

CHAPTER ONE ~ THE RABBI'S DAUGHTER

“How do you know if you have succeeded in repenting fully?” asks the Rambam. “If you find yourself in a similar situation where you sinned in the past but now you do not sin” (The Rambam, Hilchot Tshuva –Laws on Repentance.)

I stare out of the library window at golden sunlight reflecting off white Jerusalem stone and long to soak up a tan. I want to head down to Tel-Aviv beach, strip off my baggy clothes, stretch out on the sands and take a break from the rigid daily practice of soul searching, prayer and study required of us at the Seminary. It is scorching hot and I imagine how cooling the Mediterranean waves would feel against my skin, how they would wash away the perspiration that is gathering on my scalp and dripping down my neck. But I know that sunning at the seaside is a pleasure from my old life, a carefree secular existence that I have exchanged for ultra-Orthodox Jewish doctrine. Now I must keep strictly to the modesty laws and not reveal my body in public. Yet even though I pray and perform the mitzvot daily, I still find myself longing to wear blue jeans or worse, a bikini.

The bikini I brought with me when I moved to Israel is now stuffed into the back of my wardrobe, but I doubt it would still fit me anyway. I have put on weight gorging on the kugel served at every Shabbes meal and the plates of cakes and sweets at all the engagement parties and weddings which are part of my new life. My slim body is now encased in a layer of blubber and I hardly recognize myself when I stand naked in front of the mirror. My once flat stomach is protruding over formerly shapely legs that now melt into one another at the thigh, and chubby pads of flesh conceal what used to be high cheekbones. I have lost my looks.

In the two years since I moved here from London I have changed from a skinny sexy girl to a dowdy matron. Luckily the extra pounds are well hidden under the religious uniform, long shapeless skirt, high-necked, long-sleeved shirt and thick stockings that I wear even in this August heat. I know I am comfort eating, compensating food for sex, chewing and swallowing instead of kissing and caressing, the lack of physical touch causes me a constant need for the solace of foods, even forbidden foods like succulent pink lobster flesh for which I still have a craving.

My gaze wanders to the far side of the library, past the lines of shelves housing the five books of Moses, the prophets, the Talmud, the Midrash and scholarly texts to where Mrs. Hillman, my idol, role model of the holy Jewish woman, is sitting reading *The Zohar*. Nicknamed 'Hilly' by us girls of the Light of Zion yeshiva, married by an arranged match and the mother of fourteen children, she is unbothered by outward appearances, never notices the cornflakes stuck to her wig or her mismatched clothes, and devotes her life to teaching Torah. There is an ethereal quality about her that makes her seem disconnected from the material world. I imagine she lives in the world of *Yetzirah* or even *Malchut*, the higher worlds she has taught us about. Rumour has it amongst the girls here that she is a *lamed vavnick*, one of the thirty-six righteous people on whose merit the world exists. I want to be just like her and become a holy Jewish woman, but I doubt that I will ever be spiritually advanced enough to see beyond the externals to a realm where only beauty of the soul matters.

Hilly looks peaceful as she turns the pages of the sacred book. Watching her makes me forget the oppressive mid summer heat and my desire for the forbidden and inspires me to return to my own study. I pick up the heavy text in front of me, the Laws on Repentance written by the

Rambam, and read his advice with care because here, at the Light of Zion, I am repenting.

The Rambam encourages a repentant to veer to the opposite extreme in order to fix himself. He gives the example of a greedy man who in order to repent should give lavishly to charity. When his weakness is under control, he can return to the golden middle path of balance.

The more I read, the more I feel the Rambam's treatise has been written especially for me, Reva Mann, atoning for a multitude of sins, yearning to change my past ways and live according to Jewish law. I learn that once I rid myself of my weaknesses God will place me in a situation similar to one where I have sinned in the past. If I withstand the test and do not give way to temptation, I will have conquered my bad traits.

I have been celibate for nine months now and I am determined that the next time I engage in relations with a man it will be with my husband, God willing a Torah scholar, on my wedding night. But today, even though I try to concentrate on study, the pages blur in front of my eyes and memories force their way into my consciousness. My longing for a breath of freedom has brought Chris, my old London boyfriend, into the forefront of my mind and I can see his tall body with its elongated limbs and long piano fingers, hyacinth blue eyes, thin rosy lips, cheeks unshaven with a week's worth of beard. His head is bare and he is wearing the fisherman's sweater bought on holiday in Ireland. He is carrying his pinhole camera, the one that filters light in through an angle to give a distorted effect. He used it often to photograph me in the nude so he could enlarge my breasts and buttocks and play with my shape.

I shake my head trying to rid myself of these images and bring myself back into the present. I look around at the other girls here who all seem to be engrossed in their work. Our common desire for repentance bonds

us even if we come from different walks of life and have little else in common. There is Dvorah, my study partner, christened Jane, born into a Catholic Welsh family. She has told me how she was drawn by the stories in the Old Testament and claims to have heard Moses, Abraham and Isaac calling out to her. In the final stage of her conversion to Judaism, she dunked in the *mikveh* waters and surfaced reborn as a Jewess. Then she declared her Hebrew name as Dvorah after the prophetess. She is engaged to Yonatan, also a convert and follower of the Toldes Aaron Hassidic sect. Once she is married she will shave off her long blond tresses, don a wig and on top of that a pillbox hat to ensure that the synthetic mop will not be mistaken for her own hair.

Even though I am on a similar quest, I am different from her and these other girls from secular families, who traveling in the Middle East found themselves at the Western Wall face to face with a yeshiva student offering them a free Shabbat meal or a lecture on 'Proofs of God', who got turned on to the buzz of love and esoteric teaching and ended up studying here. I am the daughter of an orthodox rabbi, the granddaughter of a rabbi who was Head of the Rabbinic Council in Israel. This religious world is familiar to me. I already know that only an animal that chews the cud and has cloven hoofs is kosher and that's why pork is forbidden. I know Jews can only eat fish that have both fins and scales. I know how to read Hebrew and recite the prayers by heart. Yet I am also learning that there is far more to this world than I was aware of. I certainly never imagined the intensity of the spiritual pursuit of holiness or the extent to which keeping one's thoughts on the godly requires shunning modern thought and culture. I always thought that my father's approach of straddling both the secular and religious worlds and integrating contemporary concepts with ancient customs was the Jewish way. But here at the yeshiva this kind of synthesis is frowned upon as the

ultra orthodox believe any outside influences will contaminate their protected world.

Even though most of the girls studying here have a past, I would not want them to know about the memories of Chris that are flooding my mind. I have never told them that I had a non-Jewish boyfriend or that he was someone I met at the backstage bar of the Hammersmith Odeon when he was taking photos for Melody Maker magazine and I was tagging along with a groupie who had backstage passes. And I would certainly never let on that he picked me up that night and cut crystal lines of cocaine on a mirror and offered them to me and that I sniffed one up each nostril and pulled him off the bar stool and led him to the ladies toilet where he entered me from behind. I shudder at the memory and breathe a sigh of relief that I have found this cocoon of purity in which to let go of the past.

My father often preached from his pulpit about the dangers of intermarriage. He used to say that it only takes a lover's tiff to provoke the words 'dirty Jew' to slip from a gentile lover's mouth. But I knew I could never marry a member of my father's community, an empty-headed London Jewish boy who worked in daddy's business and blow-dried his hair. Chris was independent and deep thinking and I believe if he would have been Jewish my parents would have appreciated him. But when they found out that I was seeing a gentile, they didn't beg me to give Chris up. Instead they threw me out of the house and threatened to sit *shiva*, the seven-day mourning period for me as if I had died. I had never believed they would cast me out. But my father erected an icy impenetrable wall around himself the night he informed me that I had twenty-four hours to leave, to pack my possessions and never return. There was no way I could get through to him. I felt completely abandoned and feared that I really would be dead to my parents forever.

By that point my parents must have wanted nothing more than to be rid of me for they had both had enough of the trials I had put them through, the sexual promiscuity, the trouble with the law, the drug abuse. They had suffered my contracting Hepatitis B from having sex with a junkie who shot wine into his veins. It hadn't taken long till I turned canary yellow. My parents got me medical help, nursed me back to health for two months, then sent me off to a kibbutz in Israel to recuperate. Only months later, still in Israel, I had again called for their help, this time when my boyfriend Itai was arrested with fifteen kilos of hashish and put the rap on me because he was scared of army jail. My parents had helped me then too, arranging lawyers and monies to pay the fines. But back in the UK, once I took up with Chris, I had crossed a line from where there seemed to be no way back. I had done the unspeakable. I was dating a goy. Only now that I realize the importance of building a Jewish home with Torah values do I understand why my relationship with Chris was so abhorrent to my father. But then, when I felt I had found my true love, I couldn't give him up.

That fateful night when Chris came to collect me and help me lug my bag of possessions down into the street, we bumped into my parents who had fled the apartment to avoid being present at my departure. In his naiveté, and against my advice, Chris tried to speak to my father.

“Could I just have a word Sir?” he had innocently asked.

My father held his arm in front of his face to block the sight of the non-Jew who loved his daughter, linked his arm in my mother's and quickened his pace. It was unthinkable for him to accept the idea of his daughter being with a non-Jew. In his mind Jews only married Jews.

I never thought I would marry Chris. I always knew deep down that there was something missing. Still, our first months of living together were blissful. He was the first real boyfriend I had ever had. Despite our

sleazy first encounter in the harsh light of the backstage toilet, wastebasket spilling over with bloody tampons and sanitary napkins, toilet bowl streaked with excrement, a sordid ambience that only added to the urgency of our sex and heightened my excitement, our relationship went far deeper than the physical. I could talk to Chris and I felt he understood me. He was a friend and confidante. He didn't judge me for my past, but saw the good in me and wanted to help me develop. He educated me and introduced me to art and literature. With him I frequented the galleries and museums. Our favourites were the Photographer's Gallery in Soho and the Tate on a Sunday where I fell in love with David Hockney's photographs and oils. I had never traveled far from my father's synagogue in central London and Chris took me to explore the English countryside on weekends. We would ramble along the downs and vales and then relax and eat a ploughman's lunch in a local pub. Chris taught me how to cook. We began with a simple dish of cauliflower cheese, but even when I managed to burn the sauce, he didn't give up and continued with my culinary education until it stretched to roasts and apple pies. Chris was my savior, my Christ, my Messiah. It was under his protective wing that I disentangled myself from recreational drugs and self abuse. Sure he would roll a joint sometimes or snort a line of coke, but only on occasion. He wasn't reliant on drugs for a good time.

It was to Chris that I admitted my innermost secret: I wanted to study midwifery. From the day I fully comprehended that my older sister Michelle had been brain damaged at birth, I had wanted to become a midwife. He encouraged me to fulfill my dreams for he seemed to understand how important it was to me to find some way of coming to terms with what had happened to her during labour. He knew that I wanted to be present at the scene of birth - the very place where a lack of

oxygen to the brain had left Michelle with epilepsy, slurred speech and a mind at the level of a child – because I felt if I could help other babies be born healthy, I could somehow heal myself too. But Chris’s sensitivity to me didn’t extend towards my parents. He saw them as small and bigoted. Of course I did too at the time. I was so needy for parental stability that I didn’t consider how deeply Michelle’s birth had affected them. It has taken me years to be able to see the connection between the woman my father had fallen in a love with – a university scholarship winner, a teacher of modern languages, a strong innovative person – and the shaking jelly of a woman I call mother, the woman who relied on uppers to get her through the day and downers to help her sleep at night and understand what had caused the change. As an adult I now have compassion for my father too, his hypochondria, anxiety and need of my mother’s constant attention. But growing up, when my parents were so affected by the trauma of Michelle and didn’t have time for me, I was focused solely on myself and my own pain and certainly didn’t have the perspective I have now.

At first leading an independent life away from home was liberating. I no longer had to answer to my father or lie about my whereabouts. I could come and go as I pleased. I could walk naked in the flat, turn the volume up high on the stereo, cry, laugh, or scream, an impossibility in my father’s house where I always had to behave with decorum, never play loud music or laze around in pyjamas as I had to be presentable to greet the constant stream of callers seeking his counsel, on everything from spiritual matters to lawsuits at work to a child’s imminent marriage to a non Jew.

I loved my new freedom. Nevertheless, my precious time with Chris was clouded by the sadness of my excommunication from home. Ever

since I was a little girl and Michelle had been sent away I had feared a similar fate. Michelle had been my playmate and best friend and I was devastated when my parents placed her in a home for the handicapped miles outside of London. But my mother had assured me that I would have a better life without a retarded sibling around. “We are doing this for your own good Reva,” she had said, a phrase that haunted me for years. And now I too had been sent away and my fears of being abandoned had materialized. I felt like I had been cut off from my source. I was uprooted, floating in the universe without an anchor. I didn’t belong anywhere. How would I manage without parental support? I woke up at night in a sweat. My immune system weakened. I had a constant runny nose, a recurring sense of dis-ease. A great emptiness ate at me, but I did not try and contact my parents. I knew I had embarrassed them in front of their community and caused them shame and I was sure they had cut me out of their hearts forever. My only connection to them was through Freda, a non-Jewish social worker who advised my parents on matters pertaining to Michelle. Freda had become close to our family and she helped me find the rental in Battersea where Chris and I moved into when the lease on his bed-sit expired and he had to move out.

Chris’s parents were kind and adopted me into their family, but despite their efforts, I felt like an outsider. When they sat at Sunday lunch and carved thin slices of roast beef, which they ate slowly in small portions with Yorkshire pudding, I thought longingly of the lavish Shabbes meals my mother used to make, the golden roast chickens and roast potatoes that we ate until we were so bloated that we couldn’t move from the table. I couldn’t contribute to Chris’s mothers’ enthusiastic discussions about gardening, fertilizing the strawberry patch and pruning the rose bushes. The only horticultural education I had had was listening to my mother

order arrangements of flowers or reading the care instructions on orchids that she received from my father's congregants on New Year. When Chris's parents talked about the church sales and having tea with the vicar, I wished I could see my father dressed in the hexagonal velvet hat and clerical gown he wore to Friday night Synagogue services, when he placed his hands on my head and in the way of the Patriarchs, blessed me to be like Sarah, Rivka and Rachel. I missed the Jewish songs my father sang at the table and the operatic notes of chazanut that he practiced in the bathtub. My soul was starving. Disconnected from my people and from the Torah that was ingrained in me, the very set of rules I had mocked and rejected, I was unhappy. The severed connection to my parents cast a melancholy shadow that never seemed to dissipate.

Even when Chris and I set up a business together, buying antique cameras and daguerreotypes at auction and selling them on Bell Street Market on Saturday mornings, I couldn't escape noticing my father's congregants, dressed in silken top hats and smart overcoats, striding down the adjacent Edgware Road on their way to Sabbath services at synagogue. Though I had always dreaded the synagogue services, hated the prissy outfits my mother made me wear and suffered having to be on my best behavior to set an example, I longed for home. I wanted to shout out to the Shabbes walkers 'wait for me' but then I would see myself, hot bacon and egg sandwich in hand, and realize just how far away from home I had strayed. I felt what so many Jews before me had felt, the loneliness of exile. But I had exiled myself. Now I am trying to return to the fold.

The independent study session is almost over. Girls are slowly packing up their books and returning them to the shelves, but I stay seated, reviewing the past in my mind, thinking about how God works in

mysterious ways. Now I realize that it could only have been God who put into effect the chain of events that eventually brought me here. My redemption came in the guise of an envelope that fell one morning onto the welcome mat of our Battersea flat. It was addressed to Rabbi Mendel Mann, my father. At first I just looked at it quizzically, not understanding where it came from, but when I ripped it open to find a letter from the Halifax building society, I soon realized that the flat found for us by Freda was a flat that my father had bought, and that we were not paying rent but a mortgage. My father had not wiped me from his memory but had kept me in the forefront of his mind, worried about me and provided a roof over my head. Even though he hadn't contacted me directly, he was in constant touch through the financial transactions of paying for the flat. He knew where I was and cared that I was safe. I was delighted by this turn around and felt the sweetness of his love enveloping me. I had never felt happier than when I dashed into the bedroom waving the letter in the air.

“He's bought it!” I raved, and handed the letter to Chris.

It took a few minutes for the news to sink in. At first he said nothing, then he screwed the letter up into a ball and threw it at me. “I'm not staying. I'm not living in the house of one who is too high and mighty to recognize my existence. I'm off. I'm history. Look at you all happy now. How can you let him manipulate you like this Reva? After all the months you've suffered.”

“He's my father and I love him.”

“Then Reva, I think it's time you went home.”

It wasn't easy to break up with the man who had shared my bed and my life for a year. But Chris started packing immediately and soon made arrangements to leave. When I saw the back of his green bomber jacket and heard the door click shut, I felt completely alone. I had been living in

a non-Jewish working-class neighbourhood on the unfashionable side of the river, far from the centre of London where my parents lived and where all my other friends lived and the only thing that had kept me in Battersea was my connection to Chris. Nothing was happening for me there, and I knew I had to leave.

However, even if I could have renewed my relations with my family right then, I also knew I could not go back to live with them. I didn't want to be bound by the religious prohibitions of my father's household. I didn't want to return to the place where my parents' constant premonitions of disaster cast a permanent pall over everything. Having no idea of what to do or where to go, I cried out for help, weeping and wailing with grief. Even though I was a rabbi's daughter, I had never thought much about God. The question of whether He existed or not didn't play much of a role in my life. But I had experienced Him through my grandfather, Head of the Rabbinic Council in Israel, who prayed stooped over with humility and in genuine communication with God, the sound of his prayers filling the room and swathing me in comfort on our annual family visits to Jerusalem.

It was here during Chanukah that I remember feeling God for the first time. I was sixteen years old and Grandpa was lighting the giant menorah at the Western Wall and reciting the blessing over the candles to an audience of hundreds. I was on the women's side of the partition and I pushed my way to the front, excusing myself by saying, "It's my grandpa, let me through." When I got to the front, I saw him standing on a podium, listening as the congregation answered 'Amen' to his blessing. I caught his eye and he smiled at me radiantly exuding love and light.

That day in Battersea, I believe Grandpa was pulling strings for me in heaven. He opened the way for me to call upon my creator. God must

have answered me for it was then that I made the decision to ask my parents to help me go to Israel to study.

Seeing my parents again after a year of separation was not easy. The lapse of silence served as a barometer at just how difficult my life had been living at home with them. Returning to their flat caused me to revisit the deep loneliness I had always felt there, the feeling that they had always been too busy, too preoccupied with their own concerns, to give me the love and attention I longed for. I found it hard to bear the constant cacophony of the doorbell and the telephone, of congregants seeking my father that triggered stress with every ring and interrupted our conversation. In my mind it was as though I had fallen between the cracks of my parent's private and communal lives. Nevertheless, when I broached the subject of moving to Israel, my parents were delighted and gave me both their financial support and their blessing. They were glad to give me a fresh start in a place where it was unlikely I would meet a non-Jewish man and were relieved I finally had direction. I imagine they too welcomed the distance. Since I didn't have the necessary requirements for nursing school, my A level results being only mediocre, I opted to study at the Israel Childbirth Association and train as a doula, a breast feeding counselor and a childbirth education instructor. It wasn't midwifery, but it answered my need to help laboring mothers and aid in births.

Because of the many visits I had made to Israel when my grandfather was still alive, Israel has always been my second home. Grandpa lived in Jerusalem opposite the Great Synagogue and Hechal Schlomo, on a tree lined street in the Rechavia neighborhood inhabited mainly by Yekim, German refugees. He loved Israel and instilled that love in me. I feel at home here as I do nowhere else.

Even when I wasn't religious I always felt that Israel was where I was meant to be. Being here is so different from living as a member of a minority group in England, where social pressure meant that we conformed to the customs of those around us. Even my father would remove his hat upon entering my school for parent's day, despite that fact that a Jewish man is supposed to keep his head covered at all times. In Israel the social norms are ours. I love that in Jerusalem the taxi drivers wish me a gut shabbes as they drop me off at dusk on a Friday night and men walk down the street wearing a tallis prayer shawl on their way to shul, and I can pop into any neighbourhood store to buy the challah bread and flowers I need for the Shabbat.

Chris is still in my mind and I put down the holy book. I need to take a break and get out of here. Maybe I am experiencing a fall from grace. Rabbi Rabinowitz, the dean of the seminary, had warned me this might happen. "The nature of God awareness is that you can't keep it with you for long. It comes and it goes. You get a glimpse and then a fog covers up the light and you need to work hard until you see it again. That's the real test, to worship God even when you can't feel His presence, when you're sunk in darkness" were his very words.

Lately lethargy is setting up residence inside my muscles and I need to fight myself in order to perform the mitzvot. Today in the bright sunlight, the outdoors beckoning, the sheer ugliness of my surroundings makes me feel nauseous. The floors need sweeping. The rickety desks are falling apart. Cobwebs hang from the ceiling. Even Mrs. Hillman's jumble of mismatched clothes, which I usually find endearing, disgusts me. My mind is turning against me and instead of absorbing the material on how to truly repent, knowledge that I have been thirsty for in order to mend my ways, I can only think about sex and drugs. I know where to get shit,

even here in Israel. I won't do anything about this urge, but nevertheless I need something.

The nagging ring of the student's pay phone out in the corridor interrupts my troubled thoughts. Dvora, my study partner, goes to answer it.

"Reva!" she is shouting from the hall. "Telephone."

Who can be calling me, I think, as I heave my heavy body towards the door.

"Hello?"

"Reva? Is that you? I've finally tracked you down. Wasn't easy. Freda had your number. It's Chris, don't tell me you've forgotten the sound of my voice?"

"Chris!"

"Hello luv, guess what, the paper sent me over to cover the Sinead O'Connor concert. Bloody hot here I must say. Surprised?"

How could this be? I cover the receiver with my hand hoping no one can hear the conversation and whisper. "Chris, I can't believe it."

"Feels like yesterday doesn't it. You sound exactly the same. When can I see you? Brought some good dope, hid it in my toothpaste. They've put me up at the King David hotel. Come on over for old times sake."

Even though I am aware of the element of divine intervention working in the cosmos and that God is putting me under the Rambam's repentance test, all I can think about is how good a hit of weed would feel right now and how great Chris's lean body would feel against mine.

"Things have changed."

"New bloke?"

"No. Nothing like that. I'm in a yeshiva, a seminary for girls. I'm studying the Torah and..."

“You’re kidding right?”

“Chris.”

“Do tell me you’re kidding.” Chris bursts into laughter. “Daddy’s girl is it then?”

“No. It’s”

“Whatever happened to midwifery then?”

“It’s a long story.”

“Come on over darling. Just a cup of coffee and you’ll tell me all about it?”

Before I can reply, the sound of Oy yoi yoi yoi drifts out of the lounge, a large room at the end of the corridor where we hang out in between classes. Girls are stampeding past me. Another lucky girl has announced her engagement. I imagine the plates of sticky cakes ready to be gorged on which will surely add another roll of fat around my midriff. I think about us girls dancing around in a circle once again, making the bride-to-be happy. I can see Dvorah slipping the elastic of her waistband down and belly dancing for the bride. I can hear the blessings the fortunate girl will bestow upon us single and lonely girls and I know I can’t take it anymore.

“Give me an hour.” I say.

“That’s my girl. Room 613.”

I hang up the receiver and look down the corridor. Hilly is standing by the lounge door, beckoning the girls to come inside. Her cheeks flush with joy as she calls “*A callah, a callah*. A bride, a bride! Come on everybody – Mazaltov! Mazaltov!” I slink past her, through the door, hoping she is not using her spiritual powers to read my mind.

Bella is sitting serenely, like a queen, on a Formica chair draped with flimsy white fabric, a cheery girl who doesn’t seem to struggle with her

new life and has glided into the orthodox world with grace. Buxom girls lift her into the air and sing their congratulations as they bounce her up and down. I think about Chris and how I have agreed to meet him, but what I really want is to be the one sitting in the bridal chair having found my soul mate, building a house of Israel.

Questions about the groom shoot out from every corner. “Where is he from?”

Bella beams, her lips curl up at the corners as she answers. “Scarsdale, New York.”

“What does he look like?”

“Tall, dark, and handsome.”

“Does he have a profession?”

“He studies full time.” Bella says smugly for she has hooked a winner.

All fall silent to hear the answer to the most important question of all. “Where does he study?” We need the name of his yeshiva to ascertain the extent of his sanctity.

The blushing bride proudly announces, “The Mir Yeshiva.”

A respectful silence ensues as we nod to each other in awe and grunt approvingly, “The Mir Yeshiva — top of the line!”

I know that catching a Mir yeshiva student is a prize. That school is the Ivy League of the orthodox world. My father was a student at the original Mir yeshiva, in Poland, and I have heard the stories of his student days, the dire poverty, the housekeeper who swung a chicken through a pot of boiling water and called it soup, the mud and the cold. Despite all this the students studied with fervour into the early hours of the morning. In Jerusalem, the Mir yeshiva prides itself on students from good

families. These boys, who can be recognized by a pearl pinned on the side of their fedora hats, are considered the best possible catch. The snobbism goes even further, but fortunately these girls don't know enough to ask whether Bella's groom learns upstairs at the Mir or downstairs, which would draw finer distinctions among the students dividing them into the elite and the mere hangers on.

The celebrations are over and it is time for me to leave. I pass Hilly on my way out and hope she thinks I am going downstairs to the dining room for lunch. As I walk away from the girl's lounge, the song and chatter still streaming through the corridor, the heat of the summer day reaching its climax, I cross the vestibule towards the exit, excited at the prospect of reunion with my old love.

