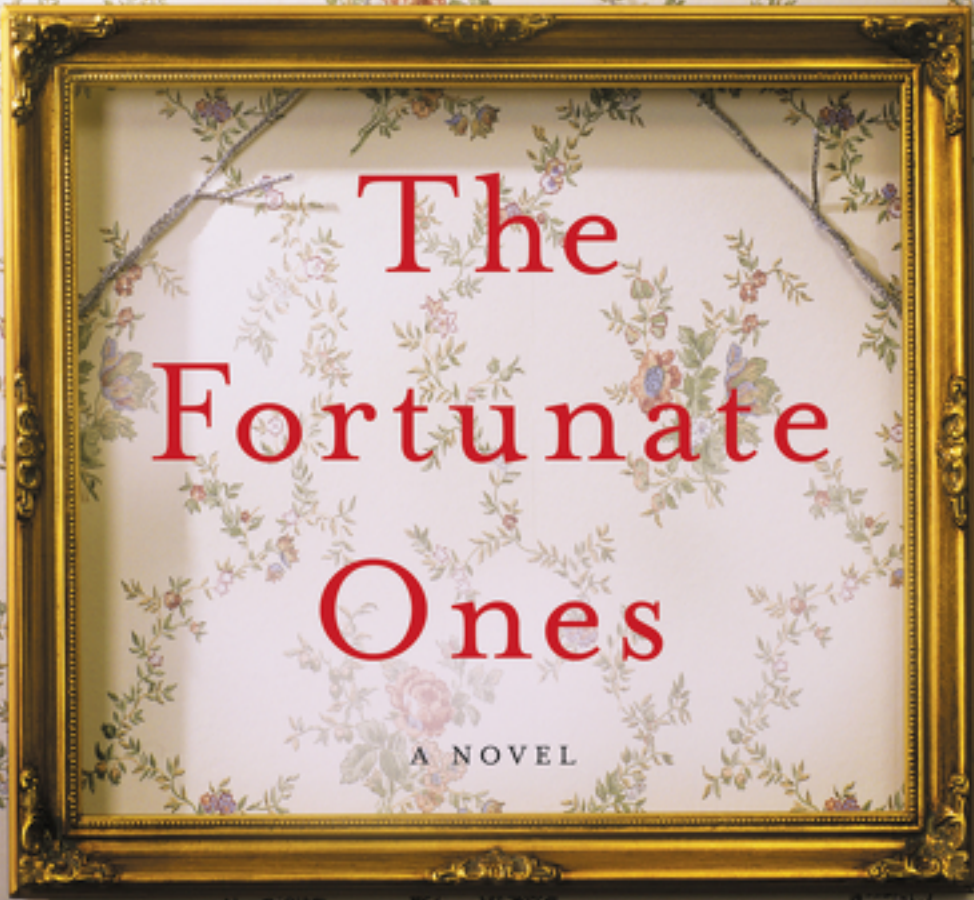


"In a story that spans decades and continents, Umansky takes readers on a journey that both challenges and affirms our notions of love, art, family, and sacrifice."

—DAVID GILLHAM, NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF CITY OF WOMEN



The
Fortunate
Ones

A NOVEL

Ellen Umansky

COMFORT

VIENNA, 1936

OMA WANTED TO SEND A telegram to Papi in Paris, but Mutti said no. “He will be back in three days. He will know soon enough,” Mutti said from the cot in the little room that would have been the nursery. She had moved in once the pains began. (“It’s too early!” Rose had heard Mutti cry out.) The doctor had come and gone, the sheets had been changed, the blood scrubbed away. Without any evidence, it almost seemed to Rose as if it hadn’t happened.

“She will be fine, won’t she?” Rose asked Gerhard.

“Of course,” he said. “She has been those other times.”

“What other times?”

Gerhard shook his head. He had little patience for his younger sister. “She will be fine,” he repeated.

They were seated at one end of the long dining table beneath the brass chandelier, eating apricot dumplings with cinnamon. Cook seemed to have forgotten that they had had strudel after lunch. Rose had already polished off her serving, but her brother had about half left. Between small careful bites, he turned to a composition notebook by his side, studied a list he’d written.

“What’s that?” Rose asked. Normally she tried not to ask Gerhard

too many questions. Her brother loved nothing more than to lord his knowledge over her. But right now she would do anything not to think of her mother lying pale down the hall.

Gerhard considered for a moment. "I am working out how to sell tickets to the Dianabad pool," he surprised Rose by answering. "Near the wave machine."

"But the Dianabad is public, and the season doesn't open for two more months," she felt compelled to say. "No one owns those spots."

He let out an exaggerated sigh, but it was no match for the glow of satisfaction lighting up his face. "You can sell anything, if you know how."

Rose heard steps and Bette's fair head appeared. "Gerhard, I could use your help." He got up and Rose did too, following them down the long hall, away from where Mutti was lying, and into their parents' bedroom.

The brocade curtains were drawn, the embroidered coverlet on the bed smoothed back, the pile of silk pillows just so. The room was chilly, and all the exactitude made Rose uneasy. "Why are we here?" she asked.

Bette sighed. "You don't have to be," she said, and to Gerhard: "She wants the painting of the boy."

"The painting?" Rose said, as surprised as if she had been told that her mother had arisen this morning and announced she was joining a nunnery.

Gerhard and Bette were already tugging at the gold frame. "She said she sleeps better with it nearby. And we are not to question her. Do you hear?"

Rose nodded. She couldn't imagine questioning her mother, today of all days.

Bette, thin-shouldered, only a few years older than Gerhard, strained as she tilted the heavy picture, scraping the plastered wall. "Gentle, gentle," she cautioned as Gerhard helped her heave it off.

Rose joined them as they carried it down the hall, and she considered it a victory that Bette didn't shoo her away.

Inside the little room, Mutti lay against white pillows on the cot. She wore a white nightgown, but the darkness of her hair, piled up on her head, stood out in contrast to all that white. Rose decided it gave her face definition. She was still reassuringly herself, beautiful. The room was cozy, the porcelain *kachelofen* chugging away, Mutti's brass lamp with the pink glass shade casting a warm glow. Bette must have moved it in, Rose realized.

A cane-backed chair sat close to the cot, and Bette and Gerhard angled the painting to rest on it. "Thank you," Mutti whispered. Her dark eyes fell on the picture, and Rose followed her mother's gaze. The boy in the painting was not pretty. He was too skinny in his red uniform, his face pasty and elongated. The paint was thick, thrown on; it looked as if the painter couldn't be bothered to slow down and pay attention. Rose didn't understand why her mother loved it so.

"Children, you are here." She said it wonderingly, not at all the sharp Mutti Rose knew, and it made Rose wish she had stayed at the dining table and not followed her brother in. Mutti motioned for her to come close, she laid a hand on Rose's head. Rose saw that the bed-sheets were Mutti's favorite, edged with crochet. "My little *mausi*," she murmured, and Rose felt chastened.

"Beef broth, ma'am?" Bette said. "The doctor said you must eat."

"I could use a touch of something," Mutti said, and leaned back against the pillows.

Bette curtsied, and signaled to the children. "Come, let your mother rest."

Back in the drawing room, Gerhard picked up the volume about the Kaiser that he had been reading, sank into the wingback chair near the windows.

"Why does she like the painting so much?" Rose leaned against the chair behind her brother, playing with the fringed edges of the

Persian throw that covered the top of the cushion. Across the room, a glazed porcelain vase crowded with roses occupied a spot on the mantel. Why hadn't her mother asked for flowers instead?

"I don't know," Gerhard said, and he didn't look up from the book. "She does."

"Well, I think it's ugly."

"Of course you do. You're too young to understand it."

"I know *you* don't either," she said, coloring. And from the way Gerhard pushed his nose into the book, peered at the pages more closely, Rose could tell that she was not wrong, and it irked him.

"Who is the boy in the painting?" Rose ventured. "Does she know him?"

"No. She bought it in Paris on a trip with Papi, years ago," Gerhard said, not looking up. "You were just a baby. You don't remember."

Gerhard was right. She didn't remember. The painting of the boy had always been in their flat, along with so many other things. Rose loved the tapestry of the peacock with its lustrous blues that hung near the swords that had been her grandfather's, the velvet jewelry case with the silver clasp that had been Oma's, the small landscape of a waterfall that if you were attentive and looked behind the copse of trees (which Rose always did), you could detect the shadow of a bear.

But her mother doted on the painting of the boy, took considerable comfort from it. It disturbed Rose. "I wish it were gone," she said with coarse agitation.

1

LOS ANGELES, DECEMBER 2005

LIZZIE MADE HERSELF LOOK. The pine casket was descending, the sun playing against its surface, metal railings guiding it into the ground. A knot of cemetery workers stood nearby, shovels in hand. She gazed past them toward a trio of slender cypress trees cutting sharp against the resolutely blue sky. It was not yet noon but already hot. Out of the corner of her eye, she registered smudges wheeling and darting. Hummingbirds? Possibly. They used to flit around the twisted vines of scarlet bougainvillea out by her father's pool. She could remember her father pointing to the tiny birds when she and Sarah first moved to L.A. "Hummingbirds don't hum," he had said. "Hear that? It's more of a *scratch-scratch*. No poetry there."

Now Lizzie squinted behind the oversized sunglasses that she'd purchased last summer on Canal Street, played with her father's watch. The Rolex was too big and loose for her wrist, but it was his. She looked again in the direction of the cypresses, but whatever birds had been there were gone. Or maybe they had never been there at all. She heard the rabbi chanting. She grasped her sister's hand.

This was a mistake. It could not be right. How could that be her father in there? How was that possible?

Lizzie had last spoken to him four days ago. She had left work that Thursday at a decent hour and was negotiating the crush of people on Sixth Avenue when he had called. He was telling her about a few trips he was planning. Next month to Iceland: he was talking about Reykjavík and eating fermented shark and how the first lady was Jewish, Israeli-born. The following spring he wanted to go to Seoul. Lizzie was only half listening, her mind focused on getting on the subway downtown so she wouldn't be late. (Another online date, another evening for which she was trying—unsuccessfully—to keep her expectations low.) Still she couldn't help but say, "So many trips. I thought you were concerned about money."

"No," he had said. "*You* think I should be concerned about money."

She half laughed, half snorted. "I do not," she had said, but that was the way it had always been between them. She was thirty-seven, and little had changed since she was seventeen.

An hour later, Lizzie thought her date was going fine, but after one round he stuck out his hand and said, "Good luck with everything!" (A banker and former ZBT brother? Just as well.) She went home, poured herself a glass of wine, settled on the IKEA couch that she kept telling herself she had to replace, and chanced on *WarGames* on TV. She reached for her phone and pecked out a text, all thumbs. "The only move is not to play," she typed. "Bullshit eighties propaganda. I'm jealous," Claudia soon responded, and Lizzie laughed, feeling better already.

The first two calls didn't wake her, but the third did, and Sarah's voice sounded high-pitched and strange: "There's been an accident, a car accident." Lizzie got on the first flight the next morning. She took a cab to JFK well before dawn and landed in L.A. just as the sun was coming up, the dishwatery gray of the sky turning a lurid orange. As she barreled over skeins of freeway to UCLA, she chanted to herself: *He'll be fine, he has to be fine.* But he never regained consciousness.

Now the rabbi motioned for the sisters to stand. Angela, on Sarah's other side, stood too, her arm around Sarah's shoulders. Lizzie clutched her sister's hand. She wished she were standing in the shade of those cypresses. She could hear the rush of cars on the nearby freeway, sounding like water. An unspeakable thought intruded: *What if the doctors had been wrong? What if for one moment when they unhooked the machines and covered him up, what if he had still been alive?*

The rabbi gestured for them to come forward, toward the fresh mound of soil beside the gaping hole. A shovel pierced the dirt, stood upright.

Lizzie remembered little of her mother's funeral, but she recalled that hill of dirt. She had been thirteen then. Lynn had been sick for about a year (and surely long before that, Lizzie realized after she died). During that year, while her mother got sicker and sicker, Lizzie and her sister continued to go to school and Hebrew school, taking ice-skating and clarinet lessons—pretending, fruitlessly, that everything would be fine. Their grandmother moved in. Joseph stepped up his visits, coming once a month. (She overheard her mother on the phone with her father: "No, no, Joseph, that's ridiculous. You need to be out there, working. I am *fine*.") He took them to the Ground Round and to Friendly's for Fribbles as he had when he and Lynn first split up and he'd moved into a rental in the city, before his friend convinced him to join his ophthalmological surgical practice out in Los Angeles, before there was the slightest inkling of Lynn's cancer.

During their mother's illness, Lizzie was the one heating up cans of Chef Boyardee for herself and Sarah, forging their permission slips, lugging up loads of laundry; she was the one who went to Sarah's soccer games. (Except for those times that she didn't, using the money her mother gave her for snacks to play Ms. Pac-Man at the arcade, slamming wrist against joystick and gobbling up those dots and cherries as if her life depended on it.) She always thought her additional domestic duties, emotional and practical, would be temporary.

She was twelve years old. Things would change. Never did she think they would change because her mother would die.

Sarah squeezed her hand, and the warm pressure of her palm, the tightness of her fingers, somehow enabled Lizzie to move forward. She took a step, stumbling slightly, but she righted herself when she took hold of the shovel's metal handle. It was heavier than she thought, but she pressed down and succeeded in flinging down a paltry patch of dirt. The hollow thump of the soil making contact with the lid of the coffin—a *pling*, really—was a harrowing, haunting sound.

Where was her father?

AFTERWARD, THEY DECAMPED TO AN art gallery at Bergamot Station. The long narrow space filled up quickly. The air grew warm. So many people, from so many different parts of her father's life: med-school classmates and cousins and ex-girlfriends and former patients and neighbors and the caterer who was also the mother of Sarah's friend from middle school (she and Joseph had probably dated, Lizzie realized with a start). Her father would have loved this. It almost felt like he was here. Max, Joseph's good friend, offered her a drink. She shook her head. "Coffee," she said. "Please," her voice sounding tinny in her ears.

Lizzie thought she spotted Claudia, but as she fought her way through the tangle of hips and elbows, the crowd closed in, tightening. It felt less like a memorial than an art opening. The space was so hot and packed; the loud voices seemed to warble, ricocheting against each other. She stood, uncertain.

"Oh, Lizzie. Oh, oh." Before Lizzie knew what was happening, a soft rotund woman rushed up and threw her arms around her. "I'm so so sorry about your father," she said. "He was wonderful."

"Thank you," Lizzie said, her cheek pressed into the woman's wiry earring. She smelled of baby powder. Who was she? And then

it clicked: her father's former secretary Pat. She had worked for him for a year, maybe two, tops, ages ago. It was during the time when his practice was booming, when Joseph issued limos to bring patients in for their cataract surgeries. All the Beverly Hills ladies loved him. He was raking in the profits and was eager to spend—on trips to Hawaii and Morocco, two-seater Italian convertibles, artwork that he liked to show off during dinner parties. All Lizzie remembered about Pat was that she was a rabid Clippers fan and lived with her brother. In fact, Lizzie now recalled, the brother started coming into Joseph's office, hanging around until his sister got off work. *The patients don't like it*, Lizzie could remember Joseph complaining. *I don't like it*. Pat was still hugging Lizzie, an awkward intimacy. But Pat felt strongly about her father, and Lizzie held on.

"I hadn't seen him in months," Pat said, finally pulling back. "Maybe even a year. What kind of person am I? It had been so long. Why hadn't I made plans?"

"It's okay," Lizzie said. "I'm sure he felt the same way." She added this even though she couldn't remember the last time her father had mentioned Pat.

"But I should have known better. I *knew* better. And now he's gone. It's too late. I can't believe he's gone." Pat's voice trembled.

"I know," Lizzie said. She couldn't bring herself to say anything more. *Remove yourself*, she could hear her father say. Where was Sarah? Claudia? She wanted a rescue.

"He was still young. And now he's gone, just like that. I can't believe it. You poor girls." She gave Lizzie's hand a squeeze. "I'm going to miss him so much."

"Thank you," Lizzie managed, "I have to—" and with her sentence unfinished, she fled.

At the back of the gallery, she stood against the wall, praying that it was close to five P.M. They had called for the memorial to end then. There were fewer people back here, no one who seemed to recognize

her, and that enabled her to breathe. It was hard to be around people. But she did not want to be alone. She gazed at a large photograph of a man's torso, elongated and stretched thin.

"There you are," Claudia said. "I've been looking all over for you."

"Found," Lizzie said as she threw herself into her friend's arms, desperate for solidity.

After a moment, Claudia pulled back, cocked her head to the side. "How are you doing?"

Lizzie touched the back of her head. Her hair felt frizzy, her body unclean, her eyes itchy from lack of sleep, all the coffee she'd been drinking. She kept waiting for Joseph to emerge from the crowd. "I'm okay," she said.

Claudia looked at her steadily and didn't say a thing. Finally she said: "Have you eaten? I have to say, the food is shockingly good. Your father would be proud."

"All Angela's doing." Lizzie's sister's girlfriend was the one who had reached out to the gallery owner, an old friend of Joseph's; Angela had set up the caterer, she hired the bartender and arranged for the chair rentals too. "I feel like I should be doing more," Lizzie confessed.

"Are you kidding me? Today, of all days?"

"I know," Lizzie said. Still, it made her uneasy.

"That's Angela. She's probably making you feel that way."

"I don't think so. She's been great."

"Uh-huh. I spoke with her earlier, and she seemed as prickly as ever."

"You're terrible," Lizzie said, laughing. It felt good to laugh.

"I'm right. You know, it stems from insecurity. She's just afraid your sister's going to leave her for a doctor or a lawyer."

"Angela is a doctor," Lizzie corrected her. "An anesthesiologist, remember?"

"Oh yeah. Well, then, a doctor with a dick," Claudia said, unperurbed. She chewed on a strawberry. "You didn't answer me: Have you eaten today?"

"A little," Lizzie lied.

"Come on," Claudia said. "Let's get you some food and libation."

Soon Lizzie was biting into a bagel that Claudia had loaded up, eating it for her friend's sake. She truly wasn't hungry. The bagel itself was dry, but the lox was fantastic, not too salty, buttery—where was it from? she found herself wondering. Then she realized her father would wonder. She turned to the lukewarm Chardonnay. Last night, despite the Ambien, she'd woken up in a sweat around four in the morning in her sister's guest room, her heart galloping, not remembering where she was or what was so criminally wrong. A maw of fear overtook her. Oh God, her father.

Claudia fished through her bag. She picked up her buzzing phone, rolling her eyes. "This had better be crucial. I told you I'm at a fuck-
ing funeral," she said. "Uh-huh, okay." She mouthed to Lizzie, *I'll be right back*.

Lizzie nodded but she felt a flip of panic. She couldn't handle another conversation like the one she had with Pat. Where was her sister? She eyed the narrow room. The crowd had thinned. She didn't see Sarah. She went to the bathroom, found the door locked.

As Lizzie waited against the wall, she looked at a nearby canvas: A large-scale painting, depicting a couple sitting on a boat-sized couch, watching TV. The man's feet were propped up on an ottoman, the woman sitting up straight, only inches apart, but a discernible distance. Sunlight spilled in from a window but their eyes remained on the glowing screen. They paid no mind to the largest object in the room: an elephant, standing to the right of them.

The elephant in the room. Lizzie let out a snort. It was funny, but it was more than that. The painting itself was beautiful: the elephant's leathery wrinkly hide, the polished elegance of his curved tusks. And it was this gorgeously rendered specificity, the fact that the painter was willing to bestow such attention, that made her think of Ben. He would like it too.

Did he know about her dad? She wanted him to know. And yet

she didn't feel like she could call him. It had been nearly three years since they had broken up. She still sometimes wondered if she had made a mistake.

The bathroom door opened, and an old woman Lizzie didn't recognize came out. She saw Lizzie looking at the painting. "What do you think?" she asked, her hands on her hips like a general.

"I like it," Lizzie said. "You?"

"Not really," the woman said. She was tiny, in a dark tailored suit with a brightly colored scarf at her neck. She spoke with a gravelly voice that made Lizzie think of peeling paint. It carried a hint of an accent—British?—that she could not place.

"You don't?" Lizzie asked. What was there not to like?

"She's not working hard enough. I'll bet you she's capable of more. At the end of the day, what are you left with?"

There was more to it than that. The joke was only the start. She could hear her father say, *Tim-ing, now that is everything*. But Lizzie only said: "I always thought being funny could get you fairly far."

The woman looked at her, her thin mouth expanding into a smile. "It's nice to finally meet you. I'm Rose Downes." She held out a hand. "I'm so sorry about your father."

Oh God, was she supposed to know her? Lizzie could be terrible with names. "Thank you. It was nice of you to come today." She hesitated. "I'm sorry; how did you know my father?"

Rose touched the silk at her neck and smiled inwardly. "You probably know me better as the woman whose family used to own *The Bellhop*."

Lizzie couldn't have heard her right. "*The Bellhop*?"

"Yes."

"My Soutine?"

"Well," Rose said, and drew her lips in. "Some might argue it's *my* Soutine. It was my family's. But yes, that painting."

"And my father knew this?" Lizzie said thickly.

"Yes, of course he knew," Rose said with a touch of exasperation. "That's how we met."

"I'm sorry," Lizzie said. "I didn't realize—" She couldn't finish her thought.

Lizzie first saw the painting on the day she arrived in L.A. after her mother died. She hadn't been to her father's house in close to a year. He opened the front door and she was hit by the light, a blinding California light. The floor-to-ceiling windows in the living room were like a taut glass skin—a country of it, everywhere you turned. She walked to the windows, stuck her face up against the glass, and peered down into the mouth of the parched ravine, the yawning canyon far below. The depth to which she could tumble filled her with a bruising, voluminous peace. It was larger than her mother's cancer, bigger than moving across the country to live with a father she didn't really know.

She turned around and, with her fingers still pressed up against the glass, she saw him. Across from the fireplace hung a painting of a man. A young man, dressed in a uniform, a fancy red uniform with gold buttons. His face and limbs were elongated, his ears elephantine. His nose was crooked, as if someone had slammed a fist into it. His stance was awkward, his head too large for his body. He didn't seem to know what to do with his hands. But the colors! His face was a riot of swirls: when she went closer to the canvas, she discovered other hues in his uniform, dips of blue and white, streaks of gold and black and purple, as if whoever had painted it couldn't contain himself, as if he were unleashing all the pigment he had at his disposal. It was angry and ugly and dizzying and beautiful, all at once.

"You like that?" Joseph asked. "It's pretty nice, isn't it?"

She shrugged. "It's okay," she said, and sat down below it. All that red!

He cleared his throat. "For someone not interested, you're paying a lot of attention."

Lizzie gave another shrug, stayed silent. She made her father nervous, she was realizing, and she found, to her surprise, that she liked this feeling, the tart taste of power like a cold marble in her mouth.

"It's by a guy named Soutine. He was a French Expressionist. Which can refer to many things, but expensive is one," Joseph continued. "I first saw it years ago, in New York." He paused. "With your mother. She liked it too."

Rose, eyes narrowed, was looking past Lizzie at the elephant in the room. "I thought your father told you, but perhaps I misunderstood," Rose said. "I truly liked him. My condolences to you and your sister." She nodded quickly.

"Your family owned the Soutine," Lizzie said, her mind too awlirl to settle on a question.

"We did."

"Where? Where are you from?"

"Vienna. My mother purchased it in Paris, in the twenties, and brought it back home."

"Oh," Lizzie said. The accent fell in place. "And then?"

"It was stolen. When the Germans came."

"Oh," she repeated. She did the math in her head. She understood. "I'm sorry."

Rose nodded. "I know it was taken from you too. I met your father, afterward. I read about the theft in the newspaper. There was a small item in the *L.A. Times*—"

Lizzie felt a familiar tightness in her stomach. She remembered reading that article months later, before she left for college. She was looking for stamps on her father's mess of a desk when she came across a short clipping from the paper, and the memories from that night came flooding back as surely as if she had been slapped. *Why was he saving it? Why was it here on his desk?* She crumbled it up, buried it deep in the wastebasket. But within the hour she stole back into his study, fished it out, ironed out the wrinkles as best she could, and placed it back where she had found it, feeling guilty once again.

"My husband read it," Rose was saying. "I couldn't believe it—*The Bellhop*, here, in Los Angeles! I hadn't seen it since I left Vienna as a child. I got in touch with your father. In the beginning, we met to talk about the painting and the theft. But—well, through the years, we just kept meeting. Not often, but we'd go to lunch or maybe an exhibit together. He always drove. I abhor driving. And he took me places I hadn't been."

"Really?" Lizzie asked, the tightness beneath her ribs easing up. She could imagine it, her father with Rose. "Where would you go?"

"Different places. The Bradbury Building, for one."

"Oh, I love that building." Her father took her there after she watched *Blade Runner* in her high school film class. She could remember the moment of stepping past the plain façade into the sun-soaked interior, all that gorgeous wrought iron. *It's even better in person, isn't it?* her father had said, and there was such delight in his voice; even if she hadn't liked it, she would have agreed.

"It's overrated," Rose said with a shrug. "Too much going on. You know the architect famously claimed he got a message from a Ouija board as to how to design it. It looks that way."

Lizzie let out a snort of a laugh. She couldn't help herself. She liked this woman.

"We went years ago," Rose continued, unfazed by Lizzie's laughter. "And to Grand Central Market afterward. This was before it was cleaned up, fancified. We tried four different kinds of *mole*, and all were delicious."

Lizzie could picture it precisely—her father leading past stalls filled high with dried chilies and avocados and mangoes, past the lunch counter with its neon sign advertising chop suey. The thought gave her a lift, made her, for a brief moment, happy. "I wish I could have been there."

Rose gave a hint of a smile. "Yes," she said, and they both fell into silence. Rose glanced toward the front of the room and Lizzie followed her gaze. The gallery had emptied out; Lizzie saw the

bartender stacking glasses into an orange plastic crate. "I have to get going," Rose said. "My condolences again." She nodded seriously.

"No, you haven't met my sister yet—"

"Another time."

"Only if you mean it. I really would like to talk to you more."

"Of course."

But Lizzie couldn't shake the feeling that if Rose left, she would never see her again. She could just hear Sarah: *You met who? She claimed to have owned what?* And this fear lent a particular urgency. "You said you were born in Vienna," Lizzie said. "During the war—where were you?"

Rose touched the bright silk at her neck. Her eyes in her lined face were like polished dark stones. "I was in England," she said.

She said it so simply, seemed so matter-of-fact about it that Lizzie decided to add: "So you got out."

"My brother and I did," Rose said. "My parents did not."

"Oh," Lizzie said. It was terrible, what Rose was saying. She didn't have to say more. "I'm so sorry."

"It's happened," Rose said firmly, as if Lizzie were trying to convince her otherwise.

2

VIENNA, 1938–1939

THEY WERE NEARLY PREPARED. BETTE had filled the wooden bucket halfway with water and set it next to the tiled stove. A cast-iron ladle leaned against the bucket, and a collection of small tin balls nestled in a snowy dishcloth, as if preparing for the alchemy that lay ahead. Rose had purchased them earlier in the week with her own money, from the bounty of the two shillings that Oma had given her for her eleventh birthday last month, forgoing a chance to see *One in a Million* at the UFA movie house. When she slid her coins over the counter, the wizened shop clerk had cracked a lopsided grin at her. “And a happy new year to you, young lady.” Rose pocketed the tin balls with a smile, feeling giddy and shy with belonging.

Now she fingered a pellet and rolled it around in her palm. It was light, to be sure, but it still felt substantial, hard. She liked the feel of the cool metal against her skin. “Are you sure it will melt?” she asked.

“Of course I’m sure. I’ve been doing it as long as I can remember,” Bette said, and she punched the heel of her palm into the dough. “It’s heat to metal; it’s what happens.”

Bette was from the country, nearly half a day’s train ride outside

of Vienna—a village where chickens ruled the dirt streets, water was drawn from a well, and a movie house was an inchoate fantasy. Rose thought of herself as having a good imagination, but when she tried to picture herself living in such a place, the movie in her mind simply stopped, unspooled itself off the reel.

Rose moved closer. “When can we start?” She felt itchy in the woolens that her mother made her wear, her feet sweating in her thick black boots.

“I need to finish my work first.”

And my parents have to leave, Rose thought, but she knew it would annoy Bette if she said it. After Rose had bought the tin balls, she tucked them deep into her knapsack, never mentioning her purchase to her mother. *Lead pouring is an old wives’ tale*, she could hear Mutti say. *That’s what they learn in the country*. But how would Rose know it wasn’t true unless she tried? Everyone else was having fun on New Year’s Eve—Gerhard was staying at his friend Oskar’s for the weekend, her parents were going to a party at Tante Greta’s—why shouldn’t she too?

Rose watched Bette’s slender fingers ribbon the edges of the dough, the smell of the yeast tickling her nostrils. “Heinrich says too much bread isn’t good for your constitution,” she said.

“Is that so?”

Rose nodded. “He says in the future we’ll probably swallow a pill instead of taking meals.” She dipped her fingers in the water of the bucket and swished them around. She had just reported the entirety of one of her conversations with Heinrich. They had had two in total. She had met him last summer at the holiday camp she had attended at the foot of the Alps. He was a reedy redhead a year her senior who spent most of his time ferreting out shade to read Jules Verne. When she saw him crossing the grounds, holding his book like armor to his concave chest, such a fluttery feeling arose in her stomach—Rose had never felt something like that before.

“Only people who have an excess of food would complain about

it," Bette said when: *brrring!* The bell sounded. Rose started. "Let's go see what the missus wants," Bette said, wiping her floury hands against her apron and heading toward the door. Rose followed. "Not you." Bette let out one of those thin knowing laughs Rose hated. "She rang for me, not for you. I'll be back soon."

After Bette left, Rose tried to amuse herself by attempting to toss the tin balls into the bucket. But each time she failed. Finally she decided to go to her parents' bedroom, see what Bette had been summoned for.

She took the long hall—still harboring a new-paint odor—past the pantry and laundry and turned down the second hall that led to the drawing room and her father's study, guarded by the double swords her grandfather had purchased in Constantinople. In their old flat, the swords had hung in the drawing room, but her mother had argued that the new home demanded a new start. Nothing was where it used to be. The one exception, Rose thought as she cut through the sitting area to knock on their bedroom door: the portrait of *The Bellhop*. In the bedroom it remained, despite her father's objections. ("I should be the only man in here," he said.)

"Come in," Mutti called. For Rose, the shift was as great as stepping from the darkened movie house into bright afternoon sunlight. She registered the smell of lilies and the rustling sound of silk before she could take in the dazzle of her mother in her entirety.

Charlotte was giving her nose a final pat of powder. A smooth lock of hair dipped down below her left eyebrow, giving Rose the unsettling impression that Mutti was winking. She wore a navy silk gown that made her pale skin look paler, her dark hair darker. Her beauty made Rose feel light-headed and envious and wistful and proud, all at once.

"Where's Bette?"

Mutti tsked. "Manners, child. What kind of greeting is that?"

"I don't know," Rose said, and looked down at her toes. Her feet felt even sweatier, entombed in her boots.

"An honest one," Papi said. Wolfe was short but nimble, always in motion. He fiddled with his tie. "We should go."

Mutti shook her head—at Rose or Papi, Rose wasn't sure. "Bette is fixing the fastener on my cape. It should only take a moment."

Her father frowned. "We'll be late. We're expected at Greta's in less than an hour."

"And it will take us less than half an hour to get there. We're not in the nineteenth district anymore."

He looked away from her, gave his tie one last decisive tug. "Indeed we are not."

Her mother had pressed hard for the move to this apartment, Rose knew, to this neighborhood in particular. Now they were close to the embassy quarter, within walking distance of Ringstrasse and the Opera—her mother's dream. No one else had seen the point in moving. So what if some rooms in their old flat were forever hot and others forever cold? Who cared if their stretch of Liechtensteinstrasse was thick with leather and machinery shops? The man in the shop on the corner always gave Rose peppermint candy when she passed, and she loved playing in the walled garden of the hospital two blocks away. But her mother persevered—she always did.

"If we're late, maybe we'll miss Karl's speechifying," Wolfe said. "He makes it sound as if Schuschnigg is already at the gate, waiting to swing it open for Hitler."

"No politics," Charlotte said. "Not tonight."

Rose had studied the Great War in school. She knew that Papi had been a foot soldier in northern Italy, but he didn't like to talk about it. She heard him once telling Gerhard, "I fought a war so you don't have to."

Bette came in, holding Mutti's wool cape in outstretched hands. "Ma'am," she said, and offered it to Charlotte.

"Perfect," Mutti said. "Thank you." Bette gave a little curtsy and bob of her head and left. "I'm glad I noticed it before we left," her mother said.

“Yes, can you imagine? Someone might have said, ‘Your cape fastener is loose. Horrors!’” Her father widened his eyes at Rose, who giggled.

Charlotte pursed her lips. “Someone should look presentable, don’t you think?” She touched Rose’s head. “You’re a good girl.”

“Thank you, Mutti,” Rose said. “Good night.”

“We’ll see you next year,” Papi said, and he too touched her head and they were gone.

SHE WAS A GOOD GIRL, Rose thought as she ran a hand over the polished brass handles of her mother’s inlaid dresser. But not *that* good. She sat down on her mother’s settee and yanked off her black boots and woolens, liberating her sweaty feet, the air delicious between her toes. Then she went over to her mother’s closet, running her hand against her dresses—silk and worsted wool and light cotton.

She paused at a peacock-blue dress, linen with an Empire waist and beautiful white piping. Mutti had worn the dress at Bad Ischl last summer, when they ate pink ice cream in the café. Rose remembered how after the ice cream, they ran into Herr Schulman, her mother’s piano teacher, near the river. When Charlotte’s hat blew off, Herr Schulman leaped after it, retrieving it with speed, heaving, and handed it back to her with such a grin on his face, as if he’d won a grand prize. Now Rose tugged off her own dress and slipped into her mother’s. It was enormous—the square neckline slipped off her shoulders—yet it felt wonderful, like sipping from a big glass of lemonade in the shade of summer.

Rose wound a long string of her mother’s pearls around her neck, dusted her face with powder. She added her favorite scarf of her mother’s, blue-and-purple silk with a pattern of birds perched on branches, others with wings open in flight. The material felt fine and elegant against her neck. Rose assessed herself in the mirror and spoke: “Why, thank you, Heinrich, I would love to dance.” She gave a

curtsy and held out her hands. She pictured Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. She spun in a circle. Once, twice.

When she stopped, she was in front of *The Bellhop*. The boy in the painting gazed at her. How many times had she looked at the picture? She knew Mutti had bought it on a whim in a Parisian gallery for far too much money—so said Papi. It had been painted by a man named Soutine, who was Jewish, her mother liked to say, as they were. (But *Ostenjuden*, her father would often add, not like us—an immigrant, from the east.) Rose had not changed her mind. She still thought the portrait ugly, but she couldn't stop looking at it.

The boy in the painting stood awkwardly in his red uniform, gold buttons glinting, a matching red triangular hat perched atop his head. His hands rested on his hips, legs straddled open so wide he looked as if he might topple over. His pale face was impassive, his dark eyebrows shot up high. There was a resentful look in his eyes, as if he didn't trust the painter, the endeavor altogether. The paint itself was so thickly piled on that Rose had the feeling it had been created in the middle of an argument—she heard shouting, she saw the flinging of color onto the canvas.

But now, none of this mattered. He did look awkward and unpleasant, but he was a boy only a few years older than herself, a boy who wanted more than anything to escape: his uniform, his life, his own skin. He didn't want to be unpleasant, Rose was convinced. She longed to help him.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to be rude." She curtsied and said, "Yes, I would love another dance."

Bette's high pitch cut through Rose's imagining. "Rose, where are you?"

"Coming," Rose called as she stepped out of the dress and left *The Bellhop* behind.

BETTE WOULDN'T LET HER HOLD the ladle. "You're my responsibility," she said, tossing her thin braid back. "Heaven forbid you

burn yourself." But she did hand Rose a ball. "Now roll it around tightly, and shake well. My *oma* always said that this gives them your strength, your print."

Rose made a fist and shook. Then she placed the ball in the cast-iron ladle. Bette positioned the ladle on top of the stove's front burner. She held it with a steady hand over the flames. Every few seconds she angled the ladle from side to side, a graceful balletic move. Soon the lead ball was shuddering under the heat, no longer a ball but a silvery amoeba-like creature, slithering to spread to the edges of the spoon. Rose, peering close, thought of the fat caterpillars she and Gerhard spotted down by the marshy banks of the Danube. "Is it ready?"

"Almost," Bette murmured.

Rose felt the heat. The ball had lost its color altogether. It flashed iridescent, something otherworldly, like something out of Jules Verne.

"Okay," Bette said. "Now." And Rose didn't know how she did it, but Bette managed to keep the ladle steady and guided Rose's hands to her own too. "You slide it into the water," Bette said. "My *oma* says it's part of the fortune."

Although her stomach was careening, Rose obliged. She could feel an emerging, nearly drowsy sensation that took her a few beats to recognize as calm. Bette transferred the ladle to Rose, but kept her hands on Rose's, and it was this warmth too, this feeling of support and connection, that Rose cottoned to, would remember for years to come when Vienna seemed like a dream.

"Now!" Bette ordered, and Rose released the bubbling metallic mass. A bright, tinkling noise sounded as the hot metal hit the water. Though there was little splash, Rose tipped back. She wiped her sweaty forehead and peered over the pail. The metal had hardened immediately. She couldn't discern its shape. She was almost afraid to look. Over the past week, she had listened attentively as Bette described the possible shapes and their corresponding fortunes: Would they see a ship, which would indicate travel in the next year? (Rose

very much hoped this would be the case.) A ball could mean that luck would roll your way. If the metal resembled an anchor, that meant that you must help someone in need; and a cross . . . “Well, let us hope we don’t see a cross,” Bette had said, making the sign of a cross.

But all Rose could make out was a bubbly surface: “That’s money! That’s definitely money,” Bette said with true excitement, but Rose was looking down farther—more money would mean more movies, it would mean more travel too, wouldn’t it? But then, oh, there was something else, a small little something, a thin piece of metal no wider than her thumb.

“Do you see that? What’s that little piece, there?” Rose pointed.

But Bette had already turned, she had pulled out the spoon. “I saw it—that doesn’t count—let’s try again.”

IN FEBRUARY, BETTE’S MOTHER FELL ill and she went home to take care of her younger brothers and sisters. In March, Chancellor Schuschnigg opened the gate for Hitler after all. Now instead of shillings and groschen, there were marks and pfennig. There were German soldiers in uniform on the street saluting one another. They spoke in funny accents, which Papi imitated with gusto at home, but fell silent when outside.

The Vienna spring of 1938 was unusually balmy. The lilac bloomed early, the chestnut trees preened with their gaudy pink blossoms, and the park benches sprouted new signs: NO JEWS PERMITTED TO SIT HERE.

In school, Rose and her Jewish classmates were moved to the back of the room, six of them occupying the last row, separated from the Christian students by two empty rows. They were a world apart now, the Jewish students. Rose hated sitting in the back. She hated class. And to make matters worse, Gerhard didn’t have to go to school anymore. The new restrictions said that Jewish children the age of fifteen or older didn’t have to attend. It was so unfair, Rose thought, why couldn’t she stay home like her brother?

By June, Bette was no longer allowed to work for them. Wolfe's importing business—which Rose's grandfather had started when he was a young man living in Constantinople decades earlier—had been repatriated. Papi disappeared for hours at a time into his study, barricading himself behind the tall thin pages of the *Neue Freie Presse*. But more distressingly to Rose, nearly as significant as Bette's departure, was this: Rose wasn't allowed to go to the movie house anymore.

"I can't go to *any* movie?" she asked. For a moment, she could imagine a dividing line: *Snow White*, yes; anything with Deanna Durbin, no.

"It's part of the restrictions," Papi said. "Those are the rules."

They were sitting at the dark oak dining table after dinner, drinking coffee and eating tiny delicious choux pastries with cream filling that Tante Greta had brought over. Mutti kept the bell to the right of her, as if a new unnamed maid might miraculously appear if she rang.

They had been talking about visas. They were always talking about visas, Rose thought, tired. They weren't going anywhere. Tante Greta had come for a visit while Onkel George went to the American embassy. Everyone said there were no American visas available until 1950, but still, they went to put their names on the list.

"Can Ilse still go to the movies?" Rose asked.

"Of course. She's not Jewish," Gerhard said, waving a spoon at his younger sister. "Idiot."

Rose waited for her father to admonish her brother, but Wolfe only lifted his eyes skyward. Rose followed his gaze up to the plaster ceiling.

"She's a child," Charlotte said to her husband, plainly enough for everyone to hear. "You think they would bother a child?"

His dark eyes became slits. "Do you really want to find out?" he snapped.

Mutti shook her head, gaze averted. Rose shot a look to her brother, but Gerhard bent over his plate and ate uncharacteristically fast.

Papi looked at all of them, into that great bowl of silence. When he spoke again, his voice had dropped. "My apologies," he said. His strangled voice was far worse than his yelling. He pushed his chair back, hurried out of the room.

For a moment, there was only the sound of scraping: Gerhard's spoon against china, as he took great care to chase down every last morsel of whipped cream. Then Tante Greta spoke: "And, Charlotte, Rose should get rid of her movie-stub collection too; it's unhygienic to have all those old tickets lying around."

Rose stared at her plate, blistered by her fury. She hated every single member of her family, but her Tante Greta most of all; she truly did.

A WEEK LATER, ROSE, MUTTI, and Gerhard decamped from Vienna to spend the summer months with Charlotte's parents in the country in Parndoff, and for a while everything seemed normal, good even. Every morning Rose helped her grandfather tug his apartment window open and lower a string down to the street. Within a few minutes a boy would yell out, "Ready!" and Rose's grandfather, with her assistance, would haul the string back up, the day's newspaper attached.

Rose spent countless afternoons swimming in the Danube with Gerhard, who liked to ignore her but never said no when she tagged along. Rose would lie on the marshy banks, pushing her toes into the warm squishy mud, the sunlight against her bare arms a reminder that no, she hadn't fallen asleep. She wondered if Heinrich had gone back to the holiday camp. She listened to the drone of insects, she tried to ascertain the shapes of the gunmetal clouds scuttling above. She decided that the country was better than the city after all.

One afternoon she and Mutti went to the grocery store. As they were about to walk inside, Charlotte recognized a stout, redheaded woman fishing a triangle of cheese out of the wooden barrel out front. "Gertrude?" she said, "Gertrude Bieler?"

The woman looked up.

"It's Charlotte Zimmer. How nice to see you!"

With seeming ease, the fat woman spit at Mutti—a great hurl of saliva. Rose saw it darken a spot on her mother's lovely cotton blouse.

"What do you people want?" Frau Bieler hissed. "Why are you still here?"

Charlotte stood, a smile cemented on her face. She smiled and she didn't say a word.

"*Juden.*" Frau Bieler spit again, this time at her feet.

It was Rose who tugged at her mother's hand, Rose who sprang back to life first. "Mutti, Mutti," she said, the words tumbling out of her.

FALL, BACK IN VIENNA. THE days growing shorter, the sky paper white. Rose attended an all-Jewish school deep in the nineteenth district. It took more than an hour to get there by tram. There was discussion of keeping her at home. But for the time being, she continued to go. Everything, it seemed, now fell under the category of "for the time being."

Each day, a different embassy. This was how her parents spent their days, waiting at consulates for hours at a time—Canada, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, Ireland, Cuba, China, it didn't matter where—lines snaking around corners, switchbacking up the sidewalk. A new dialect sprang up at home: Words like *affidavits*, *baptismal certificates*, *exit* and *entry visas* dominated the conversation. It was all the adults talked about: Try the Bolivian embassy in the late afternoon; avoid the man with the leathery face.

Wasn't there anything else they could discuss? Rose didn't want to hear their strained voices, the urgency with which they spoke. She missed Bette.

And Gerhard wasn't around to distract her. Her brother would disappear for hours at a time, sometimes saying he was going to meet Oskar, other times just slipping out without warning. They all knew

he was going to see Ilse. "At least he doesn't look Jewish," Rose overheard her mother say to her father. It was true; Gerhard was rangy and blond, and at sixteen he had a good couple of inches on their father, hitting six feet. Rose knew that Gerhard's looks brought her parents no small amount of comfort as they thought about him on the streets alone. She tried not to think about her own dark complexion.

In early November, a Jew murdered a Nazi in Paris. School was let out early, and Rose was told to hurry home, avoid the main thoroughfares and the trams. In the flat, they gathered around the wireless, glued to the broadcasts. Her parents wouldn't let her go outside for days.

There were so many stories swirling: her mother's old piano teacher, Herr Schulman, had been arrested and was being held in Dachau. The Begeleisens had had their apartment repatriated—soldiers had come in the gray hours of dawn—and had been forced to move into a flat with three other families. Rose hadn't liked Peter Begeleisen; he had told her that witches like to yank teeth out of the mouths of little girls in the middle of the night, but still she felt bad for them. The Volkman had managed to get out last week, their visas came through for Ireland. The husband had been able to land work as a machinist for a clothing factory outside of Belfast.

Their friends the Klaars had taken out a small classified advertisement in the *Jewish Chronicle*, seeking work in London, and Rose's parents decided to follow suit. They fought over the language in the ad. They fought a lot those days.

Wolfe wrote: "Would noble-minded people assist Viennese couple, capable of every kind of housework, knowledge of English, French, and Italian? Exemplary references upon request."

"No one cares what languages we speak," Charlotte said to Wolfe. He was sitting in the velvet wingback chair near the window, trying to balance the writing tablet on his knee in the watery light of the late afternoon. He now avoided his study.

"What do you suggest?"

Charlotte took the writing paper out of his hands. Wolfe played with the loose ivory threads from the Persian throw covering the velvet head cushion. His wide face looked slack, jowly.

She wrote: "Married couple, cook and footman, Jews, seek position in household."

"Everyone knows we're Jews," he said bitterly. "Why else would we be looking for work?"

"Then we shouldn't hide from it, should we?" Her mother said the words with such sharpness that Rose half expected blood to bloom.

ONE DAY IN JANUARY, ROSE came upon her mother in the kitchen. Charlotte wore Bette's old apron, which was too long on her. A jumble of pans and bowls and piles of snowy flour crowded the table. "What are you doing?" Rose asked.

"What does it look like? I'm baking." Charlotte pushed a strand of loose hair out of her glistening face with the back of her hand. "A poppy-seed cake."

"You bake?" Rose wouldn't have been more surprised if her mother had donned a pair of ice skates and broken out in song.

"Of course I bake," Charlotte said. "I do lots of things that you don't know about."

The next morning, Mutti dressed in her best suit, a houndstooth pencil skirt and flared jacket that Rose loved, with a creamy blouse with a scalloped neck. She looked like Greta Garbo. She muttered something about visiting Tante and rushed out the door, the poppy-seed cake held carefully in both hands. Rose watched her hurry down the street; the bare crooked fingers of the chestnut trees sliced the putty sky.

A week later, Rose found out where she had really been. The Kultusgemeinde, the city's Jewish community organization. Onkel George had a cousin who had a fiancée named Edith who worked for it. And because of this connection, Mutti said brightly, stooping to meet her daughter eye to eye, you're going to England!

They were in the drawing room, her father in his wingback chair, not saying a word.

"What?" Rose asked, blankly.

"You are going to England, where the queen lives with her two little princesses," Charlotte told her. "Remember Mutti showed you the pictures of the little girls in their beautiful dresses who live in castles?"

Rose stared. Her mother was speaking as if she were a baby, a girl of six years old, and not eleven. She wasn't making sense. England? How could she go to England?

But what she said was this: "Are you coming?"

Her mother shook her head, soundlessly.

"I'm going alone?"

"No, no, not alone," Mutti said quickly. "Of course not! Gerhard is going too. Along with hundreds of other children. It will be a great adventure." She straightened the hem of Rose's middy blouse, flattening down the sailor collar.

"Where am I going to live?"

Mutti's eyes were glassy bright, her cheeks aflame. "You," she said, "are going to live with an English family. A lovely generous English family," she emphasized.

"Who are they?" Rose asked, her insides slickened with a hideous sickly sensation. She hadn't known this was possible, but now she realized that it was everything she feared.

"They are good people," Mutti finally said. "They are *very* good people. I know this, because they've agreed to take care of you."

"No," Rose said. "I won't go."

Her mother must have answered, Rose knew she did, but the roar of her fear descended and tore through her, like a train bulleting ahead. Mutti had done her best to comfort her, but try as she might, Rose could never recall what she had said.