

## **CALCULUS AND CALCULATION (19??)**

MY GRANDMOTHER BRONYA was a crafty gal, made so by necessity, not design. If, God forbid, she had still been in Europe when Mr. Hitler and his cronies exercised their horrifying imaginations, I've no doubt she would have bargained her way as far down the survival line as luck allowed. But my grandmother's family, chased out of Russia after nights of Pogroms, arrived on North America's shore not long before the People tossed the Czar out of power and shot him, which puts them in this country a good many years before the Reichstag burned and Crystal Nacht began. Bronya's father, my great grandfather Asher Ronski, had saved his tinker's earnings and brought the whole family over to America in a class above steerage: his wife, my great grandmother Roisa of blessed memory; my great uncles, Mordechai and Menachem; and the princess who delighted them all, their adorable baby sister, Bronya.

That child, my grandmother, was the only member of the Ronski family to be carried off the boat and into the new world like a treasured prize. Even the sour puss customs officials at Ellis Island couldn't resist tickling her under the chin.

As she became a young woman and more and more lovely, that treasured prize was kept apart from the blood shot eyes and well veined noses of the gentile carpenters and handymen who made up the bulk of regular customers at Ronski Dry Goods and Machine. The converted barn sat high atop a dirt road just off the Spencer Road on the outskirts of Worcester. Bronya was relegated to the makeshift back room, where it became her job to manage the books and keep stock of the inventory not long after her own mother, Rosia of Blessed Memory, passed on. For while my grandmother could wield a monkey wrench with the same heft and purpose as each

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of her brothers, Bronya Ronski was more clever with figures than both brothers and her father combined. And so, after the death of her mother from what was known then only as lady's problems, my grandmother Bronya was made keeper of all Ronski accounts-- a job she has taken seriously to this day.

The family safe was kept in the back room of the store, but the room itself wasn't so secure that it could keep away the very man who would fly my grandmother to the moon and leave her there while he went out for a package of cigarettes or a newspaper, sometimes for weeks, even months at a time.

That man, my grandfather, Roman Zelkind, wherever on earth he is today, was then a dashing man by anyone's assessment. To my grandmother, who from the earliest age and despite her rustic beginnings, was a sucker for the exceptional, he was the absolute picture of male elegance and grace. Into that impenetrable back room he strolled one fine summer day, sporting a straw boater and a pair of spats. Garters on his shirt sleeves, gold cufflinks at his wrists, a striped bow tie knotted exactly in the middle.

How did he get past Asher? No one knows. Yet there he was, pushing a cart before him with an object on top covered with a Turkish towel. He tipped his hat to my grandmother and flashed her a mustachioed smile.

"Well take a look at you," my grandmother whispered. "What's a man dressed like a snake oil salesman doing in the back room of a farm store?"

"Pedaling snake oil," Roman winked. Then like a magician he pulled off the great towel to reveal—an adding machine.

My grandmother leaned into it, skeptical. "What the devil is it?"

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“Why miss,” my grandfather’s boater was sitting on her desk by now, “this device is the greatest development in mathematical technology since the abacus.”

“Is that so.” She made as if to get back to her bookkeeping, as if such a thing as an automatic adding machine was no more unusual than those tractor engines her brothers were always clanging on behind the store.

The man who would become my grandfather wiggled an electrical cord in front of my grandmother’s nose. “For one thing, it plugs right in to your wall...” In a minute he plugged the cord into the one outlet in the back room and the machine made a low purring noise.

“Where’s the handle?” My grandmother made herself sound blasé as if she’d seen a contraption like this one every day.

Roman punched three numbers into the key board and pushed a plus sign on the side. The machine rolled that number out and Roman punched another in. “This button here is your handle, Miss.” He pushed down on the plus sign, the machine rumbled and scrolled out the sum. “Think of all the wear and tear you’ll save on that lovely wrist of yours.”

She tried like the devil not to, but my grandmother blushed.

“Unless of course you want to build up your muscles.”

“I might if the likes of you keep coming around.”

Roman unplugged his machine and covered it up again. “Just keep in mind,” his eyes twinkled, “this machine will multiply and do long division as well.”

Several sales calls later, Roman Zelkind had not only sold Ronski Dry Goods and Machine a new electrical adding machine, he was collecting my grandmother in his company automobile

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and driving her to the nickel pictures in Worcester. He was chaste while he courted her, and to my great grandfather Asher's satisfaction, Roman was also absent for long stretches of time. But he dutifully sent Bronya telegrams while he made sales calls in Boston, Springfield, Hartford and New Haven, and it was clear to one and all that Bronya Ronski was the apple of Roman Zelkind's eye.

It was also clear to one and all that my grandfather had met more than one secretary in his line of work, that there were plenty of women whom he'd wined and dined after dangling an adding machine cord before their eyes. Those evenings, he was the first to admit it, generally ended in some flea bag hotel with a promise that he'd be back in a month or so, and he was good for that promise up to and for months after he'd met my grandmother.

He never admitted to the dalliances, but as I've said, Bronya was a smart cookie. My grandfather was young and handsome, and if Bronya, who had spent her entire nineteen years being unimpressed by brawny but handsome enough looking male specimens could hardly resist him, what less defended woman could? So my grandmother conceived a plan to keep him, not only in Worcester but under her own roof.

My great grandfather, Bronya's father Asher Ronski's heart was growing old faster than the rest of him. He was tired all the time and had more than once told his sons that he wanted to pass his shop on to them and retire. However, neither Menachem, who by this time had become Manny, nor Mordechai, who was known now as Mort, was interested in keeping a business out there in the sticks. Manny had taken an interest in servicing automobiles and Mort could see making a profit by selling them. Asher had no choice. He shrugged his shoulders and sold the shop, all

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except the electrical adding machine, to one of his steady customers, then divided the profits equally among his children. Bronya's share was a little more equal. "That is because," my great grandfather told her, "you are the daughter who will keep me well into my old age."

The boys went in together and started a used car business on Boylston Street. Mort took care of sales and Manny, who still liked to get up to his elbows in motor oil, took care of service. My grandmother, for her part, took her share of money and purchased a building on Worcester's north side, more or less between Clark University and the polytechnic institute. There was a large apartment upstairs and a shop on the bottom. Asher had his own room where he caught up on a lifetime of reading, and Bronya invested what was left of her small fortune into an inventory of penny candy, cigarettes, newspapers, and magazines. Roman got her a deal on an electric cash register and this took center stage.

The day Bronya was to officially open the store, she looked at Roman Zelkind carefully. "You'll notice I haven't painted a sign on the window."

My grandfather straightened his tie.

"I'm going to name the place after myself, but I believe 'Zelkind's' sounds much more inviting than 'Ronski's'."

"Bronya Ronski!" Roman was clearly tickled. "Next I supposed you are going to get down on one knee and propose to me like those goyim do in the movies."

My grandmother pulled a feather duster out of her apron pocket and swept out a little square just the size of a knee and pointed to Roman. "No, my good man, you are."

Dutifully, Roman knelt and took my grandmother's hand. "You haven't a ring have you?"

"You'll get one for me soon enough."

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THERE WAS A WEDDING and a wedding night. Soon thereafter, there was a baby girl, my Aunt Sophia, and not long after that, although Roman Zelkind had given up his sales routes in lieu of managerial duties at the candy store, he began to disappear for days and nights at a time. At the start, the reason for each journey was legitimate—someone had to go to the warehouse in Holyoke to pick up the chewing gum, the Baby Ruths, the Mary Janes. But even in those days before the Mass. Pike and the super highway, Springfield was at most a few hours away, and who knew where he went in the truck my grandmother bought from her brothers for just such purposes? The truck my great uncle Manny kept in tip top condition, absolutely free of charge.

Roman was usually back before a week went by, and although he was allowed into the building, it was understood that upon his return from these lengthy junkets he was to sleep in a chair in the store's back room. My grandmother's brothers offered many times to beat her husband to a bloody pulp. Her father Asher begged her to speak to the local rabbi. My grandmother refused all these offers for help. Instead, she perfected a technique guaranteed to keep Roman coming back—a shoulder made of solid ice. I, like my missing grandfather before me, have found such a shoulder to be an irresistible force, though I believe the women who have turned such a shoulder to me have done so in the earnest hope that I would go away for good. This was not, however, my grandmother's case.

My grandfather made his return entrances sheepishly in the beginning, waving before him enormous bouquets of roses and daffodils, or lugging behind him whole cases of Jaffa oranges, "Direct from the Holy Land!" he guaranteed. None of these lavish displays of repentance thawed Bronya's frosty resistance. But when, after each indiscretion, my grandfather

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finally swept his way into the nursery and lifted that first baby, my Auntie Sophia high into the air and spun her over his head while she giggled and cooed, the whole family of Ronski hearts—Asher, Manny, Morty—melted, my grandmother’s most of all.

The Ronski brothers, though warmed temporarily, were not actually fooled. Shortly after my great grandfather died, a copy of *War and Peace* open on his lap, a look of consternation on his face, my grandmother’s brothers began to come around daily to check on their beloved baby sister. Great Uncle Morty, whose hands by now were soft and white, his nails manicured, and could still pack a punch, once spotted my grandfather making a particularly intimate pitch while selling Tootsie Rolls to an adorable young tootsie. He moved my grandfather aside to complete the sale himself. “Meet me in back,” he hissed into Roman’s ear, and handed the woman the half dozen candies her penny had purchased.

The customer gone, Morty locked the shop door and joined Roman in the empty back room. He pulled my grandfather up by his shirt collar so that their noses were touching. “You’ll behave with respect to my sister or I’ll deliver you to the rabbi myself—in a pine box. Do I make myself clear?”

My grandfather straightened his white apron and nodded to Morty. “Extremely.”

Uncle Morty walked back into the shop, unlocked the door, and let himself out.

For some time after this, my grandfather comported himself around the shop and in the home as the dutiful and doting father of one, then two, that second child being a boy, my Uncle Jack. The children were noisy, but business was good, and Roman seemed to enjoy himself as he tossed fireballs and licorice sticks to neighborhood children, discussed politics with college

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boys as he sold them smokes, and kept track via comic book of the madcap adventures of Krazy Kat and the Katzenjammer Kids, all of whom he believed to be relatives from the old country.

And then my grandmother became pregnant once more.

Two children who looked like my grandfather Roman were one thing. The idea of three under the same roof made him extremely uneasy. My grandfather's feet and much of the rest of him began to tap out old fashioned bulgars as he sat with the family at the dining room table or listened to the radio from the sofa in the parlor. Not two months before my mother Mimi was to make her squalling appearance into the world, my grandmother Bronya big as that illustrative house, Uncle Jack still in diapers and Aunt Sophie just about to start school, my grandfather Roman Zelkind danced out of the apartment and down the stairs. Since my grandmother retained custody of the truck key, he slid kicked slid his way over to Union Station and caught a train. He took with him the clothes on his back, which consisted of a very nicely custom tailored suit, ibid his silk shirt, some sturdy American made oxfords, as well as the contents of the very same cash register he had found for my grandmother years before—a total of thirty seven dollars and fifty six cents.

He was gone this time for six and a half weeks. Three having been the limit of his past forays , it appeared to everyone, adult and child alike, that Roman Zelkind had flown the coop for good.

IN HIS OLD LIFE IN POLAND, when Roman Zelkind packed his bags and slipped out of town, that was the end of that. No one saw him again and everyone had an opinion, but no one could say they were unhappy he was gone. Money was owed, babies were made, deals that were

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brokered turned out be swindles, yet when he was gone, his bad business went with him and few people except perhaps the mothers of those babies, thought about him twice. But here in the new world, my grandfather's plan to leave Bronya a grass widow with two children and a third eminently arriving was cause for an all out search.

Mort and Manny sent telegrams to relatives in Boston who made long distance phone calls to friends of friends in Brooklyn, who themselves went calling on relatives in the Bronx and Queens. No one could find Roman but everyone was certain that he wouldn't be able to hide for long. If my grandfather did not present himself to my grandmother by the time the newest child was born, Manny and Mort would find him and present him, fully boxed, to the Jewish burial society, no matter how long it took.

And so, one bitter February morning, only a few days before my mother, Miriam Zelkind was to make her first appearance in the world, hard working, very pregnant Bronya came downstairs to open the shop for business and found none other than her erstwhile Roman lying face down in the doorway of the candy store, fast asleep. One version of what follows has it that my grandmother saw him there, curled up like a house cat in his now tattered grey suit, his shoes for a pillow, as men used to sleep in doorways in the old country. Moved by the sight of him, so peacefully resting, my grandmother gently woke him and welcomed him home.

That, as it turns out, was revisionist history. As years went by and comparisons between my grandfather, my father Larry, and in my own opinion, me, became common place, it was slowly revealed that Bronya Ronski Zelkind, full of my mother and no small amount of bitterness, found Roman Zelkind lying in his own filth, climbed over him, went into the back room, and filled a pail with cold water. This she threw on top of him with great pleasure.

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Her intention was to pick him up by the scruff of his neck, force him to notice her condition, then throw him back out into the street where he would hopefully freeze to death and leave them all in peace forever.

But Roman Zelkind's blue eyes shone with contrition and so they were compelling. Though his mustache was ragged and flea bitten, it was also handsomely placed over a pair of generous lips. Tough little Bronya Ronski, try as she might, could not help but melt at the sight of her roaming husband. As much as she wanted to bash his head in with the empty bucket, she wanted a father for her children more.

Heaving one arm over her shoulder, she dragged my grandfather upstairs, filled a warm bath, cooked him a breakfast of scrambled eggs and lox, black coffee strong as he liked it, and went back downstairs to the business of the day.

By the end of the week, tiny Miriam Zelkind was born. The following Monday, Roman Zelkind was installed behind the counter of the candy store in a newly laundered white apron and a grey felt fedora, which he wore with the brim turned up like Jimmy Durante. In the one picture of him that Uncle Jack still keeps in his office at the new store, my grandfather stands with a short cigar between his teeth, his arm around Bronya in her own trademark gingham apron. The three children, Sophia, Jackie and little Mim, surround them on the counter. Bronya looks lovely, serene in a way few have seen her in life. Roman is handsome beyond belief, more so even than my father, though he is looking off past the camera, as if into a distant land. I have, on more than one occasion, seen myself looking out past a photograph in this very pose.

My grandfather stayed with this family for ten more years, until the day after Uncle Jack's Bar Mitzvah. Two weeks later he was gone. California some said, Texas claimed others,

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though my great Uncle Mort swears he saw Roman Zelkind lying on a chaise lounge by a pool in Boca Raton as recently as 1978.

To my grandmother Bronya, it no longer mattered. Roman was gone, and the children were hers entirely. She would manage her well being as she managed the candy store, as best she could.

## **REAL ESTATE BABY (1952)**

WHICH IS HOW MY GRANDMOTHER BRONYA ZELKIND found herself one Friday afternoon late in 1952, drinking coffee from a cracked porcelain mug in the company of acne scarred engineering students, each in a bowtie and tweedy sport coat. Specifically, it is how, one year and some months after Judge Hoffman sentenced both Julius and Ethel Rosenberg to the electric chair for treason, she found herself sitting a stool away from her son in law, my father Larry Griff, who as far as she was concerned, had committed a treason of his own. Not of course the treason of spying, but the treason of cheating. If you think about it, my grandmother was behaving not unlike Ethel Rosenberg's own mother, Tessie Greenglass who would visit Ethel in prison and beg her to confess. Think of the children she would tell her, and though Ethel was unbending in her loyalty to her husband and her conviction that she was innocent, after such visits, Tessie would run to telephone the FBI. "She'll crack soon," Tess told the agent, "she's this close to confessing." But of course, Ethel never did. While the circumstances in my parents'

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case are hardly parallel, I never remember this story without thinking of Tessie Greenglass and how somehow she thought that betraying her daughter was the best thing for the family.

My father, for his part, was only thinking about the cruller he was munching and wondering if any of those slouching young mathematicians and physicists (who may or may not have themselves been privy to the mysteries of the atom bomb), ever managed to get laid. Every last one of them wore his hair in a flat top, and most of them were working slide rules and smoking cigarettes with such abandon that they knocked waves of caffeine over the sides of their cups and onto their calculus and chemistry problems and never even noticed. Their notebooks looked to my father from his vantage point at the counter to those sticky tables that served as their study carrels, to be smeared with donut jelly, Rorschach coffee splotches, and greasy half thumb prints.

Walking into this universe of junior scientists, my grandmother felt like Mata Hari. True, she wore no trench coat, had no beret pulled sexily over one eye ala Greta Garbo. She was a chubby, fifty year old Jewish lady who was extremely uncomfortable as she stretched on tip toe to settle her behind onto the leather topped stool beside my father's. But she was a woman with a mission, one that was best taken care of in private, and what place could offer more privacy than a room full of preoccupied boy bookworms.

"This better be good," my father said out of the side of his mouth. He signaled the waitress, who plopped an empty mug before my grandmother and filled it with a cascade of steaming java.

"Thank you," Bronya said curtly, and began to rifle through her oversized purse. My father Larry smoked and seethed. He hadn't any idea why he'd agreed to this meeting. Hope,

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perhaps, that my grandmother was acting as my mother's proxy, and at the last sip of beverage there would be an offer for an uncontested divorce, child support and *ghet* free.

Finally my grandmother's tiny hands emerged from her bag grasping a large manila envelope. She looked over her shoulder cautiously, then slid it wordlessly toward my father.

"What's this? Blackmail pictures?"

"I should be so lucky." She looked around her once again. Then out of the side of her mouth, "Open it."

"You open it," my father answered full voice as he slid the package back.

"Fine," my grandmother countered. Carefully, with the tip of an unmanicured finger, Bronya lifted the flap of the envelope and plucked out a brochure so slick and full my father thought at first it was a magazine. On the cover was a drawing of a brick ranch house framed on either side by leafy trees. A garage was attached to the side of the house. In front of that, two little white children, one boy and one girl, tossed a toy ball high into the air between them. In the driveway, a man who looked to be in his early thirties polished a late model convertible while a blonde woman, aproned, smiling, feather duster in hand, looked on happily from the doorway.

Underneath this illustration of domestic bliss, in script that approximated Hebrew letters were the English words: **Levinson Realty: From Twelve Tents to Seven Modern Rooms, all under \$30,000!**

Larry flipped the folder open to more drawings: a luxuriously furnished master bedroom with bath attached; two smaller bedrooms, one pink with a delicate white dresser, poofy white curtains, and a canopied twin bed; the other blue with a plain brown dresser, cowboy curtains, and a set of bunk beds with matching cowboy spreads.

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My grandmother looked on as my father ran his thumb over sketches of a second, smaller bathroom, a sunken living room, a cozy den with cheery fire place, and finally, a kitchen decked out with matching refrigerator, stove, and what was that? An automatic dishwasher? **Picture yourself here!** the brochure invited him, although it was clear to my father from the happy family that sat on the illustrated couches and around the neatly drawn kitchen table that this house was already taken by somebody else.

“Pretty nice, eh?” my grandmother offered. She had given up any pretext of secrecy as it was clear to her by now that all the other denizens of the coffee shop were more interested in working their problems than anything she had to say.

My father closed the brochure and slipped it back into its envelope. “So,” he asked, “what’s it to me?”

The waitress swung by and tipped her coffee pot toward my father but Larry brushed it away.

“You like the house?” my grandmother asked.

“Sure,” said my father. “What’s not to like. It’s a house. But not the house for me.”

My grandmother shrugged and shook a white stream of sandy sugar into her cup. She carefully set the sticky jar down. “Don’t be so certain.”

My father pulled the pamphlet back out of its envelope. He underlined the number \$30,000 with his finger. “Where am I going to get money like that?”

My grandmother readjusted herself on the stool and placed both elbows on the counter. She shook her head from side to side. She made as if to take the brochure back.

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My father held it tightly between his thumb and forefinger. He studied the happy father washing his new car and the blonde children playing ball in their imagined front yard. He pictured himself there in the driveway polishing away at the illustration convertible. Slowly his fantasy life took him behind the wheel, where he found himself speeding east on Route 9, then north on 128 toward the coast of Maine with Betty Shea beside him, her hair tied up in a pink chiffon scarf, her cat eye sunglasses reflecting back the blue autumn sky. He woke himself up and reminded himself that this was probably not the arrangement my grandmother had in mind. He pushed the pamphlet back toward Bronya but kept his palm flat on top of it.

“I’ve a simple proposition,” my grandmother told him, once again scanning the room to make sure none of the junior egg heads had drifted away from their equations to listen to her. “You get rid of that blonde *shikseh*, you make Mimi pregnant, and I will buy you this house.”

My father mentally let Betty Shea out of the passenger side of that shiny convertible, hit the gas, and peeled away from the curb, then poked his way across town, his sense of dread increasing with every shift of those make-believe gears. He imagined himself skidding into the cartoon driveway. He parked the car and dragged my near comatose mother out of the back seat like a sack of potatoes, then propped her up on the front stoop so she could watch the cartoon children play.

“You call making Mimi pregnant simple?” He felt like tapping one of those Poindexter college kids on his sport jacket shoulder and bumming a smoke. “I’ll have to get her to sleep with me first.”

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“*Paskudnyak!*” my grandmother spat. She made as if to put the envelope back into her purse once and for all. My father put his hand on hers and took the envelope back. “Not so fast, Bronya. Let me think about it.”

“He wants to think about it,” my grandmother muttered to no one. “Listen to me, Larry. If it’s that tootsie of yours you’re weighing against a brand new house, the least you can do is remember your sons. For them, there’ll be a back yard where they can play to their hearts’ content. There’ll be a bus to ferry them back and forth to a brand new elementary school the city is building on Banner Road. Not only that, the street where this house will be built is a *cul du sac!*”

My father looked at her blankly.

“A *cul du sac!*” she repeated as if it were the latest French fashion. “It’s a circle at the end of the street that goes nowhere except back to your house! The boys can learn to ride bikes with no traffic to run them over. Think about your children for once in your life! Do you want them to be stuck in that horrible apartment you’ve got them in now? By comparison,” she held the pamphlet to her heart, “this is a castle.”

“Bicycles, huh,” my father shook his head. He was considering but he didn’t want to give my grandmother an inch. “Do they come with the deal?”

“Smart guy.” Once more my grandmother made as if to put the whole business into her purse. Once more my father put his hand up to stop her.

“Why not just buy the house for Mimi and the kids? Why keep me in the picture at all?”

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“God bless me, don’t I ask myself that question every day.” My grandmother slapped the counter in front of her and looked my father in the eye. “No matter what I think about it, for some cockamamie reason, that daughter of mine loves you.”

My father immediately looked away but my grandmother caught his face in her hands and held it in front of her own. “You are the father of her child, my grandson Danny, and from my mouth to God’s ear, the father of my grandchild to be. Like it or not, you’re the man of Mimi’s family, Larry Griff. It’s my hope that a house like this will help you to act like it.”

With that my grandmother lowered herself off the counter stool and gathered up her purse. The envelope and its brochure she left to my father. “You can think it over.” She made a quick calculation in her head and placed two quarters on the counter between their two saucers. “Just you be quick about it. I have it on good authority those houses are going fast.”

My father watched as my grandmother marched out the donut shop door. He looked through the cigarette smoke at all those bookworm boys bent over their slide rules and notebooks. To the untrained eye, they might look like a bunch of losers, but my father was smart enough to know that even though they may not be able to get a date, they were eons ahead of him in the real world. These were college boys, engineers of tomorrow who were mastering and inventing tasks that would change the future of the world. By the time they were done with their four years at the polytechnic institute, they’d know how to make rockets that would take man to the moon...maybe even discover a cure for cancer. These boys already knew more about how to make an A-bomb than all of those Commie Rosenbergs and Greenglasses put together.

What could my father say for himself? He hadn’t gone to college like my Auntie Sophie. He hadn’t fought in the war like Uncle Jack. No, he was too busy digging himself out of the

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shithole he'd dug himself into back when he was eighteen. If he had only done what he wanted and followed Betty Shea down to Holyoke where those bull dog DeMolay jacketed brothers of hers had dragged her all those years ago. They could have escaped together someplace...Boston, Hartford, California....But no. He was too scared then, and just like that, the next fifteen years of his life turned to crap.

My father swung around on his stool and studied those flat topped future rulers of the universe. None of them was going to end up married not once but twice by the time he was twenty five to two women who were nowhere near his dream come true. Those boys who sat so conscientiously marking their calculations onto graph paper or studying their chemistry equations had things to look forward to. What did he have? A choice between a beautiful house complete with matching modern appliances and a half comatose wife or a life time sneaking around with his life's greatest love. A more ambitious man would figure out how to have both. As of that minute, my father could barely imagine having either. Sure, he and Betty had found each other again after all those years apart, but now he had not just the one kid, my stepbrother Ronny by his first wife, the missing Marilyn Herman, but his son with Mimi, my brother Danny, already almost four. If my grandmother had her way and my mother had another kid, me for example, the poor guy would never escape.

He looked at his watch, a Speidel my mother had given him as a wedding present. It was three thirty. He could make a few sales calls before the factories closed or he could do what he wanted and surprise Betty at home. She was done with her seven to three shift at the hospital by now, just stepping out of the tub and wrapping herself up inside that pink chenille robe he liked so well, feet up, a cup of hot tea between her hands.

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My father stuck the envelope containing my grandmother's proposition under his arm and walked to his actual car, his beat up '46 Plymouth. What kind of a cheap heel did they take him for? His best girl for a house...what kind of a sap did they think he was? He pulled away from the curb with a screech and headed toward Lovell Street. He felt guilty, but for less than a minute. He'd agreed to nothing. If he wanted to go and visit Betty Shea, why the hell not. He would see who he wanted, when he wanted. At least he would see her for now.