight shiver from the brisk sea air.

After about fifteen minutes, Peter emerged through the single back door without the man.

He smiled when he saw her.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," he said. "You wouldn't believe the number of rooms in that one building."

"Rooms for what?"

Peter stepped up onto the patio and joined her by the rail.

"Mostly study rooms. Bedrooms, of course. A small library."

"What do people do?"

"All the men I saw were studying."

"Do they pray?"

"Yes, they have prayer rooms."

"Is it like a chapel?"

"Oh, no. It's nothing like the movies where the monks have an ancient cathedral with stain glass and a choir. They just have little rooms where they can say their prayers."

"That seems kind of..." Hadassah didn't want to say, "disappointing".

"Yeah." Peter understood. "You've got to really be committed to just studying and not doing much else."

Suddenly Hadassah realized that whenever she thought about a convent, she always pictured the one in *The Sound of Music*. That's what was wrong with this place. It had the hills, but it didn't have anyone running out into the fields to sing at the top of his or her lungs. She had a tight feeling in her chest that she felt could only be relieved by a good cry or a piercing scream.

"Oh God," she said holding her head.

"What?" said Peter, sounding concerned.

She started breathing more rapidly and her body started shaking.

"Oh God," she said again running a cold hand through her hair.

"What?" Peter put his arm around her. She pushed him away and started to run. Flying around the building, she kept going until she was running as hard as she could through the fields in front of the monastery. She kept going until finally she just collapsed on the ground. Peter, who had only been a few feet behind her, was going too fast to stop, tripped, and fell beside her. He reached out his arms and before she knew she was crying on his chest.

"Oh Peter! Oh Peter! This isn't at all what I expected!"

"I know! I know! It's OK!"

He let her cry until there was nothing left inside and they could get up and go home.

CHAPTER THREE

SIGNIFICANCE IS INTEREST

"I used to think that religion was simple." I run my fingers through my hair. "There was God and I just sort of knew he was up there."

It is a Monday morning in the wood-panelled dining hall of Union University, Union, Ontario, Canada. This room can be stress-inducing during the peak of meal hours with its rows and rows of students putting away food like starving cowboys, but right now it is a pleasant post-breakfast interlude and there are only a few students scattered around the room with their books and cups.

"Want more coffee?" Judith gets up from her chair.

The small number of Theology majors at Union stick together. My freshman year I was a Journalism major and then just for the heck of it, I took Principles of Theology my sophomore year, met Dave, and ended up switching my whole curriculum. Like people say, love is a religious experience, and I'm living proof. All of my friends deal with God differently as if God is everything to all men. For Judith, who only majored in Theology because she says she needs more of a soul, God is Creator of Harry Connick Jr.

"How are things going with Dave?" says Judith when she gets back.

"OK."

"Only OK?"

"I dunno." I run my fingers through my hair, a habit I've got to break because I read somewhere that it's a sign of insecurity. "I'm worried about it."

"Why?" Judith looks sympathetic.

"Just once I'd like to have a relationship with a guy who spends time with me."

"But you spent all of Sunday with him," says Judith.

"Yeah, with him and his bike."

"Oh well," Judith says, our generic term for anything we can't solve.

She glances at her watch and gulps her coffee. "We should get to Old Testament Study."

We stand up, sling our bags over our shoulders and exit the dining hall. The smaller theology classes are relegated to the outer extremes of the campus so we have to hike half a mile on a gravel path to some trailer-like classrooms that were built right beside the forest that marks the end of campus property and the beginning of wilderness territory.

Dave brings five sharpened pencils to this class so that he can make copious notes in the margin of his Bible since Old Testament Study is his favourite class. The fact that it's taught by a bona-fide rabbi is his definition of fleshly ecstasy and I love this class because Dave gets so absorbed in it that I can just sit and watch him.

"Hi!" he greets me when Judith and I take our seats. A blond wave has fallen into his eyes and his mouth is slightly open in anticipation of spiritual morsels.

We're in the book of Ezra, all about Ezra and the Jews who returned to Jerusalem after the captivity to rebuild Jerusalem. Dave is taking notes like he's Ezra being instructed by God on what the dimensions of the temple should be. I'm wondering what it would be like to be married to one of the Levites returning to Jerusalem. Did they actually walk all the way back from Babylon? Judith is writing down musical notes in her margins.

I don't bother waiting for Dave because he likes to stay and talk to Rabbi Hirshel and I've got to get to my Reporting for Mass Media class which means jogging back to the main campus.

I've wanted to be a journalist since I was six so I kept Journalism as a minor. When I was eight I started a weekly family newspaper and went around with a pad of paper and a pencil interviewing my parents and my brothers on things like what they had done that day and what they thought of the new tablecloth. Then I wrote it all up and my mother photocopied it for me. I charged five cents an issue and since I was the baby of the family everyone bought one.

Today we are doing an assignment about a train derailment in Fenton and it ticks me off that we waste so much time with these local stories. I want to write about world events, so I switch Fenton, Ontario to Nice, France and CPR to the Train a Grande Vitesse.

"What's this?" my teacher, a retired editor from a local newspaper, says to me when I hand my story in.

"Just giving the story a little more significance," I say airily.

"How many times do I have to tell you that significance is local?" he says.

"Significance is interest," I say.

We have this conversation every time I hand something in. I don't know how this man made it through journalism school thinking that Ontario is the world.

"I don't think Dave realizes that the word 'love' can be used in the context of a relationship," I say to Judith Tuesday night at dinner. The room is packed because most people live on campus and the nearest McDonald's is seven miles away. I am yelling to Judith who is across from me, but to the person beside me who also has to holler to be heard, it probably sounds like a whisper. "I asked him yesterday what he thought love was and he said, 'What's love? God is Love. If I can barely understand God, how can I understand love?'"

"Why do you stick with him?" says Judith.

"Because he's very good-looking. Also, I prefer pain to boredom."

Tom comes up to the table with a tray and sits beside Judith.

"Hey gorgeous," he says to her. "What do you want to do tonight?"

"I've got to study Biblical History," she says.

"I kept falling asleep during Bib History today," I say. "I don't understand it because it's my only class on Tuesdays and Thursdays. That man shouldn't have slide shows so early in the day, though. I tried to open my eyes for every slide and I kept thinking I saw Demi Moore on the screen."

Tom looks at me like I just confessed that I wear fig leaves instead of underwear. He's thin and tanned with tight curly brown hair and today he's wearing chinos and a khaki-coloured shirt that matches his eyes. About the only thing that impresses me about him is that he wears a Rolex, but he whines too much to have any other redeeming qualities.

Dave comes up with his tray and sits down across from Tom.

"I want an army commander," he says abruptly to me ignoring everybody else.

"Really?" I say.

"Yeah, think about it. So many men in the Old Testament had army commanders, Saul, David, Absalom."

This conversation is visibly making Tom nervous. He would not hang around us if he weren't going out with Judith. In fact, he tries to spend as little time with Dave and me as possible.

"Man, you're right!" I say grinning. "What are you going to do?"

"I dunno, I'm working on it."

Dave has a plateful of bread that he spreads honey on from the honeybears on the table. Manna was supposed to be like wafers and honey. It's a wonder he hasn't started eating locusts. He totally refuses to eat quail after that incident in the wilderness when the Israelites complained that they weren't getting enough meat and God sent them so much quail they ate it to death.

The table is quiet. I don't care. I know that Dave doesn't notice these things because he's always so preoccupied and since I've forgotten how to make conversation I stare at the wall.

"Do you want to go back to my dorm and study?" says Judith to Tom.

"Yeah!" Tom jumps up.

How they ever started going out I will never know. Tom wants to be a CEO and Judith claims that he is a considerate and loving person, but why that would be attractive to Judith, I have no idea. The truth is, Tom comes from a moderately well-off family and represents a regular income to someday support Judith's musical ventures.

"Soooooooo," I turn to Dave.

He looks up at me.

We spend the remainder of the evening discussing the ramifications of building a Temple on the Mount in Jerusalem and reinstituting sacrifices.

Ever since becoming a Theology major, I've secretly wanted to be a prophetess. Deborah seemed so cool, sitting under her palm tree with all the Israelites coming to her for wisdom and judgement. If I had lived in Christ's time, I would have wanted to have been Mary, the sister of Martha, who sat at his feet and listened to him talk.

Dave is waiting for the Messiah. I'm waiting for a message.

"How's weight training going?" Dave asks me at lunch, biting into an apple. He's done a Hebrew word study into the fruit that was on the tree in the Garden of Eden and it wasn't an apple or else he wouldn't be eating one.

"Great!" I say. "Don't I look toned?"

I took weight training this semester because although "bodily exercise profits little" I thought physical perfection might get Dave's attention.

"Can't tell," says Dave, shaking some salt on his bread. "Your clothes would have to be rent."

In Old Testament Study we're covering the book of Esther. Dave loves it because it gives the origins of Purim.

"Can I keep the Sabbath with you again?" I say to him after class.

"Yeah, sure," he says. "Every week if you want. You just gotta memorize the blessing."

I already have.

On Fridays I check the newspaper to see what time the sun sets so I know when to meet Dave. I haven't bothered getting a head covering since I like wearing his bandanna. Dave suggests that we start having a kosher dinner as part of the service and since he didn't specify any further, I take it upon myself to bring bread and salt. Dave has some wine -- at the expense of being kicked out of college since there's prohibition in the dorms but I don't think he considers little human ordinances like that.

The ceremony has become more intricate. After I light the candles and say the "Baruch Ata Adonai", Dave does a prayer over the meal. Then there is the reciting of the verse which comes from Proverbs 31 and Dave says it's called the Eshet Chayil, a woman of valour.

"Who can find a virtuous wife?" reads Dave. "For her worth is far above rubies."

I'm sitting right here, I think.

"The heart of her husband safely trusts her..."

My mind wanders as this ideal woman gathers wool, brings food from afar, rises early, buys a field. I mean, I can't very well start knitting Dave wool sweaters, getting him food

from Tanzania, waking up early when we don't even sleep together for him to notice or buying him some Ontario farmland.

"She girds herself with strength, and strengthens her arms."

Another reason for weight training.

The next part, however, requires that I learn how to work a spindle and make scarlet garments for my household and purple silk tapestries for myself, not to mention selling fine linen to the local merchants.

I tune out until my favourite part which is at the end.

"Many daughters have done well," says Dave, "But you excel them all. Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her own works praise her in the gates."

"Beautiful," I say.

"Yeah," says Dave putting down the Bible. "Time for the Kiddush."

I stand up even though Dave tells me, I could stay seated if I want.

In a low voice Dave says, "Vayhi erev vayhi voker..."

Dave picks up his wine.

"Sav'ri maranan v'rabotai. Baruch Ata Adonai, Elohenu Melech ha-olam, boreh pri hagafen."

He takes a sip of the wine, passes the cup to me so I can take a gulp.

"We have to wash our hands now," says Dave. We go out into the lobby of his dorm where there is a small bathroom. It is an intimate moment, both of us rinsing our hands in that one little sink.

We go back into the lounge and Dave says the challot, the blessing on the bread.

"Birshut maranan v'rabotai. Baruch Ata Adonai, Elohenu Melech ha-olam hamotzi lechem min ha-aretz..."

He's got this totally memorized. I cannot even conceive of remembering that much in English, never mind Hebrew.

After the challot, we uncover the bread, break it, and eat it.

"Next time bring two loaves," says Dave putting bread in his mouth. "You've gotta have two loaves to indicate that the Sabbath is especially abundant. It symbolizes the double portion of manna that the Israelites got in the wilderness."

He gets away with a lot having the bone structure of a Greek god.

One Friday evening, Dave decides to add singing to the ritual. "We're supposed to sing the 126th psalm," he says.

"What? You mean, we're just going to open up the Bible and sing from it?" I say, my eyes widening in horror.

"Sure," he says. "Why not?"

"Well, we don't know the tune, for one thing."

For another, I only sing in the shower.

Dave is carefully reading over Psalm 126.

"Hmmm," he says. "Let's see..." He starts to sing, "When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like them that dream."

He doesn't seem to be following any particular well-known melody. I come in on the second verse, sort of a droning chanting.

If this weren't me, I would be in hysterical laughter right now.

"Then was our mouth filled with laughter, and our tongue with singing..."

I wonder if God appreciates this joyful noise? Dave ends on a high note, I end on a moan.

"That was great!" says Dave.

"Yeah!" I say.

Judith is sitting on her unmade bed when I return to the dorm after classes. The radio is on and she's leaning against the wall staring at Harry Connick Jr., looking as if she is experiencing indigestion.

"What's the matter?" I ask.

She gives me an acute look.

"He's so damn good," she says.

"Who?" I say.

"Harry," she says. She points to the radio and I assume that the soulful piano-playing is the man himself.

"I mean, he's so great," she says. "He recorded that when he was only nineteen. He had his second album out by twenty. I'm twenty and what have I done with my life?"

That's one of the good things about being a journalist, you don't have to be a child protege to be respected.

"That was Love is Here to Stay," says the throaty radio announcer. "Continuing with our special Harry Connick Jr. hour we have a classic for you from the movie When Harry Met Sally, here's It Had to Be You followed by On the Atchison, Topeka and the Santa Fe."

I lie down on my bed. When the songs are over and a commercial comes on, Judith turns to me.

"I want to have that kind of impact," she says. "I want to make a difference. I want to write music and sing in a way that carries on the tradition."

Judith is talking about the great Jazz tradition. Another reason I don't understand her relationship with Tom is that he likes Top 40 music.

"Yeah, I know what you mean," I say. I can say this with all sincerity since Judith has given me many extensive deeply-personal lectures on the Joy of Creating Truly Soulful Compositions that Recreate the Blues in Such a Way as to Render Them Even More Meaningful and Beautiful.

"Like, just look at him!"

She holds up her "She" CD and a tasteful black and white Harry Connick Jr. stares intensely at me.

"He has it all together. He's found The Way."

Judith allows me to think about this.

"Do you see God as a source of artistic inspiration?" she asks suddenly.

"Sure," I say on my back as I examine a tiny crack in our ceiling that seems to have appeared from nowhere.

"Yeah, me too. Like, I figure, if he made my mind, he could expand it too."

"I agree. I mean, it's pretty logical."

The only thing that I ever see Judith studying for is her Psalms of David class. She could also tell you every place that musical instruments are mentioned in the Bible.

"We're going to finish up with an uninterrupted Harry Connick Jr. piano medley," says the radio announcer, "starting with Sunny Side of the Street."

Judith closes her eyes and clutches her pillow while I think about Dave. I haven't talked to him since last Sabbath, three days ago. For some reason he didn't go to classes today. Maybe it's a High Holy Day or something. I get up from my bed, walk down the hallway to the study and phone his dorm. He isn't there. I go back and lie down on my bed. Just as well. I don't know what I would have said.

"You and Tom doing anything tonight?" I say.

"Watching Memphis Belle", she says. Harry's acting debut. This would be about Judith's eleventh time seeing it since buying it.

"Doesn't Tom mind that you like him so much?" I say.

"He doesn't know," she says. "He thinks I just like the movie in general. I don't think he's noticed that Harry Connick Jr. is in it."

Like the way he probably hasn't noticed him in Little Man Tate and Hope Floats, Judith's second and third favourite movies. I cannot even conceive of revering any man but Dave. Sometimes I wish I could just have a life-size poster of him on my wall and say to everyone, "Yeah, I totally love the soon-to-be rabbi, Dave Dian. Like, he's my total hero." And I could read fan magazines about him and cut out all the good pictures and eat pomegranates for breakfast because he does. My biggest fear would be that he'd get a girlfriend before meeting me, so I'd travel to his city and hang out in his neighbourhood hoping to see him. And I'd write him hundreds of fan letters because I know he'd never get them and I could say whatever I wanted in them.

"I'm thinking of getting a tattoo," I say to Dave at lunch on Wednesday.

We're sitting alone at the end of one of the long tables.

He chokes on his bread.

"Don't do that!" he says looking at me. "It's forbidden in the Torah."

Wouldn't you know that my little flippant conversation starter would be forbidden in the Torah. So much for Dave getting my name tattooed on his arm.

"Oh, I know," I say. "I mean, I would never do it."

"I'm glad," he says. "I like you the way you are."

He returns his attention to his bread. My whole body breaks out into a sweat. How am I supposed to take this? Should I say thank you? Does he mean he really likes me? Or does he just like me because God made me the way I am?

He just likes me because God made me the way I am, I decide.

Judith and Tom are sitting across the room. He is talking animatedly and she is nodding politely.

A sudden need to have an intense conversation hits me.

"I want to know God," I say suddenly.

Dave looks up.

"Really? That's good." He sounds sincere but I don't think he senses my urgency.

"I mean, what's it like to know God?" I say.

"The Israelites met God," he says pulling out his Bible. He flips through it. "Here, in Exodus 19." He begins to read.

"Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all of the people who were in the camp trembled."

Dave looks up. "I would do anything to have been there," he says.

He continues, "And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain."

His voice is so mellow, he's going to make an amazing rabbi.

"Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice."

Dave closes his Bible and puts it back in his bag.

"Yeah. So what did he say to them?"

"He gave them the ten commandments."

"Oh." I think about this. It'd be cool to talk to God, but I really want to know God.

Dave gets up.

"I'm going back to read a bit in my dorm," he says.

Our next class is Old Testament Study in 30 minutes.

"Sure," I say with forced casualness. "See you in OTS."

"Yep." He walks away with his tray.

I need a life. I have too much time to think. I should get a job or something to keep me busy. Looking around the dining hall I see some girls in white aprons from the kitchen taking a coffee break. They look cool.

Getting up, I return my tray and go back through the swinging doorway into the kitchen. It's chaos. Men in white are rushing around carrying pans of food. Guys in aprons are manoeuvring carts of plates and glasses out to the line. Every available counter space is being used for a different culinary purpose. This commotion would crowd out all thoughts of Dave.

I walk into the office.

"I'd like to work here," I say to the older lady sitting at the desk.

"I beg your pardon," she says.

"I'd like to apply for a job," I say.

"OK," she says.

"Do I need to fill out an application?" I say.

"No," she says. "Just give us a schedule of when you can work."

It makes me slightly nervous to work for a department that hires that easily. I mean, I have no experience working in a kitchen.

The next day, I hand in a schedule saying I'll work Tuesdays and Thursdays after Biblical History until dinner. I leave weekends open just in case Dave wants to get together. I can't help it.

"Wonderful," the lady in the office says. "Will you be working today?"

"Sure," I say.

"Just put on an apron and report to Mr. Samuels," she says.

I wander around the kitchen until I find the shelf where the aprons are. Mr. Samuels, the head chef -- a tall, gaunt man who doesn't look like he eats the food he makes -- leads me to a foot of counter space and six boxes of potatoes.

"Peel," he says. "Then oil."

I'm bored already.

"I'm working in the kitchen now," I say to Dave at dinner.

"No way," he says. "Why?"

"Fulfilment."

"Do they have any kosher food back there?" he says.

"Not that I've seen."

I have come to the conclusion that my body hates me. The noise of my stomach rumbling in class is directly related to whether or not I sit beside Dave. I missed breakfast and I'm in Principles of Theology. My stomach rumbles loudly once and Dave just snickers. But if it does it again he's going to think I have a problem. I do not remember what the lecture is about because I spend the whole class telling my stomach that if it makes the slightest sound I am going to personally remove it from my body and pulverize it. Miraculously, it does not make another noise.

Dave turns to me after class and says, "Do you want to go to a movie tonight?"

I stare at him. Even though we hang out together on campus, he never asks me out.

"Sure," I say.

"OK," he says, getting up. "Catch you later."

I spend all of Weight Training in a daze. I can barely lift ten pounds. Like, the man of my dreams asked me out. I guess I expected a new world order, or something, because I'm kind of disappointed that no one asks me during the day what I'm doing tonight.

"Going out with Dave," I want to be able to say casually, as if we do it all the time.

After OTS, Dave tells me he'll pick me up at six at my dorm.

Reporting for Mass Media is a wasted class since I spend the whole time trying to decide what I'm going to wear. After trying on every piece of clothing in my mind, I'm mentally exhausted. I look at my watch. In three hours, providing that I don't have a heart attack between now and then, I'm going to be with Dave. I skip dinner because I don't feel like food.

When Dave comes I'm wearing black jeans, an oversized navy-blue sweater, and Keds. I have realized that what I wear is irrelevant since Dave won't notice.

He's wearing faded Levi's, a white shirt, and leather sandals.

"What are we going to see?" I say.

"Whatever's playing."

I was expecting him to say, Ben Hur is at the dollar theatre or that he'd rented The Ten Commandments. Is it possible that he just wanted to go out?

The movie is lame. Some chick who leaves the family farm in the midwest and moves to New York City for a bit of excitement. I don't care though. Dave has his arm around my

chair and whispers periodically throughout the movie, much to the annoyance of the people behind us. Never anything related to the film. Just things he read in the paper about the latest Arab-Israeli conflicts.

Afterwards we stop off at McDonald's. I order a Diet Coke and he has a salad, fries, and a chocolate shake.

Wouldn't this be great, I think, if we did this all the time, if we were just an average couple that likes being together and doing things together.

"So," I say. "Tell me about your childhood."

He grins as he stuffs four fries into his mouth.

"In one word?" he says after he's swallowed.

"Sure."

"Typical," he says.

Then what went wrong, I want to say. When did you stop being typical?

"Typical parents," he says. "Typical neighbourhood. Typical school. Typical WASP."

"When did you get into Judaism?"

"When I got tired of indifferent religion. When I picked up a Bible and started reading and realized that it all began with the Jews. And that the Jews actually practice what's in the Bible."

"But there's a lot of churches that read the Bible and believe it," I say.

"Judaism appeals to me," he shrugs. "It's like a calling."

Didn't I tell you I suspected as much?

When we get back to campus, Dave drops me off at my dorm.

"See you tomorrow," he says.

CHAPTER FOUR

JEAN-PAUL AND SIMONE

"Let's start a revolution of thought," says Eddie suddenly. He and Hadassah are in the lounge of his dorm watching Quantum Leap reruns. The advertisements have just come on -- some lady in a conservative pale pink suit discussing the advantages of solar heating for your home and sounding very professional although Hadassah is sure she has seen the same woman in a cat food commercial. "An intellectual movement, or something."

"OK," replies Hadassah agreeably. "Actually I've got this idea I want to bounce off you." She twists around in the sinking couch to face him. "If time travel is going to be possible in the future, why don't we have a headline in The New York Times saying, PLEASE COME AND VISIT US. Then they'll find it in the future and come back to us. And the cool thing would be that they would appear instantly since they've already gotten it, if you know what I mean."

"What if no one came?"

"Then we'd know man's blown himself up."

"Interesting," says Eddie. His tone suggests he is just using the word to acknowledge her statement, not because he actually finds it riveting.

Hadassah reflects for the moment how ironic it is that she and Eddie hang out. They have next to nothing in common except for the ability to hang-out well together. There are so many times when they part for the evening and Hadassah is left with the feeling that no meaningful communication has occurred. They both have their meaningful ideas, it just seems impossible to convey them to each other.

They met in line for registration.

"This is really the pits," he had said looking down at his registration card. "I can't believe I'm a theology major."

"You must be Catholic," she said cheerfully to him, to which he grunted a yes.

"Why are you then?" she asked. Her registration card was filled with courses she was dying to get started with -- Old Testament Women, The Role of Women in the New Testament Church, Studies in Mary, Feminist Interpretations of the Bible.

"It beats a seminary. My parents said that if I don't join the priesthood I'm going to rot in hell for my sinful youth. I managed to convince them that credits from Union would transfer to St. Andrew's Seminary. By graduation though, I'll have moved to California."

"That's too bad. Haven't your parents heard of repentance for sins?"

Eddie shrugged.

"They don't think I've repented."

He looked down at her registration card.

"You look like you've got a lot planned."

"Yeah, well, I want to be a theology major."

He examined her, appraising her long dark hair, casual white t-shirt and cut-off jean shorts with a raised eyebrow. For figure he'd give her an 8.5, for face a 9.2.

"I guess you don't look too freaky."

"I suppose you think that everyone who likes theology is a Jesus-freak."

He shrugged and turned back in line. It was her turn to appraise him. Dark hair, dark eyes. Italian blood? Maybe Irish since he was wearing an old U2 concert t-shirt with his black jeans. Intriguing enough, but she much preferred the guy in the line beside her who was positively angelic looking and reading his course catalogue with an intensity she reserved for sacred scripture. By tilting her head slightly she could read the name on his registration card. Dave Dian.

"Dave, man!" Eddie waves his hand in a friendly welcoming gesture as Dave appears at the doorway. "Hadassah and I are starting an intellectual movement. Wanna join?"

"Your gnostic knowledge won't save you," says Dave coming in and sinking into a chair. He's got a travel brochure for Israel under his arm like a Parisian carrying his loaf of French bread.

"Listen to who's talking," says Hadassah grinning at him. They have a flirtatious relationship, as flirtatious as someone can be with a man who wants to become a rabbi. "As if you're the Alpha and the Omega."

"Don't talk Greek to me," says Dave. "I don't know why you aren't more proud of your Jewish blood. I mean, I know more Hebrew than you do."

"You want to know why?" says Hadassah leaning forward as if she were sharing a secret on a rush hour subway car even though they were the only ones in the room. "It's because I believe Christ was the Messiah."

"Really?" Dave is interested. Eddie is watching the TV screen. "Why?"

"Because I believe that the women who followed him, Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Martha, and all of the others, knew what they were doing. A woman can tell things about a man that other men can't. They can see his potential."

"Yeah, but a woman can follow a total jerk around too."

"Not for the rest of her life and not after he's dead. We're talking about women who saw the man die, who watched him being crucified, and then became pillars in the church that he had started. And, I mean, for those women, Christ was It. They were widows, or not married, and they laid down their life for his cause. They didn't look around for another man to take his place. He was irreplaceable."

"That's very interesting," says Dave. "But if he was the Messiah, how come more Jews didn't catch on to his ideas?"

"They were waiting for someone to overthrow the Roman government then, not for someone to come and magnify the law and talk about a future kingdom."

"So now you're waiting for the second coming?"

"Yep. And you're waiting for the Messiah?"

"Yep."

They grin at each other.

"Let's see," says Hadassah pointing at the travel brochure that has fallen onto Dave's lap. He hands it to her.

She flips through the brochure examining the tour options.

"From Dan to Beersheeva in 5 days," she practically snorts.

"That's just for the people who want to tell their friends they've been to Israel," says Dave.

"It's funny how North Americans go over there with this tourist mentality of seeing all the important sites and as they do, checking them off in the guidebook. Church of the Nativity," she says as she stabs at a picture. "Church of the Holy Sepulchre, the Garden Tomb. I mean, they do it all over the world. See the Eiffel Tower, a beerhall, the Leaning Tower of Pisa and you've seen Europe. See Ayers Rock and a kangaroo and you've seen Australia."

"You practically have to live in a country to really see it," says Dave.

"You do. Hey, Dave. If you ever go to Israel..."

"When I go to Israel," interrupts Dave.

"OK, when you go to Israel, seriously consider trying to get on an archaeological dig. I was on one when we were there last summer and archaeology just defies modern technology. It's great. If a consulting firm from the west came on the site they'd be appalled by the inefficiency. People move dirt around in buckets and form human chains when they need to get them over the bulks and out of the locus. Then the dirt is dumped into a wheelbarrow and someone stops digging to wheel it to the designated dump spot. After further theorizing by the archaeologists, this huge mound of dirt may turn out to be the most likely spot, for say, the archives of the city." Hadassah was clearly enjoying this topic. "In that case, the big pile of dirt has to be moved before even beginning to excavate that location. It could take, no joke, thousands of years to excavate a city. All the computer chips in the world don't speed up the process of actually sifting through the dirt. That's what I love about archaeology. And archaeology is at the heart of Israel..."

"Let's start our intellectual movement tomorrow," says Eddie who has been reading the television guide. "Blade Runner's on TV tonight."

CHAPTER FIVE

SEDER

Judith has decided she wants to have a baby. She relays this information to me while I'm studying for a Reporting test in the kitchen of our dorm.

She sits down in our lime-green kitchen, complete with standard white refrigerator and the frequently-used black microwave that can be found in most college dorms, a counter with bread crumbs, cheese bits, and cola stains, a sink of dirty plastic dishes, two pastel green love-seats, and one square wooden coffee-table that also serves as a foot-stool. Someone's contributed a cotton tea-towel commemorating Canada's 125th Birthday which hangs on a peg on the wall.

"I need that element in my life," she says smoothing her hair with her hand. "I need to feel like I'm doing something worthwhile."

"So, are we talking a virgin birth?" I say. "Or has Tom agreed to be the father of your child?"

"I don't really care."

The microwave starts ping. I lazily get to my feet to retrieve my cup of hot chocolate.

"Is it that late?" Judith has caught sight of the time on the microwave and jumps up. "I was supposed to meet Tom for dinner ten minutes ago."

She's been doing this a lot lately and considering that punctuality is next to Godliness with Tom, I think it's subconscious relationship suicide.

I see Dave at dinner.

"Sit down," he says, pulling out the chair for me. "This Monday is Seder and we've got to celebrate it."

"What?" I say.

"Seder," he says. "The feast that celebrates the Israelites leaving slavery in Egypt."

He pulls a thin paperback book out of his bag.

"I've got this recipe book of how to make a Sephardic Seder. It might be hard, so we could do it together."

It's already Thursday. As I flip through the book I think, I'm a Theology major, not a Home Ec major. All I know how to make is Kraft Dinner.

"Charoset Fruit and Nut Spread," I read. "Baked Fish with Cloves and Bell Peppers, Passover Vegetable Soup, Matzo Ball Soup, Mediterranean Vegetable Salad, Yemenite Lamb with Garlic and Chives, Ashkenazim Potatoes, Almond Cake with Fruit Sauce..."

I don't see any microwave instructions.

"Sure, Dave," I say. "If we do it together."

I'm working on the principle that love conquers all obstacles.

"OK," says Dave. "We'll go shopping Sunday and make the food on Monday."

Holy days, apparently, come before classes.

On Sunday, Dave picks me up on the motorcycle and we drive to Haven, a larger town 20 minutes west of Union that has a small outdoor plaza including a grocery store and a liquor store. I'm wondering how easy it's going to be to find things like dried pitted dates and fresh fava beans.

"Look!" Dave points excitedly at a sign in the window. Visit our Kosher section.

The excitement is diminished somewhat by the Kosher section being two shelves, most of which is taken up with matzos.

"Well, we need matzos anyway," says Dave choosing a box.

"So what exactly are we going to make?" I say, pulling out the recipe book.

Dave takes the book and opens it.

"OK," he says. "Let's try to get the things for the baked fish."

We spend an hour and a half in the grocery store trying to find ingredients, or equitable substitutes, and another half hour in the liquor store finding the perfect Passover wine.

It's not easy driving on a motorcycle with several bags of grocery and it's even harder when we add a bottle of wine to the whole collection. Somehow we manage to get

everything back to campus. I help Dave bring the food back to his dorm and put it in the fridge.

"What time should I come over tomorrow," I say.

"How about ten?" he says.

I don't complain. I'll get to sleep in before spending the day with my Hebrew god.

Dave is in the lounge flipping through a thick leather book when I arrive.

"Oh, hi," he looks up. "I'm just trying to figure out how to do this. Passover is very complicated."

We go into the study where he pulls a thinner book off his shelf.

"The Haggada," he says. "I've also got the cooked egg." He holds it up.

Evidently this is supposed to please me.

"We've got to ask a blessing on the egg and a piece of matzo," he says, standing up. "It's called an eruv tavshilin."

After wrapping the egg and matzo in a bandanna, he opens the Haggada and begins to pray.

"OK," I say when he's done. "What now?"

"We can make some of the food that doesn't need cooking."

He picks the recipe book off his desk and skims it.

"Like we can start with the Haroseth."

We were able to get all of the ingredients for the Charoset fruit and nut spread but Dave is going to have a lot of leftover spices since we had to buy whole containers.

"Great," I say, reading the recipe. "We're supposed to do this with a food processor."

"Oh well," says Dave. "We'll just have to mash."

The fruit and nut spread turns out very lumpy. The Mediterranean Vegetable Salad is a lot easier. Dave's desk is starting to look messy though.

Eddie, one of Dave's roommates, walks into the study.

"Whaccha doing, man?" he says.

"Seder," says Dave.

"Yeah, later," says Eddie, wandering out with a notebook.

"That's all we can do now," says Dave picking up the salad. I follow him into the kitchen where he puts it in the fridge. "Everything else has to be cooked. But we've still got to get some lamb."

"Lamb?"

"Yeah," says Dave grinning. "We've got to find a lamb so that we can slaughter it and roast it over a fire. Preferably on the front lawn of the dorm."

"Dave!" I say.

"Just kidding. We just need a small piece of bone with some meat on it as a symbol."

"And where are we going to get a small piece of bone with some meat on it?" I say.

Dave shrugs.

"You work in the kitchen. Don't they keep any bones?"

"Not with meat on it," I say.

"What are they making for lunch?" asks Dave. "Maybe there'll be something with bones."

We make our way to the dining hall, avoiding the classrooms where the classes we should be in are going on.

Lunch is spaghetti.

"Oh great," says Dave. "What now?"

"We could check in the walk-in," I say. "They may have leftovers."

When the line ladies aren't looking we duck behind the line and through the door into the kitchen. Casually and confidently, I try to walk as if I'm coming in for a work shift and hope that any supervisors just think that Dave is a new dishroom boy.

Inside the walk-in refrigerator are shelves and shelves of silver well pans.

"Carrots, beans, spinach, macaroni and cheese, mashed potatoes," I start going through the well pans.

"I'm never going to eat in this dining hall again," says Dave looking in one of the pans.
"What's this?"

I look over. "Refried beans."

"Oh sick! How about these?"

"Leftover pancakes."

"You mean they reheat them?"

"Yep."

"Sick!"

"Aahhh! Here's something!" I say. "Leftover chicken. Can we use chicken?"

"Are you sure there isn't any lamb?"

I look exasperated.

"OK. OK. We'll take chicken."

"Any particular piece?" I say, peeling back the cellophane.

"Breast," he says.

I throw it at him.

He catches it.

"Uuuuhhhh! Cold chicken!"

"Did you expect it to be hot?"

He retaliates by ripping open the half-pan of pancakes and throwing a handful at me.

Pancakes fly everywhere. I hurl a spear of broccoli at him. He ducks and it hits Mr. Samuels who has just walked in.

"Don't you work here?" he says to me.

"Yes sir," I say.

"You're fired." He turns around and walks out.

"I'm sorry," says Dave when we're leaving the kitchen. In the midst of the mess he has managed to pick up the chicken breast.

"It's OK," I say sniffing because of the temperature change from cold to warm. "It was a boring job."

We walk back to the dorm.

"We can set the table now," says Dave going into the study, opening the bottom drawer of his desk and pulling out a small white table cloth. Underneath are plates and cutlery.

He carries the table cloth and I carry the plates into the lounge.

"I bought this in a little Jewish store back home," says Dave. "It was weird because it was before I was interested in Judaism. But I was in a Jewish neighbourhood and I saw this tablecloth. Mother's Day was coming up and I bought it for my mom."

"Did she like it?" I say.

"She pretended to."

After setting the table we start on the fish. I open the box of matzos and break off pieces to eat while we try to figure out the difference between regular cooking time and microwave time. I wonder if young Jewish couples do things like this.

"We'll just heat it a bit and see how done it is, and then keep doing it until it's cooked," says Dave.

"OK," I say. "But you have to do the tasting."

We start by heating it in five-minute intervals, and when it becomes apparent that this could take awhile, we up it to twelve-minutes.

"Twelve is a holy number," explains Dave.

When the fish is finally cooked, we put it in the fridge to reheat later. I'm starving right now. Dave gets so excited about these things that he forgets to eat and I'm worried that I'm going to devour the whole box of matzos before the sun even sets.

"Dessert," says Dave.

"Almond Cake with Fruit Sauce," I reply reaching for the bag of almonds and sticking a handful in my mouth.

Dave refused to buy any instant microwave cakes because they all had yeast in them. So once again, we are faced with making a gourmet item by trial and error. It comes out very flat. We put it in the fridge along with everything else.

The soup is easy since we bought an instant broth. All we have to do is chop up some onion, cloves, celery, leeks, artichokes, and throw in a few fava beans. I have no idea where Dave got all these bowls and trays that we're using.

"OK," says Dave. "Now the Seder tray."

He takes one of the plates and puts the blessed hard-boiled egg on it and then goes to the fridge, pulls out the charoset and smears some on the plate.

"Where'd the chicken go?"

"It's sitting on your desk."

The previously chilled cooked chicken breast has warmed to room temperature and left a grease stain on the wooden surface. Dave carefully rips out a bone that has some meat attached and adds it to the egg and charoset.

"Do we have any onion left?" says Dave. I hand him a slice and that goes on the plate.

"OK, one more thing, the karpas. We just need a green vegetable."

"Uuuhh," I look around. "How about parsley?"

"Good enough."

Dave takes the plate into the lounge and puts it on the table while I go to the fridge and pull out the salad.

"Wait!" says Dave. "We can only have the Seder plate and some salt-water on the table for the first part." He gets a cup of water, puts salt in it, and places it on the table.

Three matzos are piled on a plate and Dave separates each of them with a napkin.

We wait until it's dark outside to start. Thankfully Dave's dorm is pretty quiet so the traffic through the lounge is minimal. Plus, they all know Dave and generally stay out of his way when it's clear he doesn't want them around.

You'd think that with all the candles and wine that a Seder would be a pretty romantic meal. Instead, we alternate the Haggada back and forth, reading out loud and eating at the appropriate times. Dave insists on reading his portions in Hebrew so I spend most of the time focusing on his earlobes since it's a part of his body I never really looked at before.

Of course the evening wouldn't be complete without singing, which is a lot easier to do after half a bottle of Jewish wine, so I don't mind.

The Seder ends with the traditional words, "This year slaves, next year free; this year here, next year in Jerusalem," and Dave reads it like he really means it.

CHAPTER SIX

MICHAL'S SORROW

"Dave!"

Hadassah drops her tray and books down and slips into the seat across from him.

Dave, who has been reading Hebrew poetry, looks up carefully, sees who it is and smiles.

"Did the Seder yesterday. I don't suppose you bothered."

"Do I sense antagonism?"

"No, just righteous indignation."

"Well, for your info, I did light a few candles."

"What's that?"

He points to the sheets of paper on top of her books.

"A paper I just wrote for my OT Women class. You'd like it. It's about your namesake." She snickers.

He takes a swig of milk, wipes his mouth and picks the paper up.

"Michal's Sorrow; Bathsheba's Success," he reads.

"Yes," says Hadassah. "I like the apparent irony in King David's relationship with his first wife, Michal, and one of his later wives, Bathsheba. Despite that Michal's marriage to David was totally kosher, you know, she was given to him by her father Saul for the 100 Philistine foreskins, it wasn't a happy one, especially for Michal. Bathsheba, however, first meets the king in an adulterous encounter and later loses her husband so that David can marry her. Despite the rocky beginning, she's extremely successful in the royal court."

"And no doubt you have presented a solution to this paradox?"

"I would say much of this seeming paradox can be attributed to the different ways the two women approached King David -- Michal loved him, Bathsheba respected him."

"A succinct way of putting it," says Dave, his eyes scanning the paper.

"Also, Bathsheba was loved whereas Michal loved. Perhaps that was the most fundamental difference between the two women. Michal saw David and wanted him, David saw Bathsheba and wanted her. I think for Michal, David was the romantic giant-slayer and no doubt her love was more of an infatuation. The Hebrew word for Michal's love in 1 Samuel 18:20 is *ahab* which is a broad term that includes attraction and desire. David isn't recorded as returning the sentiment, but instead told her brother, Jonathan, 'your love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.'"

"Nothing too unreasonable about that," says Dave, grinning. "After all, it was Solomon who said 'one man among a thousand have I found, but a woman among all those have I not found.'"

"Also," continued Hadassah, ignoring him, "Bathsheba became wealthier through her union with David whereas Michal expected more. Bathsheba gained much more materially by advancing from Uriah the Hittite's wife to David, King of Israel's wife, but Michal couldn't gain much more being the King's daughter. Her happiness was depending on David's love."

"But she shouldn't have been looking for love," says Dave. "Marriages in upper class families were arranged for political purposes and Michal was merely an object to be negotiated between the two men. King Saul wanted David in his household so that he could keep tabs on this charismatic new hero and at first even offered his eldest daughter to David."

"Those are the facts, yes. But I'm talking about the emotions behind it all. Each woman handled her marriage so differently."

"But the Israelite ideal of marriage was based on the concept of God's love for Israel..."

"Yes, but marriage to a polygamous warrior like King David must have fallen short of the ideal for both Bathsheba and Michal. But Bathsheba was practising something that was brought out later by the apostle Paul, namely the idea of wives submitting to their husbands as if they're the Lord. When she came to David on his deathbed, she bowed and did homage to him before making her request."

"Well, he was king..."

"Yes, but Michal, a King's daughter, would never do such a thing. When she wanted David to know how she felt, she let him know. You know all that stuff where she says, 'how glorious was the king of Israel today, who uncovered himself in the eyes of the handmaids...' She mocked him the way a woman in love lashes out at the man who has let her down. King David's priorities in life were God, Israel, and everything else, which

meant that dancing in the streets to the Lord was perfectly acceptable. For a neglected wife watching from the window, who has been dragged away from a second husband who clearly loves her, David's actions would be unbelievably irritating."

"Love can be awful, can't it?" says Dave suddenly.

Hadassah looks at him, surprised.

"I always thought it was more horrible for women. They give their whole soul to love."

Dave doesn't say anything to this, so Hadassah adds a tid-bit of information.

"Michal is the only woman in the Bible recorded as loving a man."

"The point being, look what happened to her?"

There hadn't really been a point but Hadassah feels the need to defend a woman's love.

"Well, even if it's an implicit message, there's the Song of Solomon to counter-act the idea that love is painful and not worth pursuing."

"The Song of Solomon just reinforces the idea that love isn't worth pursuing!" says Dave, now looking at her in surprise. "Everybody's coming and going and missing each other and longing for each other and nothing's happening. No consummation of the love. No assurances anything will come of it. It's very frustrating..."

Hadassah is struck by his vehemence.

"Well, in a way, Bathsheba and Michal were up against that but again, they handled it differently," she said. "Bathsheba was confident whereas Michal was jealous. It was very hard for Michal. David started out with one wife, her, but by the time he became king over Judah in Hebron he had six wives. She was the one who had had to lower him down in a basket to protect him from her angry father and then not see him for all those years. And then when he does finally come back, he's acquired a few more women along the way. No wonder she's bitter and jealous. It's funny how her words reflect the same emotions as her father's when David was cheered by the women for killing his ten thousands and the king only his thousands."

"It's ironic that it was Bathsheba's son who wrote the words, Love is as strong as death, jealousy as cruel as the grave. And that from the book you said defends love."

Hadassah has the delicacy to realize this is not entirely an exegetical discussion and doesn't point out that saying that love is as strong as death is certainly a defense of love.

"Bathsheba," she continues, "on the other hand, knew what she was getting herself into. By the time she married the king, he had at least a couple of wives, and probably several concubines. But she still went ahead and sent her message to him saying she was pregnant and then remained passive as he arranged to have her husband killed. Whereas Michal resented David, Bathsheba used him. Ultimately her mission was to see that her son, Solomon, was crowned king. I don't doubt she had an affection for David, but it's pretty clear that her love for her son was stronger and her relationship with Solomon was deeper, if you go by the beginning of Proverbs 31. If King Lemuel is Solomon, Bathsheba refers to him as the son of my womb...the son of my vows.

"And Michal never had a child..."

"Exactly. She had no one to give her intense love to so instead, a resentment towards David built up because he could not provide all of her emotional needs, not when he had so many other problems to contend with, like his already large family, and his growing kingdom, not to mention that he was a man of war, defending and conquering most of his life. There's no evidence that Bathsheba resented David's lack of attention. She had been conquered and was willing to remain in the background until it was time for her to come forward to press for her son's enthronement and ultimately, it was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, not Michal, the daughter of King Saul, who played a greater role in the history of Israel since the nation reached it's zenith under her son Solomon. It was also Bathsheba's son who carried on the Messianic line."

"I'll ignore that about the Messianic line."

"My point is, she knew her role and she played it."

"Why do you call it a role?"

"Because in the Kingdom of God there will be no male or female."

Dave sighs.

"Sorry," says Hadassah grinning. "Couldn't help it."

"OK, if a woman isn't a wife, I mean, if she never gets married, what's her position?"

"At that point, she's pretty much free to define her own role."

"Which is what you do," says Dave smiling and handing her back the paper.

"Exactly."

"So, what's a man without a woman?"

"A man without a helper."

"Does it bother you that you're just a helper? I mean, where's your power coming from?"

"Dave, Dave," Hadassah shakes her head. "You have a very male-oriented perspective when you read the scriptures. Women used their feminine charm to empower themselves. Esther saved a kingdom by flirting with a king. Ruth married Boaz and got security for her and her mother-in-law. Jael charmed a general into her tent and stabbed him in the head with a tent pick. Delilah seduced the strongest man in Israel and sold him to the Philistines."

"So that's what the patriarchal system is all about! Don't you have any respect for the historical authority of men?" He is speaking lightly, his eyes glimmering with challenge.

"Dave, I have no respect for the patriarchal system and there's nothing in the Hebrew scriptures to indicate it's some great achievement in government. As a matter of fact, I think the Bible deliberately makes patriarchy look defective. Think about it. Tamar's rape by her half-brother. The other Tamar having to sleep with her father-in-law to have a child. A concubine being gang-raped and mutilated after her lover throws her out to the men of the city. If those stories aren't smears on the patriarchal system, I don't know what is."

Dave is momentarily quieted by her strong opinion.

"So, all things considered, do you suggest women still use their charms today?" he finally asks.

Hadassah shrugs.

"It's an option. However, a quick reading of the New Testament will show that women are more service-oriented than charm-oriented. I mean, a lot of the women in the Old Testament were beautiful, but the New Testament doesn't even mention how they look."

"Which way do you prefer?"

Hadassah thinks about it.

"Well, I think Christianity is more liberating. Women in the New Testament aren't mentioned in relationship to men as much. I mean, there are single women, widows, and people like Mary and Martha who had their own household. There's nobody like Mary, who sat at Christ's feet and listened to him teach, in the Old Testament."

"I like your sandals," says Dave looking down at her feet.

"Thanks. I got them at an Arab stall in the Old City last summer."

"You were in the Arab section?" Dave asks. "Isn't that kind of dangerous?"

Hadassah shrugs.

"I don't really look Jewish. Besides, Arab men are hot."

Dave holds his head in his hands.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE RUTH PLAN

The next day I skip Bib History to sleep in. Now that I don't work, I've got the whole day free again. I could probably do homework, but it seems irrelevant after spending an evening in Egypt coming out of slavery. Instead, I grab a notebook and pen and walk into Union.

To get to Union, I follow the road that runs outside of the school -- a two-lane highway that is basically just a paved country road. There's forest on one side and fenced-in fields on the other.

Despite the very North American landscape, I'm pretending that I'm in Jerusalem, working for the Jerusalem Post, and I've been sent out to cover a minor Israeli-Arab scuffle at a local diner. Do they have diners in Israel?

"Good morning," I say to the lady behind the counter. "I'm with the Post and I'm doing a story on the fight that broke out here earlier this morning."

Actually, what I really say is "Good morning, I'll have a coffee and an orange juice."

"Yes," she says. "It was awful. Mostly Jews come in here. But this morning an Arab boy..."

"About how old would you say he was, ma'am?"

"About seventeen, maybe older. I don't know why he came in here, but he did. Came up to the counter and ordered a juice."

"What kind of juice, ma'am? My readers like details."

"Regular-sized orange. All the Jewish men were eyeing him, waiting for him to do something, or say something. But he didn't. He just drank his juice."

"How did the fight break out?"

"On his way out he kicked the back of one of the men's chairs. It may have been an accident, but it's hard to tell. All the men jumped up and surrounded him."

"I've read the hospital report, I know the rest. What nationality are you ma'am?"

"I came from America five years ago. I love Israel, but I hate the bloodshed."

"Thank you ma'am. You've been helpful."

I take my juice and coffee to a booth by the window. The diner is empty. Staring out the window at the empty parking lot, I wonder if it would be possible to start over and pretend I never met Dave. I could just go back to campus, ignore him and see if he notices. I'd be so ticked off if he didn't do anything.

There's a newspaper sitting on a table beside me so I flip through the world news then turn to Ann Landers. A long letter about being nice to your pets. A question about what to do with an aging parent who refuses to go to a nursing home. I think about what my question to Ann Landers would be.

Dear Ann, I'm in love with an aspiring rabbi. I'm not Jewish, but neither is he. Do you think I have a future with this man? Signed, Considering Conversion.

When I get back to campus it's lunchtime. Dave is sitting at a table of guys, all of them Theology majors. The conversation looks intense so I go and sit with Judith and Tom.

"Hey! Where've you been?" says Judith. "Dave's been looking for you."

"No way!" I say. "I walked to Union."

"Why?"

I shrug.

"Why not? What did Dave want?"

"Something about you accidentally taking his haggis."

After four glasses of wine anything's possible, though I don't remember waking up with a Haggada in my bed.

I get up and go over to Dave.

"Hey Dave!" I say, clearing my throat. Dave turns around.

"Hi!" he says.

"Hi!" I say. "I don't think I have your Haggada."

"Oh, I know," he says. "It's just that I wanted Judith to know that it was important that you got back to me."

I nod.

"Good idea."

"Well, anyway, how are you?" he says. "Here, sit down." He pulls out the chair beside him. The guy who was sitting there is at the salad bar.

"I'm fine," I say. "Really good, actually."

"Yeah, me too. Last night was amazing."

"Yeah, it really was," I say.

"Really moving."

"Yeah, really."

We're talking quietly but I have no doubt the other guys can hear us. I am thrilled that they might be led to believe that Dave and I engaged in a fornicative act last night.

The guy from the salad bar has come back and is standing behind his chair.

"Yeah, well, I'll just go back over there," I say nodding my head towards Judith and Tom.

"Yeah, OK," says Dave. "We'll talk." He turns back to the group discussion.

I sense things happening between us though I'm not sure what.

"Business skills are so important," Tom is saying to Judith when I sit down after getting my food. "Even for jazz musicians."

Judith nods.

"Have you considered taking any business courses, Judith?"

"No," says Judith. "I don't have the time."

Their conversations bore me to death. Judith is really an interesting person, you'd just never know it listening to her and Tom. They're the only couple I know who has no middle ground when it comes to mutual interests.

"I spend all my spare time composing," says Judith "You know that."

Tom shrugs.

"What d'ya wanna do tonight?"

"I thought we were going to the concert."

There's a small jazz festival going on at the Union Community Centre.

"Oh, right."

Last night they watched an intra-mural basketball game for Tom.

Sarah, a girl in my weight training class, sits down beside me.

"Have you studied for the test?" she says to me.

"What test?" I say.

"The one on body muscles."

"I didn't know we had a test."

Then I remember that I skipped yesterday's class. I think I should be exempted from tests in that class since I only take it for the physical benefits.

Going back to the dorm, I study my few weight training notes. Nothing goes in because all I can think about is Dave and every time the phone rings I get up to answer it because I'm thinking maybe 'we'll talk' means tonight.

But he doesn't call and I get more depressed as the evening drags by. Finally I just go to bed.

We're sitting in Principles of Theology the next day, when in comes a messenger from Administration. He hands a note to the instructor.

"Dave Dian," says the instructor, waving a hand for him to follow the man.

Dave puts his books into his bag, brushes past me and exits with a neutral look on his face.

Oh God! What's happened? Administration only calls you in to tell you someone's died or to kick you out. I panic. I imagine life without Dave. I'd need a psychiatrist.

Stay calm, I tell myself. If I'm lucky maybe his great aunt passed away or something.

I try to phone Dave before weight training but there's no answer. The only reason I go to weight training is because exercise is supposed to relieve stress but I only end up failing a test.

Dave isn't in OTS. Having no idea what Rabbi Hirshel is talking about, I read the Psalms for encouragement the entire class.

I find out at dinner via Anna, a girl who works in Student Services, that Dave was called in about the empty wine bottles he carelessly tossed in his trash bin. Characteristically, he doesn't mention this to me the next day at lunch, nor does he tell me how he got around prohibition. I pretend nothing happened.

It's Friday afternoon and I'm getting ready to go over to Dave's dorm when Judith comes in.

"I don't know how to say this," she says.

"What?" I say, turning around.

She looks upset.

"What's the matter?"

"I think Dave is seeing someone else."

"What?!"

"Yeah. I didn't want to say anything until I knew more, but I was talking to Amy Rosenthal and she says he's been going out practically every night with Tara Levin."

This, as far as I'm concerned, is below the belt because there is nothing I can do to change the fact that I am not Jewish.

"So..." I finally say. "Does he still want me to go over there tonight?"

"I dunno," shrugs Judith.

I lie down on my bed and feel nothing. Kind of like when someone you love dies and you're body refuses to accept it at first.

When I get up, I put on a little black dress and carefully do my make-up.

"Hey El!" says Dave when I arrive. "You look great!"

"Thank you," I reply.

The Sabbath has become a routine for me. I have the ritual memorized. My only change to it has been that in addition to bread, I bring cheese and vegetables and whatever else I feel like so that we can have more of a real dinner. It was ridiculous just eating bread since I read some stories about Jewish families and they always have huge Friday-night dinners.

What makes this Sabbath unique is that I am looking for signs in Dave that he's changed, or that he feels guilty. But he's just the same. When we're eating the bread, I want to start talking about faith and trust, but instead I talk about an independent study I have to do for Reporting for Mass Media and how I'm going to do it on the Gaza Strip.

Dave nods a lot, but his mind seems to be on other things.

I feel like a married woman who knows her husband has a mistress but doesn't know how to work it into the conversation. When I stop talking, the room is silent. Dave settles back into the chair, eats his bread and sips his wine.

"Are you happy?" I say to him after awhile.

"Yes," he says smiling at me. And I can tell he really means it.

"The thing is," I say to Judith that night in the dorm. "He could have been happy at that moment, or he could have been happy because he was thinking about Tara."

"He doesn't treat Tara any better than he treats you," says Judith. "Amy was telling me that all they do is drive down to Lake Melbourne and Dave just asks her questions on what it's like to grow up Jewish."

"Really?"

"Uh-huh. And Tara's getting worried 'cos she's running out of things to tell him."

"He'll dump her when she does," I say as I start to laugh. It's suddenly become clear to me that Dave is only using Tara. Sure enough, Amy reports to Judith the next week that Dave isn't calling up Tara anymore. Tara is devastated.

I want to say something sarcastic to him like, "Oh did I tell you that I'm changing my name to Naomi Goldberg?"

"You just gotta do something to get his attention," says Judith. We're sitting on our respective beds and Judith is examining her legs for the little varicose veins that look as if a blue pen has accidentally brushed the flesh without the writer realizing she has left a mark. "Something totally out of the ordinary that will impress him."

"Yeah but what?" I say.

"OK, say some woman in the Old Testament wanted to get a man's attention, what would she do?"

"I dunno," I say. "Lie at his feet?"

"That's it!" says Judith looking up. "Do what Ruth did! Lie at his feet!"

"How?" I ask leaning forward, "I mean, Boaz had fields and threshing floors. It wasn't like he lived in a room with three other men."

"We'll think of a way," says Judith, uncrossing her legs. "You have to admit it's a great idea."

"Yeah," I say, staring at the wall as I think about this new idea. "It's pretty good. Actually, it's very good. It will definitely get his attention if I can pull it off."

"OK," says Judith. "The key would be to get his roommates out of the room for the night."

"Yeah, so say we did. How do I get into his dorm?"

"Take his key."

"OK, so say I get into his room. What if he wakes up and hears someone?"

"He'll think it's a roommate coming in."

"OK, but what if he wakes up when I lie at his feet?"

"Be very careful."

I have images of being attacked by Dave mistaking me for an intruder. I decide I wouldn't mind.

"So how do we get the roommates out of the room?" I ask.

"First of all, who are they?"

"Eddie Prince, Joseph Paige, and David Richler."

"I'll have a party and invite them."

"It's gotta be for all night though," I say. "I'm supposed to lie at his feet and fall asleep."

Judith and I decide we'll keep working on it. I don't know how we're going to do it, but the more I think about it the more I know it's got to be done because there's no other way that I can get Dave to take me seriously. I've come to the conclusion that he needs a girl to make an impact on him because it's not as if he's actively looking for a girlfriend.

Knowing that I've got the Ruth plan makes it easier for me to deal with Dave being surrounded by girls when I see him in the dining hall on Monday. I take a chair kitty-corner to him and check out the competition. Not too threatening, except for two of the girls being Jewish and I figure they have a limited number of childhood stories to tell him. It's funny how the same girls who renounce their Jewish heritage to date Gentiles suddenly turn orthodox around Dave.

Dave is asking Rebecca if she follows the purification rites after menstruation. She turns red.

"Uhhh, that's not really important unless you're married," she says.

Dave nods as he takes a bite out of his bread.

"Hey!" he says smiling at me like he's just noticed me.

"Hey!" I say.

"What's up?"

"The ceiling."

He grins.

"You little Gentile."

"Yeah, well, I'm thinking of changing my name to Goldberg."

The two Jewish girls look annoyed.

"If you want to convert, I've got all the info."

"I'm still waiting for my calling."

The next day, after Bib History, I walk into Union and go to the diner. I have a story to write for my Mass Media class and it's got to be local. I've decided I'm going to do it about the diner just to make a point about being asked to do a news story on something that isn't newsworthy.

After ordering a coffee at the counter, I tell the woman I'm doing an article for my school newspaper and ask her how long the diner's been open.

"Since six a.m., honey," she replies. Even though that's not exactly the question I want answered I decide to include it in my article.

"What kind of people come in here?"

"Oh, all sorts."

"What would you say is your best item on the menu?"

"Probably the grill cheese. Maybe the pecan pie, when it's in."

"What would you like to be remembered for?"

I expect her to say their coffee since every small town diner seems to want to be known for their world-famous coffee.

"I want to be remembered for organizing a society for the betterment of mankind," she says. She's serious. She's standing there in a baby blue polyester dress with white trim serving hamburgers in a small town and she wants to be known for organizing a society for the betterment of mankind.

"Thank you ma'am," I say writing this down as she refills my coffee cup. I carefully make note of the menu and the prices, as well as the daily special since I have a feeling that my article is going to need a lot of filler.

I've been spending most of my time trying to come up with a way of getting Dave's roommates out of the room for a night and apart from drugging them all, which I'm seriously considering, I haven't thought of anything.

Back in the dorm Judith suggests it might be easier to just get Dave out of the room. So it becomes an issue of how to drug Dave, take him somewhere appropriate, preferably someplace that has a lot of straw, and then hope he comes out of it before morning. We decide we'll keep working on it.

Judith is getting ready to go out. She's curling her hair which means she must be doing something special.

"Bill Harrison rented When Harry Met Sally and we're watching it at his dorm," she says.

"You're curling your hair to watch a movie?" I say. Then it hits me. 'We' doesn't include Tom.

"Wow," I say. "Congratulations."

"Oh, it's nothing like that," she says. "It's just that Tom is sick of the movie and since Bill asked me I thought, what the hey?"

"I'm going to pray you fall in love," I say. "He plays the piano doesn't he?"

"Yeah, but he's into old jazz, like Louis Armstrong, not modern jazz."

I roll my eyes.

When she's left I pick up the Bible and turn to Ruth.

"Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons..."

I read the whole story of how Ruth married one of the sons only to have him die. Then she refuses to leave her mother-in-law Naomi, and goes back with her to Judah where she works in Boaz's wheat fields. Well, Boaz turns out to be a relative of Naomi's and rumour has it that he likes Ruth. So Naomi tells Ruth when Boaz will be at his threshing floor and how she should go and lie at his feet. When he wakes up, he finds her there and agrees to marry her. After a little bargaining they're married.

Believe it or not, I wouldn't mind being married to Dave. My conversion to Judaism probably wouldn't be too sincere, but I'd do it anyhow and if we ever moved to Jerusalem I could specialize in the Middle Eastern conflict and send articles to Western papers and magazines.

When Judith comes back she tells me she's going to have a party a week from Saturday night and she's going to invite Eddie, Joseph, and David.

"I talked it over with Bill," she says.

"You talked it over with Bill?!" I say.

"Oh I didn't tell him why you want Eddie, Joseph, and David to stay out all night. He didn't ask. He just said it sounded like fun."

"Well how're you going to do it?"

"What?"

"Keep them out all night."

"Bill says he'll mickey-finn their drinks."

"Where're you having it?"

"Bill says we could probably do it in one of those old portable classrooms that aren't used anymore."

They're in a far corner of the campus close to where Old Testament Study is held and I think that most of the faculty has forgotten that they even exist.

"If that doesn't work, Bill will lock them in the bathroom."

Thank God she met Bill. Tom would never do this.

The next day I see Judith talking to Joseph Paige in the dining hall at the drink station. Since she never talks to any of Dave's roommates, she's trying to build a casual rapport between now and the time she says, big one at old classroom five.

She comes and sits with me.

"What did you say to him?"

"I said, I like your tie."

Dave comes into the dining hall, goes straight to the salad bar and comes to sit beside me with his plate full of raw vegetables.

"Hey!" I say. "What's up?"

"God's throne."

Tom comes and sits beside Judith. I'm glad to see that there's no look of joy on Judith's face. I really do hope she gets together with Bill. For one thing, he's from New York City and Dave and I could visit them on vacation someday since I've always wanted to visit New York.

"Hey babe," Tom says.

Judith smiles briefly at him. Only I notice that her attention has been diverted by Bill walking through the dining hall.

We're up to Song of Solomon in Old Testament Study. I think Dave and I both get something different out of the class. I'm like, I hope he's taking this in and planning to use it in some way but I look down at his notes and see that he's writing down all the spiritual interpretations of the lover's words. If Song of Solomon doesn't affect him I wonder if I have what it takes to.

In Reporting for Mass Media I hand in my article about the diner. The headline is, LOCAL DINER THE HEADQUARTERS OF SOCIETY FOR THE BETTERMENT OF MANKIND. I'm expecting a D even though it's well-written.

Judith isn't sitting in our usual spot at dinner because she's on the other side of the dining hall eating with Bill and David Richler. They all look they're having a great time. When she gets up to go to the drink station I meet her there.

"Hey!" she says grinning. "Guess what? David's really into jazz too. So we're making it a jazz party Saturday night."

She's really excited and tells me how they're going to co-ordinate all of their CDs since she's got a lot of modern, Bill's got old, and David's got be-bop. They're thinking of making it a flapper's bash with tons of wine instead of beer. She shuts up when Dave comes to the drink station with a plateful of bread and cooked vegetables. They're serving ham on the line.

So as not to offend, I have a salad for dinner. Actually, I stopped eating pork after Dave referred me to the Levitical clean and unclean meats. I also stopped mixing meat with milk -- which isn't something I do often anyhow. I'm just careful not to eat cheeseburgers, at least around Dave.

"What's your favourite colour, Dave?" I ask to make conversation when he comes and sits across from me.

He stops to think.

"Blue, no, purple."

"Favourite secular book."

He thinks for awhile.

"A History of Jerusalem."

"How about fiction?"

"Exodus by Leon Uris."

"Favourite song?"

"Exodus the theme song. I saw the movie too."

"What do you look for in a woman?"

He grins.

"Teeth like a flock of sheep, lips like a thread of scarlet, temples like a piece of pomegranate."

He was taking it in during OTS.

"What's *your* favourite colour?" he says.

"Red."

"Favourite secular book?"

"The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau."

"Fiction?"

"Murder on the Orient Express by Agatha Christie."

"Song?"

"Happy Birthday to You sung by Marilyn Monroe."

"What do you look for in a man?"

"Earlobes, he's definitely got to have good earlobes."

"Do I sense sarcasm?"

"No. My favourite colour for apples is red and when I was five I loved The Undersea World of Jacques Cousteau."

"Hey, do you want to do something tonight?"

"Sure," I say, unbelievably casually.

"Let's go somewhere on the bike."

After we finish eating we drive to Lake Melbourne which is only twenty minutes away. Lake Melbourne is in between a forest and a clearing with some cottages randomly scattered around it. Since the summer residents haven't come yet, we pick a dock to sit on and stare out at the still water. I want to push Dave in just to see what he'd do. It's like, I'm tired of spending my life on the shore, let's just get in and swim around a bit.

I wonder how he started conversations with Tara. Did he just say, tell me about your childhood? I mean, it's hardly like he's interested in my childhood since he's just looking at the lake.

"It'd be cool to come fishing here," says Dave suddenly. "Except that I don't have a fishing rod, and if I did, it'd be awkward on the bike."

I nod.

"Yeah."

"I mean, I grew up in suburbia and we never did things like go fishing. The most we ever did was go on a picnic in the park."

"If you have kids, do you want to take them out fishing?"

"Yeah, I guess. I don't know. I'll probably be busy."

I'll take them fishing, I want to say. But I know that's not the point. We've got to take care of the here and now first.

I take off my shoes and stick my feet in the water. Dave lies down on his stomach beside me. We'd make an amazing photo, you know, one of those black-and-white pictures where you look at it and think, wow, they're so beautiful, I bet they're really happy. It's a sad disillusionment to find out that it's not enough to just look good together.

After an hour or so we go back to campus.

"Thanks," says Dave when he drops me off. "I had a good time."

I look forward to Tuesdays and Thursdays because that's when I walk into Union and go to the diner. This Thursday I bring a book along, *The History of Jerusalem*, which I've checked out of the library. I order a complete meal, which I've never done before. Grilled cheese, chips, and a dill pickle. I go all out and have a malted milk too.

The History of Jerusalem, although not exactly the most enticingly-written, is certainly informative. I can only read a chapter at a time there's so much to be taken in. Turning the book over, I order a coffee, and slouch down in the vinyl booth chair.

The decor is pale blue with a white and grey tile floor. I like the lady who works here because she doesn't feel any obligation to talk to her customers beyond taking their order. Instead she sits behind the counter with a newspaper and a cup of coffee.

She only looks about thirty-five, but seems older. Tired. I imagine her husband to be about forty with a beer belly and a job as the high school janitor, or something. When she goes home after a long day in the diner, she probably has to face a hungry family and a man in a white undershirt.

When I get back, I work on some homework before going to dinner. Since neither Judith nor Dave are in the dining hall, I sit with some girls from my weight training class. If I hadn't taken an all-girls phys-ed class, I wouldn't have known any females on this campus apart from Judith.

"What are you doing for the summer," asks one of them.

Don't remind me that it's only three weeks away.

"I dunno yet," I say.

They talk about their plans.

I may go home. Or, I may go to New Orleans with Judith for awhile since she keeps telling me I should get a job with a local newspaper while she checks out the music scene. She's composed quite a few pieces, and although I don't think she knows exactly what she's going to do with them, she wants to do it in New Orleans.

Dave is from Manitoba and I still haven't come up with a plausible reason for spending my summer there.

Judith is lustily singing along to one of my old Duran Duran CDs when I come back to my dorm.

Turning down the volume, Judith tells me that she ran into Eddie Prince in the library and they had a long conversation about what it's like to be one of the few Gentiles majoring in

Theology. It was an instant bonding since Eddie, although forced by his strict Catholic parents to become a Theology major, said it's really deepened his outlook on life. Although he's more into rock music, he's especially into groups with a social conscience. His walls are covered with U2 posters.

"So I told him about the party and he said he'd be there for sure," says Judith. "He said it sounded really cool."

"Anyhow," she says. "I've gotta go. Bill and I are going to the music department so I can play some of my pieces for him on the piano."

Yet despite this she maintains that she's still going out with Tom. Ten-to-one says Bill shows up in New Orleans this summer.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HANGING OUT

"Did you go to synagogue as a child?" Dave asks abruptly, looking up from his Hebrew book. Hadassah assumes the question is meant for her since Eddie, who is sharing the couch with her, has probably never even seen a synagogue. She has come over to their dorm lounge to help Eddie with a paper for his Themes in Theological Studies class.

"Sure, on high holy days."

"How come not regularly?"

"My parents weren't the most religious people. Very career-oriented, which of course means that I'll probably be uncareer-oriented since these things skip a generation."

"Did you guys ever talk religion?"

Hadassah turns her book, *Women of Thessalonica*, over onto the soft couch.

"Well, once I asked my dad how Christ could be Jewish and Christian. He explained to me, and I think he was kind of having fun, that Christ was a transitional reformer of Judaism. And I said, well what's the difference between Jews and Christians? And he said the Jewish faith still believes that they are God's chosen people, whereas the Christian faith believes that Christ's coming terminated that position and they are now God's instrument. I asked him if he thought he was one of God's chosen and he told me it referred to religion, not race, and that religious struggles are always tricky because people tend to be dogmatic."

"How did your parents explain something like the Holocaust to you?"

"My dad said that when you have two distinct communities, like Judaism and Christianity, that are forced to function in the same economic and political system you're going to have friction. He told me to read up on Jewish-Christian relations over the last 2,000 years so that I could get an overview instead of just focusing on one frightening episode as if that represented a culmination of history."

"Did you?"

"Yeah. It's a shame because it seems like when it comes to individuals, Jews and Christians can get along reasonably well. It's the ruling authorities that have a problem with it."

"So, was it the reading up on Christianity that made you believe Christ was the Messiah?"

"Oh no! In fact, I believe that Christ is the Messiah despite Christian history. No, I just picked up a Bible in my dad's study one day and started reading the Gospel of Matthew and was struck by the whole philosophy of this man who I had always thought was a wimp from the pictures I'd seen of a pale, bleeding man on a cross. But then I started thinking about it. He was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth. I've been to Israel enough times to know that the men there are built. I mean, they are hot. There's no way Christ could have been pale since he would have been sunburnt all the time, and there's no way he could have been so thin if he were a carpenter."

"So your calling was based on the fact that he was probably good-looking?"

"My calling was based on the fact that if I had been in Jerusalem in the first century, I know I would have spent the rest of my life following him around, listening to him and later joining his church."

"If this is about some women's rights issue -- Christ as the liberator of women of his time..."

"That is an entirely different issue. You know that's an entire field of study by itself. And, no, that's not what I'm talking about. I'm a woman living 2,000 years after the time of Christ with all the rights I need to live a successful life so I wasn't looking for a liberator when I read about his life. I was struck by the timelessness of his message."

Dave shrugs.

"I won't deny he was an effective teacher. Original and all that. But I still think this is about women's rights." He grins.

"If you want to talk about women's rights," says Hadassah. "I was reading this article about Old Babylonian marriage contracts and there was this one from about the 18th century B.C. that said if a wife wanted a divorce, her husband could shave her and put her on the slave market."

"Well that's not too unreasonable..."

"But get this, it could work in reverse! If it was the man who wanted a divorce, his wife could shave him and make him her slave. Not only that, he had to make sure she always had wool and oil. Isn't that hilarious?"

"I really don't find that funny," says Eddie who is sprawled on the couch, his feet on Hadassah's lap, with a notebook, pen, and bottle of non-alcoholic beer.

Hadassah smiles at Dave.

"What if they both wanted a divorce?" he asks grinning. "Would they shave each other and both be slaves?"

"You would have had to have been an idiot to file for a divorce," says Eddie, turning a page in his notebook.

"I think that was the point," says Hadassah. "It kept people together."

"Can I interrupt to ask what systematic theology is?" asks Eddie.

"It's the study of dogmatics, you know, universal truth, what you know as opposed to what you believe," replies Hadassah. "Why? How are you going to work that in?"

"I dunno," says Eddie thoughtfully, taking a swig of his drink. "It just sounds good, systematic theology."

"OK, my turn to ask you questions," says Hadassah to Dave, shifting in her corner position to pull her legs up onto the couch. "What do you see in that girl you're always hanging out with?"

"Which one?" asks Dave grinning.

"Well I don't mean your Jewish harem. The Gentile one. With the long hair. I mean, does she have a meaningful inner philosophy?"

"Eh? I dunno. I never asked her." Dave turns back to his Hebrew book.

"Well, she's got to believe something. What do you guys talk about?"

"Oh, you know, just Jewish stuff."

It's hard to tell whether he's being genuinely indifferent.

"But she's not Jewish. Why would she want to talk about Jewish stuff?"

"I don't know. Why don't you ask her?"

"Because I never talk to her. Like I'm just going to go up to her and say, Hi. I know I don't know you, but I'm wondering why you talk to Dave Dian about Jewish stuff when you're not Jewish."

"Why not?" Dave shrug.

"Dave, you're in your own world."

CHAPTER NINE

IN SEARCH OF A GOOD NEWS STORY

I decide to freak out Dave and learn a bit of Hebrew. At lunch I go to our recently remodelled three-story, fluorescent-lit library that now looks like it could serve fast-food at the circulation desk and take out a book about Jewish living that has a list of Hebrew and Yiddish sayings in the back. During Reporting for Mass Media, I memorize all the ones that may be useful. The lecture is about grammar, which if I haven't learned at this point in my academic career, I probably never will.

"Gut Shabbos, Dovid!" I say when I arrive at his dorm with the customary loaves of bread.

"Shabbat Shalom," he replies.

After we light the candles, I ask him how easy it is to become a gyoret. He doesn't seem too impressed that I know the word for a female convert.

"Much the same as a man," he says. "Except no circumcision, obviously. You've got to petition three times to a rabbi and learn enough about Judaism to become Jewish."

"Is there a ceremony?"

"Yeah, the mikva which is like a bath. Then the rabbi writes you up your sh'tar gerut which is your official certificate of conversion."

"Then what?" I say.

He shrugs.

"You're a real Jew. A lot of gyorets take on the name Ruth as their Hebrew name since she was a convert too."

It's a sign.

"It's something you've got to be serious about though," says Dave. "'Cos it's not like you can go back on it."

"Chalila!" I say. Translation: God forbid.

Dave grins.

"Yeah. Really."

"Maybe I'll just be a chasidei umot ha-olam."

"A friend of the Jews," Dave nods.

I pull out the bread and some sparkling grape juice.

"B'teavon," I say.

Dave looks puzzled.

"Bon appetit."

I've used up all my words except mazzeltov and I don't know how I'm going to work 'congratulations' into the conversation.

Dave suggests a walk after the bread. We head to the outer perimeter of the campus to avoid the Friday-night partiers, ironically ending up at the old classroom complex. Dave sits down on some steps outside one of the doors.

All I know is that Dave has two older sisters so I ask him about his family. I mean, what was a typical day in the Dian household?

He shrugs.

"Mom worked. Dad worked. Sue was always with her boyfriend. Gina studied a lot."

"Did you eat dinner together?"

"Yeah, practically every night. If you want an example of traditional Christianity that's my family. We went to church every Sunday. We even went to church picnics."

"My parents never went to church," I say. "I think that's why I took Principles of Theology."

"Do you believe in God?" he asks.

"Yeah."

"Why?"

Because you couldn't have evolved, I think.

Out loud I say, "It's a faith I have."

"I'd love to know what it's like up there," says Dave looking up at the sky.

"What do Jews say about life after death?"

"They don't. The Old Testament doesn't directly mention it. There's a lot of different ideas though. Some people say you go to a place like the garden of Eden, Gan Eden."

"What do you think?"

"I like that idea."

Any other guy would be getting pretty romantic now, alone in a deserted part of campus. Dave seems content to stare up at the sky. I guess I admire his depth.

"Hey Dave!" I want to say. "What do you think of us?"

But I know it would ruin his evening, so instead I look up at the stars and ask him if he can find Orion.

I spend Saturday morning in bed with a cup of coffee, a bag of cookies and a book on how to have a Jewish wedding.

I decide I want a Jewish wedding whether or not I convert just because there's this one part where the woman circles the man seven times to signify that he is the centre of her universe, which aptly describes my relationship with Dave.

Judith is humming *You Didn't Know Me When* as she sorts out her closet. She's been noticeably happy lately, more specifically, since she started to spend time with Bill.

"What are you going to do today?" she asks me.

"I don't know."

"Have you started studying yet?"

Finals are in a week.

"I can't concentrate on studying before the Ruth plan," I say.

"Like you'll really be able to concentrate afterwards," she says.

She turns back to her closet and starts to sing, "With imagination, I'll get there..."

I drag myself out of bed and decide she has a point about concentrating. If I don't study now I could fail my junior year. Principles of Theology is my best study choice, followed by OTS, because if I have any questions I can call Dave.

By dinner time I've memorized the themes and meanings of the names of all the minor prophets, as well as significant scriptures in each.

"How can two walk together except they be agreed?" I say to Dave at dinner. "Hosea 3:3."

"You're right," says Dave nodding.

"What are some things two people have to agree on to walk together?" I say.

"Religion," he pauses. "Maybe politics." Pause. "Music, clothing, what you take in your coffee." He grins.

And to think that before I met Dave I seriously did judge guys on music, clothes, and whether they took sugar in their coffee.

"What are you doing tonight?" I ask.

"Going to bed," he says. Dave is not an adherent to the belief that you have to party on a Saturday night. I'm glad because it'll make the Ruth plan easier.

I go back to the dorm with every intention of studying. Judith is on the phone. When she gets off she asks me if I want to go out on a double-date.

"Who's my lucky man?" I say.

"Bill."

I give her a look.

"Tom wants to go to a movie and I said that we should bring you guys along."

"So have you talked to Bill?"

"Yeah, I just phoned him. He said it'd be great."

"Does he know I'm his date?"

"Of course," says Judith airily.

The movie turns out to be the same one Dave and I saw. Just my luck. I never go out to movies but when I do, I see the same one twice.

Judith and Bill end up beside each other with me and Tom on either end. I sit and try to remember everything that Dave said to me during the movie. Most of it comes back verbatim. If I could apply the technique I use in listening to Dave to my classes I'd never have to study.

Tom seems oblivious to Judith and Bill talking throughout the film and I'm surprised Bill doesn't put his arm around her seat.

Afterwards we go to the diner. Coffee for me, Coke for everyone else. Judith and Bill are laughing and joking about the lousy background music in the film, something which is only funny to them. Feeling sorry for Tom I turn to him and try to start a conversation.

"So, you're a business major, eh?"

"Yeah."

"Do you like it?"

"Yeah. I want to get into management."

I nod.

"That's cool. So, what do you do in your spare time?"

He gives me a look, like, why is this chick talking to me?

"I play a lot of sports," he says.

"What is it now?" I say. "Baseball season?"

"Yeah."

"Do you like baseball?"

"Yeah," he says.

"Me too," I say. "I'm a Laker's fan myself."

I heard some businessman say that once.

"That's basketball," he says.

"Oh," I say. "Do you like basketball?"

"Yeah," he says.

"Better than baseball?"

"Uh-huh."

"How about hockey? I went to a hockey game in Montreal once."

"I'm not into hockey," he says.

"Well, not everyone is, I guess," I say. "What do you think of soccer?"

"It's OK." He seems to be getting bored with this conversation, so I stop and we listen to Bill and Judith talk about Frank Sinatra's influence on Harry Connick Jr. Don't ask me how they got from the movie to Frank Sinatra.

There's a different woman behind the counter. She's younger. Probably just works in the evenings. A man sitting at the counter with a cup of coffee is enjoying talking to her about the latest tornado down in Texas.

When we get back to the dorm I ask Judith what she's going to do about Tom.

"I don't know," she says.

It kills me that I'm breaking my back to get a man and she has her choice of two.

I set my alarm for eight o'clock on Sunday so I can get up to study, but I end up snoozing until ten. Then I remember that I have to do laundry and that takes till lunchtime.

"Do you want to study for finals together?" I ask Dave at lunch.

"Study what?" he says, biting into his hamburger.

"Principles, OTS."

"I doubt if I'll study for those," he says. "I usually review it enough after classes to know it."

"Do you have anything to study for?" I say, not daunted. Dave's not blowing me off. His candidness is just more developed than his relationship-orientation.

"Yeah. Hebrew for sure. Maybe Pentateuchal Studies."

"Well come over and study at my dorm," I say.

Dave brings over all his Hebrew notes after lunch. I was sure that he already knew Hebrew but he tells me he only knows the alphabet, the lettering, and limited passages.

I pick up a sheet of paper that has the Hebrew alphabet on it and try to memorize it. When I do, I recite it to Dave.

"Very good," he says. "Now you just have to learn the lettering and what it means."

He is translating a lengthy paragraph from Hebrew into English lettering and then into English. I'm embarrassed for having just recited the measly alphabet so I get up to make some coffee.

When I get back Dave has switched to his Pentateuchal Studies which is basically the study of the Torah.

"What's your favourite book in the Torah?" I say.

"Exodus," he says. "It's exciting that a whole nation just picked up and went into the wilderness."

"How was it organized?" I ask, pouring him some coffee.

"By tribe," he says taking the cup. "There were twelve and they marched out under their banners."

"What if some girl from one tribe was going out with a guy in another tribe?" I ask as I hand him a creamer that I had snagged from the dining hall.

Dave shrugs.

"It'd probably be better to like someone in your own tribe since you marched together and camped together. But you could get married and then obviously you'd both be in the man's tribe."

"Marriage seems to be the obvious solution," I say.

"Yeah," says Dave. "Could you pass me some sugar please?"

We max out in weight training on Monday. After that, the teacher makes us run for a mile out on the track. I arrive sweaty and red for lunch. Dave is sitting across from his roommate David, who is sitting beside Bill, who is not surprisingly across from Judith. The topic of conversation is the synchronization of rock elements with jazz which is good for me since Dave has no significant contributions to make to it and focuses his attention on me when I take the chair beside him.

"Been running?" he says.

"No," I say. "I just covered my face with blush and then sprayed myself with water."

"Hmmm," says Dave grinning into his sandwich. "You're in a good mood. Must be that time of the month."

"Actually," I say, "I have been running. I should congratulate you on your excellent perception."

"No problem," he says.

Frivolously I ask him if he knows the theme of Malachi.

"Apostasy," he says.

"Very good."

"What does the name Malachi mean?" he asks.

"My messenger."

Dave nods.

"Who was Malachi written to?" I ask. I found this out after some in depth textbook reading.

"The people living in Palestine," he says without hesitation. "Especially the people who worshipped at the temple in Jerusalem."

"Oh," I say. "Very good."

I get my newspaper article back in Reporting for Mass Media with a C and 'different' scrawled across the top. The girl sitting beside me got an A for reporting on an extra-mural softball game.

It's not that I object to conventional journalism. Someone's got to do it. I just don't want to be the one.

Instead of a final exam, our teacher gives us an assignment to write a feature story on the topic of our choice.

"I suggest you take this seriously," he says looking at me. "Get the facts and make sure they're facts worth getting."

"Does it have to be local?" I say, putting up my hand.

"That's probably your best bet since I doubt you want to get on a plane and fly to Iraq for a good news story."

A polite titter runs through the class.

The next day I walk to Union in search of a good news story. Somehow I think I've exhausted the diner as a story source so I cross the quiet main street and go into the hardware store.

I'm in a dim room with a wood-slatted floor and two aisles of unrecognizable small objects in wooden boxes.

"Hi there," I say to the older man wearing a plaid shirt who has his elbows propped on the counter and is reading a paper. "I go to Union and I'm doing a journalism assignment. Do you have any hot stories?"

"Well," he says pushing the paper aside thoughtfully. "We had a robbery."

"Really!" I say. "When?"

"About a year ago."

I wonder if it would be unethical to change the date to a few days ago.

"Can you think of anything more recent?"

"Well, there's a rumour going around that Tessy Mills left Union to have a baby."

"Tessy Mills?" I say.

"Her father is the head of the board of directors for Union bank."

"How old is Tessy?" I ask trying to restrain my excitement since I don't think it's professional to look as if I revel in the sordid details.

"Oh, I would say about thirty, thirty-two."

I was expecting sixteen. Still, I don't think anyone's ever done a newspaper article on a thirty year-old woman leaving town to have a baby.

"Is she married?" I ask.

"Yes, ma'am. To the shoe salesman at Frederick's."

Frederick's is the small department store at the end of the street.

"Then why'd she have to leave town."

He lowers his voice.

"Because her husband isn't the father of the baby."

"Does anyone have any idea who is the father?"

"No, but don't think people haven't been speculating. The latest rumour is that it's a Union student."

How perfectly wonderful. I can't get much more local than that.

"Thank you very much," I say. "You've been most helpful."

My next stop is the beauty parlour where I pull open the door and a tingle of bells announces my arrival. I'm in a bright floral waiting room, complete with vinyl couches and a small plastic table covered in old Harper's Bazaar magazines.

"Yes dear? What can I do for you?" An older lady with voluminous curly white hair and a pink tent-dress comes out of the backroom carrying a plastic box of foam rollers.

"I'd like a shampoo please," I say. This is probably one of the few places in the world where it still seems normal to go to the hairdresser's to get your hair-washed.

"Certainly, sweetie. Take a seat over there and I'll be with you in a minute." She waves to the sink and the chair with the curved neck rest.

The only other patron is a middle-aged lady who's sitting on one of the barber chairs, her hair in permanent rollers while she flips through a magazine. She glances up at me and smiles.

"Hi," she says. "I've never seen you before."

Before she can ask me where I'm from, the older lady returns and says, "OK honey. Just slide down a bit and lean your head back."

While she's washing my hair I casually ask her if she's seen Tessy Mills around lately.

"No," says the lady. "She's been gone for two months now."

"Only seven to go," calls out the lady in permanent rollers from her magazine.

That's the great thing about a small town. People take personal questions in stride instead of being suspicious.

"I'd say more like five since she had to be at least two months when she left. Is she a friend of yours, dear?" asks the lady doing my hair.

"I've been living here for two years now," I say evading the question. "So I know a lot of people."

"Are you a Union student?" says the lady in rollers.

There's no point in attempting to hide anything from these women.

"Yes, ma'am."

"They say it was a Union student."

"What do you mean?" I say.

"Oh, I'm sorry," says the lady as she rinses my hair and prepares to condition it. "We didn't tell you. She left town to have a baby."

"No!" I say.

"Yes," says the lady. "Sad, but true." She doesn't look very sad. "They say the father goes to Union."

"Do they have any idea who he is?" I ask.

If they say a blond theology major I'll freak out.

"No one really knows for sure," the lady says hesitantly. I have a feeling that this latest revelation was developed right here in the beauty parlour and based more on sensationalism than fact.

"Probably a senior, dear," says the lady in rollers. "Watch out for those seniors. They have too much pent-up energy."

It's hard to talk over the blow dryer but I figure I've gotten as much information as I can from the beauty parlour.

Next stop is Frederick's where I walk on pale grey tiles that I suspect were once white and through aisles of appliances, stationary, candy, underwear, and clothing that have probably been hanging on the silver metal hooks since I was born. I go straight to the shoe department.

"If I can be of any help, just let me know," says the shoe salesman, a pale man of about thirty-five.

"Thank you Mr. Mills," I say.

"How'd you know my name?" he says. He's wearing a brown polyester-cotton blend suit with an orange and brown plaid shirt and a solid brown tie, but no name tag.

"Oh, I know your wife," I say casually, pretending to examine a child's pair of black patent dress shoes.

It would probably be more accurate to say, know of.

"Oh, Tessy," he says, sounding rather sad. "Yes. She's out of town for awhile."

"Really?" I say. I find that I have instinctively picked up a box of children's rainboots in an attempt to look like a serious customer.

"Yes, her mother's sick. They don't know how long she's going to last."

"How awful," I say. "But I thought Tessy's family lives in Union."

"Her father and her step-mother do," he says clasping his hands together. "But her mother lives about an hour's drive north of here. Would you like to try those on?" He glances at the pink rubber boots.

"Do you have any sandals," I ask, putting the boots down quickly.

"No," he says. "But we have some nice tennis shoes."

"That's OK," I say. "It's been nice talking to you Mr. Mills." I walk away quickly before he can ask me my name.

Now I have the moral dilemma of do I do a sensational article about a Union student getting a local housewife pregnant, or do I do an article on Mrs. Mills leaving town to visit her sick mother? I decide to mull it over with a cup of coffee.

"Hi!" I say to the lady behind the counter of the diner.

She smiles a tired smile.

"What'll it be?"

"What's your best pie?"

"I like lemon meringue myself."

I order a piece of lemon meringue pie and a cup of coffee and take it to my booth.

"You come here often," says the lady. "How come?"

"I just like it," I say. "It's got atmosphere."

She smiles at me like, these college students, I can't figure them out.

"Hey," I call out. "Did you hear the latest about Tessy Mills?"

"Yeah," she says. "I'm her sister."

"Oh!" I say. "I'm sorry."

"No problem. Hey, you know what? They're not rumours."

"No way!" I say. This is a total gift for a journalist. Straight from the sister's mouth. "By a Union student?"

"Tessy only wishes. No. It was just some guy passing through a couple of months ago. Here to visit relatives, or something."

"So your mother isn't sick?"

"No. She told everyone that, but Dan's the only one who believed it. It's true that she did go home to mom though."

"How many people did she tell?"

"Just me as far as I know," she shrugs. "Now you know. But I figure the whole town seems to know anyhow."

Now I have a story. A story worthy of National Enquirer, but a story nonetheless. I'll have enough discretion to change the names though.

I feel sorry for Dan. Hopefully Tessy will come back in five months, having given up the baby for adoption, saying that her mother made a miraculous pull through and the Mills will be able to resume their life.

By the time I get back to campus it's the middle of the afternoon. I write the story while it's still interesting to me and then go to dinner.

Ted Stevens sits down across from me before I can tell him that the seat is saved.

"Hi!" he says looking embarrassed and happy at the same time.

"Hi, Ted," I say and try to smile. The last time I talked with Ted was when I ate dinner with him to boost my morale.

"How're you doing?" he says.

"OK," I say.

"How's that Theology major coming along?" Ted is a Journalism major and we met in the Intro to Mass Media class our freshman year.

"Great," I say.

"Why'd you switch to Theology anyhow?" he says.

Like, because, I love Dave Dian.

"Because," I pause to think. "I believe that God is important."

"Oh yeah," says Ted. "I agree."

If I were the proselytizing sort, I would make it a personal challenge to see if I could get Ted to change his major.

"So what area of journalism do you want to go into?" I say instead. I don't really want to talk about God with any guy but Dave.

"I like politics."

"North American?"

"Yeah."

"Columnist or feature-writer?"

"Probably feature-writer. I dunno. I especially like covering elections and things."

I stifle a yawn.

"Really, Ted?"

Dave walks by with a tray, gives Ted a strange look and then keeps going. He sits at a table beside Tara Levin and Amy Rosenthal. I can only hope he's going to ask them about purification rites after childbirth.

"Well, Ted." I've got indigestion from trying to eat so quickly. "What are your plans for the summer?"

"I have a job back home at a car wash."

"Where's home?" My eyes are on my food, my voice strained.

"A little town about an hour north of here called Hazeltown."

"Maybe you'll meet my friend Tessy Mills," I say.

"Who?"

"No one," I say and sigh. I have about five forkfuls left and Ted still has a full plate. My second dilemma of the day. Do I stay until he's finished?

Mercifully, a girl from my weight training class comes and sits beside me so I introduce her to Ted and then flee.

"I just had another great talk with Eddie Prince," says Judith when I get back to the dorm.

"Oh, you've got three men now," I say.

"No, it's nothing like that," she says. "He's just a nice guy. Asked me if I needed any help setting up for the party."

"Yeah, how are the plans for that coming?" I'd almost forgotten that Saturday night was either going to be the best or worst experience of my life.

"Great. So far we've got about fifty people coming."

"Fifty! How'd you get so many?"

"Oh, Bill and David and Eddie are all inviting friends. I haven't even talked to the people I want to invite."

"How are you going to fit more than fifty people into one classroom?" I say.

"It'll be standing room only, I guess. We'll just turn the whole thing into one dance floor and stick the wine in the corner."

"Yeah, how are we going to get the wine?"

"I dunno `cos the nearest liquor store is in Haven and no one I know has a car."

"Then we've got to invite someone to the party who has a car so they can go with us to buy the stuff."

"Who?"

"Dave's got the bike."

Judith sighs. "So get Dave to buy the alcohol for the party that we're having for the sole purpose of getting his roommates out of the room so that you can lie at his feet."

"I'll keep my eyes open for someone who has a car who's not doing anything on Saturday night," I say.

CHAPTER TEN

ECCLESIASTES

Hadassah is having lunch with Roger Cardon, theology major and Union's representative of the agnostic punk movement. Actually, Hadassah is finding him quite philosophically sound -- most of his ideas have come straight out of Ecclesiastes.

"Why did you become a theology major?" she asks him, after they have a rousing, and almost cheerful, discussion on how everything is just vanity of vanities.

"I had this burning desire to know what's next," he says leaning forward, his pale face slightly flushed with the intoxication of an invigorating exchange of ideas. "I mean, we all live our lives and at the end of 70 years we die, and a lot of us think about death, but we don't talk much about where we're going. I mean, heaven seems like a joke. It's a farce. Hell was an invention to keep the masses under control. To me, the most fundamental question is, what's next? It's something that all the science and technology in the world can't answer."

"That's so true," says Hadassah. "It's such a tricky question that Jews don't even touch it much."

"It's like, it's the biggest test of faith," says Roger. "You know, not to panic. But it's kind of like being on a roller coaster because there's no way off of it and you know that big hill is coming up."

They're silent for a moment.

"What's your big theological question?" asks Roger.

"Why does God allow suffering?" says Hadassah without having to pause to think. "The inability to answer this question adequately has been the failure of organized religion. I mean, philosophers since Plato have attempted to create an explanation to answer the question if God is all powerful and God is all good why is there such incredible human suffering? But it's like, in trying to provide an answer, they shrink from the issues of day-to-day pain and theorize in an effort to defend God."

"Yeah, I know what you mean," says Roger. "Augustine developed two basic inceptions of evil, the privative and the aesthetic. Leibniz said that this is the best of all possible worlds. Maybe because it's the only world. David Hume said that man was not created to live a hedonistic life. Mary Baker Eddy said that evil is an illusion."

"My favourite is that without evil, there wouldn't be good," says Hadassah. "It's almost sadistic. Or, almost as bad, suffering builds character. Tell that to the young Muslim woman who's raped by three Serbian soldiers at gunpoint while her family's forced to watch."

"Augustine traces evil back to the fall of man and says that it originated in angel's and men's free will to turn away from God," says Roger taking a sip of his black coffee.

"That theory answers when evil was introduced into the physical realm, but it's lacking for me because the farthest back we can trace evil to is the fall of Satan. But since God created Satan, does he have the potential for evil too?" Hadassah leans forward in her chair. The lunchtime crowd is dispersing and she and Roger are probably late for a class but they don't notice. "Since God is good, Matthew 19:17, we know he is not evil. He does however, possess the knowledge of good and evil since he created that tree, along with the tree of life. Eternal life and the knowledge of good and evil are hallmarks of God, Genesis 3:22. But the origin of evil still remains a mystery."

"Actually," says Roger rather slyly. "It says in Isaiah 45:7, 'I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.'"

"No way!" says Hadassah, pulling open her knapsack and searching for her Bible. "Ah, here it is." She turns to Isaiah and confirms the scripture. "I never noticed that before." She pulls out a pen with micro pigment ink and circles the scripture.

"I think that the difference between a trial and an act of evil is that the trial doesn't involve sin, whereas an act of evil is a direct violation of God's law."

"You know, I think you're right," says Hadassah placing her Bible on the table, carefully avoiding an unidentifiable orangey remnant of food about an arm's length away from her tray. "Like in Ecclesiastes when the oppressor brutalizes the oppressed. That's evil. Solomon says that the only ultimate solution is to fear God and keep his commandments which is, in essence, replacing evil with good, Romans 12:21. It's also allying yourself with God, who is strength and protection."

"You know," Roger is leaning forward, and getting excited. "Thinking back to that tree of the knowledge of good and evil versus the tree of life thing, God clearly told man to choose life, Deuteronomy 15:30. Man, however, has not chosen life."

"Yeah!" Hadassah is leaning forward too. "You know, maybe we shouldn't be asking why God allows suffering which sounds like God is at fault somehow. God has nothing to do with it. Man simply oppresses man. It isn't God's world. From the moment Eve picked the fruit she chose to make her own choices. Choosing the knowledge of good and evil made man like God and basically negated the need for him. It stinks, but that's just the way it is."

"That's scary," says Roger. "It's like there are no barriers to evil."

"I know. When I was little and first heard about Nazi concentration camps my anger at God must have lasted for about a month. I wasn't ready to chuck everything that I believed back in his face because of my sense of self-preservation. I mean, I want to be on the side of strength in this frightening world. But then I started to realize that my indignation at God for permitting Jews to be killed was self-righteousness. I could not possibly love those people more than God does. As a matter of fact, I only think I have deep sympathy for them because I'm terrified that something like that could happen to me. If I can't even love some of my fellow students here at Union, what makes me the champion of the oppressed?"

"Maybe our job is just to cry for the world," says Roger as he sticks his finger in the bottom of his coffee cup and stirs the sugary remains. He licks his finger.

"And you know what the biggest theological question of all is?" says Hadassah. "It's Why? Why life at all? Why the earth? Why the universe? Why everything? Even if there's a purpose, why that purpose and not some other purpose?"

"Someday there'll be a gigantic cosmic orgasm," says Roger slowly. "When all the why's that have ever been asked become one universal yes!"

There's a pause until Roger looks up at the clock and realizes his class on the other side of the campus started ten minutes ago.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

IN SEARCH OF A GOOD CAR OWNER

I want to find a car owner today, or at the very latest, tomorrow. The last thing I want is to be worrying about no alcohol. That party wouldn't last for long.

In the name of the cause I even get up early to go to breakfast. Before sitting down with my tray, I survey the room for potential car owners. I see one guy who's in my Mass Media class who may be affluent enough to have a car so I sit across from him.

"Hey!" I say. "How're you doing?"

"Good." He looks a little surprised.

"What did you do your feature story on?"

"Uh, I haven't started yet. I don't know what I'm going to do."

I smile.

"So, do you like cars."

"Uh, yeah. Yeah. I like cars."

He's looking puzzled, so I decide to try to smooth my approach a bit and be more conversational."

"Do you have any brothers or sisters?"

"Uh, yeah, a younger sister and an older brother. One's sixteen and the other's twenty-four."

"Oh. So how old would that make you?"

If this were Dave he'd say, between seventeen and twenty-three.

"Me? I'm twenty."

"So, have your parent's ever gotten you a car for your birthday?"

"Me? No, they're never going to buy me a car. If I want a car I'll have to buy it myself."

I nod and quicken my pace of eating.

"Have a nice day," I say five minutes later, getting up with my tray.

It's just as well. I didn't even know his name.

By the end of the day I've still found no one and I'm forced to wonder why I limit my circle of acquaintances to people as poor as me.

"Listen," I say to Judith. "Let's just buy non-alcoholic white wine from the grocery-store in Union, tear off the labels, and no one will know the difference. It'll be a psychological experiment to see if anyone still gets hammered."

Judith shrugs.

"Sure, whatever. It'd be cheaper, that's for sure. But can you still mickey finn a non-alcoholic drink?"

"Yeah, how's that going to work?"

"Bill says he's done it before by mixing vodka with champagne."

"And you're going out with this guy? So has he got the vodka?"

"I'm sure he does. I mean, that didn't seem to be a problem."

"Well hopefully if he puts enough vodka in it'll be effective." I say. "Tomorrow we'll just have to go out and buy the wine no matter what."

CHAPTER TWELVE

PHONE CALL

"Phone," says one of Hadassah's roommates, sticking her head into the bedroom briefly before letting the door fall back again.

Hadassah climbs off of her bed where she has been sprawled, writing a letter home and listening to the Pretty in Pink soundtrack. Her portion of the room is decorated with various memorabilia from her many trips to the Holy Land -- a small menorah sits amidst figurines of Madonna and Child, a golden cross on a chain, a camel carved out of olive wood bought from one of the Arab stalls in the Old City. Dave would have been appalled. On the wall is a poster of three Israeli soldiers with their arms around each other's shoulders, guns slung over their back, praying at the Western wall.

"Lo," she says picking up the phone in the hallway.

"Shalom," says the male voice.

"Hey Dave!" she says slipping down onto the thinly-carpeted floor.

"My brain's overloading. Too much Hebrew."

"Listen, all you need is a yarmulke. You're more Jewish than any Jew I know. I'm buying you one next time I'm in Jerusalem."

"You may not have to. I might get a chance to go myself."

"No way!" says Hadassah, cradling the phone on her shoulder to pull her hair back into a ponytail. "That's fabulous!"

"Would you miss me?"

The question is thrown out like a card in a poker game. She almost drops the phone.

Hadassah thinks for a moment.

"Yeah, Dave, I would."

"So, do you really think woman was created to be a helper to man?" His voice changes slightly, more intellectual, more objective.

"Well, the Hebrew word seems to indicate a helper, yes," replies Hadassah. "The only other time it's used in the scripture though, it's God saying he'll be our helper."

"I didn't know that."

"I kid you not. That's why I don't get too upset when people say it's a second-rate position. It's not."

"Yeah, but Eve did pick that fruit." Now Dave's voice is mischievous.

"Yeah, but it took a lot of convincing. Notice how all she had to do was hand it to Adam and he ate it."

"OK, you got me there." Dave groans and she can almost see him closing his eyes and covering them with his hands.

"This is why the Greek philosophers avoided women," he says. "They're too distracting."

"Those Greek philosophers did some irreparable damage to the Hebrew faith," says Hadassah. "They're the ones who wanted to put women in their place and unfortunately some of their ideas caught on."

"To hell with the Greeks," says Dave cheerfully. "They asked too many questions anyhow."

"They certainly weren't into revealed knowledge, that's for sure," agrees Hadassah.

"Come, let us reason together," drawls Dave. He sounds as if he's not particularly thinking about what he's saying, he's just happy to be on the phone talking.

Regardless of their theological differences, Hadassah knows their love for wisdom is what has drawn them to each other. She is far from the orthodox Jew that Dave seems to idealize, but he knows that she is trying to redefine her Jewish faith, building on what she has been given. It gets exhausting sorting out a creed after awhile though -- too many questions that once asked seem to raise even more questions. Sometimes it's a tempting thought to just give into Dave's convictions about her inherited faith.

"So what is the deal with men and women?" asks Dave.

"Well, I trace it back to the rib incident in the garden. Women are biologically connected to men and thus, you see in the Old Testament, the Hebrew scriptures for you, that a woman's identity revolves around man. She's some man's wife or sister or daughter. There are very few examples of women who weren't shaped by what man they belonged

to. Prophetesses probably had more independence. Harlots certainly. Even then though, they lived in a male-dominated society and depended on men's business."

"Of course you believe we're past that now...?"

"I believe that women are still shaped by the men they know," says Hadassah softly looking down at her thumb nail and vaguely noticing it is in need of an emery board. "It's just that nowadays it seems like sometimes you have to have the courage to take what you learn and move on."

There's a pause. Hadassah knows that Dave won't probe.

"The way I see it," says Dave, his tone of voice sounding as if he's carrying on the conversation. They both know he's changing the topic. "There're three types of women -- the prophetess, the temptress, and the mother."

"And which do you prefer?"

"Can't I have all three in one?"

"Very unprecedented. Has such a woman ever existed?"

Dave sighs.

"In my dreams."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FIFTEEN DOLLAR FASHION AND OTHER SHOPPING EXPERIENCES

Tom has a car but Judith doesn't want to explain to him why she's buying ten bottles of wine, especially since she didn't invite him to the party.

I even give up my bi-weekly visit to Union to see if I can find someone with a car who's going into Haven.

I'm about ready to hitchhike when Judith comes flying up to me in the dining hall to tell me that Tara Levin is driving to the mall and we can go with her. I give her a big fake smile.

"Listen," says Judith. "It's seven o'clock. We've been looking all day and Tara said she wouldn't mind doing it, so let's go."

"OK," I sigh. It's all for a higher cause anyhow.

"Hi!" says Tara as we climb in. "You guys just want to go to the liquor store?"

"Yeah," says Judith.

"OK, I just gotta buy some stuff in the mall so I'll drop you off."

I'm sitting in the middle between Tara and Judith who start talking about their Psalms class.

"Yeah, I really like it," says Tara. "I was talking to Dave Dian the other day and he says the Psalms contain some of the most pivotal scriptures in the whole Old Testament."

Like, what does this have to do with anything? If Eddie Prince had made the same observation she would have never mentioned it.

"Oh yeah," I say. "Like which ones?"

"Oh, I can't remember specific ones, although he cited quite a few."

Maybe you should have taken notes, I feel like saying. I hate sitting in the middle because I can't just stare out the window. In a way, I dread Saturday night. It hasn't really sunk in what I'm going to do and I don't let myself think about it. I just keep busy.

"Dave is such a sweetie," says Tara. "He's so enthusiastic about Judaism, it makes me excited to be Jewish."

Rub it in.

"He was asking me all sorts of questions about what it's like to grow up in a Jewish household."

"So, what is it like?" I say.

I've been dying to know.

"Well," she looks embarrassed, "I wouldn't exactly say that I was raised in an orthodox house. But we did go to synagogue now and then. Of course we had Passover every year, and Rosh Hashanna, and..." her voice dwindles.

"Did you light candles before the Sabbath?" I say.

"Oh yeah, we did that. I mean, we didn't want to forget that we were Jewish," she smiles.

"So is that why you're majoring in Theology?" I say.

"Basically," she says. "I'm studying other religions too. A lot of my friends in high school were into Zen so I'm interested in that."

Considering that Dave would have given his big toe to have been born Jewish I can see why he didn't last long with Tara.

The liquor store is beside the grocery store in the same outdoor mall that Dave and I and went to for our Seder stuff while the indoor mall is two miles down the road. Tara drops us off and says she'll meet us here in an hour and a half. Judith and I decide that it would be stupid to just buy the ten bottles of wine right away and then sit on the curb. We choose instead to explore the mall.

The first store we go into is called Fifteen Dollar Fashion. The classic thing is that the place is full of tank tops, t-shirts and shorts that all look like they should be about five dollars. Judith tries on a knit tank dress that turns out to have a large rip in the seam.

The next place is a Christian bookstore. I check out the Judaica section while Judith looks at the sheet music.

"This is great!" Judith yells across the store to me, much to the horror of the middle-aged woman at the cash register. "There's a lot of soul here!" She buys several gospel pieces and I purchase a biography about some rabbi in Brooklyn.

We wander into the next store, a health food shop.

"Hey! Look who it is!" says Judith. "Eddie! Hey, Eddie!"

Eddie Prince looks up from the label of a container of soya butter spread.

"I didn't know you were into health food," says Judith going over to him.

"I'm not," he says. "I just came in here because I've never been in a health food store before."

In case I haven't mentioned it, Eddie Prince is good-looking in a moody sort of way, something which Judith seems to be noticing. He's got sharp features and long dark hair that he slicks back, emphasizing his bone structure.

"Neither have I," says Judith. "Well, maybe once, but I was very young."

"Are you buying anything?"

"I dunno. I'll have to look around. You?"

"Yeah, I'm going to look around too. I'm waiting for my dry cleaning to be done."

They wander up and down the aisles, commenting on everything while I read some pamphlets on a little rack by the cashier. I end up buying a two dollar booklet called Health Secrets from the Bible.

"Wow!" Judith is saying. "This is just so neat!" She's got her arms full of packages of fig newtons, containers of pitted dates, sunflower seeds, papaya juice, avocado face cream, aloe vera soap, and wheatgerm shampoo with matching conditioner.

Eddie seems to have gone for the vitamin pills.

They dump their stuff on the check-out counter while I toy with the idea of buying a container of natural muscle enhancers, the healthy version of steroids. I decide that the woman in the pink string bikini on the display board picture looks a little too muscular.

Tara should be coming back in about twenty minutes and Eddie shows no signs of picking up his dry cleaning, so I say that I have to do a little grocery shopping and give

Judith a meaningful look. She understands, smiles and says she'll just be sitting on the curb with Eddie.

Liquor stores always give me a feeling of awe, probably because they're forbidden territory for the first nineteen years of life. I need a cart to take my ten bottles of the largest and cheapest wine I can find to the check-out counter. Then I start to think about how at least fifty people are coming and ten bottles seems ridiculously low and so I go back for ten more.

"Having a party?" asks the guy at the cash.

No, I just like to drink alone.

Thankfully he doubles the bags so they won't break on me the minute I walk out the door. I clank as I walk. Thankfully my weight-training has made it possible for me to carry this heavy load. As discreetly as possible I sit down on the other side of Judith, keeping the bags beside me so that Eddie won't notice them. They are so absorbed in their conversation that they barely notice me. I suddenly wonder why I'm instinctively hiding the wine from him since he's invited to the party. It's like, there's always booze at a party, but actually buying it and getting it there seems kind of sordid.

When Tara pulls up, they reluctantly say good-bye. I'm sure that Judith would have driven back to campus with him except she knows that I would have killed her.

Tara's backseat is loaded with parcels which means I have to keep some of the bottles with me in the front. A lot of her bags are from clothing stores and in an hour and a half she has bought more than I buy in a year.

"Summer's coming up," she says, "and I realized that I just didn't have anything to wear."

"What are you doing this summer?" I ask politely.

"The west coast," she says.

"So, now you've got Tom, Bill, David, and Eddie," I say to Judith when we get back to the dorm and are stowing the wine bottles under our bed behind our dirty laundry due to prohibition. "What are you going to do with all of them?"

"I think I'll go out with all of them at once," she says. "It's only two weeks until the summer."

I wake up and want to spend the day in bed. But I also want to see Dave so I get up.

"Hi!" he says to me when I sit down in Principles of Theology. I'm glad I came. He's looking good in a white t-shirt, Mediterranean woven vest, frayed jeans, and his sandals.

It's funny. I know practically everyone's summer plans except his, and for some reason I've never gotten around to asking. Before I can though, the teacher starts the class. We're winding up the year with some brief sketches of other religious works like the Koran, and some Buddhist writings.

Once we finished talking about the Bible and the Mishna, Dave had become visibly bored, tapping his pencil on his notebook and shifting his seat throughout the classes. He would have probably stopped coming to class except he said that he knew nothing about Islam and Buddhism and would fail the final.

"So, what're you doing this summer?" I say afterwards. I have to know or else I'm going to go nuts.

"I dunno," he says standing up. "I made some plans, but I'm still working on them. We'll see what happens."

He walks me to weight-training class and I want to ask him what kind of plans he's made but I don't know if he's being intentionally vague or if he just expects me to automatically be on his wave-length.

"I can't believe this class," Dave is saying. "I mean, is it Principles of Theology or is it Comparative Religion? The syllabus says that the class is supposed to focus on Judeo-Christian doctrine, not what Mohammed said, for crying out loud."

"But doesn't it interest you?" I ask cautiously. "I mean, since the Dome of the Rock is on the Temple Mount and the entire Middle East is full of Arabs?"

He looks at me like I'm crazy.

"I want to be Jewish, not Muslim."

"But aren't you just kind of interested to know what they believe?" I ask. I'm thinking if I'm ever going to be a Middle-East correspondent, I'll need to know both sides of the issue.

He sighs.

"There's enough Judaism to study for a lifetime. Where would I find the time to study another religion?"

Our weight training teacher gives us the hardest workout all year, as if knowing that none of us will even look at a weight room all summer. It takes a twenty-minute cold shower for my body to return to its normal colour.

When I go to lunch, Dave isn't there, but Judith is at a table surrounded by Bill, David, and Eddie. I wonder what her secret is since they all look like they're having a great time and none of them seem to resent that the others are there. I take the chair beside Eddie. Tom comes and sits across from me, the closest he can get to Judith.

"Hey Tom!" I say to make up for Judith seemingly not even noticing his arrival.

"Hi," he says, looking at his food. I wait for him to look up but he keeps his eyes on his plate for the entire meal. Once I see him look at Judith.

OTS is our last class together for this year. It's a sentimental occasion for me but I don't think Dave is reflecting on it. We're covering the final few minor prophets and when the teacher asks if anyone knows what the theme of Malachi is, I raise my hand and actually answer. My first contribution all year.

"Coming over tonight?" says Dave after class before his rush down to consult with Rabbi Hirshel.

"For sure," I say.

I've got to somehow get his dorm key from him tonight.

I get my newspaper article back in Reporting for Mass Media with a B- and 'improving' streaked across the top. He must have liked all my quotes. Research obviously pays off.

To celebrate the end of classes, after Reporting, I walk to the diner and order a Diet Coke float.

"How're you doing?" says the lady as she serves it to me.

"Great," I say. "Except that I have finals all next week."

"I remember what that was like," she says with a small smile.

"Where did you go?"

"York University in Toronto," she says. "For a year. Then I met my husband. A little word of advice, finish your education no matter what happens." She turns around to the coffee-maker and starts brewing a fresh pot.

"What was your major?" I ask, genuinely interested.

"International Relations." She turns around and looks at me.

No wonder she wanted to form a society for the betterment of mankind.

"Did you like it?"

She sighs. "Not enough to stick with it, but I know I should have. I want to go back though. Does Union have an International Relations major?"

"Probably."

I mean, they have Theology, they're bound to have International Relations.

"Hey, well congratulations," she says. "You made it through another year. Just study your brains out for those finals and you'll be OK." She takes a cloth and starts cleaning the counter and the tables around the room leaving me to muse over my float.

I wonder if I even have a relationship, I think as I stir the ice-cream with my straw. I mean, not once has Dave said anything to indicate where I stand with him although I've heard his roommates refer to me as his girlfriend to him when I'm in the lounge of his dorm and he's in the study and he didn't correct them. He certainly doesn't have any other close female friends. All signs indicate that I'm it even if they are by process of elimination.

Since the sun is setting later now, I don't have to get back until seven or so. I spend an hour getting ready and show up at Dave's at around eight.

"Hey El!" he says. "Only one more Sabbath after this."

So he has noticed. I wonder if I'll still keep the Sabbath over the summer.

We go into the lounge and I'm trying to think of an excuse to go into his study to see if I can find his dorm key. Unless it's in his pocket, it's usually just sitting on the desk.

Dave disappears through the study to get the menorah while I lay out the bread and the cheese and vegetables. Dave returns and we sit down and sip glasses of water as we wait for 18 minutes before sunset.

If I don't get that key soon, I'm going to have a miserable evening, so opting for the unimaginative, I excuse myself to go to the bathroom and cut through the study.

His key is not on the desk. There is no way I can get the keys from the pocket of his jeans short of making him take them off. I allow myself to panic a bit. I look around the room frantically. Then I figure, I'll just take someone else's key, and sure enough, there's a set sitting on one of the desks. I grab the ring and stick it in my purse. It's unfortunate that I have to take nine other keys. I decide it may be a good idea to just take the dorm key so the guy doesn't raise a stink when his keys are missing.

Out of the ten keys, three look like they could be dorm keys so I take all three. It takes me forever to unwind them off the ring. I arrive back to the lounge with two minutes to spare and try to look fresh and made-up, as if I just spent extensive time brushing my hair and redoing my make-up. I'm hoping that I don't have to go to the bathroom for real in the next hour or so since it will make me seem as if I have a bladder problem.

We light the candles, say the prayer and Dave pours the bottle of wine.

"How are your summer plans coming along?" I say, holding my glass with my hands trying to shield the beverage in case anyone wanders in and figures out what we're drinking.

"Still waiting to hear," he says. "I sent a few letters off and I haven't gotten them back yet."

Oh well. As long as he doesn't know what he's definitely doing there's no point in wondering.

"What about you?"

"I may go to New Orleans with Judith," I say taking the bottle from the table and slipping it behind the couch I'm sitting on. Dave, as I said, just doesn't think about things like this.

Dave nods.

"You really want to do that?" he says.

"Yeah," I shrug. "It'd be OK."

He seems like he's got a lot on his mind. More than usual. He's just leaning back, looking preoccupied chewing on the nail of his first finger.

"So what're you thinking?" I say.

He takes his finger out of his mouth.

"That this whole life is bigger than any of us."

"Yeah," I say. "For sure."

Then he laughs and his body relaxes.

"So what did you think of Principles of Theology? Overall, I mean," he says.

"I learned a lot considering that I never took a theology class in my life before Union."

"Not even Sunday school?"

"Nope."

"Me too. That's one thing my parents didn't make me do. Both my sisters went, but I always got to be upstairs with them in the service."

"Why? Were you bad?"

"Yeah," he says smiling. "I caused a disturbance the first time I went. I started telling the other kids that God didn't exist and after that I got to stay with my parents."

"Did you really think he didn't exist?"

"No, but I think I wanted to test the other kids' faith. I'm glad I didn't go to Sunday school though because I think I got more out of the services."

"So when did you stop agreeing with it?" I say.

"I got to be a teenager and I didn't see how Christianity was helping me. At least the church I went to didn't seem to." He shifts in his seat and crosses his ankle on his knee. "For me it all revolved around that one Sunday and nothing during the week. Then I met this Jewish guy and he told me a bit about Judaism and that made sense because a Jew does Jewish things everyday of the week. I mean, they eat Jewish foods, they have a Jewish heritage, they have holy days in addition to weekly worship. It was a lot more interesting to me at least." Dave pauses to take a sip of wine.

"So I got him to take me to the synagogue and that was really neat. I was only sixteen, but I knew that if I was going to be religious, this was the religion I wanted to be in. And since I believed in a God, I had to be religious."

"Why'd you come to Union?" I say. I can barely eat, so I'm just crumbling the bread on the table and watching him and wondering.

"A lot of Jewish kids come here for a Theology major because it's got enough courses that you can get all your credits with the ones based on the Old Testament. It's pretty fundamental too."

He pours himself another glass of wine.

"How come you came?" he asks.

"I wanted to be at a smaller university. Also, I wanted to go to a place that was into liberal arts."

I wish I could say it was a calling or something, and make it seem like Dave and I were predestined to both be here at the same time. Well, I did get accepted my first try, so maybe that means something.

"What're you going to do when you graduate?"

"Well," I pause and wonder what would happen if I say, marry you. "Since I'm into journalism and theology, I'm thinking of specializing in the Middle East."

"Would you want to live there?" asks Dave.

"Yeah!" I say. "That'd be really cool."

Dave nods, takes a bite of bread and there's a pause.

"So," I say. "What are good Sabbath topics?"

Dave grins.

"Oh, creation, the Torah, the Exodus, things like that."

"How about creation?"

"Yeah," says Dave. "How about that creation, eh?"

"I think I would have made the grass blue and the sky green."

"Why?"

"Why not?"

"I think I would have made the oceans out of sand and the beaches out of water." Dave gets into the spirit of it.

In two weeks Dave and I will be apart and I figure I'll look back on this conversation and repeat it in my head until oceans of sand and beaches of water are all I can see.

I can't get to sleep that night. Kind of like pre-wedding jitters, except that when I finally do get married I'm going to be so full of relief that I won't have room for nervousness.

According to Judith, everything's going to be fine. Approximately seventy-five people are scheduled to show up at old classroom five tomorrow night at ten o'clock, including Eddie Prince, David Richler, and Joseph Paige.

I tell myself that I have to relax and sleep or else I'll be tired tomorrow night. When that doesn't work I tell myself that I can stay up all night for all I care. Reverse psychology doesn't work either. I thrash around until I'm physically exhausted and finally fall asleep at about three in the morning.

When I get up I realize that I have no idea what I should wear tonight. I mean, Ruth probably went in her woven robe, or whatever, but there are just too many choices nowadays.

I finally just settle on a black knit skirt and a t-shirt with a muted pattern on it that looks vaguely Mediterranean. I borrow a pair of sandals from Judith.

I don't see Dave at lunch which is not surprising since it's the Sabbath and sometimes he doesn't show up for meals in the dining hall.

"Hey! You gonna be at the party tonight?" Eddie Prince sits down across from me.

"Yeah," I say. "For awhile."

I figure I'll stop by and have a glass of wine to relax me before my big night.

"Yeah, I'm looking forward to it," says Eddie. "I don't think anyone's ever had a party in one of those classrooms."

It would be just our luck if some faculty member happens to walk his dog by the old classroom complex.

"Hey," I say, thinking suddenly. "You can invite all of the guys in your dorm if you want."

The fewer the people in the building, the better, I figure, and I know Dave won't go, especially if he finds out that it's nothing but a jazz party in a classroom.

"Sure," says Eddie. "I'll do that."

I ask him how his dry-cleaning turned out.

He tells me how he had to take one shirt back because it still had a grease stain on it.

There's a lull until Judith comes and sits down beside me and she and Eddie start talking about who's coming to the party and about the music line-up. I get so nervous listening to them that I excuse myself and go back to the dorm and take a nap.

Judith bounds in, waking me up, and starts throwing clothes around.

"I don't know what I'm going to wear tonight!" she screeches. "I mean, I've got this flapper's dress, but I don't know if it's too formal."

She pulls out a black cocktail dress covered in black fringe.

"Go for it," I say. "Be daring."

"Yeah, why not? It's my party."

I haven't exactly decided what my game plan for the evening is because I figure I'll just wing it so it's more natural. Just to be on the safe side though, I reread the book of Ruth and say a little prayer.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

AN INVITATION

"Why are you reading an article about Al Gore's opinions on toxic waste buried in Nevada left over from the Cold War?" asks Eddie, sticking his head over Hadassah's shoulder where she's curled up in one of leather easy chairs in the library. "Aren't you supposed to be working?"

Eddie plunks himself down in the matching chair beside her.

"Coffee break."

"How long have you been on it?"

She glanced at her watch.

"About half an hour."

Eddie sighs.

"You have no work ethic."

"Work ethic is a Protestant concept." She turns a magazine page.

"Well, I came by to ask you if you want to go to a party tonight. Nothing big. Just a jazz bash in one of the old classrooms. Lots of booze."

"Sounds lovely," she says, not looking up.

"OK, you don't have to be sarcastic."

"I'm not." Hadassah smiles wickedly.

"You're definitely not Protestant," says Eddie standing up. "If you'd been living in Colonial America, they'd have burned you at the stake."

He receives a flying Newsweek in the back of his head as he's walking away.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE BIG NIGHT ARRIVES

At nine o'clock Bill and David come by to pick up Judith so they can go set-up. They've brought along Bill's stereo system which looks quite extensive. I'm relieved when they turn down my offer to help because I know I'd only end up standing around being jittery. Bill and David walk out with the twenty huge bottles of wine in some old packing boxes that Judith found in storage.

After I do my make-up -- lightly, because I don't want my face to smear on his bed -- I wander around the dorm trying to work off nervous energy. I'm having second thoughts. Like maybe there are better ways of showing him I love him. Like telling him, for example. But then I remember the last time I incorporated the word 'love' into the conversation and I know, even if I'm not doing the right thing, I'm doing the only thing.

About sixty-five people are in the one classroom when I arrive at eleven. The jazz is soulfully loud and people are downing white wine in paper cups.

"Is everyone here?" I ask Judith, who's in the corner with Bill making sure the wine goes at a moderate pace.

"Well, a few more are coming later, but yeah, most people are here," she says.

"No, I mean, is *everyone* here," I say.

"Oh," she says. "I hadn't really looked." She surveys the room.

"Eddie's here," she says, pointing to the dance floor. "And David came with Bill and I. Where's Joseph?"

We look around for Joseph Paige.

"Did he say he was coming?" I'm getting this panicky feeling in the lower regions of my stomach.

"Well, yeah," says Judith. "Remember I told you that I told him about it and he said he'd be here?"

"Have you talked to him since?"

"No, I never see him."

The way to solve this is quickly and efficiently. I leave the classroom and hike back to the dining hall where I phone Dave's dorm.

"Yeah?" Dave answers after about fifteen rings. A good sign. It must mean there aren't any other guys in the dorm.

I lower my voice and speak quickly.

"Yeah, uh, can I speak to Joseph Paige?"

"He's gone home for the weekend," says Dave. "I don't know when he's coming back."

"Thanks." I hang up. That was easy. Too easy. Watch him come back at two a.m. tonight.

I go back to the party just to make sure that the mickey-finn job is going to be carried out.

Judith has some bad news.

"Bill thought you were going to bring the vodka."

"Where did he think I was going to get vodka?" I say.

"The same place we got the wine, I guess," says Judith.

"OK," I say looking around. "We're just going to have to get some vodka."

"Uh," says Judith. "No one's brought booze because they heard they could get it here."

"OK," I say looking around again. "Look for someone with a car."

But all the car-owners are out drinking at some legitimate establishment. I'm about to just trash the Ruth plan when Bill comes up and says sorry about the vodka, or lack of it.

"Listen," he says. "I think I know why you want those guys out all night. They're both Dave's roommates, eh?" He winks. I smile weakly.

"I will personally guarantee that those guys don't make it back tonight," he says. "Don't worry! Have fun!" He grabs Judith's hand and they go out onto the dance floor.

Why is it that Ruth didn't have to go through this? All she had to do was leave early in the morning before anyone else came into the threshing floor.

I've got to kill about an hour before going there because I don't want to take any chances that Dave's not asleep. At least eighty-five people are here now, making the party standing room only. Most people are dancing to the music doing strange movements that look like a cross between the Charleston and hip-hop.

I'm just thinking how glad I am that I'm not out there on the floor when Eddie Prince yells "dance with me", into my ear. I say yell, but since everyone is screaming to be heard, it's more like a regular conversation voice. Before I can say no, he has my hand and I am being pulled through the molecular composition of the crowd.

It's a slow song which thankfully just means a bit of shuffling around.

"All the guys from the dorm are here," he yells. "Except Dave. Dave just doesn't go to things like this."

"Yeah," I say. I can't think of anything else to say I'm so nervous about tonight.

"Having fun?" I ask finally.

"Yeah!" he says. "I didn't realize that I like jazz so much. We've got to have more parties like this next year!"

"For sure," I say. Except, of course, that if all goes as intended, next year I'll be back at the dorm with Dave to begin with.

After dancing with Eddie, I make my way to the wine table to get a drink, I'm so thirsty from the heat in the room.

"Hey babe!" Some guy who's obviously got a drink source in addition to the wine gets my attention.

"Where've I seen you before?" he says. He's got a blond crew cut and looks like he's just stumbled across this party by accident.

"Tiajuana?" I say.

"Yeah! That's it!" he says.

I've never been to Tiajuana.

"What kind of music is this? I've never been to a party with this kind of music."

"It's called jazz. It was pretty big in the twenties and it's making a comeback."

"Hey, I've heard of jazz." He gives me this stop-making-fun-of-me grin. "Want some?" He pulls out a little flask.

"No thanks." I look around for Bill to let him know I've found a potential liquor source but I can't see him in the crowd.

"Hey," he says. "I know of a really cool party going on in Haven."

"Oh really."

"Yeah. Wanna go?"

"Sorry. I have other plans."

"Know anyone who wants to go?"

I give him Tara Levin's dorm number and spend the next forty minutes on the outer perimeter of the party moving quickly if anyone even looks like they're going to talk to me. I don't see Bill though and that disturbs me since he and Judith are supposed to be keeping an eye on Eddie and David.

OK. It's one o'clock. Time to do it regardless of what happens. I take a deep breath, run my fingers through my hair, and leave the classroom. I look for Judith to say bye but I can't find her anywhere. I find out later that she, Bill, David, Eddie, and a girl named Hadassah, drove all around southern Ontario that night, climbing trees and drinking wine in provincial parks, arriving back at Union for breakfast at the diner.

It's cool and peaceful as I walk across the deserted campus. A midnight ballet of gently spraying sprinklers water the coiffured lawns in front of the rising white buildings. I jingle the keys in my pocket and refuse to let myself think about what I'm doing.

When I arrive at the dorm all the lights are out. Very carefully, I try the first key. It doesn't work but the second one does. I cut through the study and put the keys on the desk that I took them from.

I am so nervous that I almost turn around right there. Slowly I twist open the door knob to the room that Dave shares with the three other guys.

I've never been in this room before so I don't even know where Dave's bed is. I quietly close the door behind me and stand in the darkness until my eyes adjust. Each bed is in a corner. The only bed that has a body in it is in the far corner. I move very slowly across the room. Before I lie down I try to see what the pictures on the wall are just to make sure it's Dave's bed and not Joseph back in the dorm. Two posters of scenes in Jerusalem. This

is the right one. The last thing I want is for this to be a reverse of Jacob waking up and finding that he's in bed with Leah.

This is the part I've been dreading. First I make sure that I won't be lying on his feet. Then, very carefully, I slide onto the end of his bed. He stirs slightly but doesn't wake up.

Victory is mine, saith the Lord.

Of all things, I wake up first. This is not supposed to happen. He's supposed to get up, be surprised to see a woman in his bed, and then wake me up. I glance at the clock on his night table. It's eight-fifteen and I've been woken up by the sunlight that's starting to fill the room. Dave is still sleeping soundly. He's pulled his feet up to make room for me, as if subconsciously he knows there's something at the end of his bed.

I try not to laugh, he looks so young and relaxed when he's sleeping. It suddenly occurs to me that he could be naked for all I know, he's only got a sheet covering his mid- body.

I have to get back to sleep because Dave's got to wake up and realize the story connection. I close my eyes and focus my whole being onto sleeping even though I'm wide awake.

I'm just drifting off when Dave starts to move around. His foot hits me and then it pulls back as if it's suddenly become aware that something's not right. I'm so afraid that I'm going to laugh. I take a deep breath and try to think of neutral things, flowers in springtime.

"What the...?" Boaz has just woken up to find Ruth at his feet.

"Hey!" Dave says. I can feel him leaning over looking at my face.

"Oh my!" He jumps back as if he just remembered something. He gets out of bed and I hear him fumbling with some clothing. Then I feel his hands on my shoulder.

"Hey!" he says, a lot more gently. "Hey, El! Wake up!"

I open my eyes to see Dave, in a t-shirt and a pair of shorts, leaning over me.

"Oh hi Dave," I say sweetly, rubbing my eyes for effect.

"What're you doing?" he says.

"Guess what famous Bible character I am?" I say.

He sits down on the edge of the bed. Then he puts his arm around my shoulders. Then he starts to laugh and he laughs until the tears come.

"You are so funny," he says.

"That's all he said?" says Judith the next afternoon. "You are so funny? Then what?"

"Then we just kind of talked."

"Talked? Talked about what?"

"Oh, I dunno. Just things. Like the posters on his wall."

"You wake up in his bed and then you talk about the posters on his wall?"

"Yeah, but he took it so well. After he stopped laughing, it was like the most normal thing in the world to be sitting on his bed talking about the stuff in his room."

"You are both so strange," says Judith. "It's like you didn't even talk about your relationship?"

"No. Although he did make some comment about how if I were one of the temple prostitutes he would have definitely picked me."

I turn red remembering it. Judith rolls her eyes.

"Well, what about what you're doing for the summer?"

"No."

"So, how'd you leave?"

"He got dressed and we went to breakfast together."

Judith rolls her eyes again and then tells me about her evening and how they didn't get back until ten in the morning. She finally decided that she loved Bill and told him so in a tree in some Conservation Area.

"What're you going to tell Tom?" I say.

"I don't know but I got to tell him soon since Bill and I are officially together now."

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE LAW

"Surely I have taught you statutes and judgements, just as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess." Dave is reading his Pentateuch, sitting cross-legged on the floor of Hadassah's lounge, leaning his back against the couch that she's sprawled on.

"Their law is what made Israel unique," says Hadassah.

"Exactly," says Dave as he continues reading. "Therefore, be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'"

"It's 10 simple commandments," says Hadassah. "Then the Jews turn it into 613 ritual rules. It doesn't have to be that complex."

"Well, better to keep 613 than only keeping half of the original ten like so many Christians today. Besides, the law was given to Israel," says Dave, turning so he could look at her.

"Keep reading," says Hadassah. "God warns them not to forget the miracles they had seen and to teach the law to the children and the grandchildren. They didn't, they got into syncretism, and they were carried into captivity."

"What are you saying?"

"I'm saying that when Christ came the law, as interpreted by him, was opened up to the Gentiles too. The thing about the law is, it doesn't matter who's got it, it matters who does it."

"I can't argue with you on that one," says Dave. "But Christians don't seem to be as concerned about the law as practising Jews."

Hadassah shrugs as best she could in her horizontal position.

"There seems to be a misunderstanding in some circles about why Christ came. He came to magnify the law and add its spiritual intent. I mean, it's a new testament. Dave, do you understand how cool it would have been to hear him speak!"

"He was charismatic I'm sure," says Dave. "I mean, he had a large following so he must have been a good speaker."

"It was so much more than that." Hadassah rolls over onto her side. "It was a movement of thought and spirit...!"

Eddie came hurtling into the lounge.

"Who is this uncircumcised Philistine?" demands Dave.

"No time for jokes, pal! I think I left my Bible here and I've got an open-book exam in two minutes."

Hadassah pulls out his small black New King James that has partially fallen between the cushions of the couch.

"Grazzie," says Eddie flying out.

"Shalom," says Dave politely.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE LAST SUPPER

I expected the Ruth plan to have more of an effect on Dave but things seem to be going on much as always. Finals week passes by in a blur of studying and planning for New Orleans. Judith breaks it to Tom that their lives are heading in diametrically opposite directions and he is surprised. I guess he didn't take her music seriously enough.

Friday night comes, my last Sabbath supper with Dave before the summer.

"Hey Ruth!" he greets me. He's been calling me that all week.

"Remember the first time you did that?" he says after I light the candles.

"Yeah, I say. "I didn't know a word of Hebrew and now I know fourteen."

After the prayer, the reciting of the Eshet Chayil, and the singing, we eat the bread and food in comfortable silence. Dave has pulled out a bottle of real Jewish red wine from somewhere.

"I think I want to be a Zionist," says Dave suddenly. He's leaning over the coffee table with his elbows propped up, a chunk of bread in one hand.

"As in, Eretz Israel?" I say.

"Yeah," he says. "I really want to go to Jerusalem."

"When?"

"As soon as I can."

I take a sip of wine. There's something I want to say, but I'm not sure how to put it into words.

The next morning, I wake up realizing that I still don't know what Dave's doing for the summer and when he's leaving. A lot of people are going home on Sunday and Judith and I are flying from Haven to New Orleans on Monday.

After lunch I go over to Dave's dorm.

"Hey! Hey!" says Eddie when I look into the study.

"Hey!" I say. "Is Dave around?"

"Yeah. He's in the bedroom packing. Go on in. He won't mind."

In the bedroom, Dave's standing in the middle of a mess of clothes, books, and suitcases.

"Hey!" I say.

"Hey, Ruth!" He turns around and smiles.

"Where're you going?" I say. I can feel the tears coming to my eyes, just seeing the open suitcases.

"Jerusalem," he says. "I got a letter today. I'm going to Hebrew school. A Talmudic academy. Yeshiva." He savours the word like a man who has just discovered the name of the woman he's infatuated with.

I stand there. The tears just sit in my eyes.

"Are you coming back to Canada?"

"In a year." He comes over and puts his arm around me.

"Look Dave." Now I know what it is that I have to say. "I love you. What do I have to do to get your attention?"

"It's not you," he says slowly. "It's me. It's just that I've got to do this."

"So what am I supposed to do?"

He looks down at my face.

"What do you want to do?"

I think about this. I'll always be number two in Dave's life, but at least I'll be his only woman.

"I'll see you in a year," I say.

Dave laughs and hugs me.

This year slaves, next year free.

This year here, next year in Jerusalem.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

GOD SPEED

"Maybe we should quote a few passages from Song of Solomon," says Hadassah jokingly.

They're both nervous. Dave's luggage is tossed by the door and they have about 15 minutes before his ride comes to take him to the airport.

"Behold, you are fair, my love!" says Dave grinning. "You have dove's eyes behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats going down from Mount Gilead."

She hits him. He holds onto her arm.

"Your teeth are like a flock of shorn sheep which have come up from the washing."

She half-heartedly struggles. They end up on the couch.

"Your lips are like a strand of scarlet, and your mouth is lovely."

They're in each other's arms, their lips pressed together, even though there are still the temples, neck, and the breasts left to be described.

"Oh, I'm going to miss you," Dave mumbles into her hair.

PART TWO

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE BLUES

I'm thinking that if I'm going to be lonely and depressed all summer, New Orleans is the place to be. The city of blues.

My parents took it well that I'm spending the summer in Louisiana, but I haven't told them yet that I want to spend the rest of my life with a guy doing rabbinical studies in Jerusalem.

Judith and I are staying in the French Quarters in a little hotel that rents rooms by the week. After making a long and animated phone call, Judith excitedly reports to me that Bill will be coming down in two weeks and staying with his second cousin who lives in New Orleans.

"Great," I say with no enthusiasm. If there's one thing I hate it's contented couples. I'm going through my purse looking for Dave's address in Jerusalem. I know I have it in here. I've sent him two letters since he left a week ago.

"Ah, here it is."

"His cousin sounds really cool," says Judith. "He's into the club scene and he's going to take us to some of the better ones."

Judith and Bill want to spend the next two months meeting musicians and making contacts. I have to start looking for a job. I've dropped the idea of working for a newspaper. I don't even know if I still like journalism.

Since arriving in New Orleans on Monday, Judith and I have been exploring everything within walking distance of the Old Louisiana Hotel. Today is Sunday and Judith wants to go to a dilapidated church we passed on one of our walks. She has this idea that she has to absorb every aspect of New Orleans culture.

I decline to go with her. I may have missed the Friday night ritual of lighting candles, but I'm not about to suddenly switch faiths either. Judith leaves for her religious experience and I go out onto our little balcony. We're on the third and top floor and we overlook a parking lot that has more weeds and wildflowers than cars. Not much action out here so I go back inside, throw on some leggings and a sweater, take the elevator downstairs and go outside.

I walk down the sleepy, tree-lined street and moss-framed sidewalk until I come to the lively road of sidewalk caf  s and art shops. Judith and I have already explored this road and of all the caf  s, my favourite is Miqueline's with its pink vinyl chairs and gold-trimmed frosted-glass tables. Taking a table by the white lace-iron fence, I order a cappuccino.

This caf   attracts an eclectic mixture of people, unlike some of the others that cater to an exclusively younger crowd, or middle-aged people, or families.

There are two types of people on a Sunday morning in New Orleans, the churchgoers and the non-churchgoers. The ones sitting in the caf   with me are the non-churchgoers whose religion is coffee and conversation and people-watching.

This is where I want to work, I've just decided. The waitresses don't even have to wear a standard outfit, just black aprons with Miqueline's written on them over their clothing. After my coffee, I go inside and ask to see the manager.

"That door right there," says one of the waitresses.

I knock on the door that says "Miqueline Claude".

"Entr  !" someone says.

I enter to face a middle-aged woman with bleach blond curls and deep red lips.

I introduce myself and tell her how much I'd like to be a waitress in her caf  .

She smiles.

"You like my caf  , mon cheri  ?" she says. "D'accord. You can work here. But only for the summer. That's my busy season."

"Thank you Miss Claude!" I say.

"Je suis Miqueline, cheri  ," she says. "Now don't bother me anymore. I'm busy. Come back tomorrow."

The caf   opens at ten so I'm there at a quarter til.

"Here is your apron," say Miqueline. "It's just you and Marie until noon, then Annette comes in. So until then, alternate tables."

Marie is about my height, with short brown hair and exotic, almost Oriental, features. She assures me that waitressing is fairly easy since most people just order coffee and shows me how to use the espresso machine.

The first customer is a tired-looking white-haired woman who takes a table in the corner.

"She comes here every morning for a café au lait," says Marie. "I'll serve her and you take the next one."

The next table to come in is a young couple, obviously tourists, who order a complete breakfast of eggs, toast, danish, juice, and coffee. Marie grins at me.

"Most people just order coffee."

It's quiet in the café on a Monday morning and after I finish serving the couple breakfast, Marie and I lean against the coffee station and talk. Miqueline is her aunt and they are both French, born in New Orleans. Marie is saving up to move to France where she wants to try to get into modelling.

"I model here," she says. "But it's not the same because I only do local things. I don't have the right look for the big jobs, you know? If I go to Europe I have a better chance with my face."

Annette comes in at noon. She's tall with a brown bob cut close to her ears. After that, I take every third customer as the café begins to fill up with a lunch-time crowd.

Coffee still seems to be the main staple with a small sandwich or salad on the side. I get a kick out of the tourists asking me what places I recommend they go to when I'm only a tourist myself.

"As many jazz clubs as you can," I say. "And Louis Armstrong's birthplace. Don't miss that."

Marie tells me after the rush that at night many jazz musicians stop off at Miqueline's before a show.

"Not the big ones," she says. "But a lot of the locals. You know, the back-up bands and people like that."

I relay this information to Judith that night in the room. Since I only work until six and Miqueline's doesn't close until ten, Judith insists on dragging me back there. She has spent the day in second-hand music shops looking for a small keyboard since she couldn't bring a piano with her.

Marie and Annette have already left when we get there at eight. Judith's head swivels for the next two hours while I contemplate my gastric problems after having my sixth cappuccino of the day since we're allowed to have as many as we want during the quiet times.

"How about that guy?" says Judith, as a rangy thirty-something man wanders in.

"Looks like a musician to me," I say. I can feel my stomach gurgling and any minute now it's going to make some noise.

"Yeah, but how do I ask him?"

"You don't," I say.

"You're right," says Judith. "We'll just follow him and see where he goes. Then we'll talk to him."

"Whatever." I don't think I'm going to be able to move I've got so much gas in my stomach.

The man orders an espresso and pulls out a slim newspaper to read.

"I think it's a musician's magazine!" says Judith excitedly.

The man reads the paper from front to back, slowly, as if studying for a test. At nine fifty-five he finally takes his last sip of coffee and pays his bill. We're several feet behind him as he exits.

"I wonder which club he's playing at?" says Judith excitedly.

We're heading in the direction away from the tourist area.

"Uh, Judith," I say, as the streets start to get quieter and the buildings more run- down. "I think this is that area that was marked on the map as a section where tourists shouldn't go."

I'm convinced of the truth of my own words when a voice in a darkened alley way suddenly says, "Hey there, ladies."

I grab Judith's hand and start to run towards the lighted main road. I realize that I am dragging Judith.

"Judith!" I say. "Are you insane? That man is not a musician, he's probably a drug-dealer. And that man in the alley was certainly not a tour guide."

"Yeah, I guess you're right," says Judith sighing.

The next day at work, I ask Marie why that area down the road is off-limits to tourists.

"Lots of reasons," she says. "Drug-dealing, prostitution, gangs. It's bad during the day, but you're dead if you go there at night."

I decide that maybe I'll light some candles on Friday night, kind of to thank God for not forgetting about me.

In the week leading up to Bill's arrival, Judith spends all of her time practising and composing on the battered keyboard she found in one of the stores. At night, we go to Miqueline's and watch for musicians. For now anyhow, Judith has abandoned the idea of meeting any musicians, she just wants to be seen by them. She's hoping that if she gets to be known as a frequenter of the café, she may have a casual encounter with some of the other regulars.

We've also hit quite a few jazz clubs where we mostly sit around and drink and listen.

My favourite is one called Tom's, where everything is wood and all the lights are blue. Judith is in love with a saxophone player who plays there often. She claims it's because of his musical talent but I think it's because of his striking resemblance to Harry Connick Jr.

When I'm not in the mood to be melancholy, I haul Judith to Funky Fun, a bizarre little club that plays upbeat music from the late sixties and seventies. The walls are filled with pin-up posters of Abba, the Bee Gees, and Shaun Cassidy.

Feelin' Groovy is playing when we come in on Tacky Tuesday. Tacky Tuesdays are when all the drinks are served in thick plastic cups and they give out little pins at the door. Mine is of Starsky and Hutch posing on the hood of a car.

Judith considered Funky Fun a waste of time until she met Mark, the bartender, who claims to have gone to the same school as the Marsalis brothers.

I order a pina colada in a green plastic cup and mingle while Judith talks to Mark.

I miss Dave, I really do. Last night, I opened my Bible and read through half of the book of Samuel just to see the name David, I missed him so much.

"Hey babe," a guy with scraggly hair and tortoise-rimmed glasses says to me.

"Yeah, hi," I say since he looks harmless.

"What's your name?"

"Evelyn," I say, the classic I use when I don't want to give my real name.

"Mind if I call you Evie?" he says.

"Call me whatever you want," I say.

"I'm Spencer," he says. "Let me buy you a drink."

"I already have a drink, Spencer," I say. "But thank you anyway."

"Oh, but you get to keep the cup!"

"Maybe later," I say slipping away. It's hard enough dealing with strangers who are sober.

I finish my drink and look around for someone to dance with. On the other hand, if I have another drink, I won't mind dancing by myself. I buy it myself since taking Spencer up on his offer may entail getting to know him better. The dance floor is small and it's hard to tell who's dancing with who anyhow. I dance for the next hour or so, until I see that Judith is looking visibly fidgety, having obviously depleted Mark of all of his jazz knowledge.

As we're walking out the door, Spencer yells, "Hey Evie! When do you want your drink?"

Bill arrives on Sunday and we get to meet his cousin. Terry is about six foot one, with cropped blond hair and green eyes. He and Bill look more like brothers than second cousins.

The first place Terry takes us to is a hard-core jazz club that isn't known to most tourists and is just called Blues. It's more of a musicians hang-out with a lot of jamming and very little commercial structure. I sit and sip wine while Terry, who's a regular at Blues, introduces Bill and Judith to some of the musicians.

"Don't you want to meet anyone?" He comes over to where I'm sitting and takes the chair beside me.

I shrug.

"I like jazz, but I'm not a fanatic."

"So, what are you doing for the summer then?"

I tell him that I work at Miqueline's.

He asks me what I want to do and I tell him how I'm interested in journalism but I'm also getting a theology degree. I don't tell him about Dave though because if there's one thing that I think is tacky, it's a girl telling a guy she just met about her boyfriend. It makes it seem like she doesn't have an identity apart from him.

"No way," he says, standing up as Judith and Bill come towards us. "That's cool. We'll have to talk."

After Blues we go back to the hotel where Terry, Bill, and Judith have coffee in the all-night restaurant in the lobby of our hotel. I go to bed. I'm the only one who seems to have a job to be at the next morning.

The next day Terry shows up at Miqueline's at a quarter to six. He must have asked Judith what time I get off work.

"Hey!" he says. "I want to take you out to dinner."

"Sure," I say casually.

"So tell me more about yourself," he says when we've settled into a booth in a little underground bistro.

"Like, do you want to know where I was born, or some significant childhood memories?" I say.

"I want to know why you majored in Theology," he says.

He'll think I'm a total moron if I tell him about Dave, so instead I talk about how I think that God is someone that affects people, even if they don't believe in God.

"I mean, if you don't think someone in heaven is watching you, you're going to act differently than someone who believes in a judgement and all that."

Terry nods.

"Yeah, I believe in God. But that's about it. I guess I don't think about it much."

"A lot of people don't," I say. "I mean, religion used to be such a big part of society. People went to church as a social activity. People talked about God like it was a given that he was up there watching you."

"So, what are you going to do with your theology degree?" he asks just as our sandwiches arrive. I wait until the waitress has given us our plates, asked us if we want anything more to drink, and wished us bon appetit before I answer.

I don't tell him that the whole point of the Theology major has been to understand the mind of Dave Dian.

"I could become a journalist who specializes in religious issues, or specializes in the Middle East," I say shrugging. "Or, maybe I'll just organize a society for the betterment of mankind."

Terry grins.

"A society for the betterment of mankind?"

"Sure," I say sounding defensive. "Why not?"

"Why not?" he says agreeably.

I ask Terry what he wants to do.

"Music," he says. "I'm majoring in music at the university here and over the summer I'm composing things. Producing is what I want to get into though. It's a lot more stable than being a musician."

"Hey!" says Terry suddenly. "I know this great little church just outside the city. It's in ruins, but it's perfect for a picnic. Do you want to go sometime?"

Since Wednesday's are my day off, he says he'll stop by the next day at eleven with a picnic basket.

Terry picks me up in an old Chevy right on time. It's hot, so we roll down the windows to get a breeze. Terry's asking me all these questions like, why is the Bible different from other books, and I'm giving him the obvious answers like, it was written by God.

The church is a small stone building, abandoned and run-down, but I know why Terry likes it because it's abounding with wild flowers, the grass is green and fresh, and the view is beautiful. Terry has brought along french bread, some cheese and meat, and a bottle of wine.

"What do you think?" asks Terry waving his hand towards the building.

I think Terry brought me here because he thinks I like religious things. But I don't believe in buildings, I believe in people.

"It's pretty," I say.

"I like it," he says. "It's peaceful and I like to get away from the crowds."

"Do you see religion as a force in art?" he says as we're eating.

"Yeah," I say. "Especially if the artist is religious."

"Do you think God would help an artist?"

I shrug.

"God will help anyone."

I'm tired of talking about religion with Terry so I get him to tell me about some of the pieces he's composed and where he gets his ideas. He tells me that he'll play some of them for me sometime.

The next night, Judith, Bill, Terry and I go to Tom's. I just want to sit in the corner of the booth, drink wine, and be moody. But Terry insists on asking me every question ever invented, like what I like to do in my spare time, what I remember most about growing up in Ontario, what my favourite book is, what my favourite movie is, what my favourite drink is. Even Judith is getting tired of listening to him and tells him to be quiet when the saxophone player comes on. Bill looks mildly peeved since she didn't seem to care about hearing the scrawny trombone player that was doing a solo before Harry Connick Jr. II walked in.

Afterwards we go back to the hotel coffee shop. I stay up with them and have coffee since the next day is Friday and I have Saturday off, which means it's just one day of being tired at work.

The coffee shop doesn't look like it's changed much since the time the hotel was built. The vinyl seats are ripped and the tables are scratched but the coffee is good. Judith and Bill get up to look at the music in the jukebox in the corner while Terry stays behind and asks me if I want to go to a movie with him Saturday afternoon.

"Sure," I say.

I mean, hey, it's a social life.

Judith and Bill come back after starting up Frank Sinatra's Night and Day. Great. Just what I need. One of the ultimate missing you songs.

Marie is in a state of panic when I come in Friday morning.

"My boyfriend," she says, her French accent more obvious than I've ever heard it. "Motorcycle accident. I just got a phone call. He's at the hospital."

"Is he OK?" I say.

"Yeah, just a broken leg, but I've got to see him, but I can't just leave."

"Go," I say generously. "I can handle things until Annette gets here."

"Are you sure?" she says.

"Hey," I say. "My boyfriend has a motorcycle. I know what it's like. Go."

The white-haired lady shuffles in at ten o'clock. It's not that she walks like she's old, just like someone who is very tired. I bring her a café au lait before she has to order it.

"Merci, cherié," she quietly breathes the words. "How are you today?"

"Good," I say.

"You are new," she says.

"Yes," I say.

"You are from New Orleans?"

"No ma'am. From Ontario."

"Ah, well. A little New Orleans is good for the soul."

She takes a sip of coffee and turns her head, which I take as my cue to leave.

At ten-thirty a red-eyed musician with an instrument case slinks in and takes a corner table.

"Coffee," he mutters to me and then keeps on mumbling to himself. He makes me think of the proverb, "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? ... They that tarry long at wine."

"Où Marie?" Miqueline comes stomping out.

"She had to go to the hospital because her boyfriend was in an accident," I say.

"Uhhgh!" says Miqueline in disgust. "I tell her, do not go out with a man who rides a motorcycle! Sooner or later, they have an accident and who needs the pain?"

She turns around and goes back inside without even inquiring about the state of Marie's hospital-ridden boyfriend.

I'm a little apprehensive about the eleven-thirty rush since that's when the café starts to fill up. By eleven-forty, five tables are full and three of them have ordered complete lunches. Of course, Annette picks today to be late and shows up at twelve-fifteen, about half an hour after I've had a nervous breakdown.

After the café has quieted down, I get an espresso and sit down with it while I refill the sugar containers. A young man wanders in and orders a coffee which Annette brings to him. He smiles at me. I smile back. As a waitress I feel I should. Besides, it's not like he's ugly or anything. He sits for the next half hour and stares at the people going by, a man just taking a breather from life.

Terry comes over to the hotel after work. I've gone out with this guy more in a week than I did with Dave in a year.

"Let's go out," he says. I take him to Funky Fun since Judith and Bill aren't coming with us.

Friday night is Disco Night. The disco ball is going and there are even some people wearing white bell bottom suits with dark shirts and doing John Travolta moves.

This is Terry's first time here and I can tell that he loves it as much as I do even though this place is not for serious musicians. All the music is taped at Funky Fun, except for Poetry Night Mondays when they have a saxophonist playing in the corner and everyone sits on the floor and reads poetry. Mark, the bartender, told me about it and I really want to come sometime.

Terry and I both agree that we're lousy disco dancers so we head straight for the bar. After two licorice schnapps I feel like I can at least get up and move around a bit. Terry and I have fun just making things up as we go along and becoming more creative the more we drink.

It hits me halfway through the evening that maybe I should be at home lighting some candles and saying a prayer. I mean, if I don't keep it up, I could forget the Hebrew. More schnapps doesn't make the uneasy feeling go away, so finally I just tell Terry I want to leave.

"You OK?" he says.

"Yeah, fine," I say. "I just remembered some things I have to do."

We walk back in silence, me thinking about the Sabbath, him seeming worried.

"You're sure you're OK?"

"Yeah," I say. "It's just that I remembered something important that I have to do."

"Want to go to Poetry Reading Monday?" I say to him when we get back to the hotel, to make up for this evening that I cut short.

"Sure!" he says, visibly looking happy. "Is tomorrow still on?"

I had forgotten about tomorrow.

"Yeah," I say. "It's been awhile since I saw a movie."

Judith isn't in the room when I get up to the third floor. I pull my suitcase from under my bed to find the candles. It's obviously way past sunset but I still want to do it. I put on the bandanna that Dave gave me before going to Jerusalem.

I remember his words as I light the candle.

"Baruch Ata Adonai, Elohenu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat."

I wave my hands then cover my eyes and uncover them.

"Amen."

CHAPTER TWENTY

A WOMAN'S HEART

"Why does liking someone hurt like hell?" asks Sue Vallencia, Economics major and Hadassah's summer roommate. Hadassah considered going home for the summer, then decided it was too much of a pain to look for a job. It was easier to stay and take summer classes.

"It's not the attraction," says Hadassah looking up from where she is sprawled on her bed writing a letter to Dave. "It's the desire to possess. Solomon called a woman's heart a snare."

"Who's Solomon? Your ex?" Sue is curled up in her beanbag flipping through a *Mademoiselle*.

"King Solomon. Reigned over the kingdom of Israel from 974 to 937 B.C.E., according to some calculations, anyhow."

"The one with all the wives?"

"700 wives and 300 concubines."

"What's the difference between a wife and a concubine?"

"Concubine isn't as prestigious as a wife. More like a mistress."

For a moment Hadassah thinks about the poor foreign princess who finds out that she's going to be married to King Solomon of Israel for whom weddings were probably as exciting as a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. King Solomon's court was probably more efficient than any Las Vegas white chapel facade.

"So, he said a woman's heart is like a snare?"

Hadassah nods.

"And her hands are fetters," she adds.

"You know, it makes sense." Sue is thinking. "It's like, women always want to hold onto someone and it's the holding on that hurts. I mean, it doesn't hurt to see a good-looking man. The pain comes as soon as you want to take him home with you."

"Pretty much," agrees Hadassah. She's writing to Dave in Hebrew just because she knows he'll like it.

"So, I don't understand why you're not with Eddie Prince anymore," says Sue.

With only two hundred people left on campus news spreads quickly and due to the boredom of the summer, people are even gossiping about the people they barely know.

"Between you and me, he came from a dysfunctional family," says Hadassah. It isn't particularly confidential information. Eddie himself loves telling stories to everyone about the deviant behaviour of all of his family members.

"I totally know what you're saying," says Sue. "It's like, I went out with this guy and I totally carried his pain. These guys who come from dysfunctional families have such a hard time giving because they have less to give right from the beginning."

"I agree," says Hadassah politely. She pulls out her Hebrew/English dictionary to look up the word 'apocalyptic.'

"So now I have this three-point triangle to appraise my relationships by."

All triangles have three points, Hadassah can't help thinking.

"It's Respect, Trust, Control. I have to respect a guy, you know, his mental capacity and all, and I have to trust him before I relinquish my control of the relationship. The operative word is healthy relationship."

Hadassah nods. If the operative word is healthy, she thinks, then you are grammatically correct. If, however, you are including the word 'relationship', then you must say 'the operative words are healthy relationship.'

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

JUDITH AND BILL HAVE AN ADVENTURE

The movie theatre is in a district that I've never been in before, which is not too phenomenal considering that I only know the few blocks around where I live.

It's a small theatre that shows a lot of the movies that are at the film festivals but never make it to mainstream theatres. Most of the people in the audience have come by themselves, although there are a few couples. We see a movie about an elderly bag lady who takes up poetry and dies after writing almost two hundred poems. Afterwards we go to a 24-hour deli for coffee.

"Did you like that?" asked Terry, leaning forward in the wooden chair as if the fate of the world depends on my answer.

"Yeah," I say. "It was interesting."

"What did you like about it?"

"I don't think I liked the film as much as I liked the atmosphere." I say. "I mean, the movie was OK, but I liked the theatre and the people that were in it."

"Yeah," says Terry leaning back, more relaxed. "I go there a lot because I like the ambience. What do you think of New Orleans?"

"It's nice," I say. "It's artsy and it's interesting. Lots to look at."

"Yeah," says Terry. "Do you like it as a place?"

It seems crucial to him that I like it here.

"Yeah," I say. "I like it. But if I stayed here I'd become superficial. I'd end up just sitting around watching people. I'd never be a participant because I'm not a musician."

"New Orleans isn't just for musicians," says Terry earnestly. "It's for all artists."

I shrug.

"That's true but I'm not an artist. I'm a kind-of-sort-of journalist who ended up becoming a theology major."

Terry looks disappointed.

"So tell me more about your music," I say.

"Music is my life," he says picking up his mug of coffee. "I mean, you have theology and I have music. I think of all the arts, music is the one that gets the closest to touching God because it's so intangible."

"I've never thought about it that way before," I say.

"Yeah, well, jazz isn't always a religious experience because it's a very down-to-earth type of music," he says. "And I compose a lot of jazz pieces. But it's always at the back of my mind that someday I want to compose something that shoots people right up into heaven and makes them feel God."

It comes as a mild disturbance that Dave isn't the only one who is mortal aspiring to meet God. I mean, I always thought his intensity was unique, but here I am sitting across from a guy who seems equally as driven. Obviously I'm the type of person who thrives on ambitious men.

Marie's boyfriend is doing better and despite her tears, has refused to sell the bike.

"He will ride till he breaks his neck," says Miqueline. "Il est un cretin."

"He's a fool," Marie translates for me, almost starting to cry again.

Marie is teaching me French between customers. French is required learning growing up in Canada but I've forgotten most of it. On Sunday we start with basic conversational French and all the expressions that Miqueline likes to throw into her English.

At night I'm teaching myself Hebrew. Dave gave me a thin paperback booklet with the basic alphabet and pronunciation. I figure if I learn that this summer I'm doing well.

Poetry Reading Monday at Funky Fun is very bohemian. The room is magically transformed from a night-club into what feels like somebody's basement. We all sit around cross-legged on the floor. Some people have brought books of poetry while others just get up and do a stream-of-consciousness poem, especially the ones who've had too much to drink. Everyone is vying to say a poem so Terry and I just sit on the floor and take it all in. Terry keeps buying me daiquiris which I'm finding funny because his motives are so obvious. I can hardly blame him though. I guess he figures that with a few drinks I'll loosen up and start liking Louisiana enough to stay here.

"You're such a sphinx," says Terry after he figures he's filled me up with enough liquid to make me reveal every secret I've ever known and every desire I've ever suppressed.

"Why's that?" I say.

"You're hiding something," he says. "There's something you're not telling me about yourself."

Well, I figure I ought to tell him and the daiquiris will certainly make it easier.

"I have a boyfriend," I say.

He looks down at the floor.

"Why didn't you tell me?" he says.

"You never asked," I say. "Look, I didn't know this was a relationship."

"It's not," he says, and turns and watches the person reciting a poem. I don't know if he's listening to her, but I kind of doubt it.

After Monday night I don't expect to see much more of Terry, but he shows up Tuesday afternoon at Miqueline's with a bouquet of flowers.

"For my good friend," he says, holding them out to me.

The three tables of customers are all staring.

"Thanks Terry," I say.

"Let's go out for coffee tonight," he says.

"I've got to study Hebrew," I say.

"We can have it in the coffee shop."

Terry knocks at the hotel door at eight o'clock just as I'm carefully writing out a gimel. Bill and Judith have gone out to Blues. I answer the door making sure that I'm fully-dressed so as not to give any suggestion that I've changed my mind about the status of our friendship.

"Hey!" he says stepping inside.

"Let me grab my key," I say.

When we're seated in the coffee shop, Terry asks me lots of questions about Union and what university life is like in Canada. I find myself suddenly wishing that Terry had been there the last year so I could have had a guy to talk to and just hang out with. I'm sure we would have gone out to the movies a lot more than just once.

I wake up the next morning and Judith's bed hasn't been slept in. The last time I saw her was yesterday before she and Bill went to Blues and she didn't say anything about staying out all night.

I phone Terry, waking him up, and ask him if Bill is there. He isn't. Terry says he'll be right over, though I don't know what good that will do. He shows up looking like he's just thrown on a t-shirt and bermuda shorts.

We decide to start out by going to Blues to see if they really did go there. On our way we walk past Miqueline's and I wave to Marie and then, as an afterthought, I go back and ask her if Bill and Judith were there last night, but she doesn't know since she got off at five.

"I will ask Claire," she says going inside. "She worked last night."

She brings out Claire, a tall girl with long auburn hair, so that I can describe Judith and Bill to her.

"Yes," she says. "They were here until we closed at ten."

As we're walking to Blues, we hypothesize that Judith and Bill stopped off at Miqueline's first since Blues stays open practically all night.

"No babes," says Harry, an ancient trombone player and relic of the last night's festivities, who's sitting alone at the bar. "I was here since eleven and your friends didn't come all night."

"So, somewhere between Miqueline's and Blues they decided to do something else," I say, once we're outside.

"Either that, or something happened to them," says Terry.

I suspect that Terry is just being melodramatic so that the crisis will bring us closer together. It's also my opinion that Judith and Bill just fell asleep somewhere after a fun-filled evening and I'm ticked that I'm using my day off to look for them.

Terry suggests that we walk back to Miqueline's keeping our eyes open for anything suspicious. On a crowded street in New Orleans everything looks suspicious I point out to him. Of course if he's looking for their bodies in the entrance of an alleyway that might be easier.

"How can you be so calm?" he says.

"Because worrying doesn't do anything and I personally think they're OK," I say.

By late afternoon when they haven't shown up at the hotel or at Terry's place, I'm forced to admit that something may be wrong. I'm about to phone the police when we hear a key turning. Judith and Bill walk into the hotel room.

"Where the heck have you been?" I say.

"Uh, we kind of got lost," says Judith looking embarrassed.

"How could you get lost going to Blues?" says Terry, who has jumped up from where he is sitting on the bed, sounding half-relieved, half-angry.

"We didn't," says Bill.

I think at this point they would have both liked to drop the discussion, but knew that Terry and I wouldn't just let it go.

"OK. OK," says Judith to me. "You know that musician guy we saw at Miqueline's?"

"The one who was probably the drug dealer," I say.

"Yeah, except he was a musician because he was sitting at the table next to ours and it was a music magazine he was reading. So just for fun, we followed him."

"You followed him back to that neighbourhood?" I'm mad now and when Terry finds out where they went, he's angry too.

"That area isn't safe even if you're in a group of twenty," he says, "never mind two. Those guys love couples. They could get you down in a minute and drag your bodies into a back alley before you even opened your mouth to scream."

"Well, we were OK," says Judith. "At least while we were following the guy. We kept going until he came to this really run-down building."

"They're all run-down," says Terry.

"Well, this one was especially run-down. So this guy goes up a flight of stairs and we follow him. We go through this door and there's a bunch of guys jamming inside!"

Bill is quiet. He looks embarrassed about the whole thing.

"So they let us play with them for awhile, and they're drinking wine, so we have some too. After that, I can't remember anything."

"We woke up on the floor," says Bill. "They'd taken our money."

"You're lucky that's all they did!" says Terry.

"I want to call the police," says Judith walking to the telephone table.

"Right!" says Terry. "Like they're really going to listen to you. That place is marked on every map as being a no-tourist zone. Call the police and you're more likely to get a lecture than your money back."

Judith puts the phone down and says she's too drowsy to do anything anyway and flops out on her bed. Bill falls into my bed and they're both asleep in minutes.

"Come on." Terry takes my arm and we go downstairs to the coffee shop.

Terry slips in beside me in the booth and it's not until I'm sitting down that I realize how tired I am even though it's only five o'clock. We both don't feel like discussing the day, so instead we just sip our coffee and make small talk.

The days pass by. I learn to write out the entire Hebrew alphabet and am now working on memorizing short phrases. I get a letter from Dave, a cause for celebration since it only took five from me before he wrote back.

On my days off, Terry takes me around New Orleans so that after a few weeks I feel like I know it quite well. My favourite days are when we just take a picnic to the church and then come back, do coffee and go clubbing. We hit Tom's and Blues if we're with Judith and Bill, but if we're alone we go to Funky Fun.

I try to drop Dave's name occasionally just so Terry doesn't get his hopes up, but it's draining me to miss Dave and like Terry at the same time.

One Saturday night Terry takes me to a park where there's a symphony of Schubert and Brahms. It's when we're stretched out on the grass looking up at the stars that I really do feel like I'm shooting up to heaven and touching God. When Terry takes my hand, I don't mind because I know he's feeling the same thing.

I want to tell him that it's not his fault. Maybe I should be with him, but somewhere along the line I decided that I wanted Dave and that's what I've got to follow.

After the symphony we buy ice cream from a vendor and eat it on one of the park benches.

"That's what I want to get into," says Terry referring to the symphony. "But the problem is, I like the jazz lifestyle. I like the small underground clubs and the crowded smoky rooms. I'm thinking maybe I should try to synthesize the two and incorporate classical elements into my music."

He's kind of musing to himself while I listen and watch his face move, the way his lips twist when he says something he's not confident about but wants me to accept.

I like his vision, his hope.

"I haven't heard any of your music," I say. "I'd really like to."

"OK!" he says jumping up. "How about now?"

We drive back to his place. I've been to his apartment a few times when Judith, Bill, and I were there before or after clubbing. It's a small one bedroom apartment decorated with prints of musicians by various painters.

Terry's got a sax in the corner, but I know his instrument is really the piano. He has a keyboard, more extensive than the one Judith bought, set up at one end of his box-size living room.

"It's a good instrument for bridging jazz and classical," he says when I ask him why he favours it over the sax.

He plays me one of his pieces and although it's far from Schubert, even I can tell that he has potential. His music is intriguing, moody and intense, leaving me with a feeling of wanting more.

"I love it," I say, after he plays the last note.

He smiles.

"Did you ever take music lessons?" he says.

I shake my head.

"About all I know is that this is middle C," I say, hitting it. "That's the only thing I remember from music class in primary school."

"Sit down," he says. "I'll teach you something."

After about half an hour I can play Mary Had A Little Lamb, without making too many mistakes.

"Very good," says Terry encouragingly.

I figure if I ever want piano lessons I'll come to him since I'd never develop a complex that I wasn't good enough.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE LETTER

Hadassah's hands are shaking as they rip open the letter. Her fingers suddenly look anaemically bloodless, their paleness complemented by her white long sleeves. She doesn't even bother to take the long, narrow brown envelope back to her dorm but tears it apart right in front of her open mailbox with her Souvenir From the Holy Land keychain still dangling from the lock.

"Dear Hadassah, (it says)

I know it's been 50 million years since I last saw you..."

Her hands are now in control but her insides are shaking and she feels feverish, almost nauseous. The last time she saw Peter was about a week after they had visited the monastery. They had had their usual afternoon of tea drinking in her uncle's restaurant. His mother told her that he had gotten on a Greyhound that night, leaving a note on his dresser saying that he would get off the bus when he felt like it and send a postcard when he arrived. He had sent a postcard home when he got to Arizona. But he had never written Hadassah.

"You probably know I'm in Arizona, especially if you checked the postmark when you wondered what does AZ stand for and who the hell is Peter Cairns?

'I'm working on a ranch. I guess you could say I'm a cowboy, no joke. Around here, in parts anyway, it's totally the Wild West. My girlfriend's the rancher's daughter which makes me feel like I'm in *Oklahoma!*. Before that I went out with a girl who bartends at the local dive. THAT would have caused a scandal back in Nova Scotia, but here nobody cares what you do as long as you don't (1) mess with their woman, or (2) shoot their brother..."

She reads his page and a half long letter, still standing, and then folds it back up, replaces it in the envelope, and sticks it in her leather knapsack. Not a word about why he left. Not one validation of their relationship or that it meant anything to him. He doesn't even sound like he had ever even thought of joining a monastery.

She barely remembers to remove her key from the mailbox.

It starts to drizzle as she is walking up the path to the front entrance of her dorm. It is pouring by the time she is searching for her keychain in her knapsack. Finally she finds it in the outside pocket where she put it so she could get to it easily. She is soaked.

Damn symbolism, she thinks. A sunny day might have mocked her into a show of strength.

Somehow she climbs up the two flights of stairs and finds herself back in her room lying on her bed staring at the chipping ceiling. Glancing over at the window that is already hazy with cool moisture, she is momentarily entranced by the drops of water rolling down the pane like tears.

She pulls out the letter again. Since letters are epistles, she applies principles of hermeneutics to analyze it. What is the author's intent? What is the context of the work? There are no Greek words to look up which might change the meaning of a passage. She is forced to accept that Peter's letter seems to be pretty straightforward. It's what it doesn't say that is significant and there is no way of determining what these unwritten thoughts are by the letter in her hand. She lets the letter drop and rolls over on her stomach.

An undetermined amount of time passes before Sue comes into the room.

A sudden lurch of gas in Hadassah's stomach results in an involuntary gasp.

"What's the matter?" asks Sue, flopping onto her bed, her head turning towards Hadassah.

"He didn't learn a damn thing from me," says Hadassah slowly. "Men impregnate us with their ideas and what do we give them? Do ideas, apart from their own ideas, of course, even matter to them?"

"I read in Cosmopolitan that men feel threatened by women with ideas," says Sue reaching for a pack of sugar-free Trident on the nightstand.

That's one great thing about Sue, thinks Hadassah. She assumes that all problems revolve around men so she can easily pick up on any related discussion. She is not a woman to jump off a building when she is fired from her job or blow her brains out when her stocks drop and she loses her life savings. She just says, "Oh well, it's only money."

She is, however, a woman who does not philosophize when, for example, she finds out that the man she loves has been dating someone else on the side. She climbs into bed and becomes inconsolable. If there is a knife on her nightstand, she inserts it into her chest. If there is no knife or no sleeping pills to OD on, she lies there staring at the ceiling wondering why does God allow suffering? The worse part of it, thinks Hadassah, is that I can relate to her.

"Women are shaped by men," says Hadassah. "We don't act as much as we react. And it sucks because once you're hurt by one, the one you think you totally love, everyone else is just a substitute. I'll be rebounding for the rest of my life."

Sue is sympathetically quiet.

"I suppose I was just lucky to get a letter," Hadassah sighs. Too many raw nerves, she thinks. Too much intensity for something that isn't even a case of outright rejection. Maybe not every love is meant for this lifetime.

"What was he like?" Sue asks.

"He was one of those guys that if he started a cult, women would be lined up to be one of his wives."

"Do you still love him?"

Now we're getting into the philosophical realm, thinks Hadassah. What is love? Physical love seems to demand two things. First, that you understand the other person. Second, that the other person, to some degree, match your emotions. I neither understand him anymore, nor do I feel he cares about me.

"I guess not."

"All I know is," says Sue rolling over onto her back, "if you want to hold onto a guy, you gotta brush your hair, like every time you go into a bathroom. I read in *Mademoiselle*, I think it was, that guys don't like messy hair and they love to see it looking smooth and glossy."

Hadassah sighs and internally vows to never brush her hair again as long as she lives.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

SEASONS IN THE SUN

The three letters that I've got from Dave are displayed on my dresser, kind of to remind myself that we still have a relationship. His letters are full of descriptions about Jerusalem and the Hebrew school where he is studying. He's been visiting the Western Wall to pray practically everyday and goes to a synagogue on Friday evenings to hear the discussions of the law.

He doesn't say anything about missing me, but at least the letters are signed, "Love."

It's Tuesday and Terry's supposed to be coming by after work so we can go to Funky Fun. Of all the nights there, our favourite is Tacky Tuesday, and I'm looking forward to it.

I get a phone call at a quarter six.

"Sorry, I can't make it tonight," says Terry.

"Oh," I say.

"Yeah, something came up."

He tells me he'll phone me whenever, and we'll do something.

From Dave this wouldn't have bothered me because it was a given that love and pain were synonymous, but from Terry it's disturbing. I mean, I know we're both aware that there are only two more weeks of the summer, and Terry's been handling it by becoming more and more casual, but this is the first date he's broken off, and I'm left with an empty feeling.

I don't want to just go back to the hotel room and see if I can go out with Judith and Bill so I walk to Funky Fun by myself. At the door I get a pin of Sonny and Cher and my rum-and-Coke comes in a psychedelically swirling pink and yellow plastic cup.

I sit at the counter and tell Mark dramatically that I'm a woman torn between two lovers. He's very sympathetic so I end up telling him the whole story of how I busted myself trying to get Dave to like me and then how easy it was with Terry. Except that now Terry is acting strange.

"Well," says Mark. "I'll tell you what. If you go for Terry you'll be making the same mistake that practically every couple in history makes, thinking love is easy. With Terry, you'll always be upset when it gets hard because you'll feel like it shouldn't be that way. With Dave, you won't mind when it gets hard because you already know that love is something you have to work at."

I'm looking at him the way Mary Magdalene must have looked at Christ.

"You're right," I say. "That's exactly it! I mean, love isn't about convenience, it's about really caring for somebody. Physical things like time and distance shouldn't destroy that."

I get up from the stool.

"I've gotta go," I say. "I'm going to write Dave a letter. I haven't written to him for a week."

My letters to Dave had decreased considerably since going out with Terry.

I buy a set of paper and envelopes in a little gift shop and take it to Miqueline's. I don't really have much to say to Dave since I can't exactly tell him about all the things I've been doing with Terry, so I describe the people in the café and that takes up three pages. Then I go back to the room and study my Hebrew until I'm exhausted.

Judith wakes me up at noon to ask me if I want to do anything with her because Bill is spending the day with his aunt and uncle, Terry's parents.

"I think Terry's going with them too," she says.

"As if it makes a difference," I say. "I want to do something with you even if he isn't doing anything."

"Did you guys have a fight?" she says.

"No," I say. "I just remembered that I'm in love with someone else."

She laughs.

"I was wondering what you were going to do."

Since we don't have a car, Judith and I just wander around the busy streets near our hotel trying to go to all of the places we haven't been to before. Instead of having lunch at one place, we order a sandwich in one deli, then have a salad at a café, then go for dessert at a little bakery. Then we shop, going into every store that we haven't been in. By night time we're exhausted but we still want to go to a club that we passed during the day called

Finnigan's. It's an Irish pub that seems so out of context with all the jazz places and even Judith is getting tired of the blues since she and Bill have hit practically every club in New Orleans.

Finnigan's is smoky and noisy. The crowd is mostly older and everyone is drinking beer. Judith and I take a booth and each order a Guinness, mostly because the walls are covered with posters for it.

A forty-year old man tries to convince us that we want him to join us but we tell him we're not into men. It's not too hard to get rid of the older conservative ones, even when they've had too much to drink.

All day Judith and I have been telling each other about our summers since this is the first time we've been out alone together since Bill came.

She's disappointed that I didn't fall for Terry since she and Bill are planning on getting married and moving to New Orleans after college.

"It would have been cool," she says. "All of us living here."

There's no dancing at Finnigan's. This is a hard-core bar for drinkers only. There is, however, a dart board that is very popular and if you stand at a certain point and get a bull's eye, you can win a t-shirt with "Feeling Good at Finnigan's" scrawled across it in green. It's so tacky that I want one, but I end up hitting the wall around the dartboard. Even when the men graciously let me try again, I only hit the outer perimeters of the dartboard.

Afterwards we go to Miqueline's for cappuccinos but we're both so tired that it's like drinking milk before bed.

I was kind of expecting Terry to stop by at work, but Thursday passes without me hearing from him. He phones me Friday night in the hotel room and asks me if I want to go to Friday Night Disco.

"I've got things to do," I say. I've never told him about how I like to light candles and say a prayer for the Sabbath.

"But you're leaving in practically a week," he says.

"Yeah, I know," I say. "Let's do something tomorrow."

He says he'll pick me up at ten.

When I see him the next day, I realize that I had forgotten how good-looking he is and I'm glad I talked to Mark or else I may have found myself grovelling a bit to keep him.

Terry takes me to the museum, one of those kind that you go to on school field trips when you're in elementary school.

"Where shall we start," says Terry after he's paid for our entrance and we're standing in the marble foyer with four different hallways to choose from. "Dinosaurs?"

"I never liked the dinosaurs," I say. "All the other kids used to spend the whole day in the dinosaur gallery while I would go off by myself to sit and stare at the Greek gods."

We take a winding flight of stairs up to the Greek exhibit. Passing by display cases full of pottery and jewellery, we come to a little room with all of the Greek statues.

"Dave!" I almost cry out.

"What?" says Terry.

"Nothing," I say, walking over to one of the statues. It's Dave. The wavy short hair, the smooth face, the cool calm eyes. Even though it's a white marble statue, I know his hair is blond and his face pale.

"You like this one?" says Terry coming up behind me. "I personally go for that one." He points to a nude of Aphrodite.

I hit him. We wander around the room, pausing to examine in mock scholarly poses, Zeus, Dionysus, Apollo, Artemis, Ares. The one that looks like Dave is an unnamed Greek man.

Terry insists that after we go through the Greek and Roman galleries we see the dinosaurs. I don't mind them as much now. They must have been too overwhelming when I was younger. After the dinosaurs we do up the natural sciences -- beetles on pins, 1,000 varieties of butterfly, birds in their natural habitat, a stuffed ape, a photo-gallery of African wildlife. We also check out the special exhibit -- Treasures from India, which is a small room full of trinkets and costumes.

We're finished the museum by one. We pass up the museum cafeteria to go to a nearby café.

"Are you looking forward to going back to Union?" asks Terry after we've ordered our food.

"Yeah, in a way I am," I say taking a sip of coffee. "I'm going to take a lot of Middle Eastern Studies, so that'll be interesting. How about you?"

"No," he says smiling. "I doubt I'll be taking a lot of Middle Eastern studies, but yeah, I am looking forward to school. I have a feeling this is going to be a good year."

"How come?"

"Because I feel like I've really lived this summer and I want to go back to school and live the same way."

"Yeah," I say. "I know what you mean. One thing about life is you've got to do things to make it meaningful. You can't just sit around and think about it."

"Exactly!" says Terry. "I want that idea to come out in my music so I can move people to action."

"Yeah, I'm thinking maybe I'll try to get a double major in Journalism," I say. "I really want to be able to do something significant someday."

We spend the afternoon at a shopping mall, the first one I've been in the entire summer. After two months of shopping in little boutiques, it freaks me out to be in a department store. Since Terry missed out on Tacky Tuesday, I insist that we have dinner in their small cafeteria where we order chicken burger platters, grapeade, and blue jello in clear plastic cups.

Then we go back to Miqueline's for coffee to kill time before Funky Fun opens.

Mark winks at me when we come in that evening. I wink back. I know he understands.

What bond would ever keep Terry and I together, I wonder as we're dancing to Seasons in the Sun. I mean, sometimes I think pain makes you closer to a person than just sharing good times.

"We had joy, we had fun, we had seasons in the sun," hums Terry when we're walking back to the hotel. "But the wine and the fun, like the seasons they are gone."

This is my last Sunday working at Miqueline's. When I go in to tell Miqueline she says, "make it your last day, cherié, si tu veux."

Si tu veux means 'if you wish', I've learned from Marie's French lessons.

I take her up on her offer since I wouldn't mind having the last week to work on my Hebrew and hang around with Terry. Marie is sad that I'm leaving, but she excitedly tells me that her boyfriend's leg has sufficiently recovered for him to pick her up that evening, on the motorcycle.

"Ooo-la-la," I say. "Does Miqueline know?"

"Oh no!" she says. "He won't pull up in front of the café. I'll meet him down the road."

It's busy for a Sunday. It's one of the few Sundays left in the summer and people are taking last-minute weekend vacations to New Orleans. Most of the people in the café are young married couples, some with children. After I serve all the parents their sandwiches and coffee and the kids their hamburgers and Cokes, Marie and I sit down for our final French lesson.

"Je reve de toi toutes les nuits, et quels rêves!" says Marie. "I dream of you every night and what dreams!"

I decide I'll include that in my next letter to Dave along with *je t'adore*.

"Adieu," says Marie when we are hugging good-bye. "Bonne chance!"

Judith, Bill, Terry, and I are all going out to Tom's tonight. Much to Bill's satisfaction, the Harry Connick Jr. look-a-like has been replaced by an aging saxophonist who plays with a lot more soul but a lot less style.

Tom's always makes me feel moody. It's the best place for enjoying your depression. I miss Dave all the time, but my immediate melancholy is that I'll be missing Terry in a week. Terry is being quiet unlike the first time we came here and he was talking his head off, so we just sit and drink wine while Judith and Bill laugh and joke with each other. Finally they move up to a closer table when a particularly gifted jazz quartet comes out to play for awhile.

"Do you want to move up?" I say.

"No," says Terry. "Do you?"

"You know me," I say. "An entire summer in New Orleans and jazz still all sounds the same to me."

Terry smiles sadly.

"Maybe you'll start to like Middle Eastern music, or something," he says.

Terry and I sit in silence and I wonder if we have run out of things to say because we know our relationship is going nowhere or just because we never had much in common to begin with? I miss Dave's habit of suddenly bursting into a discussion of the Old Testament prophets as naturally as some people ask you how you're doing. I never felt like I had to rack my brain for something trivial to say. Besides, Dave always equated silence with deep thought.

Judith and Bill return to our table after the quartet is finished their repertoire which irks my desire to be alone with Terry, but I know that nothing magical would have happened anyhow. The ideal would be to be at Tom's by myself where I could just sit and be moody.

After Tom's we go back to the hotel coffee shop. Judith and Bill are excitedly talking about what courses they're going to be taking back at Union. Terry is stirring his coffee as if it takes a minute of steady, consistent movement for the sugar to dissolve completely. I stare at a framed picture of a puppy sitting on a rock.

"I've got to go to bed," says Judith. "I'm dead."

She and Bill get up and leave.

"So," I say after a minute of silence. "What do you want to talk about?"

Terry shrugs.

"How about whether true jazz music should absorb and incorporate outside musical elements?"

"Hey!" I suddenly say. "What do you think about the way Jeremiah lived through the things he prophesied?"

I'm dead serious. I was reading the book of Jeremiah a couple of nights ago.

"I like my topic better," says Terry grinning.

It was my last minute hope. If we had had an in-depth discussion about the prophet Jeremiah I might have come back to New Orleans. Of course, I know it's unreasonable to expect Terry to discuss the prophet Jeremiah when he's probably never even heard of him. The ironic thing is that if I had never met Dave I wouldn't even care about Jeremiah's prophecies.

On Monday Terry takes me to see the University of New Orleans campus. We tour all the pertinent sights, like where he takes his Advanced Piano, his Advanced Musical Composition and his Jazz History.

The way the girls look at him when we're in the little coffee shop near the campus I know he won't have any trouble finding a girlfriend. This upsets me somewhat.

"Now I won't be able to come here without thinking about you," says Terry grinning sadly.

"I know," I say. "I'm going to miss you like hell."

"Will we write?" he says.

"Sure," I say.

It'll be nice to write for awhile, and then maybe he'll stop when he finds someone else. Still, I have a feeling that I'll get more letters from Terry my first month back than from Dave all year. Oh well. I'll show the letters to my children when they ask me what I did before I married Daddy.

We get into a discussion about whether it's better to be a musician who goes to school or one who teaches himself. Obviously Terry is for the former. I play the devil's advocate and tell him I'm into raw genius.

Terry and I spend the rest of the week in cafés and clubs. On Friday, after we've spent the day picnicking and listening to CD's back at his apartment, he pleads with me to go to Disco Night at Funky Fun. It would be our last night alone together since tomorrow we're going to Blues with Judith and Bill.

"I can't," I say.

"Why not?"

I hesitate. I've told him practically everything else about myself.

"I've got to keep the Sabbath," I say.

"What?"

"You know, Friday night and Saturday is the Jewish Sabbath," I say. "I like to light candles and say a prayer for it."

"Can I come?"

He's serious. This is not what I want. I feel like to invite Terry would be to violate Dave. But what can I say?

We drive back to the hotel and I decide that I'm just going to stick to lighting the candles, saying the prayer and eating the bread and wine that we buy in a convenience store near the hotel.

At eighteen minutes before sundown, I light the first candle. Terry is respectfully quiet.

"Baruch Ata Adonai," I say waving my hands.

"Elohenu Melech ha-olam, asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hadlik ner shel Shabbat."

I cover my eyes, then uncover them.

"Amen," I say.

"Amen," says Terry.

"Wow," he says, after pausing to see if I'm going to say anymore. "That's serious."

We break the bread and drink the wine.

"I wish I were in Jerusalem," I say. "I want to see how the real Jews keep the Sabbath."

"Do you really think it's the city of God?" he says.

"Well, it's hard to tell just by looking at the pictures," I say. "But yes, I do. I don't think Dave would be there if it wasn't."

"Is Dave infallible?"

I look at the wall.

"Dave is fallible," I say finally. "But the God he worships isn't."

"How does a person become religious?" says Terry.

"If you're talking Christianity, no man can come to Christ unless the Father draws him," I say. "John 6:44. But I don't know about other religions. It's probably a calling."

Now it's Terry who's staring at the wall.

"How do you know if you're being called?" he says.

"I don't know if I can even tell you," I say. "I don't know if my calling is a religious one."

"You mean, you may just be following a man?"

"A man who I know is convicted," I say. "But I don't know if I would have ever understood or experienced that kind intensity without him."

The next day Judith and I have to pack since we're leaving Sunday. Bill and Terry come by to pick us up at eight.

We walk to Blues and I try not to be moody because I want this to be a good memory for Terry. When Judith and Bill abandon us to talk to some musicians, I valiantly try to follow Terry's conversation. He's talking about life as a meaningful experience.

"As long as you suffer, you know you're alive," says Terry. "Suffering, not contentment, inspires art."

I wonder if maybe I should get into art.

"I wouldn't go so far as to say I look for suffering," Terry goes on. "But I don't mind it. That's what jazz is all about. Not being afraid of the blues."

"That's what theology is about too," I say.

"God must be a jazz musician."

Terry wants to dance. I refuse to do anything but the slower songs, you know, the ones where you just hold onto each other and shuffle around a bit. For the fast ones here you actually have to know the steps.

We don't get back to the hotel until four so we go into the twenty-four hour coffee shop for breakfast.

"I can't believe how many musicians we met this summer!" says Judith.

Bill pulls out a crumpled sheet of paper full of names and addresses.

"Next summer we've got it made," he says. "If we can compose some really good pieces this year, all we have to do is bring them back here."

Terry gives me a look as if to say there won't be a next summer for us. To make things worse, Bill is saying to Judith how as soon as he gets back to Union in a few days, they can start composing together.

Our plane leaves in three hours and I dread saying good bye to Terry. What makes it worse than Dave is that our good-bye will really be a good-bye.

Judith and I decline Bill's offer of Terry and him leaving so that we can sleep a bit. We figure an hour of sleep would only make us more tired.

After a breakfast of eggs, pancakes, and coffee, we go upstairs, get our suitcases, and check-out. We get to the airport at 6:30, a half hour before our flight.

"Listen," says Terry. We're sitting in the waiting area on the baby-blue vinyl chairs welded to the floor, five seats away from Judith and Bill. "Dave, or no Dave, I just want you to know I love you."

Obviously this is more than I can deal with.

"Thanks Terry," I say. "I love you too. Like a brother."

He looks crushed.

"Like a step-brother, I mean," I say grinning as I lean over and kiss his cheek.

He laughs.

"OK, I can live with that."

He stands up as they announce that they are boarding the flight to Toronto, Canada.

We hug and kiss good-bye and in a blur I find myself being jostled through a tunnel, boarding a plane, and facing a window that looks down on the asphalt. Judith is beside me, but I'm alone and terrified. I start to cry. I can't help it. I cry as the engines start. I cry harder as we back out, turn around, and make our way to the runway. I sob as we hyper-accelerate until finally we take off. By the time we're in the clouds, my head is light and my face is a wreck.

I'm distressing Judith. The flight attendant asks me if I want anything to drink, but I need a warm wet towel. I cover my face with it and try not to think of Terry. I'm sick of missing people.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

LOVE AND THE SUNDAY STAR

"...Basically the apostle John stressed the main message of Christ and the reason why the Bible had to be written -- Love. The Bible is essentially a handbook of love -- in the Old Testament, God's love for Israel, in the New Testament, God's love for the rest of the world. John stresses that in return we must love. It's interesting to note that while Christ preached many dynamic sermons, it was the fact that he healed people that drew the crowds.

`In the academic sense, love would solve virtually every problem we have on earth. Realistically, it is hard for a human being to have a healthy love for another human being without expecting some sort of return. But we can give it our best shot.

`Anyhow, Dave, that's what's been on my mind. I can't believe classes are starting again.

`All love (theoretically or otherwise), Hadassah."

As she's writing out the Jerusalem address, Sue comes into the room.

"I just had, like, the most irritating experience." She's clutching a Sunday Star as she collapses into her beanbag in the corner of the room. "I have all this loose change, you know dimes and nickels, and I'm using it in the paper box to get rid of it all. But I don't notice until I try to open the box that all of my coins have dropped down the change return. So I fish them out, `cos you know how it's been raining, and all of my coins are in this little puddle at the bottom of the coin return. Is it change return or coin return? Oh well. Who cares.

`ANYhow, I drop all my coins in for the second time and it still doesn't work. Did I mention that I'm at the box by the parking lot so there are people in their cars who are just sitting there WATCHING me. Some guy I don't even know gets out of his car and comes over and says, you have to wait for the coins to fall. EACH one. I say, I did. He says, did it make a Clunk CLUNK sound? I say, I guess it did. I wasn't exactly listening.

`Some other guy passing by hears us and says, no, it's supposed to make a CLUNK Clunk sound, not so much Clunk CLUNK. The first guy says, no, all machines are Clunk CLUNK. Not this one, says the second guy. This one is CLUNK Clunk. So the second guy tries dropping the coins in and it still doesn't work.

Then finally this third guy, don't ask me where he came from, comes along and points at the little sticker on the machine beside the coin slot that says, 'For weekend papers, only use dollar coins and quarters.' Boy does everyone feel stupid. Thankfully I had some quarters, but now I've still got all my dimes and nickels."

"Sounds like a Seinfeld episode."

"Yeah, really. The guy who pointed at the little sign even looked like Kramer."

Hadassah glances out the window.

"It's that girl," she says out loud. A girl with long brown hair is lugging two obviously heavy suitcases in the direction of one of the dorm entrances.

"What girl?" asks Sue getting up from her bed and coming over to the window. "Oh. Dave Dian's girlfriend."

Hadassah turns away from the window. There are times when she wishes she could just be like the girl out there. To stop thinking so much.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

FIRST MEETING

I choose my courses entirely based on what I think Dave would approve of -- Hebrew Studies, Modern Middle Eastern History, Jewish Literature, Major and Minor Prophets, Feature Writing for the Media, and Weight Training II. There's one exception. I also sign up for Beginner's Piano.

I like being back at Union because I feel like any minute I may see Dave. I don't let myself think about him not being here anymore. When I walk by his old dorm, I try to just act as if I'll be going there Friday night and that everything is back to normal.

Within a week of my return there's a letter in my box from Terry. He's taking a complete music program, with one exception, he signed up for Comparative Religion. I write back to him right away even though I know if I had any sense I'd wait a week.

Judith and I are roommates again although she spends most of her time with Bill who has just gotten a car from his parents for his twenty-second birthday. I vow that this year I'm going to totally devote myself to studying and get a 90% average. This zealotry lasts a week when I realize that to get an A in Hebrew Studies alone would require five hours of homework every night. I lower my expectations to maintaining my standard 75%.

Judith, Bill, and David, Dave's old roommate, invite me to go out with them Saturday night. I'm a little wary of these double-date situations now. Besides, they're going to a little jazz bar that's just opened in Haven and I've had enough blues to last me a lifetime.

"I'll just start to cry," I say to Judith. "It'll remind me of Terry."

"I still don't know why you two aren't together," she says.

I sigh. She pleads with me to come with them. I give in.

Saturday night I find myself in the back seat of Bill's car with David.

"So, do you hear much from Dave?" he asks.

"Yeah," I say. "But he likes to write me letters on the Holy Days and there aren't any Holy Days in the summer."

The jazz bar is called Marvin.

"Why isn't it called Marvin's?" says Bill to the young doorman who's wearing a ripped leather jacket and faded Levi's.

"Because my name ain't Marvin."

"Curious," I say as we go inside. "But intriguing."

The only thing jazzy about Marvin is the music. The decor is punk with Sex Pistols and Clash posters papering the walls. The tables are mismatched and we are sitting on chairs and chesterfields that look like they were grabbed from the street before the garbage man got to them.

The clientele is mostly young and mostly punk. Beer is the only thing on the menu but they have twenty varieties. Our waitress has a safety pin in her nose.

"If the music is good, I'm willing to be open-minded," says David, a quintessential preppy.

"If we don't get beaten up, I'm willing to be open-minded," says Judith looking around nervously.

"Next time we'll just have to wear our chains and leather," I say. I like it here. It doesn't remind me of anything. Neither Dave nor Terry would come here.

The music is excellent. After a summer in New Orleans, despite what I told Terry, I know good jazz when I hear it.

After two beers I'm starting to think that David isn't bad looking. I mean, he isn't as good-looking as Dave although his hair is blond, but then I'm not even sure if I remember what Dave looks like. Consequently I agree to come back to Marvin next Saturday night with Judith, Bill, and David.

Sunday morning I wake up and tear through my stuff looking for a photo of Dave. I find it stuck in my Bible between Psalms and Proverbs and repent in dust and ashes for my infatuation the night before.

My first class on Mondays is Hebrew Studies taught by Rabbi Hirshel. I'm so grateful that I already know the Hebrew alphabet since it seems to be our teacher's goal to make us fluent in Hebrew by the end of the year. I can't help but think that he's being a little demanding considering that he probably started Hebrew school when he was five.

After that I have Modern Middle Eastern History.

We started with the Zionist Movement, and at the rate we're going with the teacher, who's a young Jewish man who recently returned from studies in Jerusalem, we'll be lucky if we make it to the Six-Day War before the semester's over.

After lunch I have Feature Writing with the same teacher who taught my Reporting for Mass Media class last year. I'm already working on my first story about Marvin.

Finally, I have Jewish Lit. Most of the writing is twentieth-century. We've finished some short stories by Mordecai Richler and we're getting into Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*.

On Tuesday I get to sleep in because my first class isn't until eleven, Major and Minor Prophets. Thanks to Dave I have a cursory knowledge of most of the prophets, but what I don't know could fill a Bible. After lunch I have Weight Training II although I may have to start skipping lunch because the class is taught by the same lady who still believes that cross-country running should be a part of any weight-training curriculum.

I take my piano lessons at night. I've never been so busy in my entire life. Classes, homework and piano practice take up so much of my time that I can only devote about two hours a day to thinking about Dave, and that's usually when I do my Hebrew homework. I'm going to ask Rabbi Hirshel if I can get extra credit for writing letters to Dave in Hebrew.

I think about Terry when I practice the piano. I can now play *Mary Had a Little Lamb* without making a mistake. I tape a copy of it and send it to him. He sends me back a letter telling me how good I'm getting and encloses a tape of one of his latest compositions -- an emotional piece that makes me cry it's so beautiful. I feel five years-old for sending him my tape, but I know that's not what he intended. It hurts me to hear his voice again.

The next Saturday night, Judith, Bill, David, and I go back to Marvin. I'm wearing Dave's bandanna on my head, a leather jacket, and ripped jean shorts. The others are wearing their usual uniform of jeans and a loose shirt and they look at me strangely when I get into the car.

The doorman recognizes us.

"Hey!" he says, smacking his gum. "It's the preps! Except you, you ain't so preppy."

"Thank you," I say, taking it as a compliment.

We sit down at a round wooden table and order our beers. I'm in somebody's old armchair, the springs so sunken that my seat is practically on the floor.

"Maybe this is some avant-garde music movement," says Judith referring to the band. "Punks for Jazz."

No one dances although a few people standing around the walls sway a bit when the music is slow. Some people are alone. They're the ones who have five empty beer bottles at a table for one. Couples are blatantly making out. Gangs of six or seven are crowded around tables looking collectively grim. Mostly they listen to the music though there's jostling between some of the guys and a few twisted grins exchanged between guys and girls.

I get up to get another beer at the bar since our waitress seems to have disappeared.

"Hey," A voice speaks to me while I'm waiting at the bar. "Are you lost?"

I turn and I'm facing a guy with a dark mohawk. His features are defined and even though the room is dim, I can see he's exceptionally attractive. In fact, I'm just staring at him.

"Yeah," I say, finally. "I think I am lost."

"Yeah, me too," he says, his finger slowly running over the rim of his beer bottle. "Who are you?"

He's asking it like it's a philosophical question.

"I'm El," I say.

He nods.

"I'm Sammy," he says, taking my hand to shake it. In fact, he doesn't let go of it and so I'm forced to take the bar stool beside him. And I can't say I mind the situation. If Dave is light and goodness, then this guy is nothing like I've ever met before. Everything about him is dark -- his hair, his clothing, his features. And yet he is so warm and for the moment, I feel so safe, wrapped up in his attention. So there we sit, holding hands and enjoying being close to someone. Eventually, a bartender brings me a beer.

"So," says Sammy after awhile. "What should we do to help the world?"

It could just be the beer, but I like the question.

"We could start a society," I say on a whim. "The Society for the Betterment of Mankind."

He thinks about this for a moment.

"Yeah," he says, looking at me. His fingers are caressing mine. "That sounds cool. What would we do?"

"I dunno," I say. "I've never done it before. I guess you've just got to give me your phone number and I'll get back to you."

Sammy waves to the bartender and asks him for a pen. Then he reaches for a napkin on the counter.

"Sammy," he writes and scrawls some numbers underneath.

"Call me," he says. He gets to his feet and then, with great courtesy, he escorts me back to my table. "Call me."

"Who was that?" says Judith. Bill and David are both staring at me.

"One very interesting man," I say. I don't bother telling them that he's also going to be the president of the Society for the Betterment of Mankind that I've just decided I'm going to start.

"Don't worry," says David with a hand on my knee. "If we thought he was going to do anything, we would have come over."

My homework keeps me busy until Sunday afternoon. Then I call the number on the scrap of paper.

After talking to someone who sounds like Sammy's mom, I get a very hung-over Sammy on the line.

"Hey Sammy," I say. "Remember me? El? I met you last night."

"Oh yeah!" I can hear him coming to life. "Didn't we plan to do something?"

"Yeah," I say. "We're forming a society."

"That's right!" I hear some life come into his voice. "Something about mankind, or something."

"Yeah," I say. "Can we meet somewhere?"

"Where are you?"

"Union. I go to the college"

"I thought you might. I'm here in Union too. I grew up here."

"How 'bout the diner?"

"Now?"

"Yeah," I say. "They've got good coffee. It'll help your head."

"Yeah, that's a good plan." I hear heavy sighing then a click.

I dress all in black and tie the bandanna around my head.

Sammy is sitting in a booth with a mug of coffee and his mohawk brushed down when I get there.

"Hey!" he says. "I remember you! I had forgotten what you looked like."

"Yeah, well, it happens." I slide into the seat across from him.

"You're better looking than I remember."

"Thanks." I know I turn bright red.

"So what do I do to be in your society?"

"I'm just starting to organize it now," I say. "It'll be the Society for the Betterment of Mankind. You can be president, of course, and I'll be the vice-president."

"Wow, that's heavy," says Sammy. "How'd you come up with this?"

I look around the diner for the lady behind the counter, but it's an older woman I've never seen before who's making a fresh pot of coffee.

"A lady that works here wanted to do it," I say.

"Excuse me!" I call out to the woman behind the counter. "Is there a lady working here, in her thirties, dark hair..."

"That would be Beth," she says. "She left."

"She left?"

"Yes. She just left one day."

Obviously there's more to the story but since I'm not doing a feature article I don't push it.

"Well, anyhow," I say turning back to Sammy. "It's up to us now." The older lady comes over with a cup of coffee for me.

"Yeah, so like, what do we believe in?"

"Truth." I take a sip of the black beverage.

"Truth is good."

"I really feel like I need to figure things out," I say. "I'm still looking for something to believe in."

"I know what you mean. I don't believe in anything," says Sammy.

"Do you want to?"

"Yeah, if I could find something to believe in."

"Good," I say. "That's what we're all about."

"So, like, where do we start?"

I shrug.

"We can get together, you bring some of your friends, I'll bring some of mine, and we'll talk. We'll talk about life and truth."

"Sounds cool," says Sammy. "Where and when?"

"I like it here," I say.

"Sunday mornings," says Sammy. "We'll be dead from last night, but it'll be like going to church. Oh, and El...?"

"Uh-huh?" My heart starts beating faster. It's the way he's looking at me.

"You can be President. I don't mind."

Next Sunday morning we meet at the diner. I bring Judith, Bill, and David. Sammy is at a table with a girl who has brown hair twisted into spikes that point straight out of her head and the guy who's the doorman at Marvin.

"Hey, it's the preppies! You didn't tell me it was going to be them!" says the guy, whose name turns out to be Ray. "This is going to be different." He jabs Sammy in the ribs to convey some sort of inaccessible message.

The girl, who turns out to be Ray's girlfriend, is indifferently introduced as Rita.

"OK," says Ray. "So, we're into truth. So what's truth?"

"It's funny you should ask that," I say. "Pontius Pilate said the same thing."

"Who the hell is Pontius Pilate?"

"The Roman governor who talked to Christ before the crucifixion."

"So, like, are you going to get religious?" says Rita.

There's a red rose in a vase on our table. Rita pulls it out and sticks it in her cleavage.

"We're talking about the truth," I say. "The point is we're all going to share our ideas about it."

"So, I don't believe in a God," says Ray. "Is that OK?"

"Perfectly," I say. "As long as you let me believe in God."

"Yeah, that's cool. As long as I don't have to convert or nothing."

"OK, so what's truth?" says Sammy.

"I think God is truth," I say. I can't believe I'm being so open. It's like the spirit of Dave giving me strength, or something.

"I think God isn't the truth," says Ray.

We turn to Sammy.

"I'm thinking truth is truth," he says. "It's just a matter of finding it."

Rita's turn.

"Truth is sex," she says. "It happens and you know it."

Judith, Bill, and David have been quiet. I think it's going to take them awhile to warm up to Sunday morning truth sessions with three punk rockers.

"So why do you think God is truth?" says Sammy to me.

"Because it's in the Psalms that all the paths of God are mercy and truth."

"That's if you believe the Bible," says Ray.

"Yeah."

"I don't," he says. "I believe that we make our own truth. Truth is what I do. If I hit this table." He demonstrates. "That's truth."

"That's limited truth." Bill speaks for the first time. "Sure it's the truth that you hit the table. But there are bigger truths."

"Like what?"

"Like, why are we here?"

"I'm just here," says Ray.

"I think there're two types of truth," says Sammy. "Obvious truth, like the fact that we're here, and unobvious truth, like why we're here."

"But why do we care?" says Rita.

"Because the unexamined life is not worth living," says Judith, entering into the exchange.

"Why not?"

"Because there's more to life than what we see and feel."

"Listen, I believe in what I see and feel," says Rita. "It's there. I can hold onto it."

"But that's just it," David bursts out. "You need other things to hold onto when the things you see and feel let you down."

"Yeah, but what if those other things let you down?" says Ray.

"You've got to believe in something to the degree that it won't let you down," I say. "If you have truth, you can always hold onto it. You may not always like it, but it will always be there and you can always hold onto it no matter what."

Sammy explodes.

"So what the hell is truth anyhow?"

In that moment I realize that I've had my calling. Truth. That's what I would beg people to search for. Truth. Strip away preconceived ideas, don't be afraid to explore foreign territory. When you find a fragment, hold onto it. Don't build a foundation on that fragment, though, because it only represents a small portion of the sum total of knowledge and it will keep you from further growing in understanding. Build a foundation on the quest for truth.

It's all coming together.

It's better to say "I don't know" than to believe something that isn't true. It's better to have a small group of firm convictions than a whole system of belief with a weak foundation.

A dizzy elation runs through me.

I believe it not because Dave does, but because I do. Then suddenly I feel sick. Dave. If I'm going to stand for truth I must examine my relationship with Dave because truth also means understanding myself and not living under any illusions. It means facing my biggest fear that maybe...

The rest of the meeting is a daze. I vaguely hear Judith, Bill, David, Sammy, Ray, and Rita hotly debating whether there's just one truth, or whether there are many truths.

After two hours and three pots of coffee, they agree to adjourn and meet again next week, same time.

"Hey prez," says Sammy nudging my elbow. "You gotta officially adjourn."

"Adjourned," I say absently.

Terry's letters are starting to dwindle. I haven't even gotten one this week. It's characteristic of Dave not to write me often and I don't take it personally but with Terry, I feel rejected.

I phone up Sammy just to talk because he told me he doesn't do much during the day and to call him anytime.

"Hey El babe," he says when I tell him about my lack of mail. "Why let it get you down? You're a president now."

I ask him if he has a girlfriend because I never see him with anyone.

Sammy sighs.

"It's so hard, man," he says. "It'd be cool to have someone, but I'm not into the relationship thing."

"What do you do all day?" I ask.

I can hear him shrugging.

"Oh, things. Sometimes I work, like maybe some warehouse stuff for awhile. Right now I'm reading the paper."

"What do you want to do for a career?"

He laughs, not like it's funny, but just as an automatic response.

"I don't know. I'm not too sold on this nine-to-five job deal where the greatest thing is to have your own computer in some office building. I bum off my parents a lot. I've got a website too..."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, I'm OK with computers. I just don't like the thought of sitting in front of one all day..."

"What's your website about?"

"I'll show you someday." He answers briefly and I don't pursue it. I'm just happy to have someone who likes talking and isn't in a hurry to get back to his Hebrew Studies.

Ray greets us Saturday night with, "The preppies have arrived!" I think we're friends now.

A girl with a mahogany crew cut and perfect bone structure is sitting at the bar with her arm tightly around Sammy's shoulders. He looks over at me and smiles.

In the course of the evening I perceive that the girl considers herself Sammy's personal post-it note. He's caressing his Molson Dry beer bottle more affectionately than her though.

When we get back to the dorm Judith is ticked off that I was so moody all night.

"I was not," I say sitting on my bed and kicking off my black clod-hoppers.

"You're always moody now," she says. "David doesn't know what to think of you."

"He shouldn't think anything," I say.

"You could at least be nice," she says.

"Judith, why do you care?" I say turning to her. "You like talking to them both. You don't need me saying anything to make the night better."

Judith looks at the wall.

"Why is Sammy the vice-president?" she says.

So that's what's bothering her. I try not to laugh.

"It's not important," I say. "It really isn't. I mean, all we do is talk, it's not like we have official meetings, or anything."

"Yeah, but why did you talk to him about it before you even mentioned the idea of a society to me? I'm your best friend."

"I just did it on impulse. I was getting depressed with Dave and Terry and..."

"And you started liking Sammy?" says Judith in disbelief.

"I like him because he doesn't remind me of either of them." I say. "Listen, Judith, him being vice-president means nothing. I just did it so that he'd join the society and bring his friends and it'd be more interesting for us."

"I see," says Judith. "OK."

We hug.

She starts walking towards the door.

"You're going out?" I say. "It's three o'clock!"

"Yeah, I told Bill I'd bring him over some blank sheet music. He likes to compose things in the middle of the night."

She never had this much stamina with Tom.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

ALONE

"...If every seven years everyone cancelled all debts that were owed to them, and every fifty years, land was returned to the original family who owned it, it would revolutionize economics and virtually prevent recessions and depressions..."

Dave, in his letter to Hadassah, outlines the ideal society -- everything from economics to sanitation. It sounds suspiciously like the system ancient Israel lived under. When she's done reading it she sticks it between the pages of her Judaism and Modern Culture notebook. She appreciates that in all of his letters he has never tried to redeem her and pull her back to pure Judaism. He once said that the most pitiful cry is made by a man without a God, and she knows that he knows that she is not in that category.

Hadassah is sitting alone at the back of the dining hall, fully aware, as she looks around the room, of the social opportunities she is missing. It is noon, nearly every table is filled with talking and laughing young students. She doesn't care. If she is lonely, she is so used to being lonely she doesn't notice it anymore. She doesn't have the energy to be nice.

She had taken a chance yesterday and sat beside a reasonably good-looking guy at lunch and found out that his favourite topic was how he had just gotten tickets to some concert in Toronto, and how all his friends were going, and how they had all gone last year to see some great singer and how cool it was. And Hadassah had tried to smile, to seem interested, to make his defined features and his dark wavy hair that fell so nicely into his face compensate for the absolute tediousness of the words that came out of his mouth. And she had even gone so far as to think, maybe I should get involved with someone like this because if I ever lost him I wouldn't care because I could buy a sixteen-month calendar of the Boys of California and be as equally satisfied.

Rather than continue to stare at all the happy faces while she eats, she pulls a random textbook out of her knapsack and opens it up to any page. Egyptian Medicine versus Hebraic Medicine is the caption. Apparently the ancient Egyptians had heart disease and cancer. They even performed surgeries. The Pharaohs had priest-physicians for every body part. On the other hand, the Mosaic health laws stressed prevention more than treatment with their clean and unclean foods, emphasis on sanitation, and rules of quarantine.

None of it is new to Hadassah but she keeps on reading.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

WAITING

I start a subscription to the Jerusalem Post just to keep current. The amount of violence in the Middle East, I must confess, makes me nervous. In a weak moment I think, if Dave dies I'll just go back to New Orleans.

When all my hope is finally depleted, I get a letter from him. It takes me five hours to transfer into English and when I finish, I take it to Rabbi Hirshel who agreed to give me extra credit for translations, especially as he knows Dave.

Dave's doing well. He's working on memorizing the Torah in Hebrew and I want to cry because I'm working on the Hebrew equivalent of Row, Row, Row, Your Boat.

In Feature Writing we are discussing political articles. I've already written up the manifesto of the Society for the Betterment of Mankind, the chief objective being to make peoples' lives more meaningful and fulfilling. The details are a little hazy, I explain, because the organization is still in its formative stages.

I haven't been to the diner by myself since last year so I visit Union one Tuesday after Weight Training.

"You're rosy," says the older woman behind the counter. "Been working on your tan?"

"No," I say. "Just working out."

I order a coffee and when she brings it to me I ask her what happened with Beth.

"We used to talk," I say when the woman hesitates. "She was even thinking of going to Union to finish up her degree."

The woman looks sad.

"I don't know all the details," she says slowly. "Apparently she went up north to visit her sister who was staying with their mother. The mother was sick, or something."

She stops talking.

"She told me about her sister," I say.

"So you know all about Tessy?" asks the lady. "About her being pregnant?"

I nod.

"Well, Beth went up there, she said, to be with her sick mother. But everyone thinks it was to be with Tessy. And considering what happened, it's more likely it was to be with Tessy."

"What happened?" I say.

"There's a little lake behind the house they were staying in." The woman stops talking again, this time because her voice catches. "One night, Beth and Tessy got into one of the cars and drove into the lake."

My eyes widen.

The woman sighs and looks over my head out the window.

"I was close to Beth's mom when she was living here with her husband."

"I'm very sorry," I say looking at my coffee cup.

That poor shoe salesman at Frederick's.

I finish my coffee and walk slowly back to campus. I want to write about Beth and Tessy but I don't know what approach I should take. After about two hours at my desk, I've written a feature with the headline, FOUNDER OF THE SOCIETY FOR THE BETTERMENT OF MANKIND TAKES HER OWN LIFE.

"But it's just the beginning for us," I say to Sammy on the phone the next day, after I call him to tell him the story about Beth.

"Heavy," says Sammy, obviously still pondering the double suicide. "THAT is heavy."

"Yeah," I say. "The Society should be a legacy. It should stand for helping others have full and meaningful lives, not ending in despair and uselessness."

When we hang up I decide I'd better practice the piano. My interest in piano has dwindled with proportion to Terry's letters and it's not like I can explain this to my teacher.

Rumour in the Marvin crowd is that Sammy and I are a couple. I'm even less comfortable with this suggestion than being paired off with Terry. Terry was a viable threat to Dave but Sammy even more so. He's like me. We're both looking for truth.

However, the girl with the mahogany crew cut seems to come to Marvin for the sole purpose of giving me dirty looks. So, I don't think Sammy's really available.

"So, are you and Sammy together, or what?" says Judith one night when we're both in the bedroom of our dorm.

I look up from my Introductory Hebrew textbook to roll my eyes.

"No, I'm serious," she says. "He's very good-looking, even with a mohawk, and you guys are together all the time. And, like, you're always on the phone with him..."

"We have a mission," I say. "It's nothing personal."

"Do you think you'll ever like him?" she says. "I mean, that would be wild."

"I'm practically engaged to Dave," I remind her.

"Yeah, but you almost fell for Terry."

Why is it best friends are so blunt?

"Sammy's an atheist," I say.

"And like Terry's really a God-fearing Christian."

"He believes in God. It gives people a different outlook."

Climbing off of my bed, I get up to get dressed for my piano lesson. I haven't practised the piece I'm supposed to know, so there's an uncomfortable feeling in my stomach. Dropping little tid-bits about the music scene in Jerusalem is not going to endear me to my teacher, Miss Smith, I know. If, however, I could set her up for a date with Tom Cruise, I'd have an A if I never practised again.

I plunk along, hitting so many strident notes that it sounds like I tried to compose the piece myself.

"Not too good," says Miss Smith, making a little note in her grade book. "How many times did you practice this piece?"

To lie or not to lie.

"None," I say.

"Oh. Well considering this is your first time playing it, it wasn't too bad. But by next class I want a flawless performance. Also, learn the first page of this."

She shoves the theme music to Chariots of Fire into my hands. I really miss Terry's praise for a flawed performance of Mary Had a Little Lamb.

I haven't gotten a letter from Dave in a month.

"Listen," I say to his photo. "I can handle it that you don't communicate with me. But I really do need those bonus points for Hebrew."

He just looks back at me, a slight smile on his perfect lips.

"Although it would be nice to hear from you and just know what the weather is like in Jerusalem."

He's still looking at me, his eyes passively following every word I say.

"You know, sometimes it bothers me that Terry has sent me more letters than you. I've worked it out. For every letter from you, Terry has sent me four, and that's including the ones you wrote over the summer."

He just smiles coolly at me.

"I still get my magazines and stuff. I mean, it's not like I just want to have something in my mailbox. And the Jerusalem Post comes regularly." I sigh and stare at the ceiling. "Thank God for magazine subscriptions."

I look down again at the photo.

"OK, to be truthful," I say. "If you don't write me soon I'm going to kill myself."

Despite my suicide threat there's no letter in my box the next day. I check my mailbox so many times that I reach the point where I'm considering getting counselling for addiction.

By evening I'm in a foul mood. I try not to take it out on Judith, Bill, and David as we're driving to Marvin, but they all seem so cheerful that it's hard to control myself. When I'm edgy, I just want everyone to sit around and be irritable.

You might think seeing Sammy would cheer me up, but he'll be a prisoner of Miss Crew-Cut all night and won't be allowed to do more than occasionally smile at me.

"Hey! What's with you?" David jabs me in the ribs with his elbow.

"I hate life," I say.

Why hide it?

"How come?"

He seems amused that anyone could hate life on a Saturday night.

"Because it's a hassle," I say.

"Nah," says David, like I'm pulling his leg, or something.

Thankfully he leaves me alone and leans forward to talk and joke with Judith and Bill in the front seat.

I hate life because all I do is wait. I always wait. I sit here in this stupid car and wait.

I waited all last year for the times that I got together with Dave. I waited for the Ruth plan. I waited all summer to get back to Union so I could escape from liking Terry. Now I'm here waiting for Dave's letters and I'm waiting for him to get back from Jerusalem.

I don't know how much longer I can just wait.

The evening turns out not to be such a write-off. Sammy is alone.

Rita and the rest of the gang swagger over at various intervals in the evening, mostly to say hi to Sammy who's plunked himself down in an old patio lounge chair at our table, not saying much, with his ankle crossed over his knee. It's like they're checking to make sure that we're not mistreating him.

After two, Ray doesn't let any more people in, basically so that he can come inside and hang out.

"I found this great empty warehouse yesterday that we could have a meeting in," he says coming over to talk to us and actually pulling up a chair unlike the other punks who just stood towering over us. "It must be between owners, or something, because it used to be full and now it's empty. To get in, all you have to do is climb in the window."

I'm a little concerned that the warehouse might be private property but Sammy says no one cares about a warehouse anyhow and it's not like an owner is going to be checking out his warehouse on a Sunday morning.

Rita wanders up smacking her gum loudly.

"Hey Ray! Whaddya doing?"

"Planning a meeting at that warehouse on Old Union I was telling you about."

"Tell'em to bring their own beer," says Rita drifting away.

Our Sunday morning rendez-vous in the warehouse makes me feel like a Bolshevik attending a revolutionary meeting. We have to climb in a window because all the doors are locked. There is nothing in the warehouse, not even empty packing crates or the odds and ends that you would expect. The only light comes from the dusty windows making the room feel even more dark and damp. We're all cross-legged on the cement floor and it seems like I've heard somewhere that sitting on cold pavement can give you a bladder infection.

"Let's play Truth or Dare," says Rita suggestively after a lazy discussion of why politicians have such a bad reputation for not telling the truth.

"Let's talk about Truth or Dare," I say quickly. "How many people do you think really tell the truth when they play?"

"I make it up," says Ray. "I like to see if anyone can catch me."

"How important is truth?" says Sammy. "I mean, if you can make it up in Truth or Dare, does that make truth less significant?"

"You mean, like, when does it matter that you tell the truth?" says Ray.

"All the time," I say. "Because if you start making things up, your life isn't pure truth anymore."

"But who cares?" says Sammy. "Why is truth truth? Why is it important?"

"Truth is an absolute," I say.

"It's a standard you set," says David. "If you believe in truth, it's like a lighthouse for you. It gives you direction."

"But what if I don't want truth to be my direction?" says Ray. "What if I want to believe in something else?"

"If you believe in anything but the truth," I say, "you're going to find that it has flaws somewhere. It'll let you down because it won't be the truth."

"Truth is undeniable," says Judith.

"But what if I personally choose to deny it?" says Ray.

"Then your life won't be based on truth," I say.

"I still don't know what truth is," Sammy sighs. "Big party Friday night here at the warehouse," he says standing up indicating his search for truth is concluded for the day. "You guys can come if you want."

"Why do so many punks hang around Marvin?" I ask Sammy on the phone that week. This has been bothering me since my first visit.

"Where else are they gonna hang out?" he says.

He has a point. Haven is not known for its musical variety. The only other club plays top-40.

"Who owns Marvin?" I ask.

"Some friend of Ray's," he says. "Or maybe it's an uncle, I'm not sure."

"We used to hang out in warehouses," he goes on. "But it's great having Marvin, 'cos it's like a solid place we can all go to. We pretty much hang out every weekend."

"Do you like jazz?"

An unseen shrug.

"It's OK. I don't not like it. I don't even know why Marvin plays jazz. I think Ray's uncle, or whatever, used to be a jazz musician or something, so he likes to give the local bands a job. Hey El?"

"Uh-huh?"

"Do you like poetry?"

I never expected Sammy to ask me that.

"Sure," I say. "I like poetry."

"Then look at my website," he says. Before hanging up, he gives me a URL.

I have a laptop but I have to go to the library for the internet connection.

Sammy's site is very simple. It's divided up into two categories. His favourite poems and the poems he's written. But there's also a third link and it simply says, "For El". I click on it.

"The little sycamore she planted," I read "prepares to speak -- the sound of rustling leaves sweeter than honey.

On its lovely limbs is new fruit and ripe fruit red as blood jasper, and leaves of green jasper.

Her love awaits me on the distant shore. The river flows between us, crocodiles on the sandbars.

Yet I plunge into the river, my heart slicing currents, steady as if I were walking.

O my love, it is love that gives me strength and courage, love that fords the river."

When I'm done reading, I can barely breathe. I know Sammy didn't write it because it says it's an Egyptian poem from 1,500 B.C., but the intensity of the feeling still blows me away. Nothing Dave has ever said and nothing Terry has ever written in a letter can compete with this.

Sammy made me promise that I'd e-mail him after reading it and so, with shaking fingers, I hit the key for my Outlook Express.

"Dear Sammy," I write. "You've made me forget everything I've ever learned and everyone I've ever met." At this point I'm tempted to delete it all. But suddenly, I just want to be honest and pour it all out. "Can we find truth in love? If we can, I want to find it with you."

I hit the 'send' button before I can change my mind. I don't think of anything on my walk back to the dorm. I certainly don't think of Dave. I just think about that Egyptian lover who looks across the river and is willing to swim crocodile-infested waters for love.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

THE LOST SAYINGS OF CHRIST

With all of her work hours scheduled for the quiet mornings when the only patrons in the library are the regulars who come to study in the peaceful Terry Fox Memorial Room, Hadassah feels minimal guilt for curling up in one of the oversized leather chairs in the corner of the reading room with a book.

While shelving a Bible commentary on the book of Luke, Hadassah has found a fascinating chapter about origins of the synoptic gospels that discusses the idea of a notebook that was kept by one of the disciples, recording Christ's words, and then later referred to when Matthew and Luke wrote their accounts of the life of Jesus. To think that this text could still be floating around somewhere! The lost sayings of Christ! Maybe there are sermons and parables in it that had never made it to any of the gospels. No other thought excites her like this one even when she reads that most scholars believe that any document would have long since decomposed. But if the Dead Sea Scrolls from the same period have survived, Hadassah doesn't think it's unreasonable to hope for further finds.

Today she is reading the Gospel of Thomas, a document found in Egypt, that purports to contain authentic sayings of Christ.

"Hadassah!"

Her supervisor, Mrs. Farnsworth, who isn't supposed to be in until 11:00, has entered the reading room.

Although a shiver has run down her spine, Hadassah tries to discreetly uncurl her legs from the chair and look up calmly.

"Hello Mrs. Farnsworth," she says smiling politely.

"Who is supposed to be on the desk?" It is a rhetorical question. Hadassah is the only employee scheduled on the desk in the mornings.

"Oh," says Hadassah. "Does someone need help with a reference question?"

Mrs. Farnsworth is forced to acknowledge that no one needs help. She does not go so far as to admit that there is not even a patron in the reference room at the moment.

They are at an impasse. Mrs. Farnsworth does not know how to ask Hadassah if she is working on a reference question for someone. Hadassah is not going to further jeopardize her job by saying something wrong.

"I will be in Acquisitions if you need me," says Mrs. Farnsworth finally.

"Very good," says Hadassah like an English butler.

She returns to the desk taking the Gospel of Thomas with her.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

TRUTH, BEAUTY, AND LOVE

I'd do anything to go the warehouse party but I'd die of guilt if I broke the Sabbath. Surprisingly, Judith, Bill, and David want to go. I think they're under the impression that the music will be jazz.

"Their parties are unlike any party I've ever gone to," says Judith on Friday at about 11:30 when she comes into the bedroom where I'm sprawled on my bed reading the Mishnah. "They sit around and drink and smoke and listen to music. The music just goes on and on, there'd be like one long moan and then the singer would scream. Barely anyone talks and no one dances."

They didn't know what to do at Sammy's party because at Marvin, at least they could watch a live band and since we sit at our own table, there isn't a stigma against talking. Finally they just left.

Sammy phones me from the police station two minutes after Judith goes into the bathroom to take a shower.

"They caught us, man," he says. "About a half hour after your friends left, the police cruiser was driving by and heard the music."

"So what are they going to do to you?" I say horrified.

"Oh, I dunno," says Sammy vaguely. "Press charges? We don't have money to pay a fine, so it doesn't matter. They'll probably just let us all go tomorrow, or something. It's only breaking and entering, or whatever they say."

I feel so bad. He could only make one call and he phones me and there's nothing I can do to help him. I wonder what it was like for all of them inside the warehouse with only the one window as an escape.

The immense relief that Judith, Bill, and David left early hits me so hard that I have to lie on my bed for a few minutes. I'm not even going to tell them about the arrests because if I do they'll never go to another Society get-together again.

On Monday I get a long-awaited letter from Dave. He has some quotes from interviews in the Jerusalem Post which makes me smile. They're the only English portions of the letter except for the last paragraph.

"Anyhow, I miss you and I'm looking forward to next year. Love, Dave."

It makes it all worthwhile somehow.

However, the violence in the Middle East is making me nervous. The Jerusalem Post reported that a young Jewish rabbi was killed in a street fight that broke out in an alley in the Old City. He wasn't a part of it. He just happened to be in the way. I wonder if he has a girlfriend somewhere who is mourning for him. My biggest fear is that I'll get a letter from one of Dave's roommates a week before he comes home, saying that he was the victim of some sporadic anti-Jewish attack.

Distress about midterms takes precedent over worrying about Dave as my grades have been sliding since the formation of the Society and this is my chance to pull them up. It's at times like these that I regret taking all these lecture classes since I have pages and pages of notes to process and review. In addition, I'm about a hundred pages behind in my Jewish Lit reading assignments.

I go into my first exam, Hebrew Studies, telling myself that this is an excellent opportunity to cultivate faith. I figure if God inspired the Old Testament to be written in Hebrew, he can help me with some basic conversational phrases.

Middle Eastern History is a breeze. One essay question. The teacher asks us to take what we've learned in class and offer a solution to the Middle Eastern problem. With copious paraphrased quotes from the Jerusalem Post I cite the many outbursts of violence that have taken place in the last few months.

I suggest setting up a Society for the Betterment of Mankind in Jerusalem where the youth can sit around and throw out ideas about peace and life over coffee. If preps and punks can do it, maybe Arabs and Jews could too.

Midterms pass with a few tense moments.

Sammy and his friends spent a night in jail with a strict warning never to go near the warehouse again. Although Sammy and Ray are willing to go back there for our Sunday morning meetings, I firmly say that I like the diner better because at least we can have coffee.

"Truth in the context of beauty," I say on Sunday when we've slid into a booth with Ray and Rita on chairs at the end. "What is beauty?"

"You just know it when you see it," says Rita.

I have a feeling that Rita's definition of beauty would be a poster of shirtless pin-up boy in tight jeans on a motorcycle.

"Are there standards of beauty?" I say.

"Yeah," says David. "Why is it that a flower and a person can both be considered beautiful when they're both so different?"

"Beauty has to be categorized," says Judith. "Beautiful for a flower. Beautiful for a person."

"It's gotta appeal to you," says Sammy. "That's the most important thing."

"Appeal to the senses," I say. "Beauty is determined by sight, sound, smell, taste, or touch."

"But why is it that some people taste broccoli and think it's beautiful and others don't?" says Bill.

"Because beauty is in the eyes of the beholder," says Rita, cracking her gum.

"The elusiveness of beauty illustrates the elusiveness of truth," I say. "And yet we know it exists. We know it when we see it."

"Would you rather see something and know it's beautiful right away?" says Judith. "Or would you rather discover that it's beautiful?"

"I'd rather see it right away," says Rita.

"I'd rather discover it," says Bill. "It would mean more to me."

"I don't believe in beauty," says Ray. "I don't think anything is beautiful."

"But you must like things," I say.

Ray shrugs.

"Yeah, but not because they're beautiful. Because they're there."

"But you've got to like looking at some things more than others," I say.

"Not really," says Ray. "I mean, everything is the same crap when you get right down to it."

"Are things that are beautiful just beautiful on the surface, or does it go deeper?" says Judith.

"The things that are deep will last," I say. "But I think beauty is beauty no matter what, there are just different levels of beauty."

"I think it's just that something's not as ugly as something else," says Ray.

I'm wondering what Rita thinks about her boyfriend's views of aesthetics, but she seems preoccupied with her blood red fingernails.

"Is beauty truth?" says Sammy. I feel his arm go around my waist. We're sitting so close in the booth that any closer and I'd be on his lap.

"I don't think beauty is as certain as truth," says Bill.

"But elements of beauty can be found in truth," says David.

"Yeah, but truth is more consistent."

"But just as abundant."

"What do you mean," says Bill.

"Beauty and truth are everywhere," says David. "It's just a matter of seeing them."

"But where do you get the eyes to see beauty and truth?" says Sammy.

"You've got to believe that they exist, first of all," I say. "Then you have to be willing to do anything for them."

"Then what?"

"Then you keep looking until you find them."

"How do you know when you've found them?"

"Either it'll be totally new and it will all make sense, or else it'll be old and you've just never seen it before."

No one seems to have anything beyond that to say and one of the strengths of the Society is that we may be individually dogmatic but as a group we don't have to come to any bottom lines. When it reaches the point where we have nothing philosophical to say, we just talk about music, or whatever.

"Hey man," Ray calls out to Sammy even though he's only a metre away from him. "I think Vivian really likes you."

Vivian is the girl with the crew cut.

Sammy shrugs. Under the table, his hand pats my knee as if to let me know that his feelings are for me.

"I say go for it," Ray goes on. "She's a sure thing."

"I dunno," says Sammy. "I'm not into this. She'll want a relationship, or something."

Ray shrugs.

Rita's looking at me to see if this upsets me. I know she'd like to see Sammy with Vivian, even if it's only so that he wouldn't be with me. I haven't figured out whether Ray cares one way or the other. If I were ever going to make it into the Marvin crowd I'd have to shave my head or dye my hair green. It's not enough to just dress in black and wear a bandanna because even if I showed up head to toe in leather with a safety pin in my cheek I know Rita would think of me as preppy.

The wild thing is that while Rita considers me too tame, people at Union are starting to think I'm too radical. Since becoming friends with Sammy, I've started wearing a lot of black. Sammy also lends me items of clothing that he's acquired from various sources, the latest being a fringed leather vest that he claims he found in a bag of clothing somewhere. I suspect that the bag was in a Goodwill box.

When we meet next week at the diner, Sammy wants to discuss love.

"Is love truth?" he says. "Or is it an illusion?"

"Are feelings truth?" I say. "Because if they are, then love is truth."

"But love isn't just a feeling," says Judith. "Love is action. It's doing things for someone."

"If you do something, then that's truth," says Ray.

"Do you believe in love?" Bill says to Ray.

"I believe in being in a relationship," says Ray. "If you're in one, you know you're in it. But I don't ask myself if I'm in love."

"Do you have to love someone to have a relationship with them?" says Sammy.

"Definitely," says Bill. "If you want it to last."

Ray shrugs.

"What's it matter?"

"Does love matter?" says Sammy.

"If it's truth, it does," I say.

"But if love isn't truth, then the only thing that matters are relationships because you can see them," says Sammy.

"What's closer to the truth," says David. "A relationship without love or love without a relationship?"

"Depends on whether you believe in love as truth or a relationship as truth."

"Relationship, definitely," says Ray.

Rita agrees with him.

"Love," I say, "is the ultimate reality."

I'm not exactly sure what I mean and I'm glad no one asks me to explain myself.

"Love within a relationship," says Judith. "That's truth because the love can be expressed."

"Love is a hope," says Bill. "Is hope truth?"

"The fact that we have hope is true," says Judith. "But the hope itself may not be truth."

Ray and Bill get into an argument about how true feelings are.

"Feelings are part of the human experience," says Bill. "So they've got to be true."

"Yeah, but is the human experience true?"

That pretty much settles the issue because no one feels up to a philosophical debate about the truth of the human experience. After all, we've already established that we're alive, we just have various opinions as to why we're alive. So we wrap up for the morning and adjourn the meeting in favour of a lesser discussion about how good the band at Marvin was last night.

Sammy does something different and walks me back to school.

We let Judith, Bill and David get well ahead and then Sammy takes my hand. Nothing much has been said since the poem and I don't really know what's going on. But the walk back to campus, holding Sammy's hand, is enough. Judith, Bill and David have completely disappeared by the time we make it to the gates of the entranceway. Ignoring the security booth and the man in it, still holding my hand, Sammy stops, tilts my chin up and leans down. I am in danger of fainting and I'm not sure if I can breathe. Then his lips are on mine and for a moment or two, or maybe it's a whole minute, everything and nothing matters except Sammy. Just that one long kiss. And nothing in my life will probably ever live up to it again.

Then he lets go of my hand, gives me a little grin and a wave and starts heading back to Union. My weak legs carry me back to the dorm.

There is only one theology major at Union who comes close to being a punk. That night he sits down across from me at dinner.

"Hi," he says. His bleached hair is cut into a Billy Idol crew cut and his black turtleneck emphasizes his white, almost transparent skin.

"Hi," I say.

I'm a little wary since I'm comfortable with the current number of men in my life.

"Roger," he says.

I open my mouth to introduce myself.

"I already know," he says. "Ellen."

I nod, like, OK, whatever.

"You seem cool," he says. "You're a theology major and you dress well."

Roger's the first person who's described my new look as dressing well. Probably because our wardrobes are practically identical.

"So what kind of music do you like?" he says.

"I hang out at Marvin."

"Cool. I've been there."

"So how come you're a theology major?" I say.

Roger leans forward.

"God is where it's at. He's the only reality."

"What do you think truth is?"

"I think truth is the things we can't see. This table," he says grabbing the edge of it, "is something we can see. But it's made up of atoms that we can't see. At the molecular level, everything is invisible. I believe more in the molecular level than I do in the visible level."

"Yeah," I say nodding. "Yeah, I think that's it."

"Faith," he pushes the word out of his mouth, "is at the molecular level."

Roger asks me why I'm a theology major.

"What else is there to major in?" I say. "Theology is the only thing that answers the big questions of life. I believe in truth more than anything else."

"I can't imagine settling for life on a purely physical plane," says Roger. "You wouldn't be living in reality."

"I think the two biggest realities are the microcosm and the macrocosm," I say with sudden inspiration. "The atom and the universe."

"And too many people are stuck on planet earth, eh?" says Roger.

Roger invites me to come to his dorm anytime to listen to music and talk and even though I don't imagine I ever will, it's a nice offer from someone who seems to be living in the same sub-reality.

In my Feature Writing class we finally get an assignment to report on an international story.

"I don't expect you to go to Tokyo," says the teacher. "Just gather data and write a story as if it's an event that has global significance."

I know he doesn't believe that anyone will be able to come up with a significant story outside of Ontario.

"I don't want anything about the environment," he says. "I'm sick of hearing about global warming and acid rain. I want a story, not a report or an editorial."

He goes on.

"I don't want to hear about Elizabeth Taylor either. She's not globally significant."

"But sir!" Bonnie, a future gossip columnist, raises her hand. "She is significant for a lot of women. Especially people who like classic movies."

"Why would a woman in Union, Ontario care about a woman in Los Angeles, California?"

"Because she's interesting," I say.

I can't help it. Even I read articles about Liz Taylor when they're in the Jerusalem Post.

"Is Elizabeth Taylor even still alive?" asks another guy.

The teacher sighs.

"Write whatever the hell you want, but I'm grading it."

I'm going to write a story about the increasing street violence in Jerusalem, particularly when it affects young Canadian soon-to-be rabbis.

I'm only two reading assignments behind in Jewish Literature. The problem is, I'll be getting into a story and my mind will start to wander and I start thinking about Dave and once I do that, my concentration is shot.

You might think the kiss has driven all thoughts of Dave out of my mind, but loving Dave is a long-established habit. Sammy's part of my everyday life, but Dave is in my heart. I've always had to love him in my heart rather than out in the open so I'm used to him being there.

Before I know it, I'm writing him a letter or rereading one of the ones he's sent me and then, so much for the Jewish Lit reading assignment. I should ask my teacher if his letters could count as Jewish literature.

Sammy phones me on Friday to make sure that we're going to Marvin tomorrow night.

"I'm worried," he says. "'Cos Vivian really likes me and I thought maybe if I hang out with you guys she'll get off my case."

I don't know if I like the idea of being the one to stand between him and Vivian. She's not the type of person to apply the rules of sportsmanship to her competitors.

"Hang loose, preppies," says Ray when we arrive.

Sammy isn't inside. Vivian and I spend the next hour keeping our eyes on the door from our respective tables. When he comes in and sits at our table Vivian's eyes spit in my face. The knot in my stomach resembles the birth pains of an ulcer.

"Hey!" says Sammy. "What's up?"

"God's throne," I say weakly as Vivian stands up across the room and begins to walk towards us.

"Hey Sammy," she says chewing on a wad of something that could just be bubble gum but gives the effect of tobacco. "We got a seat saved for you over there."

"That's OK, Viv," says Sammy examining his finger as if he's just suddenly discovered that he has fingernails. "I think I'll just stay here for awhile."

She doesn't have to say anything to me. The look she gives me over her shoulder as she's walking away clearly conveys her hatred.

"Sammy," I say. "If you don't do something, I'm going to have to seriously think about making up a will."

"Ah, don't worry about Vivian," he says. "She's all talk."

"No she isn't," I say, leaning forward. "She doesn't talk. That's the problem. She's not getting her anger out of her system. She's bottling it up inside of her until the day she kills someone."

"What do you want me to do?" says Sammy. "Go over there? I'll go over there if you want."

He sounds ticked off.

"Don't worry about it," I say leaning back in my seat. "I'm not afraid to die. I believe in an afterlife."

If Dave can bravely live in Jerusalem daily facing death in the eye, surely I can deal with one irate punker.

"Listen," says Sammy, putting his arm around my shoulder.

I jump a mile out of my seat.

"Don't do that!" I say. "If she sees, I'm dead!"

"She'll have to kill me first," he says, moving his arm and patting my knee.

"But she won't," I mutter. "She'll kill me."

I don't even want to know if Vivian is watching, so I don't look. Judith, Bill, and David have been intensely absorbed in the band ever since Sammy arrived and they seem to think that I consider myself autonomous now, as if I actually like competing with punk girls for punk boys.

"I think Sammy really likes you," says Judith to me when we are back safely in the dorm and changing for bed.

"No he doesn't," I say. I'm in a bad mood. There's no doubt that there's a lot of chemistry between me and Sammy. But I don't feel like he's really protecting me when it counts.

"Then why isn't he going out with Vivian?"

"Haven't you looked at her?" I say climbing into bed. "She's a scary girl."

"We're talking about a guy who has a mohawk," says Judith folding her jeans and returning them to her closet.

"I dunno," I say. "I think even guys who have mohawks can be intimidated by girls with crew cuts."

"Wait and see what happens tomorrow," says Judith before going into the bathroom to brush her teeth. "I know he likes you."

Our Society meeting is conducted with Sammy's arm around the back of my chair. I only vaguely know what we discuss because at some point his arm moves down to around my shoulders and I become uncomfortably aware of Rita's disapproving looks.

"Every time he made a comment he looked at you to see what you thought," says Judith afterwards when we're sitting in the dorm kitchen sipping Irish Breakfast tea. "He started

off with his arm around your chair and by the end of the meeting it was around your shoulders. What're you going to do?"

And she doesn't even know about the kiss. Sammy didn't walk me back to the campus today, but he did give my hand a squeeze and promised to call as we were leaving the diner.

"Nothing," I say. "He hasn't said anything and I'm not going to."

"He's really not bad-looking. In fact, he's quite exceptional..."

"Are you saying I should get together with him?!" The mug that has been moving towards my lips stops mid-air. "What about Dave?"

Judith sighs, stands up and walks over to look out the window.

"What?" I say leaning forward. "What are you thinking?"

"You love Dave," she says carefully, staring off into the horizon. "He's a really intriguing guy."

"Go on."

"But wouldn't you like to be in a relationship where maybe you could just be appreciated for who you are, you know, something like, boy meets girl, they like each other, they hang out, they get together." She turns around suddenly with a There-Now-I've-Said-It look on her face.

I sigh.

"Judith," I say. "Love is not that simple. It takes work."

"But how much work?" She almost sounds like she's pleading. "You don't have to break your back bending over to please someone."

"Judith."

"I'm sorry," she says, hurrying back to sit down beside me. "I shouldn't have said anything. Listen, you don't hate me do you? I really should have kept my mouth shut."

"No," I say. "You're right."

I get a sudden pain that shoots from my temple to my jaw and brings tears to my eyes.

"I mean, I love Dave and he says he loves me, but it terrifies me that things can be so easy with Terry and Sammy." I put my mug down on the table because my fingers suddenly feel weak. "I mean, what if I find out that Dave isn't the man I think he is? What if I get married to him and find out that what I had with Terry or Sammy was love?" I'm trying not to cry. "I don't know what to do, Judith."

As I start to cry Judith puts her arm around me.

"Don't worry," she says. "It'll be OK. It'll be OK."

CHAPTER THIRTY

NOTES

This is totally unethical, thinks Hadassah, but how am I supposed to resist? This is temptation more than I can bear.

Dave's brown-haired friend has just spent the last hour at one of the round wood tables in the reference room, obviously in the throes of intense composition, surrounded by issues of the latest Time, Newsweek, and Maclean's, frequently flipping through them with one hand while still writing with the other. Before she left, she crumpled up her rough notes and dropped them in the trash can right beside the reference desk where Hadassah has been sitting and reading an article in a theological journal about the validity of the idea that the Q source was ever a separate gospel account.

There is no one in the reference room. Hadassah reaches into the small garbage can and retrieves the notes.

"Only Christianity says love your enemies...Christianity accused of being exclusive but it offers the only paradigm for the Society for the BM. Everything else looks inward, builds fences, to protect itself. NOT the kind of Christianity you find in church but the kind you find in individuals...like Jesus. Churches can do more socially, can help the community, but that's a lot of work, organization. It's about individuals. People who aren't afraid of the truth. Human beings need a group. Being human is lonely. But we can connect through the truth. We disconnect when we run away from the truth."

Then, at the very bottom of the paper, in small writing, "Judaism is too exclusive. I couldn't share it with Terry and Sammy."

Must be a theology paper, thinks Hadassah, before she returns the notes to the garbage can.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THAT'S LIFE

When Sammy starts to phone me regularly just to talk and then asks me out, I have to concede that Dave or no Dave, we have a relationship. And what's even crazier is that I make time in my already frantic schedule to go out with him. For our first real date he borrows Ray's van and takes me to a restaurant in Haven that he thinks I'd like. I appreciate the refined decor and the quality food, but what really melts me is to see Sammy wearing a white shirt and tie. Of course, the mohawk keeps him from blending in completely, but the mix of punk and preppy is somehow especially attractive. We end up back at the diner for ice cream sundaes made with fake whipped-cream and maraschino cherries.

"You know, you really would look good if you sort of shaved your head at the sides," Sammy suddenly says. Up until now we had just been discussing childhood memories.

"Really?"

This is a beauty alteration I have never considered although I know that hair is my one obstacle to being accepted at Marvin.

"Yeah, I mean, you've got the face for it. And you already dress well. You'd really fit in at Marvin if you just did something to your hair."

My thoughts are confirmed.

Dave would freak out, I think. Out loud I say, "Well, I kind of follow the Jewish teachings of Torah. And I don't know if I should do anything too dramatic to my hair."

"Come on!" says Sammy. "Don't those orthodox Jew guys grow their sideburns and wear those little hats? You wouldn't be doing anything stranger than that."

"I'll think about it," I say.

I don't know whether I'll actually think about it, but I'll definitely think about thinking about it.

"Listen," Sammy takes my hand. "I don't like Vivian. I will never like Vivian."

I'm kind of at a loss for words.

"That's good," I say.

"I can handle a relationship if I liked the person," he says, still keeping his hand on mine.

"Yeah," I say.

The problem is, I like Sammy. I really like him. And I like him in a way I've never liked anyone before. But that poem sums it up. We're on two shores. And one of us is going have to do some swimming to get to the other side.

"Anyhow, whatever you want," he says, now intertwining our fingers. "So, what do you wanna talk about?"

"Truth," I say. It's the first word that comes into my head. It's the word we use the most in this diner now. And it's dawned on me that, for all our talk, we still don't know what truth is. "I mean, do you feel like we've got it?" I say. "That's all that matters."

If Sammy and I find the truth together, then that's all we need.

"Just how much does truth change your life anyhow?" he says. "I mean, with or without it, I get up, I eat breakfast, I work. I survive. I love..."

"I guess it doesn't matter if someone doesn't do anything with their beliefs," I say.

"So, truth isn't worth a hell of a lot without action?"

"Exactly."

"Which is better, to have truth and do nothing, or to not have truth and to do something?"

"I guess it depends on what you actually do without the truth. But I think the worse thing is to find the truth and then to walk away from it."

"Do you think a person would get a second chance?"

"I wouldn't want to risk it."

"Maybe I'm glad I haven't found truth," says Sammy straightening up in his seat. "I may not like it and then what would I do?"

I shrug.

"If you believe in truth, you'd have to do everything for it and that requires your whole life."

"Are you willing to give it your whole life?"

I think about this. I think about Dave in Jerusalem devoting his whole being to what he believes. I could never go back to being the way I was before I met him -- drifting, not having or caring about a creed. But there's still an unsettled feeling in my heart that Dave's truth may not be my truth.

"Yes," I say. "Yes I am."

I also have an unsettled feeling that I may be wanting something that's hard, that goes way beyond just hanging out and being cool and talking about the truth.

Finals are approaching with a frightening swiftness. I start studying early to try make up for the number of times I turned in a C+ paper because I wrote it after a night of talking on the phone with Sammy.

I haven't missed any Society meetings either, despite my lengthy Jewish Lit reading assignments and Major and Minor Prophets term papers.

"I believe in truth as a general concept," says Sammy. It's Sunday morning and exams are starting a week from tomorrow. "I just don't know what the specific details are."

I told Sammy about how I light candles and say a prayer on Friday nights. He was sincerely interested, but thought it was unfortunate that it fell on a Friday since that was one of the best partying nights.

Sammy hasn't mentioned my hair again but he always holds my hand when we go out, although I've noticed he doesn't show much affection when we talk at Marvin. Thankfully Vivian has observed this and has been led to believe that we really are just friends, although this doesn't relieve my fear one iota when I occasionally find myself alone in the small, heavily-graffitized Marvin bathroom with her.

"I don't know what gives people the right to think that they know the truth," says Ray as the waitress pours him another cup of coffee.

"I think everyone has the right to think they have the truth," I say. "It just becomes an issue when their beliefs affect other people."

"But who has the right to say this is truth and this isn't?"

"If you're going to determine on your own what is truth and what isn't, then you are going to have to take responsibility for what you believe and what you do."

"What if you don't want to take responsibility?" says Ray.

"Then you can do one of two things," I say. "You can not bother trying to find the truth, or you can look to a higher authority to supply you with truth."

"Who's responsible if you look to the higher authority?" says Sammy.

"If the higher authority is willing to take responsibility then he is," I say. "If he's not, then it falls back on you."

"Bullshit," says Rita suddenly. There's hatred in her voice. "What gives you the right to act like you know everything? All you want is Sammy and you don't even love him."

She gets up and stomps out of the diner.

"Don't listen to her," says Sammy after a pause. "She doesn't know what she's talking about. She's been talking to Viv."

"What's with you, Sammy?" says Ray suddenly. "What do you mean she's been talking to Vivian? Of course she has. They're practically best friends."

"I'm sick of the hassle," mutters Sammy.

"Sick of the hassle?" says Ray standing up as if he can't believe his ears. "You used to be one of us and now I don't know who the hell you are."

The table is quiet as Ray follows Rita out of the diner to the parking lot where we see them pause between two decrepit painted white lines for consultation. Judith, Bill, and David, who haven't said a word for the whole meeting, suddenly seem even more silent.

Sammy mutters under his breath, runs his fingers through his loose mohawk, and takes a violent gulp of his coffee as if it's whisky.

"I don't know what their problem is," he says. "But don't worry or anything, I'm going to talk to them."

Ray and Rita have already climbed into their van and screeched away which makes any immediate peace negotiations impossible.

"I think we should go back," says David standing up.

"I'll meet you guys later," I say.

Sammy and I are left with a table of half-full coffee cups.

"Look," says Sammy. "I don't know what it is, but you're different from other girls and it's worth a little bit of hell to get to know you better."

"Thanks," I say.

"Seriously," he says. "I mean, I never cared about truth before."

"It's a scary thing to care about," I say. "There's no turning back."

"But you don't want to turn back," says Sammy.

"No," I say. "But I don't want to force other people to make decisions that they don't want to make."

"That's life." Sammy shrugs. "We never asked to be born either."

"What were you like before we met?" I say.

Sammy laughs.

"Like Ray, except without Rita."

"Does Ray love Rita?"

"Yeah, if you keep in mind that Ray believes in love about as much as he believes in truth. But yeah, in his own way, I guess he does. They've been going out since they were sixteen."

Sammy walks me back to campus and tells me again not to worry. He'll sort things out.

"You gonna come to Marvin this week?" he says.

"I'm going to have beg or bribe with hundred dollar bills to get Judith, Bill, and David to go," I say.

"Try if you can," says Sammy. "'Cos I know I'll have things worked out by then."

"So what happened?" says Judith. She, Bill, and David are sitting in the dorm lounge.

"Don't worry," I say with absolutely no conviction. "Everything's gonna be OK."

"I'm Jewish now," Dave writes in Hebrew and English. "I'm a real Jew now. This is the best day of my life."

I'm stunned. Then I start to cry. There's no going back.

"I want to convert," I say to Rabbi Hirshel the next day.

"I have to convert," I say, correcting myself.

He looks surprised.

"Are you sure?"

I swallow.

"Yes."

I'm probably being stupid but I have to go down this road to see where it leads. I have to believe in something and this is the best I've got right now.

"Well, I'll give you some papers to read then."

That night I flip through all of the pages. I'm thinking that if Dave had to become Jewish, I wish that he had waited until after my exams when I'd have the time to read all of this stuff. I put the papers aside to look at after finals, but at least I've taken the first step.

I study like crazy all week and in my spare time I eat and sleep. Sammy phones me to say that he's working on Ray and Rita. I'm so preoccupied with trying to memorize the thread of the history of Israel since it was founded in 1948 that I don't stop to wonder what he meant by 'working on.'

I have to practically offer myself as a slave to Judith, Bill, and David to convince them to go to Marvin on Saturday night. Unlike fanatical me, they were all planning on cramming for their finals. They concede only because I tell them that there's a strong possibility that Michael Buble owes Ray's uncle a favour and will be singing tonight. After all, anything's possible.

"I have a bad feeling about this," says Judith as we're driving to Haven. "I mean, I think Rita and Vivian want blood."

"Don't worry," I say. "Sammy would never let it happen."

That's actually my primary concern and motivation for going. I've got to let Sammy work this out. Because he's trying to make it safe for me in his world.

"The only reason I'm not worried is because they want your blood, not mine."

Judith, Bill, and David sit at their usual table. Once they realize that the band playing will never make it outside of Marvin and that Michael Buble is nowhere in sight, they pull out their study sheets and start quizzing each other.

I go over to the bar.

"Hey," I say to the lone punk at the bar with his familiar beer bottle.

"Hey," says Sammy.

"So, what's new?"

"I dunno," he says shrugging. "I'm still working on it."

"Great," I say. "So, like, am I safe here?"

"Oh sure," says Sammy vaguely. "What could happen?"

"I don't know," I say. "You tell me. What could a girl with spikes coming out of her head and a girl with a crew cut do to me?"

"Stay cool," he says. "They'll take it out on me."

I sigh. Sammy doesn't know anything about women. If a woman wants a man, she kills the competition, not the man.

"I think I'll be safer over there," I say as I see Vivian approaching us. I start walking back to my table.

"Hey!" says Vivian.

My whole body responds to that one word. Even my kidneys feel nervous.

"Are you talking to me?" I say.

"Yeah," she says. "As a matter of fact, I was talking to you."

"Listen," I say. "Me and my friends were about to leave right now."

"Well, that's not so good because I want to talk to you right now."

"I'd be delighted to talk," I say, stressing the last word.

"I want to know what you want," she says.

Sammy is sitting two feet away from me, providing no moral support.

I want to go home, is what I want.

"I want you to have as nice a life as possible," I say. "That's why I'm leaving right now."

"I don't want to ever see your face again."

"You probably won't."

God willing, Dave and I will move to Jerusalem, although now I think I'm going to suggest that we consider Australia since it's even farther away.

Judith, Bill, and David have been watching the whole scene in tense silence.

"Let's go," I say.

With a flurry of study sheets we exit Marvin. I don't look back at Sammy.

I get a phone call from Sammy the next day. This is the first Sunday morning that we didn't meet as a group at the diner.

"I'm sorry, man," he says. "I really am."

"It's OK," I say. "School's almost over and when it is, I'm out of here."

"Where're you going?"

"Home." Until Dave comes back.

"I'm sorry about everything though," says Sammy. "I mean, the Society and everything."

"I guess it's over," I say.

"I guess so," he says. "I couldn't work things out with Ray and Rita."

"Don't worry about it," I say.

"Listen," he says. "I really love you."

There's a pause.

"And I think I always will. But it's not going to work," he goes on.

"Irreconcilable differences," I say.

"Yeah."

"Like a Jew loving an Arab."

"Yeah."

"Well," I say. "Thanks a lot for everything. You've been an amazing vice-president."

"You've been an amazing president."

"Thanks."

"Bye."

"Bye."

I hang up the phone and already the hurting starts. I know I loved Sammy, but I guess love isn't truth.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

DEAR DAVE

Dear Dave,

I'm coming to Jerusalem. I've applied for a couple of the summer archaeological digs in Israel and I'm going to try to transfer some Union credits and get into the Hebrew University to major in Ancient Literature and Archaeology. I want to study the possibilities of finding more fragments of the Aramaic logia or the Q source, in other words, the sayings of Jesus. The Gospel of Thomas contains some sayings of Christ and I believe there must be other types of agrapha, non-canonical documents, yet undiscovered that at least allude to the teachings of Christ. It's a huge world and if there is anything it could be anywhere from Yemen to Rome, but I figure the Holy Land is the most reasonable place to start.

I keep thinking about the old city -- the narrow stone streets, not necessarily the exact ones that Christ walked on, but surely he felt the same as he moved through the bustling crowds of women buying their fresh fruit, men selling their copper and brass and leather, and children laughing and playing on the sloping steps that lead up to unknown avenues and alleys.

I'll be looking out for you in your yarmulke. I'll be the one in the keffiyeh.

Love,

Hadassah.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

REVELATION

I don't know what would have happened if I hadn't studied my brains out for finals. As it is, I'm just barely maintaining my 3.0 G.P.A. Some of it has to do with my inability to concentrate while taking the exams.

During Hebrew Studies, I start to wonder why Dave hasn't written to tell me exactly when he's coming back. I mean, am I supposed to just move home and get a job, or what? Dave doesn't realize that the practicalities of life concern me.

During my Jewish Lit final, my mind wanders to Sammy as I recall the number of reading assignments I skipped to go out with him. It seemed like a fair exchange at the time.

My piano exam is a fiasco. Terry hasn't written me in the last two months and I almost start to cry in the middle of playing Somewhere My Love. Miss Smith interprets my sniffing as an emotional response to the music and lets me pass even though the second half of the song is barely analogous to the original music.

I leave my music exam, my final exam, but the relief of finishing is overwhelmed by a helplessness that is turning my body into jelly.

Numb and sniffing, I make my way to the mailroom adjacent to the dining hall hoping that maybe today I'll get a letter from Dave.

My yelp of joy causes everyone in the mailroom to turn and stare at me as I pull out the thin white envelope with the Jerusalem postmark.

"I'm so happy. I'm so happy," I hum to myself, the last few hours of agony forgotten.

I trip out into the dining hall and collapse into a chair. With trembling hands, I clumsily rip open the envelope.

"El," it says. "I'm really sorry, but I'm staying in Jerusalem. I have a once in a lifetime chance to go to one of the best rabbinical schools here."

Everything in my body has stopped.

"May the God of peace and truth bless and guide you. Shalom. Dave."

"I...I." The words won't come out. My eyes are shut tight. My hands cover my face. I'm in a black room. The letter drops onto the table and absorbs a ring of damp coffee.

The room is the darkest I've ever been in, no windows, no air, only a door in the corner with a sliver of light through the crack beneath.

The End