

PROLOGUE

June 12, 1953

His eyes were wrong. Sepia gray and filled with hate. She knew his eyes were a luminous blue, much like the cat's-eye marble she had played with as a child.

And the grainy face. It didn't belong here, staring at her from the screen of her television in the dimness of her living room. It was all wrong. The receding hairline, bulldog jaw, angry mouth. One eyelid drooped like a falling curtain over his right eye. This was the man Americans had been taught to hate. It was not the man Mariasha had known.

The camera pulled back to reveal the entire vile placard carried by one of the demonstrators marching outside Sing-Sing Prison awaiting the execution. Above the unrecognizable face, the printed words shouted DEATH TO GOLDSTEIN!

Mariasha winced. How could things have gone so wrong?

The newscaster's televised voice rang out, each word a painful jolt.

Head of spy ring. Passed atomic-bomb secrets to the Soviets. Sentenced to death by electric chair.

Traitor!

Mariasha tried to breathe, vaguely aware of the sunken sofa cushion beneath her, the warm stagnant air, her husband's hand claspings hers. His soft and strong, a few age spots and wrinkles appearing among the golden hairs. Hers, numb.

The voice coming from the television stopped abruptly. Aaron's hand tightened over hers. This was it.

A shuffle of paper. The newscaster looked up. "I just received word that at 8:17 this evening, Isaac Goldstein died in the electric chair." He ran his tongue over his lips. "Once again. Atomic spy Isaac Goldstein has gone to meet his maker."

She squeezed her eyes shut, so tight she became dizzy. She had made her choice.

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Her young daughter ran into the living room and threw her arms around Mariasha. “What’s going to happen to Sally?” Essie asked.

Mariasha stroked her daughter’s golden curls, so like her father’s hair. Essie had been friends with Isaac Goldstein’s daughter since they’d been babies.

She met her husband’s eyes.

Aaron nodded. He knew. He understood.

“I’m sure Sally’s mother will take good care of her,” Aaron said. He gently lifted the little girl. “Come, Esseleh. I’ll tuck you into bed.”

There was no air left in the room. Mariasha grabbed her handbag and fled the apartment into a crumbling fortress of brick and concrete. This was the old Manhattan neighborhood where Isaac Goldstein had lived much of his life. His people. Most had never wavered in their support of him. But they were only a small minority. In the street, neighbors huddled, moaning, crying. Old men and women, many others younger, Mariasha’s age. Some carried lit candles as they marched in their solemn vigil. It was after sundown. *Shabbos*. The executioners had even violated the holy Sabbath.

She hurried down Ridge Street, past the dilapidated Lower East Side tenements, away from the people. A bulldozer blocked a street where they’d started knocking down older buildings to make room for a government housing project. Mariasha could smell the stale East River and remembered the park. The bench where they’d sat together, the world frozen as though they were sealed inside a snow globe. But she couldn’t go there. The memory was too close. It would be like staring into a solar eclipse.

She walked instead to Delancey Street and got on the train to Brooklyn.

The train car jerked and yawed, lights flashing off and on as it screamed through the tunnel, until it finally surfaced to cross the Williamsburg Bridge.

Beneath her, the black river was still. The muted Brooklyn skyline rose ahead of her, low buildings silhouetted against a

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faded sky. No stars tonight. All brightness had been sucked out of the world by too many bolts of killing electricity.

The train crossed Brooklyn. Crossed Mariasha's life. A too-short childhood picnicking with her parents in Prospect Park, a few happy moments at Coney Island, her years as a politically active student at Brooklyn College.

She got off the train at the Alabama Avenue station, then picked her way down cracked, deserted sidewalks past red brick buildings, the shoemaker and butcher shops, maple and elm trees thick with broad green leaves.

Her old street was quiet. Tenement windows open to catch a nonexistent breeze. A few cars parked along the curb. Smudged chalk on the sidewalk from a game of hopscotch. A broken stickball bat stuck out of a garbage can.

She sat down on the stoop of her childhood apartment building, remembering how the neighborhood women would gather outside with their baby carriages and fan themselves against the summer heat, listening to the off-key carnival sounds of an organ grinder. How Mama would drop a small paper bag down to her from their second-floor kitchen window. In it, a sandwich of pumpernickel bread smeared with delicious *schmaltz* and sprinkled with salt.

Mariasha leaned back against the cool stone steps and looked up at the rusting fire escapes. Diapers hung from the clotheslines like limp flags of surrender.

Her heart ached so much she could hardly breathe. She had made her choice.

But had it been the right one?

CHAPTER 1

Over sixty years later

Here in the kitchen. *La cuisine*. That's where Annette Revoir could still feel her grandmother more than anywhere else in the old Paris apartment. Grandma Betty had always been in the kitchen, surrounded by hanging copper pans, making *chocolat chaud*, baking croissants, or cleaning a chicken in the chipped porcelain sink.

As a child, Annette would watch from her perch on the rickety ladder-back chair, boosted up by a couple of thick telephone books. Grandma Betty would boil hot milk in a saucepan, fold in finely chopped pieces of bittersweet chocolate, then add brown sugar. After they finished drinking their cocoa, Grandma Betty would wash her hands and dry them on her plain white apron. Then she would stand behind Annette and carefully separate her thick blonde hair into sections. Annette would grow sleepy in the warm kitchen that smelled like melted chocolate. Sometimes Grandma Betty would call her Sally, forgetting that her daughter was a grown-up woman and Annette her daughter's child. She would plait Annette's hair into braids so tight they felt like forever hugs.

Annette's eyes stung. The kitchen was cold and smelled like disinfectant. No one had cooked here in a long time. And no one was ever again going to braid her hair into forever hugs.

She wiped away her tears. Dear, sweet Grandma Betty was gone and it was time to say goodbye. Annette snatched another sheet of yesterday's *Le Figaro* to wrap the last copper saucepan. A familiar face in smudged newsprint near the bottom of the page stopped her. She started to wad up the newspaper. That face did

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not belong here in her grandmother's house, especially not now, so soon after her death. But like someone hypnotized by a public hanging, Annette couldn't help herself. She flattened out the page and glanced at the article beside the old photo. Two short paragraphs about a newly published memoir by a former KGB agent who had been involved with U.S. atomic-bomb spy rings back in the 1940s.

She heard the front door opening. Mama returning from the *boulangerie* with lunch. Annette ripped out the article and shoved it into the pocket of her jeans as her mother stepped into the kitchen, placing a canvas bag of groceries on the table.

Mama fluffed out her short white hair. "*Il pleut*," she said. She shook off her old camelhair coat, scattering a few droplets of rain over the cartons lined up on the wood floor.

"*Pas de pot*," Annette said. "At least it isn't snowing yet."

"*Fini*?" Mama asked.

"*Oui*." She put the wrapped pan into a carton. "I finished packing up the kitchen," she said, switching from French to English. She and her mother usually spoke in a *mélange* of their two languages. "Dishes. Pots and pans. Everything's in boxes for the men from the Emmaus charity to take."

"*Bien*." Her mother laid her coat over one of the ladder-back chairs. "I bought some brie and grapes for us. And a little wine."

Annette pulled the long baguette from the satchel. The bread was wet with rain on its exposed half. She broke off an end. "Do you want to go through the cartons?"

"No," her mother said. She opened the bottle of burgundy with the corkscrew Annette had left out with a couple of plates and glasses for their lunch. She seemed smaller than the year before when Annette had returned to Paris for a visit, just after she'd finished her master's degree in journalism. Grandma Betty's slow deterioration and finally her death almost two weeks ago, a few days before Christmas, had taken its toll. Her mother's once-plump face was gaunt and her blue eyes sunken, reminding Annette of photos she'd seen of concentration-camp victims.

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Mama poured wine into two glasses, handed one to Annette, and took a long sip from her glass. She gestured with her chin at the pile Annette had assembled on one of the kitchen chairs. A folded embroidered tablecloth with matching napkins, brass candleholders, and a book with yellowed pages, missing its cover, called *The Jewish Home Beautiful*. It had been published in 1941 and had recipes and tidbits about Jewish living, like table settings for the different Jewish holidays. There was an inscription on the first page. *To my dearest sister Betty. Love, Irene.* “What’s all this?” her mother asked.

“I thought you might want it,” Annette said. “Grandma Betty kept it, so it must have meant something to her. Reminders of our family.”

“I don’t need any reminders.”

“But Mama...”

Her mother backed out of the kitchen carrying her glass and the bottle of wine. “I want nothing from the past.”

Annette wanted to shout, *Grandma Betty’s gone. We only have each other now.* But she said nothing. Mama was incapable of showing affection. The past had killed that in her.

Annette finished her bread, cheese and wine, rinsed off the plate and wine glass, then packed them away. She ran her hand over the top of the butcher-block kitchen table. Grandma Betty was gone. She had lived in this same apartment all of Annette’s life, and for many years before. She and Mama had moved to the Marais district in the 1950s, when they had first come to Paris from New York. Annette couldn’t say if this had been their original apartment, or if they’d moved in after Grandma married her second husband, the very French Simon Revoir, whom Annette had called Grand-Père.

She stood in the entrance to the living room, taking in everything for the last time. The walls, high ceilings, and crown moldings were all painted white, the sofa and chairs were covered in an ivory fabric, and sheer, floor-length drapes hung in front of the tall windows. Everything was clean and colorless, and it

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occurred to her that perhaps the purpose of all the white had been to erase something.

Her mother sat on the sofa surrounded by cartons, the wine bottle on the parquet floor in front of her. She sipped from her glass as she stared at the rain splattering against the window panes.

Annette bent over and kissed her head. Her mother squirmed, hating to be touched, but Annette held tight and kissed her again. The short white hair had thinned and Annette could see her pink scalp. Mama was getting old, almost sixty-nine. She'd had Annette, an only child, late in life, and Annette often felt as though she'd been raised by two grandmothers.

She released her mother and went to finish packing up the master bedroom. Her grandmother's high bed with its white iron headboard was in the center of the room beneath a beautiful old crystal chandelier that hung from an ornate ceiling medallion. The real estate woman had suggested that they strip the apartment of all personal items, but leave the furniture and fixtures in case someone wanted to buy them, as well.

Even after most everything had been packed away, the apartment still felt as it had when her grandmother was alive. There had never been much of a personal nature. No paintings, knickknacks, or books. Only three photos had sat on the now-empty nightstand. One of Grand-Père, a spindly little man with a black goatee whom she hardly remembered, the second of Annette's mother in her nurse's uniform, and the third of Annette when she had graduated from the University of Michigan four years before. Maybe her grandmother hadn't wanted to settle in, perhaps for fear of having to someday leave it all behind.

She brought the stepladder and a damp dust rag over to the floor-to-ceiling closets. The day before, she had cleared out all of her grandmother's clothes and taken them to a Catholic charity. But there were several high shelves that she had been unable to reach. She climbed up the steps with the rag and peered into the first shelf. Nothing but dustballs and a couple of dead bugs. She wiped it clean, stepped down and moved the ladder to the next section. Also empty. She cleaned it, then went to the final closet.

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There was a box pushed all the way back, so it hadn't been visible when she was standing on the floor.

Annette felt a trill of excitement. Had this belonged to Grand-Père or her grandmother? She reached in and pulled out a small leather suitcase with no luggage tag. She wiped off the dust, carried it down the stepladder, and laid it on the bed.

If it had belonged to Grandma Betty, perhaps the suitcase contained some link to a past that had been carefully hidden from Annette. She had a vague recollection from her childhood of her grandmother reading pale-blue tissue-thin letters, tears running down her cheeks, but didn't know what had upset her, or what had become of those letters.

She ran her fingers over the worn brown suitcase. She flipped up the two locks and pried the top open, releasing the smell of camphor.

Women's clothes. She carefully laid out each item on the bed. A ruffled black apron—very different from the plain white one her grandmother had always worn. A sexy satin aqua nightgown with beige lace around the neck. Had this been Grandma Betty's? She shook out a long, yellowed wedding veil, fingering the small holes in the sheer fabric, eaten away by time. Beneath the veil, in the bottom of the suitcase, was a large rectangular book with a black leather cover.

Her heart bounced. A photo album.

She opened it, fascinated. Black-and-white photos of smiling people she didn't recognize were pasted onto black construction paper, each labeled with names and dates.

On the first page was an eight-by-ten portrait of Grandma Betty wearing a long satin bridal gown that fell in waves on the floor. She held a bouquet of white orchids. Her grandmother's face was pursed in a shy smile that minimized her overbite, and her medium brown hair was arranged in a rolled page-boy. Although she wasn't a pretty woman, she looked radiant. On her head was the veil that now lay on the bed.

Mama needed to see these, even if she didn't want to.

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Annette carried the album into the living room and sat down beside her on the sofa. Her mother was still looking out the window. The rain had turned to snow and flakes were sticking to the panes.

“Mama, I found photos of Grandma Betty when she was young. You have to look at these.”

“No,” her mother said, but her eyes turned to the book on Annette’s lap.

Annette opened to the portrait of her grandmother as a bride, let her mother study it for a minute, then turned to the next page.

She was confused. This one was of Grandma Betty and the groom. But the man that stood a head taller than her grandmother was a handsome, sparkling young man. He was dressed in a formal U.S. Army uniform with a number of ribbons and medals over his breast pocket. In the shadow of his billed cap, she could tell he had light eyes, probably blue like hers and her mother’s, a hint of pale hair, and a broad open smile. Annette had never imagined her real grandfather once looked like this.

Her mother made a small noise, like a bird about to be crushed.

“I’m sorry, Mama. We don’t have to look at these.”

Her mother patted her throat. “Show me.”

Annette turned to the next page. There he was again. Much younger, a grinning teenager wearing an old-fashioned bathing suit with a striped top. 1932. Upstate New York, the label read.

The face was open and pure. How could that be? These photos contradicted everything Annette believed.

She slowly turned the pages as her mother studied each photo with her. Her grandparents wrapped in a plaid blanket on a toboggan, wearing ice skates at the side of a frozen lake, laughing with another couple whose faces were blurry. December 1943, Laurels Hotel, Catskill Mountains, New York.

She turned the page. Another picture of her grandparents with the same couple seated around a table in a restaurant. Her grandfather was in his military uniform, the others in evening dress. In this photo, Annette could see the faces of the other couple

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clearly. An older man with thinning hair and a much younger-looking woman. The woman had dark hair and eyes, high cheekbones, and a movie-star smile. A cluster of large stones that looked like rhinestones sparkled in her ears. She was stunning. Next to her, Grandma Betty with her small eyes and pronounced upper jaw looked like a mouse, despite the white orchid she wore on a velvet ribbon around her neck. Annette read the caption. With Mariasha and Aaron Lowe. December 1944. Dinner and dancing at the Starlight Roof Supper Club.

She wasn't sure why she was so taken aback that her grandparents had had friends. Yet here was a photo of four people out for an evening. None of these people looked like monsters. Certainly not her grandfather.

Her mother took the album from Annette and turned the pages. She stopped on the last page. Annette looked over her mother's shoulder at the photo of two little girls, both blonde, holding hands in front of a brick apartment building. They could have been sisters.

"This is me," her mother said. "And I think I remember the other girl."

Annette read the caption. "1950. Our Sally with classmate Essie Lowe. In front of our apartment on 120 Columbia Street."

Essie Lowe. Probably the daughter of her grandparents' friends, Mariasha and Aaron Lowe. And if the girls were classmates, they'd probably all lived in the same Manhattan neighborhood.

"Essie was my friend," her mother said, in a voice that sounded childlike and plaintive.

Annette's heart ached for her. Her mother had once been a happy child until one day her ordinary life was publicly shattered. Then, probably to escape a vicious world, Grandma Betty bundled herself and little Sally off to Paris, away from friends, family, their old neighborhood, and a familiar language.

But why had it happened? Because her grandfather had been a monster or because it was convenient for people to believe he was?

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Annette reached into the pocket of her jeans, pulled out the article she had torn from the newspaper, and looked at the smudged photo of Isaac Goldstein. His hooded eye glared at her. A monster?

She quickly read the two short paragraphs about the KGB agent's memoir. According to the agent, Isaac Goldstein had no involvement in passing secret atomic-bomb information on to the Soviets. *Goldstein was never a major player in communist spy circles*, the agent had written. *He didn't have access to crucial material. That all came from another source.*

What if there was something to the Soviet agent's story? Annette was a journalist, someone who didn't accept things at face value, and yet that's exactly what she had been doing all these years.

She took the album from her mother and looked again at the photo of the smiling bridegroom, a decorated army hero. Her real grandfather. Isaac Goldstein. He looked nothing like the smudged picture of the angry man from *Le Figaro*, a traitor with a squinty eye. The hateful photo had been on 'Death to Goldstein' posters in 1953 and was the one that popped up hundreds of times if you searched on Google Images. But did that make it true?

Who had this man really been? A hero or a traitor?

Annette put her arm around her mother, holding tight even as Mama shrank from her touch. Perhaps the truth about Isaac Goldstein could help Mama reclaim her life.

And then his granddaughter could finally reclaim hers.