

THE OTHER EINSTEIN

a novel



"Fascinating and thoughtful."

—B. A. SHAPIRO, *New York Times*
bestselling author of
The Art Forger and *The Muralist*

MARIE BENEDICT

PRAISE FOR *THE OTHER EINSTEIN*

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For Jim, Jack, and Ben

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PROLOGUE

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*62 Huttenstrasse
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The end is near. I feel it approaching like a dark, seductive shadow that will extinguish my remaining light. In these last minutes, I look back.

How did I lose my way? How did I lose Lieserl?

The darkness quickens. In the few moments I have left, like a meticulous archeologist, I excavate the past for answers. I hope to learn, as I suggested long ago, if time is truly relative.

Mileva "Mitza" Marić Einstein

PART I

Every body perseveres in its state of rest, or of uniform motion in a right line, unless it is compelled to change that state by forces impressed thereon.

Sir Isaac Newton

CHAPTER 1

Morning

October 20, 1896

Zürich, Switzerland

I SMOOTHED THE WRINKLES ON MY FRESHLY PRESSED WHITE blouse, flattened the bow encircling my collar, and tucked back a stray hair into my tightly wound chignon. The humid walk through the foggy Zürich streets to the Swiss Federal Polytechnic campus played with my careful grooming. The stubborn refusal of my heavy, dark hair to stay fixed in place frustrated me. I wanted every detail of the day to be perfect.

Squaring my shoulders and willing myself to be just a little taller than my regrettably tiny frame, I placed my hand on the heavy brass handle to the classroom. Etched with a Greek key design worn down from the grip of generations of students, the knob dwarfed my small, almost childlike hand. I paused. *Turn the knob and push the door open,* I told myself. *You can do this. Crossing this threshold is nothing new. You have passed over the supposedly insurmountable divide between male and female in countless classrooms before. And always succeeded.*

Still, I hesitated. I knew all too well that, while the first step is the hardest, the second isn't much easier. In that moment, little more than a breath, I could almost hear Papa urging me on. "Be bold," Papa would whisper in our native, little-used Serbian tongue. "You are a *mudra glava*. A wise one. In your heart beats the blood of bandits, our brigand

Slavic ancestors who used any means to get their due. Go get your due, Mitza. Go get your due.”

I could never disappoint him.

I twisted the knob and swung the door wide open. Six faces stared back at me: five dark-suited students and one black-robed professor. Shock and some disdain registered on their pale faces. Nothing—not even rumors—had prepared these men for actually seeing a woman in their ranks. They almost looked silly with their eyes bulging and their jaws dropping, but I knew better than to laugh. I willed myself to pay their expressions no heed, to ignore the doughy faces of my fellow students, who were desperately trying to appear older than their eighteen years with their heavily waxed mustaches.

A determination to master physics and mathematics brought me to the Polytechnic, not a desire to make friends or please others. I reminded myself of this simple fact as I steeled myself to face my instructor.

Professor Heinrich Martin Weber and I looked at each other. Long-nosed, heavily browed, and meticulously bearded, the renowned physics professor’s intimidating appearance matched his reputation.

I waited for him to speak. To do anything else would have been perceived as utter impertinence. I could not afford another such mark against my character, since my mere presence at the Polytechnic was considered impertinent by many. I walked a fine line between my insistence on this untrodden path and the conformity still demanded of me.

“You are?” he asked as if he weren’t expecting me, as if he’d never heard of me.

“Miss Mileva Marić, sir.” I prayed my voice didn’t quaver.

Very slowly, Weber consulted his class list. Of course, he knew precisely who I was. Since he served as head of the physics and mathematics program, and given that only four women had ever been admitted before me, I had to petition him directly to enter the first year of the four-year program, known as Section Six. He had approved my entrance himself! The consultation of the class list was a blatant and calculating

move, telegraphing his opinion of me to the rest of the class. It gave them license to follow suit.

“The Miss Marić from Serbia or some Austro-Hungarian country of that sort?” he asked without glancing up, as if there could possibly be another Miss Marić in Section Six, one who hailed from a more respectable location. By his query, Weber made his views on Slavic eastern European peoples perfectly clear—that we, as dark foreigners, were somehow inferior to the Germanic peoples of defiantly neutral Switzerland. It was yet another preconception I would have to disprove in order to succeed. As if being the only woman in Section Six—only the fifth to *ever* be admitted into the physics and mathematics program—wasn’t enough.

“Yes, sir.”

“You may take your seat,” he finally said and gestured toward the empty chair. It was my luck that the only remaining seat was the farthest away from his podium. “We have already begun.”

Begun? The class was not designated to start for another fifteen minutes. Were my classmates told something I wasn’t? Had they conspired to meet early? I wanted to ask but didn’t. Argument would only fuel the fires against me. Anyway, it didn’t matter. I would simply arrive fifteen minutes earlier tomorrow. And earlier and earlier every morning if I needed to. I would not miss a single word of Weber’s lectures. He was wrong if he thought an early start would deter me. I was my father’s daughter.

Nodding at Weber, I stared at the long walk from the door to my chair and, out of habit, calculated the number of steps it would take me to cross the room. How best to manage the distance? With my first step, I tried to keep my gait steady and hide my limp, but the drag of my lame foot echoed through the classroom. On impulse, I decided not to mask it at all. I displayed plainly for all my colleagues to see the deformity that marked me since birth.

Clomp and drag. Over and over. Eighteen times until I reached my

chair. *Here I am, gentlemen*, I felt like I was saying with each lug of my lame foot. *Take a gander; get it over with.*

Perspiring from the effort, I realized the classroom was completely silent. They were waiting for me to settle, and perhaps embarrassed by my limp or my sex or both, they kept their eyes averted.

All except one.

To my right, a young man with an unruly mop of dark brown curls stared at me. Uncharacteristically, I met his gaze. But even when I looked at him head-on, challenging him to mock me and my efforts, his half-lidded eyes did not look away. Instead, they crinkled at the corners as he smiled through the dark shadow cast by his mustache. A grin of great bemusement, even admiration.

Who did he think he was? What did he mean by that look?

I had no time to make sense of him as I sat down in my seat. Reaching into my bag, I withdrew paper, ink, and pen and readied for Weber's lecture. I would not let the bold, insouciant glance of a privileged classmate rattle me. I looked straight ahead at the instructor, still aware of my classmate's gaze upon me, but acted oblivious.

Weber, however, was not so single-minded. Or so forgiving. Staring at the young man, the professor cleared his throat, and when the young man still did not redirect his eyes toward the podium, he said, "I will have the attention of the entire classroom. This is your first and final warning, Mr. Einstein."

CHAPTER 2

Afternoon

October 20, 1896

Zürich, Switzerland

ENTERING THE VESTIBULE OF THE ENGELBRECHT PENSION, I closed the door quietly behind me and handed my damp umbrella to the waiting maid. Laughter drifted into the entryway from the back parlor. I knew the girls were waiting for me there, but I didn't feel up to the well-intentioned interrogation just yet. I needed some time alone to think about my day, even if it was just a few minutes. Taking care to tread lightly, I started up the stairs to my room.

Creak. Damn that one loose step.

Charcoal-gray skirts swishing behind her, Helene emerged from the back parlor, a steaming cup of tea in her hand. "Mileva, we are waiting for you! Did you forget?" With her free hand, Helene took my hand in hers and pulled me to the back parlor, which we now referred to among ourselves as the gaming room. We felt entitled to name it, as no one used it but us.

I laughed. How would I have made it through these past months in Zürich without the girls? Milana, Ružica, and most of all Helene, a soul-sister of sorts with her sharp wit, kindly manner, and, oddly enough, a similar limp. Why had I waited even a day to let them into my life?

Several months ago, when Papa and I arrived in Zürich, I could not

have imagined such friendships. A youth marked by friction from my classmates—alienation at best and mockery at worst—meant a life of solitude and scholarship for me. Or so I thought.

Stepping off the train after a jostling two-day journey from our home in Zagreb, Croatia, Papa and I were a bit wobbly. Smoke from the train billowed throughout Zürich's Hauptbahnhof, and I had to squint to make my way onto the platform. A satchel in each hand, one heavy with my favorite books, I teetered a bit as I wove through the crowded station, followed by Papa and a porter carrying our heavier bags. Papa rushed over to my side, trying to relieve me of one of my satchels.

"Papa, I can do it," I insisted as I tried to wriggle my hand out from under his grip. "You have bags of your own to carry and only two hands."

"Mitza, please let me help. I can handle another bag more easily than you." He chortled. "Not to mention that your mother would be horrified if I let you struggle through the Zürich train station."

Placing my bag down, I tried to extricate my hand from his. "Papa, I have to be able to do this alone. I'm going to be living in Zürich by myself after all."

He stared at me for a long moment, as if the reality of me living in Zürich without him just registered, as if we had not been working toward this goal since I was a little girl. Reluctantly, finger by finger, he released his hand. This was hard for him; I understood that. While I knew part of him relished my pursuit of a singular education, that my climb reminded him of his own hard-scrabble ascent from peasant to successful bureaucrat and landowner, I sometimes wondered whether he felt guilty and conflicted at propelling me along my own precarious journey. He'd focused on the prize of my university education for so long, I guessed that he hadn't actually envisioned saying good-bye and leaving me in this foreign place.

We exited the station and stepped into the busy evening streets of Zürich. Night was just beginning to fall, but the city wasn't dark. I caught Papa's eye, and we smiled at each other in amazement; we'd

only ever seen a city lit by the usual dim, oil streetlamps. Electric lights illuminated the Zürich streets, and they were unexpectedly bright. In their glow, I could actually make out the finer details on the dresses of the ladies passing by us; their bustles were more elaborate than the restrained styles I'd seen in Zagreb.

The horses of a for-hire clarence cab clopped down the cobblestones of the Bahnhofstrasse on which we stood, and Papa summoned it. As the driver dismounted to load our luggage onto the back of the carriage, I wrapped my shawl around me for warmth in the cool evening air. The night before I left, Mama gifted me with the rose-embroidered shawl, tears welling in the corners of her eyes but never falling. Only later did I understand that the shawl was like her farewell embrace, something I could keep with me, since she had to stay behind in Zagreb with my younger sister, Zorka, and my little brother, Miloš.

Interrupting my thoughts, the driver asked, "Are you here to see the sights?"

"No," Papa answered for me with only a slight accent. He'd always been proud of his grammatically flawless German, the language spoken by those in power in Austro-Hungary. It was the first step upon which he began his climb, he used to say as he badgered us into practicing it. Puffing up his chest a little, he said, "We are here to register my daughter for the university."

The driver's eyebrows raised in surprise, but he otherwise kept his reaction private. "University, eh? Then I'm guessing you'll want the Engelbrecht Pension or one of the other pensions of Plattenstrasse," he said as he held the cab door open for us to enter.

Papa paused as he waited for me to settle in the carriage and then asked the driver, "How did you know our destination?"

"That's where I take many of the eastern European students to lodge."

Listening to Papa grunt in response as he slid into the cab alongside me, I realized that he didn't know how to read the driver's comment. Was it a slur about our eastern European heritage? We'd been told

that, even though they adamantly maintained their independence and neutrality in the face of the relentless European empire building that surrounded them, the Swiss looked down upon those from the eastern reaches of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. And yet the Swiss were the most tolerant people in other ways; they had the most lenient university admissions for women, for example. It was a confusing contradiction.

Signaling to the horses, the driver cracked the whip in the air, and the carriage rumbled down the Zürich street at a steady clip. Straining to see through the mud-splattered window, I saw an electric tram whiz by the carriage.

“Did you see that, Papa?” I asked. I’d read about trams but never witnessed one firsthand. The sight exhilarated me; it served as tangible evidence that the city was forward-thinking, at least in transportation. I could only hope that the way its citizens treated female students was also advanced to match the rumors we’d heard.

“I didn’t see it, but I heard it. And felt it,” Papa answered calmly with a squeeze of my hand. I knew he was excited too but wanted to appear worldly. Especially after the driver’s comment.

I turned back to the open window. Steep green mountains framed the city, and I swear I smelled evergreens in the air. Surely, the mountains were too distant to share the fragrance of their abundant trees. Whatever the source, the Zürich air was far fresher than that of Zagreb, ever redolent of horse dung and burning crops. Perhaps the scent came from the crisp air blowing off Lake Zürich, which bordered the southern side of the city.

In the distance, at what appeared to be the base of the mountains, I glimpsed pale yellow buildings, constructed in a neoclassical style, set against the backdrop of church spires. The buildings looked remarkably like the sketches of the Polytechnic that I’d seen in my application papers but vaster and more imposing than I’d imagined. The Polytechnic was a new sort of college dedicated to producing teachers and professors for various math or scientific disciplines, and it was one

of the few universities in Europe to grant women degrees. Although I'd dreamed of little else for years, it was hard to fathom that, in a few months' time, I'd actually be in attendance there.

The clarence cab lurched to a halt. The hatch door opened, and the driver announced our destination, "50 Plattenstrasse." Papa passed up some francs through the hatch, and the carriage door swung open.

As the driver unloaded our luggage, a servant from the Engelbrecht Pension hurried out the front door and down the entry steps to assist us with the smaller bags we were carrying by hand. From between the handsome columns framing the front door of the four-story brick town house, an attractive, well-dressed couple emerged.

"Mr. Marić?" the heavyset, older gentleman called out.

"Yes, you must be Mr. Engelbrecht," my father answered with a short bow and an outstretched hand. As the men exchanged introductions, the spry Mrs. Engelbrecht scuttled down the stairs to usher me into the building.

Formalities dispensed with, the Engelbrechts invited Papa and me to share in the tea and cakes that had been laid out in our honor. As we followed the Engelbrechts from the entryway into the parlor, I saw Papa cast an approving glance over the crystal chandelier hanging in the front parlor and the matching wall sconces. I could almost hear him think, *This place is respectable enough for my Mitza.*

To me, the pension seemed antiseptic and overly formal compared to home; the smells of the woods and the dust and the spicy cooking of home had been scrubbed away. Although we Serbs aspired to the Germanic order adopted by the Swiss, I saw then that our attempts barely grazed the Swiss heights of cleaning perfection.

Over tea and cakes and pleasantries and under Papa's persistent questioning, the Engelbrechts explained the workings of their boardinghouse: the fixed schedule for meals, visitors, laundry, and room cleaning. Papa, the former military man, inquired about the security of the lodgers, and his shoulders softened with every favorable response

and each assessment of the tufted blue fabric on the walls and the ornately carved chairs gathered around the wide marble fireplace. Still, his shoulders never fully slackened; Papa wanted a university education for me almost as much as I wanted it for myself, but the reality of farewell seemed harder for him than I'd ever imagined.

As I sipped my tea, I heard laughter. The laughter of girls.

Mrs. Engelbrecht noticed my reaction. "Ah, you hear our young ladies at a game of whist. May I introduce you to our other young lady boarders?"

Other lady boarders? I nodded, although I desperately wanted to shake my head no. My experiences with other young ladies generally ended poorly. Commonalities between myself and them were few at best. At worst, I had suffered meanness and degradation at the hands of my classmates, male and female, especially when they realized the scope of my ambitions.

Still, politeness demanded that we rise, and Mrs. Engelbrecht led us through the parlor into a smaller room, different from the parlor in its decor: brass chandelier and sconces instead of crystal, oaken panels instead of blue silken fabric on the walls, and a gaming table at its center. As we entered, I thought I heard the word *krpiti* and glanced over at Papa, who looked similarly surprised. It was a Serbian phrase we used when disappointed or losing, and I wondered who on earth would be using the word. Surely, we had misheard.

Around the table sat three girls, all about my age, with dark hair and thick brows not unlike my own. They were even dressed much the same, with stiff, white blouses topped with high lace collars and dark, simple skirts. Serious attire, not the frilly, fancifully decorated gowns of lemon yellow and frothy pink favored by many young women, including those I'd seen on the fashionable streets near the train station.

Looking up from their game, the girls quickly set their cards down and stood for the introduction. "Misses Ružica Dražić, Milana Bota,

and Helene Kaufler, I would like you to meet our new boarder. This is Miss Mileva Marić.”

As we curtsied to one another, Mrs. Engelbrecht continued, “Miss Marić is here to study mathematics and physics at the Swiss Federal Polytechnic. You will be in good company here, Miss Marić.”

Mrs. Engelbrecht gestured first to a girl with wide cheekbones, a ready smile, and bronze eyes. She said, “Miss Dražić is here from Šabac to study political science at the University of Zürich.”

Turning next to the girl with the darkest hair and heaviest brows, Mrs. Engelbrecht said, “This is Miss Bota. She left Kruševac behind to study psychology at the Polytechnic like yourself.”

Placing her hand on the shoulder of the last girl, one with a halo of soft brown hair and kindly, gray-blue eyes framed by sloping eyebrows, Mrs. Engelbrecht said, “And this is our Miss Kaufler, who traveled all the way from Vienna for her history degree, also at the Polytechnic.”

I didn’t know what to say. Fellow university students from eastern Austro-Hungarian provinces like my own? I had never dreamed that I wouldn’t be unique. In Zagreb, every other girl near the age of twenty was married or readying for marriage by meeting suitable young men and practicing to run a household in their parents’ home. Their educations stopped years before, if they ever went to formal schooling at all. I thought I’d always be the only eastern European female university student in a world of western men. Maybe the only girl at all.

Mrs. Engelbrecht looked at each of the girls and said, “We will leave you ladies to your whist while we finish our conversation. I hope that you will show Miss Marić around Zürich tomorrow?”

“Of course, Mrs. Engelbrecht,” Miss Kaufler answered for all three girls with a warm smile. “Maybe Miss Marić will even join us in whist tomorrow evening. We could certainly use a fourth.”

Miss Kaufler’s smile seemed genuine, and I felt drawn to the cozy scene. Instinctively, I grinned back, but then I stopped. *Be careful*, I warned myself. *Remember the beastliness of other young ladies: the taunts,*

the name-calling, the kicks on the playground. The Polytechnic's mathematics and physics program lured you here, so you could follow the dream of becoming one of a very few female physics professors in Europe. You did not travel all this distance just to make a few friends, even if these girls are indeed what they seem.

As we walked back to the front parlor, Papa linked his arm with mine and whispered, "They seem like remarkably nice girls, Mitza. They must be smart too, if they are here to study at the university. It might be the right time to find a female companion or two, since we've finally met a few that might be your intellectual equals. Some lucky girl should get to share in all the little jokes you usually save for me."

His voice sounded oddly hopeful, as if he were actually eager for me to reach out to the girls we'd just met. What was Papa saying? I was confused. After so many years professing that friends did not matter, that a husband was not important, that our family and education alone counted, was he giving me some sort of test? I wanted to show him that the usual desires of a young woman—friends, husband, children—didn't matter to me, as always. I wanted to pass this strange examination with the highest honors, just as I had all others.

"Papa, I promise you I'm here to learn, not to make friends," I said with a definitive nod. I hoped this would reassure him that the fate he foretold for me—even wished for me—all those years ago had become my own embraced destiny.

But Papa wasn't elated with my answer. In fact, his face darkened, with sadness or anger I couldn't tell at first. Had I not been emphatic enough? Was his message truly changing because these girls were so different from all the others I'd known?

He was uncharacteristically quiet for a minute. Finally, with a despondent note in his voice, he said, "I had hoped you could have both."

In the weeks that followed Papa's departure, I avoided the girls, keeping to my books and my room. But the Engelbrechts' schedule meant that I dined with them daily, and courtesy required that I politely

converse over breakfast and dinner. They constantly entreated me to join them in walks, lectures, café-house visits, theater, and concerts. They good-naturedly chided me for being too serious and too quiet and too studious, and they continued to invite me no matter how often I declined. The girls had persistence I'd never witnessed anywhere but within myself.

One early evening that summer, I was studying in my room in preparation for the courses beginning in October, as had become my custom. My special shawl was wrapped around my shoulders to ward off the chill endemic to the pension's bedrooms no matter how warm the weather. I was parsing through a text when I heard the girls downstairs begin to play a version of one of Bizet's *L'Arlésienne Suites*, fairly badly but with feeling. I knew the piece well; I used to perform it with my family. The familiar music made me feel melancholy, lonely instead of alone. Glancing over at my dusty tamburitza in the corner, I grabbed the little mandolin and walked downstairs. Standing in the entrance to the front parlor, I watched as the girls struggled with the piece.

As I leaned against the wall, tamburitza in hand, I suddenly felt foolish. Why should I expect them to accept me after I'd declined their invitations so frequently? I wanted to run back upstairs, but Helene noticed me and stopped playing.

With her characteristic warmth, she asked, "Will you join us, Miss Marić?" She glanced at Ružica and Milana in mock exasperation. "You can see that we can use whatever musical assistance you can offer."

I said yes. Within days, the girls catapulted me into a life I'd never experienced before. A life with like-minded friends. Papa had been wrong, and so had I. Friends did matter. Friends like these anyway, ones who were fiercely intelligent and similarly ambitious, who suffered through the same sort of ridicule and condemnation and survived, smiling.

These friends didn't take away my resolve to succeed as I'd feared. They made me stronger.



Now, months later, I plopped down into the empty chair as Ružica poured me a cup of tea. The smell of lemon wafted toward me, and with a self-pleased grin, Milana slid over a plate of my favorite lemon-balm cake; the girls must have specially requested it for me from Mrs. Engelbrecht. A special gesture for a special day.

“Thank you.”

We sipped tea and nibbled on the cake. The girls were unusually quiet, although I could see from their faces and the glances they shot one another that it was a hard-won restraint. They were waiting for me to speak first, to offer up more than an appreciation for the treats.

But Ružica, the most high-spirited, couldn't wait. She had the most abundant persistence and the least patience and simply burst with her question. “How was the infamous Professor Weber?” she asked, eyebrows knit in a comic interpretation of the instructor, well-known for his formidable classroom style and equally formidable brilliance.

“As billed,” I answered with a sigh and another bite of cake; it was a glorious mix of sweet and savory. I wiped away a crumb from the side of my mouth and explained, “He insisted on consulting his roster before he let me sit in the classroom. As if he didn't know I was entering his program. He admitted me himself!”

The girls giggled knowingly.

“And then he made a dig about me coming from Serbia.”

The girls stopped laughing. Ružica and Milana had experienced similar humiliations, having come from far reaches of the Austro-Hungarian Empire themselves. Even Helene, who hailed from the more acceptable region of Austria, had suffered her own degradations from her Polytechnic professors because she was Jewish.

“Sounds like my first day in Professor Herzog's class,” Helene said, and we nodded. We had heard Helene's tale of mortification in

excruciating detail. After noting aloud that Helene's surname sounded Jewish, Professor Herzog spent a substantial part of his first Italian history lecture focusing on the Venetian ghettos where Jews were forced to live from the sixteenth to eighteenth century. We didn't think the professor's emphasis was a coincidence.

"It isn't enough we are but a few women in an ocean of men. The professors have to manufacture other flaws and highlight other differences," Ružica said.

"How are the other students?" Milana asked in a clear attempt to change the subject.

"The usual," I answered. The girls groaned in solidarity.

"Self-important?" Milana asked.

"Check," I said.

"Heavily mustached?" Ružica suggested with a giggle.

"Check."

"Overly confident?" Helene proposed.

"Double check."

"Any overt hostility?" Helene ventured, her voice more solemn and cautious. She was very protective, a sort of mother hen for the group. Especially for me. Ever since I told them about what had happened to me on my first day at the upper school in Zagreb, the Royal Classical High School, a story I'd shared with no one else, Helene was extra wary on my behalf. While none of the others had experienced such overt violence, they'd all felt the menace seething beneath the surface at one time or another.

"No, not yet anyway."

"That's good news," Ružica announced, ever optimistic. We accused her of fabricating silver linings in the blackest storms. She maintained that it was a necessary outlook for us and briskly recommended that we do the same.

"Sense any allies?" Milana tiptoed into more strategic territory. The physics curriculum required collaboration among the students on

certain projects, and we had discussed strategies about this. What if no one was willing to partner with me?

"No," I answered automatically. But I paused, trying to follow Ružica's advice to think more optimistically. "Well, maybe. There was one student who smiled at me, maybe a little too long, but still, a genuine smile. No mockery. Einstein, I think is his name."

Helene's heavy eyebrows raised in concern. She was always on high alert for unwelcome romantic overtures. She believed them to be almost as much cause for concern as outright violence. Reaching for my hand, she warned, "Be careful."

I squeezed her hand back. "Don't worry, Helene. I'm always careful." When her expression failed to lighten, I teased, "Come on. You girls always accuse me of being *too* cautious, *too* private. Of only showing you three my true personality. Do you really think I wouldn't be careful with Mr. Einstein?"

Helene's worried look lifted, replaced by a smile.

I constantly astonished myself with these girls. Astonished that I had the words to express my long-buried stories. Astonished that I allowed them to see who I really was. And astonished that I was accepted regardless.

CHAPTER 3

April 22, 1897

Zürich, Switzerland

I NESTLED INTO MY LIBRARY CARREL. THE AIRY, WOOD-PANELED library at the Polytechnic was full almost to capacity, but still, the room was hushed. The students were quietly worshipping at the altar of one discipline or another, some studying biology or chemistry, others math, and still others physics like myself. Here, buffeted from the world by the carrel, barricaded in by my books, fortified by my own musings and theories, I could almost pretend that I was like every other student at the Polytechnic library.

Spread before me were my class notes, several required texts, and one article from my own collection. They all clamored for my attention, and as if I were selecting among beloved pets, I found it hard to choose to which I would devote my time. Newton or Descartes? Or perhaps one of the newer theorists? The air at the Polytechnic, indeed throughout Zürich itself, felt charged with talk of the latest developments in physics, and I felt like it was speaking directly to me. The world of physics was where I belonged. Embedded in its secretive rules about the workings of the world—hidden forces and unseen causal relationships so complex that I believed only God could have created them—were answers to the greatest questions about our existence. If only I could uncover them.

Occasionally, if I relaxed into my reading and calculations—instead

of studying and working so earnestly—I could see the divine patterns I desperately sought. But only in the periphery of my sight. As soon as I turned my gaze directly upon the patterns, they shimmered away into nothingness. Perhaps I wasn't yet ready to view God's masterwork head-on. Perhaps in time, he would allow it.

I credited Papa for bringing me to this scintillating threshold of education and curiosity. My only regret was that he still worried about me here in Zürich, both in terms of my future prospects and the safety of my daily living. While I worked hard in my letters to convince him of the abundance of teaching positions for me when I finished, if research should not be my career, and the inviolability of my structured life at school and the pension, I sensed his anxiety through his endless questioning.

Interesting that Mama seemed more comfortable with my current path. After a lifetime bristling against her disapproval of my unorthodox need for education, once I settled into my life in Zürich, she seemed to surrender to my choice, particularly when I started to fill my letters to her with tales of my outings with Ružica, Milana, and Helene. In her responses, I saw that Mama delighted in these new friendships. My first friendships.

Mama's approval wasn't always so freely given. Until this recent rapprochement, my relationship with her was darkened by her worries over me, her lame, lonely, and unconventional child. And by the impact my thirst for education had on her own life.

On one brisk September afternoon in my birthplace of remote Titel, nearly seven years ago, she didn't bother to mask her opposition to my decidedly unfeminine path, even though Papa himself propelled it forward, and she rarely challenged him. We were on our pilgrimage to the cemetery where my older brother and sister were buried, the siblings who had died of infant illnesses years before my birth. The wind was fierce, whipping the kerchief around my head. I grabbed the black fabric and held it down tightly, imagining the cluck of Mama's disapproval should the kerchief fly off, leaving my head exposed while treading on

sacred ground. The folds covered my ears, muffling the low, mournful moans of the wind. I was grateful for the quiet, although I knew the wind's keening befitted our destination.

I smelled *tamjan*, a sweet and pungent incense, wafting from our church as we passed, and fallen leaves crunched underfoot as I struggled to keep up with Mama's stride. The hill was rocky and hard for me to climb, which Mama knew well. But she wouldn't slow down. It was almost as if the arduousness of the walk to the cemetery was part of my penance. For surviving when my brother and sister did not. For living when childhood sicknesses claimed the others. And for inspiring Papa to accept the new governmental post in Zagreb, a larger city with better schooling for me, but a move that would take Mama farther away from the graves of her firstborn children.

"Are you coming, Mitza?" Mama called to me without turning around. I reminded myself that her sternness didn't stem solely from her displeasure over the move to Zagreb. Strict discipline and high expectations were her daily prescription for righteous children; she often said, "The Proverbs say that 'The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother.'"

"Yes, Mama," I called back.

Dressed in her usual mourning black and dark kerchief, worn in honor of my dead brother and sister, Mama walked ahead, looking like an ebony shadow against the gray autumnal sky. I was short of breath by the time I reached the summit, but I muffled my labored breathing. This was my duty.

Risking a cluck, I turned around; I loved the view from this vantage point. Titel spread out before us, and above the church spire, the vista of the town looked as though it clung to the banks of the Tisa. The dusty town was small, with only a town square, market, and a few governmental buildings at its center, but it was still beautiful.

But then I heard Mama lowering herself to the ground, and my guilt set in. This was no pleasure stroll; I should not be enjoying myself.

This would be one of our last visits to the cemetery for a long time to come. Even Papa couldn't make me feel better about our move today.

I took my place at Mama's side before the gravestones. The pebbles dug into my knees, but I wanted to feel pain today. It seemed a reasonable sacrifice for the pain I was inflicting on Mama by sparking our move to Zagreb. Since I'd reach the limits of my local education, Papa wanted me to attend the Royal Classical High School in Zagreb. We wouldn't be returning to Titel with any frequency. I glanced over at her. Her brown eyes were shut, and without their flinty animation, she looked older than her thirty-odd years. The burden of loss and the weight of daily minutiae had aged her.

I made the sign of the cross, closed my eyes, and offered a silent prayer to the souls of my long-departed brother and sister. They had always served as my invisible companions, a replacement for the friends I never had. How different my life might have been had they lived. Maybe with an older brother and sister by my side, I would not have been so lonely, secretly longing to play with the girls in the schoolyard, even the ones who hurt me.

A shaft of sunlight passed over me, and I opened my eyes. The arched marble gravestones of my older brother and sister stared back at me. Their names—Milica Marić and Vukašin Marić—glistened in the sun as if they had just been chiseled, and I held back an impulse to run my finger along each of the letters.

Mama usually liked to keep our visits silent and reflective, but not that day. She reached for my hand and called out to the Virgin in our native, rarely used Serbian:

Bogorodice Djevo, radujsja
Blagodatnaja Marije...

Mama was so loud that she drowned out the wind and the rustling leaves. And she was swaying. I felt embarrassed by the strength

of Mama's voice and her dramatic movements, especially when two mourners in the distance peered over at us.

Still, I chanted along. The words of the Hail Mary usually soothed me, but today, they felt unfamiliar. Almost thick on my tongue. Like a lie. Mama's utterances sounded different too, not like reverential worship but like a condemnation. Of me, certainly not of the Virgin.

I tried to focus on the wind, the crackling of the branches and leaves, the gallop of hooves as horses passed by, anything but the words coming from Mama's mouth. I did not need further reminders that so much rested on my success at the school in Zagreb. I had to succeed. Not just for myself and Mama and Papa but for my departed brother and sister too. Souls left behind.



I heard the scratch of fountain pens from other students working nearby in the library, but only one man captivated my attention. Philipp Lenard. I reached for the article by the noted German physicist and began reading. I should have been reading the texts of Hermann von Helmholtz and Ludwig Boltzmann, assigned by the professor, but I was drawn to Lenard's recent research on cathode rays and their properties. Using evacuated glass tubes, he bombarded the tubes' metallic electrodes with high-voltage electricity and then examined the rays. Lenard observed that, if the end of the tube opposite the negative charge was painted with a fluorescent material, a minuscule object within the tube began to glow and zigzag around the tube. This led him to believe that cathode rays were streams of negatively charged energetic particles; he dubbed them quanta of electricity. Putting down the article, I wondered how Lenard's research might impact the much-debated question about the nature and existence of atoms. Of what substance had God made the world? Could the answer to this question tell us more about mankind's purpose on God's earth? Sometimes, in the pages of my texts and in the glimmers of my musings, I sensed God's patterns unfolding in the

physical laws of the universe that I was learning. These were the places I felt God, not in the pews of Mama's churches or in their cemeteries.

The clock in the university tower struck five. Could it really be so late? I hadn't even touched the day's assigned reading.

I craned my neck to glimpse out a well-positioned window. There was no shortage of spired clock towers in Zürich, and the clock hands I saw confirmed that it was five. Mrs. Engelbrecht was Teutonically firm with her pension dinner schedule, so I could not linger. Especially since the girls would be waiting, instruments in hand, for some pre-dinner music. It was one of our little rituals, the one I loved best.

I organized my papers and began to slide them into my bag. Lenard's article sat on top of the pile, and a phrase caught my attention. I began reading again and became so engrossed that I jumped when I heard my name.

"Miss Marić, may I intrude on your thoughts?"

It was Mr. Einstein. His hair was wilder than ever, as if he had been running his fingers through his dark curls and willing them to stand on end. His shirt and jacket looked no better; they were rumpled almost beyond recognition. His disheveled appearance was at odds with the careful mien of the other students at the library. But unlike them, he was smiling.

"Yes, Mr. Einstein."

"I'm hoping that you can help me with a problem." He thrust a stack of papers into my hand.

"Me?" I asked without thinking and then chastised myself for my obvious surprise. *Act confident*, I told myself. *You are every bit as bright as the other students in Section Six. Why shouldn't a fellow classmate ask you for help?*

But it was too late. My self-doubt had already been revealed.

"Yes, you, Miss Marić. I think you're quite the smartest in our class—by far the best at maths—and those *Dummkopfs* over there"—he gestured to two of our classmates, Mr. Ehrat and Mr. Kollros, who

stood between two book stacks, whispering and gesticulating wildly to one another—"have tried to help me and failed."

"Certainly," I answered. I was flattered by his assurances but still wary. If Helene were here, she would urge caution but also push me to forge a collegial alliance. Next term, I would need a lab partner, and he might be my only option. In the six months since I had entered the physics program and sat in class with the same five students every day, the others had shown only the basest civilities and an otherwise practiced indifference toward me. By his daily kindnesses in greeting me and occasionally inquiring into my thoughts on Professor Weber's lectures, Mr. Einstein had proven to be my sole hope.

"Let me see." I looked down at his papers.

He had passed me a nearly incomprehensible mess. Was this the kind of unorganized work that my fellow students were doing? If so, I did not have to worry about my own efforts. I glanced over his messy computations and quickly spotted the error. It was laziness, really, on his part. "Here, Mr. Einstein. If you switch these two numbers, I believe you will arrive at the proper solution."

"Ah, I see. Thank you for your assistance, Miss Marić."

"It's my pleasure." I nodded and turned back to the business of packing up my belongings.

I felt him peering over my shoulder. "Are you reading Lenard?" he asked, surprise evident in his voice.

"Yes," I answered, continuing to pack my bag.

"He isn't part of our curriculum."

"No, he isn't."

"I'm quite amazed, Miss Marić."

"Why is that, Mr. Einstein?" I turned to face him square on, daring him to challenge me. Did he think I couldn't handle Lenard, a text far more complicated than our basic physics curriculum? Because he was quite a bit taller than me, I was forced to look up. My short stature was a disadvantage that I had come to loathe as much as my limp.

"You seem the consummate student, Miss Marić. Always in attendance at class, following the rules, scrupulous in your note-taking, toiling for hours in the library instead of whiling them away in the cafés. And yet, you are a bohemian like me. I wouldn't have guessed."

"A bohemian? I don't catch your meaning." My words and tone were sharp. By calling me bohemian, a word I associated with the Austro-Hungarian region of Bohemia, was he insulting my heritage? From cracks made by Weber in class, Mr. Einstein knew I was Serbian, and the prejudice of the Germanic and western European people such as himself against easterners was well known. I had wondered about Mr. Einstein's own heritage, even though I knew he hailed from Berlin. With his dark hair and eyes and distinctive last name, he didn't look the traditional Germanic blond. Perhaps his family settled in Berlin from somewhere else?

He must have sensed my latent anger, because he rushed to clarify himself. "I use the word bohemian in the French manner, after the word *bohémien*. It means independent in your thinking. Progressive. Not so bourgeois as some of our classmates."

I did not know how to read this exchange. He didn't seem to be mocking me; in fact, I thought he was trying to compliment me with his strange bohemian label. I felt more uncomfortable by the minute.

Busying myself with the remaining sheaf of papers on the carrel's desk, I said, "I must go, Mr. Einstein. Mrs. Engelbrecht keeps to a strict schedule at her pension, and I mustn't be late for dinner. Good evening." I sealed my bag shut and curtsied in farewell.

"Good evening, Miss Marić," he answered with a bow, "and my gratitude for your help."

I passed through the arched oak door of the library and across its small stone courtyard out onto Rämistrasse, the busy street bordering the Polytechnic. This boulevard overflowed with boardinghouses, where Zürich's plentiful students slept at night, and cafés, where those same students debated great questions in the daylight hours not spent

in class. From my furtive glances, it seemed that coffee and pipes were the primary fuel for these heated café conversations. But this was only a guess. I didn't dare join in at one of these tables, even though I once spied Mr. Einstein with a few friends at an outdoor table at Café Metropole, and he waved me over. I pretended not to see him; sightings of women alongside men for these free-spirited café exchanges were rare, and it was a line I couldn't yet bring myself to cross.

Night was falling over Rämistrasse, yet the street was bright with electric illumination. A fine mist began to form in the air, and I pulled up my hood to prevent the dampness from settling on my hair and clothes. The rain increased—unexpectedly, as the day had started bright and clear—and I found it harder to weave my way through the warren of Rämistrasse. I was by far the shortest person in the crowd. I was drenched, and the cobblestones were getting slippery. Dare I break my own rule and duck into one of the cafés until the weather broke?

Without warning, rain stopped pouring down on me. I glanced up, expecting to see a shaft of blue sky, but instead saw only black and rivers of water gushing down all around my sides.

Mr. Einstein was holding an umbrella over my head.

"You are dripping wet, Miss Marić," he said, his eyes full of their usual humor.

What was he doing here? He did not look ready to leave the library just moments ago. Was he following me?

"An unexpected deluge, Mr. Einstein. Many thanks for the umbrella, but I'm fine." It was imperative that I insist on self-sufficiency; I didn't want any of my classmates to see me as a helpless female, Mr. Einstein in particular. He wouldn't want me as a lab partner if he perceived me as weak, would he?

"After you saved me from the certain wrath of Professor Weber with your correction of my calculations, the least I can do is to escort you home in this rain." He smiled. "Since you seem to have forgotten your umbrella."

I wanted to object, but in truth, I needed the assistance. Slick cobblestones were hazardous with my limp. Mr. Einstein placed his hand on my arm and held the umbrella high above my head. The gesture was perfectly gentlemanly if a bit bold. Feeling the pressure of his hand on my arm, I realized that, apart from Papa and a few of my uncles, I had never been so close to a grown man before. Even though multitudes of people packed the boulevard and we all wore burdensome layers of cloaks and scarves, I felt oddly exposed.

As we walked, Mr. Einstein launched into a spirited monologue about Maxwell's electromagnetic wave theory of light, tossing out some rather unusual thoughts about the relationship of light and radiation to matter. I piped in with a few comments that Mr. Einstein responded to with encouragement but otherwise stayed quiet, listening to his irrepressible chatter and evaluating his intellect and spirit.

We reached the Engelbrecht Pension, and he delivered me directly up the stairs to the covered front door. Relief flooded through me.

"Again, my thanks, Mr. Einstein. Your courtesy was unnecessary but much appreciated."

"My pleasure, Miss Marić. I'll see you in class tomorrow," he said and turned to leave.

A disjointed Vivaldi piece floated out of the slightly open parlor window and onto the street. Mr. Einstein started back up the front steps and peered through the window where the girls had gathered for a casual concert.

"By God, that's a lively group," he exclaimed. "I wish I'd brought my violin. Vivaldi is always better with strings. Do you play, Miss Marić?"

Brought his violin? How presumptuous of him. These were my friends and my sanctuary, and I did not invite him to join us. "Yes, I play the tamburitza and piano, and I sing. But it's no matter; the Engelbrechts are very strict about gentlemen callers."

"I could come as a classmate and fellow musician, not as a caller," he offered. "Would that appease them?"

I blushed. How stupid of me to imply he wanted to come as a caller. "Perhaps, Mr. Einstein. I would have to make inquiries." I hoped he understood that my demur was a gentle rejection.

He shook his head in appreciation. "You have astonished me today, Miss Marić. You are much more than just a brilliant mathematician and physicist. It seems you are a musician and bohemian too."

His smile was infectious. I could not help but return it.

He stared in amazement. "I do believe that's the first time I've seen you smile. It's quite fetching. I'd like to steal more of those smiles from your serious little mouth."

Flustered by his comment and uncertain how to reply, I turned and entered the pension.

CHAPTER 4

April 24, 1897

The Sihl Valley, Switzerland

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE WE DISEMBARKED THE TRAIN FROM Zürich and set out on the path through the Sihl Valley, our group was quiet. A hush settled over us, almost like we had entered a cathedral. In a way, that was what these primeval woods, the Sihlwald, felt like.

Ancient, giant trees flanked us, and we stepped over the corpses of their fallen brethren. The carpet of moss muffled the sound of our footsteps, making the croak of the frogs, the knocking of woodpeckers, and the song of the birds seem louder. I felt as though I had stepped into the primordial wilderness from one of the fairy tales that I loved growing up, and from their silence, I sensed that Milana, Ružica, and Helene felt the same awe.

“*Fagus sylvatica*,” Helene whispered, interrupting my thoughts. I did not understand the meaning of her vaguely Latin-sounding phrase, strange since I spoke or read German, French, Serbian, and Latin, two languages more than Helene. I wondered if she was speaking to me or to herself.

“Pardon me?”

“Sorry, it’s the genus and species of this particular beech tree. My father and I used to go on long walks in the forest near our home in Vienna, and he had an affinity for the trees’ Latin names.” She twirled a fallen beech leaf between her fingers.

"The name is as beautiful as they are."

"Yes, I've always been partial to the name. It's quite lyrical. *Fagus sylvatica* can live for nearly three hundred years. If given enough space to grow, they can reach nearly thirty meters. Crowd them, and their growth is stunted," she said with an enigmatic smile.

I caught her unspoken meaning; in our own way, we were like *Fagus sylvatica*. I grinned back.

I glanced down at the hiking path. I was wary of my footing, even though I had not taken a misstep yet. I became so engrossed with the ground that I bumped into Milana, who had stopped suddenly. When I gazed over her shoulder to see what lay before us, I understood why.

We had reached the Albishorn, the peak of these woods, with its legendary vista. Spread before us was the vivid blue of Lake Zürich and the Sihl River, set off against white-capped mountains and rolling green hills dotted with farms. The blue of the Swiss waters was so much more brilliant than the muddy Danube of my youth; the Albishorn's accolades were well deserved, particularly since the air was filled with the crisp wonder of the mountains' ample evergreens.

I felt reborn here.

I took in a big breath of the invigorating air. I had done it. I had not been certain that I could manage this hike. I had never tried anything like it before. Only when the girls begged me to come—and Helene pointed out her own success on past Sihlwald hikes despite her limp—did I concede. Helene really left me with no excuse. Although her limp resulted from a childhood bout of tuberculosis in her hip and not a congenital hip defect like mine, her gait approximated my own. How could I claim that my disability prevented me from trying?

I had learned something new about myself. The unevenness of my legs was not as marked on uneven terrain. My disability was actually more pronounced on even ground. I could climb as well as any of the girls. What freedom.

I glanced over at Helene, and she smiled at me. I wondered if she

had experienced the same self-doubts and the same revelation on this trail, even though she had hiked with her father growing up. When I smiled back, she reached for my hand and gave it a little squeeze. She released it only when she walked closer to the tip of the Albishorn for a better view.

The sun had set by the time we stumbled back into the Engelbrecht pension. The foyer seemed overstuffed and dim compared to the clear, bright, simple beauty of the wilderness, not to mention that it smelled cloyingly musty, no matter the cleaning lengths to which Mrs. Engelbrecht went. The maid helped us struggle out of our packs and rumpled coats, and we giggled with the effort.

"You girls are quite a sight!" Mrs. Engelbrecht said as she entered the foyer. The commotion had attracted her attention, and although she usually liked order and quiet in the pension, she could not help but laugh along with us.

"What a day we've had, Mrs. Engelbrecht!" Ružica said in her usual singsong.

"The Sihlwald was breathtaking as usual?"

"Oh yes," Milana answered for us all.

Mrs. Engelbrecht turned to me. "And you, Miss Marić? How did you find our jewel?" She had raved about the Sihlwald to me before our departure, reminisced about walks that she and Mr. Engelbrecht had taken there in the early days of their marriage.

The words to describe my experience did not come easily—for me, it was so much more than a mere hike—and I stammered. "It was so very..."

"So very...?" Mrs. Engelbrecht asked expectantly.

"Miss Marić adored it, Mrs. Engelbrecht." Helene came to my rescue. "Look, the Sihlwald rendered her speechless!"

Milana and Ružica chortled, and Mrs. Engelbrecht indulged us with another smile. "I'm delighted to hear it."

Mrs. Engelbrecht pointedly glanced up at the clock on the wall and then scanned us. "Perhaps you will want to freshen up before dinner?"

It will be served in fifteen minutes, and the windy boat ride across Lake Zürich has wreaked havoc on your hair. *Unordentliches Haar.*” She emphasized the unsightliness of our appearance.

Even though we were brilliant university students outside the Engelbrecht pension, within the pension doors, we were ladies who were expected to be respectable at all times. I patted my hair. I had carefully braided it this morning, then swept the heavy braids together on top of my head in a topknot, thinking it would withstand the hike and return boat trip, but I felt a mass of curly tendrils slipping out of the braids, knotting together in places.

“Yes, Mrs. Engelbrecht,” Ružica said, answering for us all.

As we tromped upstairs to our rooms, I tried to untangle one particularly stubborn knot. No success. As Milana and Ružica tromped off to their respective rooms, Helene reached from behind me to help. I paused as she teased out the hairs.

“Do you want me to come to your room, and we can take turns with each other’s hair? Otherwise, I’m not sure we will make dinner in fifteen minutes,” she asked.

“Please.”

After I unlocked my door, I grabbed two combs and some hairpins from my dressing table. We settled onto my creaky bed, and Helene began the painful business of fixing my hair. We visited each other’s rooms often enough, but this was the first time I recalled ever working on each other’s hair, although I’d spotted Ružica and Milana creating styles for each other often enough.

“Ow,” I yelped.

“Sorry. There’s nothing for this birds’ nest other than a thorough combing. You’ll have your revenge in a few minutes.”

I laughed. “Thank you for encouraging me to come today, Helene.”

“I’m so glad you did. Wasn’t it wonderful?”

“Yes, it was. The view and the woods were magnificent. I never thought I could manage such a climb.”

"That's ridiculous, Mileva. You were more than capable of that hike."

"I was worried about holding everyone back. You know, with my leg."

"For a brilliant girl who's had so much success in the classroom, you're awfully unsure of yourself elsewhere, Mileva. You did wonderfully today, and now you have no excuse not to join our hikes," Helene said.

A question about Helene had been haunting me since we met. "Your leg seems not to concern you at all. Don't you ever worry how people perceive you?"

Helene's heavy brows knitted in confusion. "Why should I? I mean, it's a nuisance—sometimes I'm a little unsteady on my feet, and I might not be the quickest in the bunch—but why should it affect how others see me?"

"Well, in Serbia, if a woman has a limp, she's not suitable for marriage."

Helene stopped brushing. "You're joking."

"No."

She placed the brush down on the bed, looked me in the face, and reached for my hand. "You're not in Serbia anymore, Mileva. You're in Switzerland, the most modern country in Europe, a place that would never adhere to such ridiculous, antiquated ideas. Even in my homeland of Austria, which seems like the hinterlands compared to progressive Zürich, such an idea would never be tolerated."

I nodded my head slowly. I knew she was right. Still, the notion of unmarriageability had been jangling around in my mind for so long, it almost seemed a part of who I was.



This perception started years before with an overheard conversation. I was seven, impatiently waiting after school on a cold November day for Papa to return home. I had a surprise for him, one I hoped would make him smile.

Bored with pacing around the parlor, I grabbed a book off the shelf and sunk into Papa's armchair. Tucking my legs under me, I curled around the leather-bound, gold-embossed book, an exterior that belied the dog-eared, well-loved pages within. Although our family library contained many books—Papa believed that it was everyone's duty to become educated, even if his or her upbringing, like his own, did not provide a formal education—I returned to this collection of folk and fairy tales over and over. The stories were a bit simple for me at seven, but the book contained my favorite tale, "The Little Singing Frog."

I was halfway through the tale about a couple who prayed for a child and, when they received a frog daughter instead of a human girl, became embarrassed by her differences and hid her away. Just as I was about to read my favorite scene, where the prince hears the frog girl's singing and decides that he loves her despite her appearance, I erupted in a fit of laughter. Papa had snuck into the room and was tickling me.

I gave him a big hug, then excitedly stood up and pulled him across the room. I wanted to show him the ramps I'd built, based on the sketches I made in school earlier that day. "Papa, Papa, come see!"

Weaving through the fussy green velvet and walnut furniture to the one and only undecorated corner of the parlor, I led Papa to the experiment I had created, based on an earlier dinner conversation about Sir Isaac Newton. We talked about Newton at dinner often. I liked his idea that everything in the universe, from apples to planets, obeyed the same unchanging laws. Not laws made by people, but laws inherent in nature. I thought I might find God in such laws.

Papa and I had discussed Newton's writings about the force of objects in motion and the variables that affect them—more simply, why objects move the way they do. Newton intrigued me because I suspected he might help me understand why my leg dragged while other children's legs skipped lightly down the streets.

Our conversation had given me the idea. What if I made my own little experiment, exploring Newton's question about how increasing

mass affects the force of objects in motion? Using strips of wood leaning on book stacks, I could create ramps with different inclines, and if I sent different-size marbles down those ramps, I would have a wealth of data to discuss with Papa. After school, I had begged the strips of wood off Jurgen, our house steward, and then leaned them against carefully stacked books, five books for each of the four ramps to be exact. Once I had tinkered with them for over an hour to ensure the inclines were exactly the same, I thought they were ready for Papa and me to perform the experiment.

“Come on, Papa,” I implored, handing him a marble slightly larger than the one in my own hand. “Let’s see how the *size* of the marbles affects their motion and speed.”

Grinning at me, Papa ruffled my hair. “All right, my little bandit. An Isaac Newton experiment it is. Do you have your paper ready?”

“Ready,” I said, and we knelt on the floor.

Papa lined up his marble on the ramp. After checking to make sure I did the same, he called out, “Go!”

For the next quarter hour, we released marbles down ramps and recorded the data. The minutes flew by in a blur. It was the time of day when I felt happiest. Papa really understood me. He was the only one.

Our housemaid, Danijela, interrupted us. “Mr. Marić, sir, Miss Mileva, dinner is served.”

The peppery, meaty scent of my favorite *pljeskavica* wafted through the air, but still, I was disappointed. I had to share Papa over dinner. True, Papa and I dominated the dinnertime conversation—Mama barely spoke except to serve—but her presence dampened my enthusiasm and Papa’s openness. Mama had so many expectations about who I should be, and none of them included a scientific little girl. *Why aren’t you like the other girls?* she often asked me. Sometimes, she filled in the name of a specific Ruma child; there were any number of ordinary little girls in Ruma for her to pick from. She never explicitly filled in the question with the name of my late

sister, but I knew that was implicit. Why wasn't I more like Milica might have been had she survived?

Often, in the darkness of my bedroom at night, in the silence of the hours after everyone had fallen into slumber, I wondered if I was making the wrong decision by pleasing Papa instead of Mama. I couldn't gratify both.

Despite their differences of opinion on my path, Papa would not brook any criticism of Mama, however slyly I made it. He defended her expectations as appropriate for a mother protecting her daughter. And I knew he was right. Mama loved me and wanted the best for me, even if her vision of the best didn't comport with my own.

Dinner ended after a stifled conversation about Newton. I was sent back to the parlor alone. Something was wrong between Mama and Papa, something unspoken but palpable. Mama would never openly disagree with Papa, certainly not in front of me, yet her manner—her unusually terse dinner prayer, her abrupt passing of plates, her failure to ask about the acceptability of the meal—spoke of defiance. To occupy myself until Papa returned, I reviewed the data we'd gathered and prepared for a second experiment to examine another one of Newton's theories. In order to measure the impact that friction has on the motion of identically sized marbles, I had asked Jurgen to prepare three strips of wood, each with varying degrees of roughness.

I thought about Papa's comment when I proposed this experiment: "Mitza, you are like the objects in one of Newton's investigations. You tirelessly maintain your velocity through life unless you are acted upon by an outside force. I hope no outside force ever changes your velocity."

Papa was funny.

As I created ramps using the different strips of wood, voices scratched at the edges of my consciousness. The maids were probably bickering again, a skirmish that resurfaced nearly every day as the dinner hour ended and the cleaning duties mounted. The voices escalated near the kitchen. What was going on? I had never known

Danijela and Adrijana to be so loud before, so disrespectful. Nor had I ever known Mama to lose control of the kitchen. She was spare with her words but always firm. Curious, I strained my ears but could not make sense of the conversation.

I wanted to find out what was going on. Instead of nearing the kitchen through the parlor entrance, I crept down the servants' hallway. Here, the wood used for the dull floors was a rougher grade, and there were no pictures on the walls, unlike the rest of our house. In the area where we lived, the floors were polished to a high gleam and were covered with Turkish rugs, and the walls were crowded with still lifes of fruit and portraits of people we didn't know. Papa always said he wanted our house to be as fine as any home in the lauded city of Berlin.

No one expected me here. Trying to tread lightly—not easy in my heavy boots—I realized that the voices did not belong to Danijela and Adrijana. They belonged to Mama and Papa.

I had never heard Mama and Papa fight before. Soft-spoken and submissive everywhere but the kitchen—and even there, she was quietly adamant—Mama hardly even talked in Papa's presence. What horrible event had caused Mama to raise her voice?

Drawing closer to the kitchen door, I heard my name.

"Do not give the child false hope, Miloš. She is only seven years old. You spend too much time with her, encouraging her ideas and reading," Mama pleaded. "She is a gentle spirit, in need of our protection. We must prepare her for her *real* future. Here, at home."

"My hope in Mitza is not unfounded. No amount of time spent on her is too great. If anything, it is too little. Do I have to repeat what Miss Stanojević told me today? About Mitza's brilliance? About her genius with math and sciences? Her nimble way with other languages? Need I tell you again what I have long suspected?" Papa's voice was firm.

Surprisingly, Mama did not relent. "Miloš, she is a girl. What good does it do for you to teach her German and math? To do science experiments with her? Her place is in the home. And Mitza's home will be *this*

home; her leg will make marriage—and children—impossible. Even the government recognizes this. Girls can't even attend high school."

"That may be true for ordinary girls. But it does not apply to a girl like Mitza."

"What do you mean, 'a girl like Mitza'?"

"You know what I mean."

Mama was quiet. I thought she had backed down, but then she spoke again.

"Do you mean a girl with a deformity?" Mama spat out the word.

I recoiled. Had Mama really just called my leg a deformity? Mama was always telling me how beautiful I was, how my limp was hardly noticeable. That no one really took account of the unevenness of my legs and hips. I had always known that this wasn't completely true—I could not ignore a lifetime of strangers' stares and schoolmates' teasing—but a deformity?

My father's tone was filled with fury. "Don't you dare call her leg a deformity! If anything, it is a gift. With a leg like that, no one will claim her in marriage. This gives her license to pursue the intellectual gifts God has given her. Her leg is a sign that she is destined for greater, better fates than a simple marriage."

"A sign? God-given gifts? Miloš, God would want us to protect her in this home. We must keep her expectations realistic so as not to crush her spirit." Mama paused, and Papa broke into the momentary silence.

"I want Mitza to be strong. I want her to walk by any *klipani* who mock her leg, confident that God gave her a special gift—her intelligence."

I felt like I was viewing myself for the first time. Mama and Papa perceived me much the same way the parents in "The Little Singing Frog" saw their daughter. I heard them say I was smart, but mostly, I sensed their shame. They wanted to hide me away everywhere but the classroom and our home. They didn't even think that I was worthy of marriage, something to which even the dullest farm girl could aspire.

Mama didn't answer, a long silence that signaled her return to submission. Papa spoke for them both, more calmly. "We will get her the education that her fine mind deserves. And I will teach her an iron will and the discipline of mind. It will be her armor."

Iron will? Discipline of mind? Armor? This was to be my future? No husband. No home of my own. No children. What about the hopeful ending of "The Little Singing Frog", where the prince sees the beauty within the frog daughter's ugly exterior and makes her his princess, clothing her in golden gowns the color of the sun? Was this not to be my fate? Didn't I deserve a prince of my own, no matter how horrible I was?

I ran out of the house, not bothering to mask the thuds of my ungainly hobble. Why should I? Mama and Papa had made clear that it was my limp that defined me.



I had grown quiet, thinking about the past. Helene released my hand and took me by the shoulders. "You do see, don't you, Mileva? That your limp does not make you unmarriageable? Or limit you in any other way? That you need not be tied to such old-fashioned beliefs?"

Looking into Helene's clear blue-gray eyes and hearing the conviction in her steady voice, I agreed with her. For the first time in my life, I believed that—maybe, just maybe—my limp was irrelevant. To who I was, to who I could become.

"Yes," I answered with a voice as steady as Helene's own.

Helene let go of my shoulders, picked up the brush, and resumed the painful work of untangling my hair. "Good. Anyway, why should we even worry about marriage? Even if you wanted to get married, why would you? Look at our group—me, you, Ružica, and Milana. We will be four professional women with busy lives of our own, here in Switzerland with its tolerance of women, intelligence, and ethnic peoples. We will have one another and our work; we need not follow the traditional path."

I considered this for a moment. Her statement seemed almost revolutionary—a bit like Mr. Einstein's description of a bohemian—even though it was a future we had all been marching toward. "You're right. Why should we? What's the point of marriage these days? Maybe it's something we don't need anymore."

"That's the spirit, Mileva. What fun we'll have! By day, we will work as historians or physicists or teachers, and by night and weekends, we will play our concerts and go for hikes."

I imagined the idyllic life Helene described. Was it possible? Could I really have a happy future full of meaningful work and friendships?

Helene continued, "Shall we make a pact? To a future together?"

"To a future together."

As we shook hands on our pact, I said, "Helene, please call me Mitza. It's the name used by my family and everyone who knows me well. And you know me better than almost anyone."

Helene smiled and said, "I'd be honored, Mitza."

Laughing over the day, we finished with each other's hair and readied for dinner. Unruly hair addressed and arms linked, Helene and I strode down the stairs. Deep in an animated debate about which of the rotating courses of entrees would be served that evening—I craved the creamy white wine and veal dish *Zürcher Geschnetzeltes*, and Helene was longing for something simpler—we were late in noticing Mrs. Engelbrecht standing at the bottom of the staircase, waiting for us. Or, rather, me.

"Miss Marić," she called up, her displeasure evident, "it seems you have a caller."

The sound of a throat clearing came from behind Mrs. Engelbrecht, and a figure stepped out from her silhouette. "Pardon me, ma'am, but I am a classmate, not a caller."

It was Mr. Einstein. Violin case in hand.

He had not waited to be asked.

CHAPTER 5

May 4, 1897

Zürich, Switzerland

GENTLEMEN, GENTLEMEN. IS THERE NOT A SINGLE ONE AMONG you who knows the answer to my query?" Professor Weber strutted across the front of the classroom, delighting in our ignorance. Why a teacher derived such glee from his students' failures was incomprehensible and disturbing to me. Being called a gentleman did not trouble me nearly as much. Months ago, I had become inured to Weber's regular slights, whether they be remarks about eastern Europeans or his insistence on referring to me as a man. I only wished Weber's lectures were like those of other professors, like oysters cracked open to reveal the most lustrous of pearls.

I knew the answer to Weber's question, but, as usual, I hesitated to raise my hand. I glanced around, hoping someone else would answer, but every one of my classmates—including Mr. Einstein—had his arm glued to his desk. Why wasn't anyone raising his hand? Perhaps the unseasonable heat was making them languorous. Unexpectedly hot for spring, even the opening of the classroom windows did not stir a breeze, and I saw Mr. Ehrat and Mr. Kollros pushing the limpid air around with makeshift fans. Perspiration beaded on my forehead, and I noticed that my classmates' suit jackets were stained with sweat.

Why was it so hard to raise my hand? I'd done it several times before, although not easily. I shook my head slightly as a recollection took hold of me. I was seventeen, and I had just left my first physics class at the all-male Royal Classical High School in Zagreb, where Papa managed to get me admitted after my time in Novi Sad, despite a law prohibiting Austro-Hungarian girls from attending high school, by applying successfully to the authorities for an exemption. Relieved and thrilled with my first day—where I ventured to answer the instructor's question and got it correct—I floated out of my classroom. I had waited until the room nearly cleared so the hallway was empty. A man came behind me suddenly and pushed me down another more dimly lit hallway. Was he in such a rush that he didn't see me?

"Sir, sir," I called out over my shoulder, but he didn't stop pushing me down the ever-darkening corridor. There was no one around to hear my pleas. What was going on?

I struggled to turn around but couldn't. The man was over a foot taller than me. He shoved me against the wall—my face smashed against it and away from his, so I could not identify him later—and held me down tightly. My arms burned.

"You think you're so smart. Showing off with that answer." He seethed, spit from his angry words spraying my one exposed cheek. "You should not even be allowed in our class. There's a law against it." He gave me a final shove into the wall and then ran off.

I stayed frozen, still facing the wall, until I heard his last footstep. Only then did I turn around, shaking uncontrollably. I had not expected an eager welcome from my fellow students, but I had not expected this either. Leaning against the wall, I began to cry, something I had promised myself I would never do at school. Wiping away my tears and the attacker's spittle from my cheeks, I realized that I was going to have to tamp down my intelligence and keep my smarts quiet too. Or risk everything.



Weber interrupted my unpleasant memory with chiding. “Tsk, tsk. I am very disappointed that not one of you has your hand raised. We have been leading up to this question for the *entire* class. Doesn’t anyone know the answer?”

Remembering my conversation with Helene from a month ago, I decided to stop my past from paralyzing me. I took a deep breath and raised my hand. Weber stepped down from the podium and walked toward my seat. What sort of ignominy would he make me suffer if I was wrong? What would my classmates do if I was correct?

“Ah, it’s you, Miss Marić,” he said as if surprised. As if he didn’t know whose desk he was walking toward. As if I hadn’t already demonstrated my intellect to him. This feigned astonishment was just another way he humiliated me. And tested me.

“The answer to your question is one percent,” I said. I felt more heat rise in my cheeks and wished I hadn’t opened my mouth.

“I’m sorry, can you repeat that a little louder, so we can all share in your wisdom?” Wisdom. It sounded as if Weber was mocking me. Had I gotten the answer wrong? Was he reveling in my failure?

I cleared my throat and said, in the strongest voice I could muster, “Given the context of your question, the closest we can come to stating the time necessary to cool the earth is by one percent.”

“Correct,” Weber admitted with not a small amount of surprise and disappointment. “For those of you who could not hear it, Miss Marić has arrived at the correct answer. By one percent. Please mark it down.”

Murmurs built around me. At first, I could not hear any of the comments clearly, but then I teased a few pointed remarks out of the chatter. I heard “she got it” and “nice work” among the phrases. These compliments were a first; I had answered a couple of Weber’s questions correctly before without a single reaction. Most likely, today, my classmates were merely delighted that someone got the better of Weber.

As class came to an end, I stood and began to pack my satchel. Mr. Einstein walked the few steps over toward my desk. "Most impressive, Miss Marić."

"Thank you, Mr. Einstein." I answered quietly with a nod. "But I'm certain any one of our classmates could have done just as well." I resumed my packing, wondering why I felt the need to diminish my accomplishments.

"You do yourself a disservice, Miss Marić. I can assure you that none of us other fellows knew the answer." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Or else we wouldn't have allowed Weber to badger us for so insufferably long."

An irrepressible smile crept upon my face at Mr. Einstein's audacity in criticizing Weber while he was standing right there at the podium.

"There it is, Miss Marić. That elusive smile. I believe I've only seen it twice before."

"Is that so?" I glanced up at him. I didn't want to encourage his silly banter—especially in the presence of my classmates and Weber, who I wanted to think of me seriously—but I did not want to be rude.

He met my gaze. "Oh yes, I've been keeping careful—and quite scientific—notes about your smiles. A few evenings ago, when you were kind enough to allow me to play music with you and your friends, I spied one. But that wasn't the first. No, the first smile took place on the steps of your pension. That day I walked you home in the rain."

I didn't know how to respond. He seemed serious, not at all his usual bemused self. And that very fact made me apprehensive. Was it possible that he was making some sort of overture toward me? I had no experience with such things, and other than Helene's occasional warnings, I had no way to assess his comments.

Out of nerves or discomfort, I started walking toward the classroom door. The rustle of papers behind me and the fast clip of shoes told me that Mr. Einstein was racing to follow me. "Will you ladies be playing this evening?" he asked once he reached my side.

Ah, perhaps he simply sought musical companionship. Maybe his statements had not been flirtatious at all. A strange mix of disappointment and relief washed over me. This startled me. Was there some part of me that sought his attentions?

"It is our custom to play before dinner," I answered.

"Do you have a piece selected?"

"I believe Miss Kaufler chose Bach's Violin Concerto in A Minor."

"Ah, that is a beautiful piece." He hummed a few bars of the music. "May I join you again?"

"I didn't think that you waited for an invitation." I surprised myself with my saucy retort. Despite my conflicted feelings and my attempts to steer the conversation back to a more appropriate course, I could not resist the jab at Mr. Einstein's disregard of normal protocol over a week ago when he arrived uninvited to the pension after our Sihlwald outing.

While he waited in the parlor for us to finish dinner, Milana and Ružica bombarded me with questions about Mr. Einstein, expressing their dismay at his presumptuousness, while Helene simply listened, her eyes wary. We agreed to let him join us for music, but the wariness lingered throughout our disjointed playing of a Mozart sonata. Since I did not think of the evening as a success, I was bewildered that he was inquiring about another such night.

He snorted in surprise then chuckled. "I suppose that is well deserved, Miss Marić. But then, I already warned you that I am a bohemian."

Mr. Einstein followed me as I walked through the hallways toward the back entrance of the school building. Given that my nerves were already a bit jangled, I wanted to avoid the clamor of Rämistrasse. He pushed open the heavy doors, and we passed from the dim school hallways into the bright daylight of the terrace on the back side of the building. I squinted into the light, and the mountainous backdrop of Zürich, dotted equally with ancient church steeples and modern-day office structures, came into view.

As we crossed the terrace, out of habit, I counted its right angles and calculated the symmetry of its design. I'd begun this ritual as a way of distracting myself from the derogatory whispers I sometimes overheard from male students and teachers—even their sisters, mothers, and girlfriends—as they too walked across the terrace. The criticisms about the inappropriateness of a woman student, the sniggers about my limp, the ugly remarks about my dark looks and serious face—I didn't want my confidence in the classroom to be tainted by their commentaries.

"You are so quiet, Miss Marić."

"I am often accused of such, Mr. Einstein. Unfortunately, unlike a typical lady, I have no gift for small chatter."

"Unusually quiet, I mean. As if an important theory has taken hold. What thought has captured your formidable mind?"

"In truth?"

"Always the truth."

"I was assessing the colonnades and geometric layout of the square. I've realized that they have an almost exact bilateral, axial reflection, symmetry."

"Is that all?" he asked with a smirk.

"Not quite," I retorted. If Mr. Einstein did not play by the rules of social niceties, why should I? It was a relief, so I explained my actual thoughts. "Over the past few months, I've noted the parallels between artistic symmetry and the concept of symmetry as it plays out in physics."

"What have you concluded?"

"I've determined that a follower of Plato would say that the square's beauty is solely attributable to its symmetry." I didn't mention how this conclusion saddened me; imbedded into the theories of the studies I love best, math and physics, was the ideal of symmetry, a standard that I myself, with my irregular legs, could never achieve.

He stopped walking. "Impressive. What else have you noticed about this square, which I stroll by obliviously each day?"

I gestured around the square to the abundant spires. "Well, I've

noted that Zürich seems to sprout church towers rather than trees. Bordering this square alone, we have the Fraumünster, Grossmünster, and St. Peter's."

He stared at me. "You were right, Miss Marić, about not being a typical lady. In fact, you are a most extraordinary young woman."

After this roundabout perambulation, Mr. Einstein made a turn leading toward Rämistrasse. I paused, not wanting to go that way. I craved instead the peace of a stroll through quiet residential neighborhoods on my way back to the pension. I wondered if he would follow, unsure whether I wanted his company. I enjoyed my conversations with Mr. Einstein, but I worried that he might follow me all the way back to the pension, and that might incur the girls' acrimony again over his uninvited presence.

"Mr. Einstein! Mr. Einstein!" A voice called out from a café across the street on Rämistrasse. "I say, you are late for our meeting! As usual!"

The voice came from a sidewalk café table. Glancing over, I spotted a dark-haired, olive-complected gentleman waving his hands in our direction. I did not recognize him from the Polytechnic.

Mr. Einstein waved to his friend, then turned back toward me. "Will you join me and my friend for a coffee, Miss Marić?"

"My studies beckon, Mr. Einstein. I must go."

"Please, I should so like you to meet Mr. Michele Besso. Even though he graduated from the Polytechnic as an engineer and not a physicist, he's introduced me to many new physics theorists, like Ernst Mach. He is very likable and intrigued by many of the same big, modern ideas as you and I."

I was flattered. Mr. Einstein seemed to believe that I could hold my own in a scientific discussion with his friend. Not many other men in Zürich would make such an offer. Part of me wanted to say yes, to accept his invitation, to sit across a café table from my classmate and discuss the thorny big questions that physics raised. Secretly, I longed to participate in the fervent conversations happening on the streets of Zürich and in its cafés. Instead of just watching.

But part of me was scared. Scared of the confusing nature of Mr. Einstein's attention, and scared of stepping over the invisible divide and taking the risks that came with becoming the person I dreamed of being.

"Thank you, but I can't, Mr. Einstein. My apologies."

"Another time, perhaps?"

"Perhaps." I took my leave and began walking in the direction of the Engelbrecht Pension.

I heard his voice piping up in the mounting distance. "Until then, we shall have music!"

Feeling very bold—more like a fellow scholar instead of a lady—I called back over my shoulder. "I don't recall extending an invitation!"

Laughter came from Mr. Einstein. "As you yourself said, I have never waited for invitations!"

Don't miss the rest of Mileva's story.
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A CONVERSATION WITH THE AUTHOR

Albert Einstein is such a well-known historical figure. Were you intimidated or afraid to humanize him? What struggles did you have turning him into a round character, not just an “idea” of a person most people have?

I almost didn't write *The Other Einstein* because I found the notion of fictionalizing the iconic Albert Einstein incredibly daunting! Because Albert factors so prominently in Mileva's life, I had to muster my courage to share a side of Albert's personality that wasn't always flattering and that very likely contradicted the more widely held understanding of him, even though my depiction is fictional. Still, I had to remind myself periodically that I was telling an important story about Mileva's life, not Albert's, to reaffirm my commitment to the task.

***The Other Einstein* relies on a great deal of research. What was that process like?**

Researching *The Other Einstein* was both exhilarating and frustrating, especially since I'm an exhaustive researcher who prefers to use original source material. Of course, there is a vast amount of information—both original and secondary—about Albert Einstein, but the research material available about Mileva is more scant, making the process a bit more challenging. I was fortunate, however, that some letters between Albert and Mileva still exist, as well as some letters between Mileva and Helene. They were invaluable in conjuring up Mileva's voice.

Mitza is a young woman in a man's world, both confident and uncomfortable at the same time. Did you draw on any personal experiences to write those scenes?

I definitely channeled my early years as a very young lawyer at an enormous law firm in New York City when I wrote about Mitza's time at the Polytechnic. When I first started practicing as a commercial litigator in the 1990s, women lawyers were not as prevalent as they are today, and very often, I found myself as the only woman—and the youngest person—in a conference room or courtroom full of men. I remember well summoning my courage to speak or present in those situations, even when I knew that I was the only one with the correct answer. I drew upon those memories and experiences when I wrote about Mitza's own struggles to share her knowledge and insights in similar contexts.

What drew you to the character of Mitza? Why not write the book from Albert's point of view?

I have always been fascinated by the untold tales of history, and Mileva's story had long been hidden from view. Initially, I was drawn to her story because I was interested in viewing this critical period of Albert's life—when most of his revolutionary theories were formed—from a different perspective, one never before explored. But once I learned about Mileva's astounding rise from the relative hinterland of the Austro-Hungarian Empire to the forward-thinking physics classrooms of fin de siècle Switzerland, I felt honor-bound to write about her own compelling life. As for point of view, the idea of drafting the story from Albert's perspective never really occurred to me; my interest is in unearthing the unknown, and Albert's past has been examined exhaustively. I felt like it was time for a new voice.

While *The Other Einstein* is about a relationship, it is not a love story in the traditional sense. You do a fantastic job of capturing the idealism one feels at the dawn of a relationship, and the sometimes painful truth of what that relationship actually is. Was that what you were after when you began the novel, to write the evolution of a relationship?

At the outset, I did have a certain amount of interest in tracking the course of the relationship between Albert and Mileva. Theirs was a passionate affair and magnificent meeting of the minds that devolved rather dramatically over time. But I was also interested in exploring the process of scientific creativity that happened between them—that very moment of insight—and the attribution that happened afterward.

Which character, if any, from the book did you relate to the most?

More than any other character in the book, I probably connect with Mileva, particularly in two areas. First, as I mentioned before, I really relate to Mileva's experiences as a young woman navigating a man's world. Second, like Mileva, I have struggled with balancing the all-consuming aspects of life as a mother with the demands of life as a professional person. In *The Other Einstein*, Mileva feels torn between these two realms, and I know that there are many women like me who wrestle with this same issue today. In that way, Mileva's story is a very relevant, modern one.

Have you always enjoyed science yourself, or was writing about physics and theory a whole new world for you?

The irony about writing *The Other Einstein* is that I haven't always been a lover of science. In fact, I almost didn't write it because I found the science overwhelming. That said, once I dug into exciting scientific developments of this historical time period, I developed a new appreciation for mathematics and science—physics in particular. Viewed through Mileva's eyes, math and science become a way of discovering divine, universal patterns in our world, a notion I found very intriguing.

Who are some of your favorite authors, and why?

That is a tremendously hard question because I adore so many authors, particularly writers of fiction. Certainly, I have perennial favorites like Jane Austen, A. S. Byatt, and Agatha Christie. But I admit to having some new favorites as well. I've really been enjoying recent releases by David Mitchell, Lily King, Ann Patchett, and Lev Grossman. New or old, I am drawn to authors who attempt to unravel the larger mysteries of time.