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Written by Paul Auster

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According to family legend, Ferguson's grandfather departed on foot from his native city of Minsk with one hundred rubles sewn into the lining of his jacket, traveled west to Hamburg through Warsaw and Berlin, and then booked passage on a ship called the *Empress of China,* which crossed the Atlantic in rough winter storms and sailed into New York Harbor on the first day of the twentieth century. While waiting to be interviewed by an immigration official at Ellis Island, he struck up a conversation with a fellow Russian Jew. The man said to him: *Forget the name Reznikoff. It won't do you any good here. You need an American name for your new life in America, something with a good American ring to it.* Since English was still an alien tongue to Isaac Reznikoff in 1900, he asked his older, more experienced compatriot for a suggestion. *Tell them you're Rockefeller,* the man said. *You can't go wrong with that.* An hour passed, then another hour, and by the time the nineteen-year-old Reznikoff sat down to be questioned by the immigration official, he had forgotten the name the man had told him to give. *Your name?* the official asked. Slapping his head in frustration, the weary immigrant blurted out in Yiddish, *Ikh hob fargessen (I've forgotten)!* And so it was that Isaac Reznikoff began his new life in America as Ichabod Ferguson.

He had a hard time of it, especially in the beginning, but even after it was no longer the beginning, nothing ever went as he had imagined it would in his adopted country. It was true that he managed to find a wife for himself just after his twenty-sixth birthday, and it was also true

that this wife, Fanny, née Grossman, bore him three robust and healthy sons, but life in America remained a struggle for Ferguson's grandfather from the day he walked off the boat until the night of March 7, 1923, when he met an early, unexpected death at the age of forty-two—gunned down in a holdup at the leather-goods warehouse in Chicago where he had been employed as a night watchman.

No photographs survive of him, but by all accounts he was a large man with a strong back and enormous hands, uneducated, unskilled, the quintessential greenhorn know-nothing. On his first afternoon in New York, he chanced upon a street peddler hawking the reddest, roundest, most perfect apples he had ever seen. Unable to resist, he bought one and eagerly bit into it. Instead of the sweetness he had been anticipating, the taste was bitter and strange. Even worse, the apple was sickeningly soft, and once his teeth had pierced the skin, the insides of the fruit came pouring down the front of his coat in a shower of pale red liquid dotted with scores of pellet-like seeds. Such was his first taste of the New World, his first, never-to-be-forgotten encounter with a Jersey tomato.

Not a Rockefeller, then, but a broad-shouldered roustabout, a Hebrew giant with an absurd name and a pair of restless feet who tried his luck in Manhattan and Brooklyn, in Baltimore and Charleston, in Duluth and Chicago, employed variously as a dockhand, an ordinary seaman on a Great Lakes tanker, an animal handler for a traveling circus, an assembly-line worker in a tin-can factory, a truck driver, a ditchdigger, a night watchman. For all his efforts, he never earned more than nickels and dimes, and therefore the only things poor Ike Ferguson bequeathed to his wife and three boys were the stories he had told them about the vagabond adventures of his youth. In the long run, stories are probably no less valuable than money, but in the short run they have their decided limitations.

The leather-goods company made a small settlement with Fanny to compensate her for her loss, and then she left Chicago with the boys, moving to Newark, New Jersey, at the invitation of her husband's relatives, who gave her the top-floor apartment in their house in the Central Ward for a nominal monthly rent. Her sons were fourteen, twelve, and nine. Louis, the oldest, had long since evolved into Lew. Aaron, the middle child, had taken to calling himself Arnold after one too many schoolyard beatings in Chicago, and Stanley, the nine-year-old,

was commonly known as Sonny. To make ends meet, their mother took in laundry and mended clothes, but before long the boys were contributing to the household finances as well, each one with an after-school job, each one turning over every penny he earned to his mother. Times were tough, and the threat of destitution filled the rooms of the apartment like a dense, blinding fog. There was no escape from fear, and bit by bit all three boys absorbed their mother's dark ontological conclusions about the purpose of life. Either work or starve. Either work or lose the roof over your head. Either work or die. For the Fergusons, the weak-minded notion of All-For-One-And-One-For-All did not exist. In their little world, it was All-For-All—or nothing.

Ferguson was not yet two when his grandmother died, which meant that he retained no conscious memories of her, but according to family legend Fanny was a difficult and erratic woman, prone to violent screaming fits and manic bursts of uncontrollable sobbing, who beat her boys with brooms whenever they misbehaved and was barred from entering certain local shops because of her vociferous haggling over prices. No one knew where she had been born, but word was that she had landed in New York as a fourteen-year-old orphan and had spent several years in a windowless loft on the Lower East Side making hats. Ferguson's father, Stanley, rarely talked about his parents to his son, responding to the boy's questions with only the vaguest of brief, guarded answers, and whatever bits of information young Ferguson managed to learn about his paternal grandparents came almost exclusively from his mother, Rose, by many years the youngest of the three second-generation Ferguson sisters-in-law, who in turn had received most of her information from Millie, Lew's wife, a woman with a taste for gossip who was married to a man far less hidden and far more talkative than either Stanley or Arnold. When Ferguson was eighteen, his mother passed on one of Millie's stories to him, which was presented as no more than a rumor, a piece of unsubstantiated conjecture that might have been true—and then again might not. According to what Lew had told Millie, or what Millie said he had told her, there was a fourth Ferguson child, a girl born three or four years after Stanley, during the period when the family had settled in Duluth and Ike was looking for work as an ordinary seaman on a Great Lakes ship, a stretch of months when the family was living in extreme poverty, and because Ike was gone when Fanny gave birth to the child, and because the

place was Minnesota and the season was winter, an especially frigid winter in an especially cold place, and because the house they lived in was heated by only a single wood-burning stove, and because there was so little money just then that Fanny and the boys had been reduced to living on one meal a day, the thought of having to take care of another child filled her with such dread that she drowned her newborn daughter in the bathtub.

If Stanley said little about his parents to his son, he didn't say much about himself either. This made it difficult for Ferguson to form a clear picture of what his father had been like as a boy, or as a youth, or as a young man, or as anything at all until he married Rose two months after he turned thirty. From offhand remarks that occasionally crossed his father's lips, Ferguson nevertheless managed to gather this much: that Stanley had often been teased and kicked around by his older brothers, that as the youngest of the three and therefore the one who had spent the smallest part of his childhood with a living father, he was the one most attached to Fanny, that he had been a diligent student and was hands down the best athlete of the three brothers, that he had played end on the football team and had run the quarter mile for the track team at Central High, that his gift for electronics had led him to open a small radio-repair shop the summer after he graduated from high school in 1932 (*a hole in the wall on Academy Street in downtown Newark*, as he put it, *hardly bigger than a shoeshine stand*), that his right eye had been injured during one of his mother's broom-swatting rampages when he was eleven (partially blinding him and thus turning him into a 4-F reject during World War II), that he despised the nickname Sonny and dropped it the instant he left school, that he loved to dance and play tennis, that he never said a word against his brothers no matter how stupidly or contemptuously they treated him, that his childhood after-school job was delivering newspapers, that he seriously considered studying law but abandoned the idea for lack of funds, that he was known as a ladies' man in his twenties and dated scores of young Jewish women with no intention of marrying any of them, that he went on several jaunts to Cuba in the thirties when Havana was the sin capital of the Western Hemisphere, that his greatest ambition in life was to become a millionaire, a man as rich as Rockefeller.

Both Lew and Arnold married in their early twenties, each one

determined to break free of Fanny's demented household as quickly as he could, to escape the screaming monarch who had ruled over the Fergusons since their father's death in 1923, but Stanley, still in his teens when his brothers decamped, had no choice but to stay on. He was barely out of high school, after all, but then the years passed, one year after the other for eleven years, and he continued to stay on, unaccountably sharing the same top-floor apartment with Fanny throughout the Depression and the first half of the war, perhaps stuck there through inertia or laziness, perhaps motivated by a sense of duty or guilt toward his mother, or perhaps driven by all of those things, which made it impossible for him to imagine living anywhere else. Both Lew and Arnold fathered children, but Stanley seemed content to go on playing the field, expending the bulk of his energies on building his little business into a bigger business, and because he showed no inclination to marry, even as he danced through his mid-twenties and approached the brink of thirty, there seemed little doubt that he would remain a bachelor for the rest of his life. Then, in October 1943, less than a week after the American Fifth Army captured Naples from the Germans, in the middle of that hopeful period when the war was finally beginning to turn in favor of the Allies, Stanley met the twenty-one-year-old Rose Adler on a blind date in New York City, and the charm of lifelong bachelorhood died a quick and permanent death.

So pretty she was, Ferguson's mother, so fetching with her gray-green eyes and long brown hair, so spontaneous and alert and quick to smile, so deliciously put together throughout the five feet six inches that had been allotted to her person that Stanley, on shaking her hand for the first time, the remote and normally disengaged Stanley, the twenty-nine-year-old Stanley who had never once been burned by the fires of love, felt himself disintegrating in Rose's presence, as if all the air had been vacuumed from his lungs and he would never be able to breathe again.

She, too, was the child of immigrants, a Warsaw-born father and an Odessa-born mother, both of whom had come to America before the age of three. The Adlers were therefore a more assimilated family than the Fergusons, and the voices of Rose's parents had never carried the smallest trace of a foreign accent. They had grown up in Detroit and Hudson, New York, and the Yiddish, Polish, and Russian of their parents had

given way to a fluent, idiomatic English, whereas Stanley's father had struggled to master his second tongue until the day he died, and even now, in 1943, close to half a century removed from her origins in Eastern Europe, his mother still read the *Jewish Daily Forward* instead of the American papers and expressed herself in an odd, mashed-up language her sons referred to as Yinglish, a nearly incomprehensible patois that combined Yiddish and English in nearly every sentence that escaped her mouth. That was one essential difference between Rose and Stanley's progenitors, but even more important than how much or how little their parents had adjusted to American life, there was the question of luck. Rose's parents and grandparents had managed to escape the brutal turns of fortune that had been visited upon the hapless Fergusons, and their history included no murders in warehouse holdups, no poverty to the point of starvation and despair, no infants drowned in bathtubs. The Detroit grandfather had been a tailor, the Hudson grandfather had been a barber, and while cutting clothes and cutting hair were not the sorts of jobs that steered you onto a road toward wealth and worldly success, they provided a steady enough income to put food on the table and clothes on your children's backs.

Rose's father, Benjamin, alternately known as Ben and Benjy, left Detroit the day after he graduated from high school in 1911 and headed for New York, where a distant relative had secured a job for him as a clerk in a downtown clothing store, but young Adler gave up on the job within two weeks, knowing that destiny had not meant for him to squander his short time on earth selling men's socks and underwear, and thirty-two years later, after stints as a door-to-door salesman of household cleaning products, a distributor of gramophone records, a soldier in World War I, a car salesman, and the co-owner of a used-car lot in Brooklyn, he now earned his living as one of three minority-share partners in a Manhattan real estate firm, with an income large enough to have moved his family from Crown Heights in Brooklyn to a new building on West Fifty-eighth Street in 1941, six months before America entered the war.

According to what had been passed down to Rose, her parents met at a Sunday picnic in upstate New York, not far from her mother's house in Hudson, and within half a year (November 1919) the two of them were married. As Rose later confessed to her son, this marriage had

always puzzled her, for she had rarely seen two people less compatible than her parents, and the fact that the marriage endured for over four decades was no doubt one of the great mysteries in the annals of human coupledom. Benjy Adler was a fast-talking smart aleck, a hustling schemer with a hundred plans in his pockets, a teller of jokes, a man on the make who always hogged the center of attention, and there he was at that Sunday afternoon picnic in upstate New York falling for a shy wallflower of a woman named Emma Bromowitz, a round, large-bosomed girl of twenty-three with the palest of white skins and a crown of voluminous red hair, so virginal, so inexperienced, so Victorian in her affect that one had only to look at her to conclude that her lips had not once been touched by the lips of a man. It made no sense that they should have married, every sign indicated that they were doomed to a life of conflict and misunderstanding, but marry they did, and even though Benjy had trouble staying faithful to Emma after their daughters were born (Mildred in 1920, Rose in 1922), he held fast to her in his heart, and she, though wronged again and again, could never bring herself to turn against him.

Rose adored her older sister, but it can't be said that the opposite was true, for the first-born Mildred had naturally accepted her God-given place as princess of the household, and the small rival who had come upon the scene would have to be taught—again and again if necessary—that there was only one throne in the Adler apartment on Franklin Avenue, one throne and one princess, and any attempt to usurp that throne would be met by a declaration of war. That isn't to say that Mildred was overtly hostile to Rose, but her kindnesses were measured out in teaspoons, no more than so much kindness per minute or hour or month, and always granted with a touch of haughty condescension, as befitted a person of her royal standing. Cold and circumspect Mildred; warm-hearted, sloppy Rose. By the time the girls were twelve and ten, it was already clear that Mildred had an exceptional mind, that her success at school was the result not just of hard work but of superior intellectual gifts, and while Rose was bright enough and earned perfectly respectable grades, she was no more than an also-ran when compared to her sister. Without understanding her motives, without once consciously thinking about it or formulating a plan, Rose gradually stopped competing on Mildred's terms, for she instinctively knew that trying to

emulate her sister could only end in failure, and therefore, if there was to be any happiness for her, she would have to strike out on a different path.

She found the solution in work, in trying to establish a place for herself by earning her own money, and once she turned fourteen and was old enough to apply for working papers, she found her first job, which quickly led to a series of other jobs, and by the time she was sixteen she was fully employed by day and going to high school at night. Let Mildred withdraw into the cloister of her book-lined brain, let her float off to college and read every book written in the past two thousand years, but what Rose wanted, and what Rose belonged to, was the real world, the rush and clamor of the New York streets, the sense of standing up for herself and making her own way. Like the plucky, quick-thinking heroines in the films she saw two and three times a week, the endless brigade of studio pictures starring Claudette Colbert, Barbara Stanwyck, Ginger Rogers, Joan Blondell, Rosalind Russell, and Jean Arthur, she took on the role of young, determined career girl and embraced it as if she were living in a film of her own, *The Rose Adler Story,* that long, infinitely complex movie that was still in its first reel but promised great things in the years to come.

When she met Stanley in October 1943, she had been employed for the past two years by a portrait photographer named Emanuel Schneiderman, whose studio was located on West Twenty-seventh Street near Sixth Avenue. Rose had started out as a receptionist-secretary-bookkeeper, but when Schneiderman's photographic assistant joined the army in June 1942, Rose replaced him. Old Schneiderman was in his mid-sixties by then, a German-Jewish immigrant who had come to New York with his wife and two sons after World War I, a moody man given to fits of crankiness and bluntly insulting language, but over time he had conceived a grudging fondness for the beautiful Rose, and because he was aware of how attentively she had been observing him at work since her first days at the studio, he decided to take her on as an apprentice-assistant and teach her what he knew about cameras, lighting, and developing film—the entire art and craft of his business. For Rose, who until then had never quite known where she was headed, who had worked at various office jobs for the wages she earned but little else, that is, without any hope of inner satisfaction, it felt as if she had suddenly chanced upon a calling—not just another job, but a

new way of being in the world: looking into the faces of others, every day more faces, every morning and afternoon different faces, each face different from all the other faces, and it wasn't long before Rose understood that she loved this work of looking at others and that she would never, could never, grow tired of it.

Stanley was now working in collaboration with his brothers, both of whom had also been exempted from military service (flat feet and poor eyesight), and after several reinventions and expansions, the small radio-repair shop started in 1932 had grown into a sizable furniture-appliance store on Springfield Avenue that featured all the lures and gimmicks of contemporary American retail: long-term installment plans, buy-two-get-one-free offers, semi-annual blowout sales, a newlywed consultation service, and Flag Day specials. Arnold had been the first to come in with him, the blundering, not-too-bright middle brother who had lost several jobs in sales and was having a rough go of it trying to support his wife, Joan, and their three kids, and a couple of years after that Lew joined the fold, not because he had any interest in furniture or appliances but because Stanley had just paid off his gambling debts for the second time in five years and had forced him to join the business as a show of good faith and contrition, with the understanding that any reluctance on Lew's part would entail never receiving another penny from him for the rest of his life. Thus was born the enterprise known as 3 Brothers Home World, which was essentially under the direction of one brother, Stanley, the youngest and most ambitious of Fanny's sons, who, from some perverse but unassailable conviction that family loyalty trumped all other human attributes, had willingly taken on the burden of carrying his two failed siblings, who expressed their gratitude to him by repeatedly showing up late for work, filching tens and twenties from the cash register whenever their pockets were empty, and, in the warm months, taking off to play golf after lunch. If Stanley was upset by their actions, he never complained, for the laws of the universe prohibited complaining about one's brothers, and even if Home World's profits were somewhat lower than they would have been without the expense of Lew and Arnold's salaries, the business was well in the black, and once the war ended in another year or two, the picture would be even brighter, for television would be coming in then, and the brothers would be the first boys on the block to sell them. No, Stanley wasn't a rich man yet, but for some time now his income had

been growing steadily, and when he met Rose on that October night in 1943, he was certain the best days were still to come.

Unlike Stanley, Rose had already been burned by the fires of a passionate love. If not for the war, which had taken that love from her, the two of them never would have met, for she would already have been married to someone else long before that night in October, but the young man she had been engaged to, David Raskin, the Brooklyn-born future doctor who had entered her life when she was seventeen, had been killed in a freak explosion during a basic training exercise at Fort Benning in Georgia. The news had come in August 1942, and for many months after that Rose had been in mourning, by turns numb and resentful, hollowed out, hopeless, half-mad with sorrow, cursing the war as she shrieked into her pillow at night, unable to come to terms with the fact that David would never touch her again. The only thing that kept her going during those months was her work with Schneiderman, which brought some solace, some pleasure, some reason for getting out of bed in the morning, but she had no appetite for socializing anymore and no interest in meeting other men, reducing her life to a bare routine of job, home, and trips to the movies with her friend Nancy Fein. Bit by bit, however, especially in the past two or three months, Rose had gradually begun to resemble herself again, rediscovering that food had a taste when you put it in your mouth, for example, and that when rain fell on the city it didn't fall only on her, that every man, woman, and child had to jump across the same puddles she did. No, she would never recover from David's death, he would always be the secret ghost who walked beside her as she stumbled into the future, but twenty-one was too young to turn your back on the world, and unless she made an effort to reenter that world, she knew she would crumple up and die.

It was Nancy Fein who set up the blind date for her with Stanley, caustic, wise-cracking Nancy of the big teeth and skinny arms, who had been Rose's best friend since their childhood days together in Crown Heights. Nancy had met Stanley at a weekend dance in the Catskills, one of those crowded bashes at Brown's Hotel for the unattached-but-actively-seeking young Jews from the city, *the kosher meat market*, as Nancy put it, and while Nancy herself was not actively seeking (she was engaged to a soldier stationed in the Pacific who at last word was still among the living), she had gone along with a friend for the fun of it and had wound up dancing a couple of times with *a guy from Newark named*

Stanley. He wanted to see her again, Nancy said, but after she told him she had already promised her virginity to someone else, he smiled, made a neat little comic bow, and was about to walk away when she started telling him about her friend Rose, Rose Adler, *the prettiest girl this side of the Danube River and the nicest person this side of anywhere*. Such were Nancy's genuine feelings about Rose, and when Stanley understood that she meant what she was saying, he let her know he would like to meet this friend of hers. Nancy apologized to Rose for having brought up her name, but Rose merely shrugged, knowing that Nancy had meant no harm, and then she asked: Well, what is he like? In Nancy's words, Stanley Ferguson was about six feet tall, good-looking, a bit old, almost thirty being old to her twenty-one-year-old eyes, in business for himself and apparently doing well, charming, polite, and a very good dancer. Once Rose had absorbed this information, she paused for a few moments, pondering whether she was up to the challenge of a blind date, and then, in the middle of these reflections, it suddenly occurred to her that David had been dead for more than a year. Like it or not, the moment had come to test the waters again. She looked at Nancy and said: I suppose I should see this Stanley Ferguson, don't you think?

Years later, when Rose told her son about the events of that night, she left out the name of the restaurant where she and Stanley met for dinner. Nevertheless, if memory hadn't failed him, Ferguson believed it was somewhere in midtown Manhattan, East Side or West Side unknown, but an elegant place with white tablecloths and bow-tied waiters in short black jackets, which meant that Stanley had consciously set out to impress her, to prove that he could afford extravagances like this one whenever he chose to, and yes, she found him physically attractive, she was struck by how light he was on his feet, by the grace and fluidity of his body in motion, but also his hands, the size and strength of his hands, she noticed that at once, and the placid, unaggressive eyes that never stopped looking at her, brown eyes, neither large nor small, and the thick black brows above them. Unaware of the monumental impact she had made on her stunned dinner companion, the handshake that had led to the utter disintegration of Stanley's inner being, she was a bit thrown by how little he said during the early part of the meal, and therefore she took him to be an inordinately shy person, which wasn't strictly the case. Because she was nervous herself, and because Stanley

continued to sit there mostly in silence, she wound up talking for the two of them, which is to say, she talked too much, and as the minutes ticked by she grew more and more appalled with herself for rattling on like a brainless chatterbox, bragging about her sister, for example, and telling him what a brilliant student Mildred was, summa cum laude from Hunter last June and now enrolled in the graduate program at Columbia, the only woman in the English Department, one of only three Jews, imagine how proud the family was, and no sooner did she mention the family than she was on to her Uncle Archie, her father's younger brother, Archie Adler, the keyboard man with the Downtown Quintet, currently playing at Moe's Hideout on Fifty-second Street, and how inspiring it was to have a musician in the family, an artist, a renegade who thought about other things besides making money, yes, she loved her Uncle Archie, he was far and away her favorite relative, and then, inevitably, she began talking about her work with Schneiderman, enumerating all the things he had taught her in the past year and a half, grumpy, foul-mouthed Schneiderman, who would take her to the Bowery on Sunday afternoons to hunt for old winos and bums, broken creatures with their white beards and long white hair, magnificent heads, the heads of ancient prophets and kings, and Schneiderman would give these men money to come to the studio to pose for him, for the most part in costumes, the old men dressed up in turbans and gowns and velvet robes, in the same way Rembrandt had dressed up the down-and-outs of seventeenth-century Amsterdam, and that was the light they used with these men, Rembrandt's light, light and dark together, deep shadow, all shadow with the merest touch of light, and by now Schneiderman had enough faith in her to allow her to set up the lighting on her own, she had made several dozen of these portraits by herself, and then she used the word *chiaroscuro,* and she understood that Stanley had no idea what she was talking about, that she could have been talking Japanese for all the sense it made to him, but still he went on looking at her, listening to her, rapt and silent, thunderstruck.

It was a disgraceful performance, she felt, an embarrassment. Fortunately, the monologue was interrupted by the arrival of the main course, which gave her a few moments to collect her thoughts, and by the time they started in on the food (dishes unknown), she was calm enough to realize that her uncharacteristic rambling had been a screen to protect her from talking about David, for that was the one subject she

didn't want to talk about, would refuse to talk about, and therefore she had gone to great and ridiculous lengths to avoid exposing her wound. Stanley Ferguson had nothing to do with it. He seemed to be a decent man, and it wasn't his fault that he had been rejected by the army, that he was sitting in this restaurant dressed in finely tailored civilian clothes rather than tramping through the mud of some distant battlefield or getting himself blown to bits during a basic training exercise. No, it wasn't his fault, and she would be a heartless person to blame him for having been spared, and yet how not to make the comparison, how not to wonder why this man should be alive and David should be dead?

For all that, the dinner went reasonably well. Once Stanley had recovered from his initial shock and was able to breathe again, he proved to be an amiable sort, not full of himself as so many men were, but attentive and well mannered, less than a blazing wit, perhaps, but someone receptive to humor, who laughed when she said something even remotely funny, and when he spoke about his work and his plans for the future, it was clear to Rose that there was something solid about him, dependable. Too bad that he was a businessman with no interest in Rembrandt or photography, but at least he was pro-FDR (essential) and seemed honest enough to admit that he knew little or nothing about many things, including seventeenth-century painting and the art of taking pictures. She liked him. She found him pleasant to be with, but even though he possessed all or most of the qualities of a so-called good catch, she knew she could never fall for him in the way Nancy hoped she would. After the meal in the restaurant, they drifted along the midtown sidewalks for half an hour, stopped in for a drink at Moe's Hideout, where they waved to Uncle Archie as he worked the keys of his piano (he responded with a fat smile and a wink), and then Stanley walked her back to her parents' apartment on West Fifty-eighth Street. He rode upstairs in the elevator with her, but she didn't ask him in. Extending her arm for a good-night handshake (deftly warding off any chance of a preemptive kiss), she thanked him for the lovely evening and then turned around, unlocked the door, and went into the apartment, almost certain she would never see him again.

It was otherwise with Stanley, of course, it had been otherwise with him since the first moment of that first date, and because he knew nothing about David Raskin and Rose's grieving heart, he figured he would have to act quickly, for a girl like Rose was not someone who

would remain unattached for long, men were no doubt swarming all around her, she was irresistible, every particle of her cried out grace and beauty and goodness, and for the first time in his life Stanley set out to do the impossible, to defeat the ever-expanding horde of Rose's suitors and win her for himself, since this was the woman he had decided he must marry, and if it wasn't Rose who became his wife, it would be no one.

Over the next four months he called her often, not often enough to become a pest but regularly, persistently, with unabated focus and determination, outflanking his imagined rivals with what he imagined was strategic cunning, but the truth was that there were no serious rivals in the picture, just two or three other men Nancy had fixed her up with after she met Stanley in October, but one by one Rose had found those others wanting, had turned down further invitations from them, and was continuing to bide her time, which meant that Stanley was a knight charging through a vacant field, even as he saw phantom enemies everywhere around him. Rose's feelings about him hadn't changed, but she preferred Stanley's company to the loneliness of her room or listening to the radio with her parents after dinner, and so she seldom refused when he asked her out for the evening, accepting offers to go ice-skating, bowling, dancing (yes, he was a terrific dancer), to attend a Beethoven concert at Carnegie Hall, two Broadway musicals, and several films. She quickly learned that dramas had no effect on Stanley (he dozed off during *The Song of Bernadette* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*), but his eyes invariably stayed open for comedies, *The More the Merrier*, for example, a tasty little cream puff about the wartime housing shortage in Washington that made them both laugh, starring Joel McCrea (so handsome) and Jean Arthur (one of Rose's favorites), but it was something said by one of the other actors that made the strongest impression on her, a line delivered by Charles Coburn, playing a sort of Cupid figure in the guise of an old American fatso, which he repeated again and again throughout the movie: *a high type, clean-cut, nice young fellow*—as if it were an incantation extolling the virtues of the kind of husband every woman should want. Stanley Ferguson was clean-cut, nice, and still relatively young, and if *high type* meant upstanding, gracious, and law-abiding, he was all of those things as well, but Rose was by no means sure that these were the virtues she was looking for, not after the love she had shared with the intense and volatile David Raskin, which had been an

exhausting love at times, but vivid and always unexpected in its continually mutating forms, whereas Stanley seemed so mild and predictable, so safe, and she wondered if such steadiness of character was finally a virtue or a flaw.

On the other hand, he didn't maul her, and he didn't demand kisses from her that he knew she wasn't willing to give, even though it was manifestly clear by now that he was infatuated with her and that each time they were together he had to struggle not to touch her, kiss her, maul her.

On the other hand, when she told him how beautiful she thought Ingrid Bergman was, he responded with a dismissive laugh, looked her in the eye, and said, with the calmest of calm certainties, that Ingrid Bergman couldn't hold a candle to her.

On the other hand, there was the cold day in late November when he showed up unannounced at Schneiderman's studio and asked to have his portrait taken—not by Schneiderman but by her.

On the other hand, her parents approved of him, Schneiderman approved of him, and even Mildred, the Duchess of Snob Hall, expressed her favorable opinion by announcing that Rose could have done a lot worse.

On the other hand, he did have his inspired moments, inexplicable jags of rambunctiousness when something in him was temporarily set free and he turned into a joking, daredevil prankster, as, for example, the night when he showed off for her in the kitchen of her parents' apartment by juggling three raw eggs, keeping them aloft in a dazzle of speed and precision for a good two minutes before one of them went splat on the floor, at which point he let the other two go splat on purpose, apologizing for the mess with a silent comedian's shrug and a one-word declaration: Whoops.

They saw each other once or twice a week over the course of those four months, and even if Rose couldn't give her heart to Stanley in the way he had given his heart to her, she was grateful to him for having picked her up from the ground and set her on her feet again. All things being equal, she would have been content to go on as they were for some time, but just as she was beginning to feel comfortable with him, to enjoy the game they were playing together, Stanley abruptly changed the rules.

It was late January 1944. In Russia, the nine-hundred-day siege of

Leningrad had just ended; in Italy, the Allies were pinned down by the Germans at Monte Cassino; in the Pacific, American troops were about to launch an assault on the Marshall Islands; and on the home front, at the edge of Central Park in New York City, Stanley was proposing marriage to Rose. A bright winter sun was burning overhead, the cloudless sky was a deep and glittering shade of blue, the crystalline blue that engulfs New York only on certain days in January, and on that sun-filled Sunday afternoon thousands of miles from the bloodshed and slaughter of the interminable war, Stanley was telling her that it had to be marriage or nothing, that he worshipped her, that he had never felt this way about anyone, that the entire shape of his future depended on her, and if she turned him down, he would never see her again, the thought of seeing her again would simply be too much for him, and therefore he would disappear from her life for good.

She asked him for a week. It was all so sudden, she said, so unexpected, she needed a little time to think it over. Of course, Stanley said, take a week to think it over, he would call her next Sunday, one week from today, and then, just before they parted, standing at the Fifty-ninth Street entrance to the park, they kissed for the first time, and for the first time since they had met, Rose saw tears glistening in Stanley's eyes.

The outcome, of course, was written long ago. Not only does it appear as an entry in the all-inclusive, authorized edition of *The Book of Terrestrial Life*, but it can also be found in the Manhattan Hall of Records, where the ledger informs us that Rose Adler and Stanley Ferguson were married on April 6, 1944, exactly two months before the Allied invasion of Normandy. We know what Rose decided, then, but how and why she came to her decision was a complex matter. Numerous elements were involved, each one working in concert with and in opposition to the others, and because she was of two minds about all of them, it turned out to be a trying, tormented week for Ferguson's future mother. First: Knowing Stanley to be a man of his word, she recoiled at the thought of never seeing him again. For better or worse, after Nancy he was now her best friend. Second: She was already twenty-one, still young enough to be considered young but not as young as most brides were back then, since it wasn't uncommon for girls to put on wedding gowns at eighteen or nineteen, and the last thing Rose wanted for herself was to remain unmarried. Third: No, she didn't love Stanley, but it was a proven fact that not all love-marriages turned into successful

marriages, and according to what she had read somewhere, the arranged marriages prevalent in traditional foreign cultures were no more or less happy than marriages in the West. Fourth: No, she didn't love Stanley, but the truth was that she couldn't love anyone, not with the Big Love she had felt for David, since Big Love comes only once in a person's lifetime, and therefore she would have to accept something less than ideal if she didn't want to spend the rest of her days alone. Fifth: There was nothing about Stanley that annoyed her or disgusted her. The idea of having sex with him did not repel her. Sixth: He loved her madly and treated her with kindness and respect. Seventh: In a hypothetical discussion about marriage with him just two weeks earlier, he had told her that women should be free to pursue their own interests, that their lives should not revolve exclusively around their husbands. Was he talking about work? she asked. Yes, work, he answered—among other things. Which meant that marrying Stanley would not entail giving up Schneiderman, that she could go on with the job of learning how to become a photographer. Eighth: No, she didn't love Stanley. Ninth: There were many things about him that she admired, there was no question that the good in him far outweighed the not-so-good, but why did he keep falling asleep at the movies? Was he tired from working long hours at his store, or did those drooping eyelids suggest some lack of connection to the world of feelings? Tenth: Newark! Would it be possible to live there? Eleventh: Newark was definitely a problem. Twelfth: It was time for her to leave her parents. She was too old to be in that apartment now, and much as she cared for her mother and father, she despised them both for their hypocrisy—her father for his unrepentant skirt chasing, her mother for pretending to ignore it. Just the other day, quite by accident, as she was walking to lunch at the automat near Schneiderman's studio, she had caught sight of her father walking arm in arm with a woman she had never seen before, a woman fifteen or twenty years younger than he was, and she had felt so sickened and angry that she had wanted to run up to her father and punch him in the face. Thirteenth: If she married Stanley, she would finally beat Mildred at something, even if it wasn't clear that Mildred had any interest in marriage. For now, her sister seemed happy enough bouncing from one brief affair to the next. Good for Mildred, but Rose had no interest in living like that. Fourteenth: Stanley made money, and from the way things looked now, he would be making

more money as time went on. There was comfort in that thought, but also some anxiety. In order to make money, you had to think about money all the time. Would it be possible to live with a man whose sole preoccupation was his bank account? Fifteenth: Stanley thought she was the most beautiful woman in New York. She knew that wasn't true, but she had no doubt that Stanley honestly believed it. Sixteenth: There was no one else on the horizon. Even if Stanley could never be another David, he was vastly superior to the lot of sniveling whiners Nancy had sent her way. At least Stanley was a grown-up. At least Stanley never complained. Seventeenth: Stanley was a Jew in the same way she was a Jew, a loyal member of the tribe but with no interest in practicing religion or swearing allegiance to God, which would mean a life unencumbered by ritual and superstition, nothing more than presents at Hanukkah, matzo and the four questions once a year in the spring, circumcision for a boy if they ever had a boy, but no prayers, no synagogues, no pretending to believe in what she didn't believe, in what they didn't believe. Eighteenth: No, she didn't love Stanley, but Stanley loved her. Perhaps that would be enough to start with, a first step. After that, who could say?

They spent their honeymoon at a lakeside resort in the Adirondacks, a week-long initiation into the secrets of conjugal life, short but endless, since each moment seemed to have been given the weight of an hour or a day from the sheer newness of everything they were going through, a period of nerves and skittish adjustments, of small victories and intimate revelations, during which Stanley gave Rose her first driving lessons and taught her the rudiments of tennis, and then they returned to Newark and settled into the apartment where they would spend the early years of their marriage, a two-bedroom flat on Van Velsor Place in the Weequahic section of town. Schneiderman's wedding present to her had been a one-month paid vacation, and in the three weeks before she went back to her job, Rose frantically taught herself how to cook, depending exclusively on the sturdy old manual of American kitchen science her mother had given her on her birthday, *The Settlement Cook Book*, which bore the subtitle *The Way to a Man's Heart*, a six-hundred-and-twenty-three-page volume compiled by Mrs. Simon Kander that included "Tested Recipes from the Milwaukee Public School Kitchens, Girls Trades and Technical High School, Authoritative Dieticians, and Experienced Housewives." There were numerous

disasters in the beginning, but Rose had always been a fast learner, and whenever she set out to accomplish something she generally wound up doing it with a fair amount of success, but even in those early days of trial and error, of overdone meats and flaccid vegetables, of gooey pies and lumpy mashed potatoes, Stanley never said a negative word to her. No matter how wretched the meal she served him, he would calmly plunge every morsel of it into his mouth, chew with apparent pleasure, and then, every night, every night without fail, look up and tell her how delicious it was. Rose sometimes wondered if Stanley wasn't teasing her, or if he wasn't too distracted to notice what she had given him, but as with the food she cooked, so it was with everything else that concerned their life together, and once Rose began to pay attention, that is, to tote up all the instances of potential discord between them, she came to the startling, altogether unimaginable conclusion that *Stanley never criticized her.* For him, she was a perfect being, a perfect woman, a perfect wife, and therefore, as in a theological proposition that asserted the inevitable existence of God, everything she did and said and thought was necessarily perfect, necessarily had to be perfect. After sharing a bedroom with Mildred for most of her life, the same Mildred who had put locks on her bureau drawers to prevent her younger sister from borrowing her clothes, the same Mildred who had called her *empty-headed* for going to the movies so often, she now got to share a bedroom with a man who thought she was perfect, and that man, moreover, in that same bedroom, was rapidly learning how to maul her in all the ways she liked best.

Newark was a bore, but the apartment was roomier and brighter than her parents' place across the river, and all the furnishings were new (the best that 3 Brothers Home World had to offer, which wasn't the very best, perhaps, but good enough for the time being), and once she started working for Schneiderman again, the city remained a fundamental part of her life, dear, dirty, devouring New York, the capital of human faces, the horizontal Babel of human tongues. The daily commute consisted of a slow bus to the train, a twelve-minute ride from one Penn Station to the other, and then a short walk to Schneiderman's studio, but she didn't mind the travel, not when there were so many people to look at, and she especially loved the moment when the train pulled into New York and stopped, which was always followed by a brief pause, as if the world were holding its breath in silent anticipation,

and then the doors would open and everyone would come rushing out, car after car disgorging passengers onto the suddenly crowded platform, and she reveled in the speed and single-mindedness of that crowd, everyone charging off in the same direction, and she a part of it, in the middle of it, on her way to work along with everyone else. It made her feel independent, attached to Stanley but at the same time on her own, which was a new feeling, a good feeling, and as she walked up the ramp and joined yet another crowd in the open air, she would head toward West Twenty-seventh Street imagining the different people who would be coming to the studio that day, the mothers and fathers with their newborn children, the little boys in their baseball uniforms, the ancient couples sitting side by side for their fortieth- or fiftieth-anniversary portrait, the grinning girls in their caps and gowns, the women from the women's clubs, the men from the men's clubs, the rookie policemen in their dress blues, and of course the soldiers, always more and more soldiers, sometimes with their wives or girlfriends or parents, but mostly alone, solitary soldiers on leave in New York, or home from the front, or about to go off somewhere to kill or be killed, and she prayed for them all, prayed they would all return with their limbs attached to still-breathing bodies, prayed, every morning as she walked from Penn Station to West Twenty-seventh Street, that the war would soon be over.

There were no serious regrets, then, no punishing second thoughts about having accepted Stanley's proposal, but the marriage nevertheless came with certain drawbacks, none of which could be directly blamed on Stanley, but still, by marrying him she had also married into his family, and every time she was thrown together with that half-cocked trio of misfits, she wondered how Stanley had managed to survive his boyhood without becoming as crazy as they were. His mother first of all, the still energetic Fanny Ferguson, in her mid- to late sixties by then, who stood no taller than five-two or five-two-and-a-half, a white-haired sourpuss of scowling mien and fidgety watchfulness, muttering to herself as she sat alone on the couch at family gatherings, alone because no one dared go near her, especially her five grandchildren, ages six to eleven, who seemed positively scared to death of her, for Fanny thought nothing of whacking them on the head whenever they stepped out of line (if infractions such as laughing, shrieking,

jumping up and down, bumping into furniture, and burping loudly could be considered out of line), and when she couldn't get close enough to deliver a whack, she would yell at them in a voice loud enough to rattle the lampshades. The first time Rose met her, Fanny pinched her cheek (hard enough for it to hurt) and declared her to be a fine-looking girl. Then she proceeded to ignore her for the rest of the visit, as she had continued to do throughout every visit since then, with no more interaction between them than the blank formalities of saying hello and good-bye, but because Fanny demonstrated the same indifference toward her two other daughters-in-law, Millie and Joan, Rose didn't take it personally. Fanny cared only about her sons, the sons who supported her and dutifully showed up at her house every Friday night for dinner, but the women her sons had married were no more than shadows to her, and most of the time she had trouble remembering their names. None of this particularly bothered Rose, whose dealings with Fanny were sparse and irregular, but Stanley's brothers were a different story, since they worked for him and he saw them every day, and once she had absorbed the stunning fact that they were two of the most beautiful men she had ever seen, male gods who resembled Errol Flynn (Lew) and Cary Grant (Arnold), she began to develop an intense dislike for both of them. They were shallow and dishonest, she felt, the older Lew not unintelligent but crippled by his penchant for gambling on football and baseball games and the younger Arnold all but semi-moronic, a glassy-eyed letch who drank too much and never passed up an opportunity to touch her arms and shoulders, to squeeze her arms and shoulders, who called her *Doll* and *Babe* and *Beautiful* and filled her with an ever-deepening revulsion. She hated it that Stanley had given them jobs at the store, and she hated how they made fun of him behind his back and sometimes even to his face, the good Stanley, who was a hundred times the man they were, and yet Stanley pretended not to notice, he put up with their meanness and laziness and mockery without a word of protest, showing such forbearance that Rose wondered if she hadn't inadvertently married a saint, one of those rare souls who never thought ill of anyone, and then again, she reasoned, perhaps he was no more than a pushover, someone who had never learned how to stand up for himself and fight. With little or no help from his brothers, he had built 3 Brothers Home World into a profitable concern, a large, fluorescent-lit

emporium of armchairs and radios, of dining tables and iceboxes, of bedroom suites and Waring blenders, a high-volume, mid-quality operation that served a clientele with mid-level and low incomes, a wondrous, twentieth-century agora in its way, but after several visits in the weeks following the honeymoon, Rose had stopped going to the store—not just because she was working again, but because she felt uneasy there, unhappy, entirely out of place among Stanley's brothers.

Still, her disappointment in the family was softened somewhat by the brothers' wives and children, the Fergusons who were not really Fergusons, the ones who had not lived through the calamities that had befallen Ike and Fanny and their offspring, and Rose quickly found herself with two new friends in Millie and Joan. Both women were years older than she was (thirty-four and thirty-two), but they welcomed her into the tribe as an equal member, according her full status on the day of her wedding, which meant, among other things, that she had been given the right to be let in on all sister-in-law secrets. Rose was particularly impressed by the fast-talking, chain-smoking Millie, a woman so slender that she seemed to have wires under her skin rather than bones, a smart and opinionated person who understood what kind of man she had married in Lew, but no matter how loyal she remained to her scheming, profligate husband, that didn't prevent her from issuing a steady flow of ironic cracks about him, such clever, acerbic asides that Rose sometimes had to leave the room for fear of laughing too hard. Next to Millie, Joan was something of a simpleton, but so warm-hearted and generous that it still hadn't occurred to her that she was married to a dunce, and yet, what a good mother she was, Rose felt, so tender and patient and caring, whereas Millie's sharp tongue often led her into tangles with her kids, who were less well behaved than Joan's. Millie's two were eleven-year-old Andrew and nine-year-old Alice, Joan's three were ten-year-old Jack, eight-year-old Francie, and six-year-old Ruth. They all appealed to Rose in their different ways, except for Andrew perhaps, who seemed to have a rough and belligerent side to him, which led to frequent scoldings from Millie for punching his little sister, but the one Rose liked best was Francie, unmistakably it was Francie, she simply couldn't help herself, the child was so beautiful, so exceptionally alive, and when they met it was as if they fell in love with each other at first sight, with the tall, auburn-haired Francie rushing into Rose's arms and saying, Aunt Rose, my new Aunt Rose, you're so pretty, so

pretty, so very pretty, and now we get to be friends forever. So it began, and so it continued afterward, each one enthralled with the other, and there were few things better in this world, Rose felt, than to have Francie crawl into her lap when they were all sitting around the table and start talking to her about school, or the last book she had read, or the friend who had said something nasty to her, or the dress her mother was going to buy for her birthday. The little girl would relax into the cushioning softness of Rose's body, and as she talked Rose would stroke her head or her cheek or her back, and before long Rose would feel she was floating, that the two of them had left the room and the house and the street and were floating through the sky together. Yes, those family gatherings could be gruesome affairs, but there were compensations as well, unexpected little miracles that occurred at the unlikeliest moments, for the gods were irrational, Rose decided, and they bestowed their gifts on us when and where they would.

Rose wanted to be a mother, to give birth to a child, to be carrying a child, to have a second heart beating inside her. Nothing counted as much as that, not even her work with Schneiderman, not even the long-range and as yet ill-defined plan of one day striking out on her own as a photographer, of opening a studio with her name on the sign above the front door. Those ambitions meant nothing when she compared them to the simple desire to bring a new person into the world, her own son or daughter, her own baby, and to be a mother to that person for the rest of her life. Stanley did his part, making love to her without protection and impregnating her three times in the first eighteen months of their marriage, but three times Rose miscarried, three times in her third month of pregnancy, and when they celebrated their second wedding anniversary in April 1946, they were still childless.

The doctors said there was nothing wrong with her, that she was in good health and would eventually carry a child to term, but these losses weighed heavily on Rose, and as one unborn baby succeeded another, as one failure led to the next, she began to feel that her very womanhood was being stolen from her. She wept for days after each debacle, wept as she hadn't wept since the months that had followed David's death, and the normally optimistic Rose, the ever-resilient and clear-eyed Rose, would tumble into a despond of morbid self-pity and grief. If not for Stanley, there was no telling how far she might have fallen, but he remained steadfast and composed, unflustered by her

tears, and after each lost baby he would assure her it was only a temporary setback and all would come out right in the end. She felt so close to him when he talked to her like that, so grateful to him for his kindness, so enormously well loved. She didn't believe a word he said, of course—how could she believe him when all the evidence declared he was wrong?—but it soothed her to be told such comforting lies. Still, she was puzzled by how calmly he accepted the announcement of each miscarriage, by how untormented he was by the brutal, bloody expulsions of his unborn children from her body. Was it possible, she wondered, that Stanley didn't share her desire to have children? Perhaps he didn't even know he felt that way, but what if he secretly wanted things to go on as they were and continue to have her all to himself, a wife with no divided loyalties, no split in her affections between child and father? She never dared voice these thoughts to Stanley, would never have dreamed of insulting him with such unfounded suspicions, but the doubt persisted in her, and she asked herself if Stanley hadn't been too good at fulfilling his roles as son, brother, and husband, and if that were the case, perhaps there was no room left in him for fatherhood.

On May 5, 1945, three days before the war in Europe ended, Uncle Archie dropped dead of a heart attack. He was forty-nine years old, a grotesquely young age for anyone to die, and to make the circumstances even more grotesque, the funeral was held on V-E Day, which meant that after the benumbed Adler family left the cemetery and returned to Archie's apartment on Flatbush Avenue in Brooklyn, people were dancing in the streets of the neighborhood, blasting the horns of their cars, and shouting in raucous merriment to celebrate the end of one half of the war. The noise went on for hours as Archie's wife, Pearl, and their twin nineteen-year-old daughters, Betty and Charlotte, and Rose's parents and sister, and Rose and Stanley, and the four surviving members of the Downtown Quintet, and a dozen or more friends, relatives, and neighbors sat and stood in the silent apartment with the shades drawn. The good news they had all been looking forward to for so long seemed to mock the horror of Archie's death, and the jubilant, singing voices outside felt like a heartless desecration, as if the entire borough of Brooklyn were dancing on Archie's grave. It was an afternoon Rose would never forget. Not just because of her own sorrow, which was memorable enough, but because Mildred grew so distraught that she drank seven scotches and passed out on the sofa, and because it was

the first time in her life that she saw her father break down and cry. It was also the afternoon when Rose told herself that if she was ever lucky enough to have a son, she would name him after Archie.

The big bombs fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August, the other half of the war came to an end, and in mid-1946, two months after Rose's second wedding anniversary, Schneiderman told her that he planned to retire soon and was looking for someone to buy his business. Given the progress she had made in their years together, he said, given that she had turned herself into a skilled and competent photographer by now, he wondered if she had any interest in taking over for him. It was the highest compliment he had ever paid her. Flattered as she was, however, Rose knew the timing was wrong, for she and Stanley had been putting aside all their extra money for the past year in order to buy a house in the suburbs, a one-family house with a backyard and trees and a two-car garage, and they couldn't afford to buy both the house and the studio. She told Schneiderman she would have to talk it over with her husband, which she promptly did that evening after dinner, fully expecting Stanley to tell her it was out of the question, but he ambushed her by saying the choice was hers, that if she was willing to give up the idea of the house, she could have the studio as long as the cost was something they could manage. Rose was flabbergasted. She knew that Stanley had set his heart on buying the house, and suddenly he was telling her the apartment was perfectly all right, that he wouldn't mind living there for another few years, all of which was untrue, and because he was lying to her like this, lying because he adored her and wanted her to have whatever she wanted, something changed in Rose that evening, and she understood she was beginning to love Stanley, truly love him, and if life continued to go on in this way much longer, it might even be possible for her to fall in love with him, to be struck down by an impossible second Big Love.

Let's not be rash, she said. I've been dreaming about that house, too, and jumping from assistant to boss is a big step. I'm not sure I'm ready to handle it. Can we think it over for a while?

Stanley agreed to think it over for a while. When she saw Schneiderman at work the next morning, he, too, agreed to let her think it over for a while, and ten days after she started thinking, she discovered she was pregnant again.

For the past several months, she had been seeing a new doctor, a

man she trusted named Seymour Jacobs, a good and intelligent doctor, she felt, who listened to her carefully and didn't rush to conclusions, and because of her past history with the three spontaneous miscarriages, Jacobs urged her to stop commuting to New York every day, to stop working for the length of her pregnancy, and to confine herself to her apartment with as much bed rest as possible. He understood that these measures sounded drastic and a touch old-fashioned, but he was worried about her, and this might be her last good chance to have a child. *My last chance*, Rose said to herself, as she went on listening to the forty-two-year-old doctor with the large nose and compassionate brown eyes tell her how to succeed at becoming a mother. No more smoking and drinking, he added. A strict, high-protein diet, daily vitamin supplements, and a routine of special exercises. He would stop by to see her every other week, and the instant she felt the slightest twinge or pain, she should pick up the phone and dial his number. Was all that clear?

Yes, it was all clear. And so ended the dilemma of whether to buy a house or the studio, which in turn put an end to her days with Schneiderman, not to speak of interrupting her work as a photographer and turning her life upside down.

Rose was both elated and confused. Elated to know she still had a chance; confused by how she was going to cope with what amounted to seven months of house arrest. An infinite number of adjustments would have to be made, not just by her but by Stanley as well, since he would have to do the shopping and the bulk of the cooking now, poor Stanley, who worked so hard and put in such long hours as it was, and then there would be the added expense of hiring a woman to clean the apartment and do the laundry once or twice a week, nearly every aspect of daily life would be altered, her waking hours would henceforth be governed by a multitude of interdictions and restraints, no lifting of heavy objects, no moving the furniture around, no struggling to open a stuck window during a summer hot spell, she would have to keep a vigilant watch over herself, become conscious of the thousands of small and large things she had always done unconsciously, and of course there would be no more tennis (which she had grown to love) and no more swimming (which she had loved since earliest girlhood). In other words, the vigorous, athletic, perpetually moving Rose, who felt most fully herself whenever she was engaged in a rush of high-speed, all-consuming activity, would have to learn how to sit still.

Of all people, it was Mildred who saved her from the prospect of terminal boredom, who stepped in and transformed those months of immobility into what Rose would later describe to her son as *a grand adventure*.

You can't sit around the apartment all day listening to the radio and watching that nonsense on television, Mildred said. Why not get your brain working for once and do some catching up?

Catching up? Rose said, not understanding what Mildred was talking about.

You might not realize it, her sister said, but your doctor has given you an extraordinary gift. He's turned you into a prisoner, and the one thing prisoners have that other people don't is time, endless amounts of time. Read books, Rose. Start educating yourself. This is your chance, and if you want my help, I'll be happy to give it.

Mildred's help came in the form of a reading list, of several reading lists over the months that followed, and with movie theaters temporarily off-limits, for the first time in her life Rose satisfied her hunger for stories with novels, good novels, not the crime novels and bestsellers she might have gravitated to on her own but the books that Mildred recommended, classics to be sure, but always selected with Rose in mind, books that Mildred felt Rose would enjoy, which meant that *Moby-Dick* and *Ulysses* and *The Magic Mountain* were never on any of the lists, since those books would have been too daunting for the meagerly trained Rose, but how many others there were to choose from, and as the months passed and her baby grew inside her, Rose spent her days swimming in the pages of books, and although there were a few disappointments among the dozens she read (*The Sun Also Rises*, for example, which struck her as fake and shallow), nearly all the others lured her in and kept her engrossed from first to last, among them *Tender Is the Night*, *Pride and Prejudice*, *The House of Mirth*, *Moll Flanders*, *Vanity Fair*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Madame Bovary*, *The Charterhouse of Parma*, *First Love*, *Dubliners*, *Light in August*, *David Copperfield*, *Middlemarch*, *Washington Square*, *The Scarlet Letter*, *Main Street*, *Jane Eyre*, and numerous others, but of all the writers she discovered during her confinement, it was Tolstoy who said the most to her, demon Tolstoy, who understood all of life, it seemed to her, everything there was to know about the human heart and the human mind, no matter if the heart or mind belonged to a man or a woman, and how was it possible, she wondered, for a man to know what Tolstoy knew

about women, it made no sense that one man could be all men and all women, and therefore she marched through most of what Tolstoy had written, not just the big novels like *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Resurrection*, but the shorter works as well, the novellas and stories, none more powerful to her than the one-hundred-page *Family Happiness*, the story of a young bride and her gradual disillusionment, a work that hit so close to home that she wept at the end, and when Stanley returned to the apartment that evening, he was alarmed to see her in such a state, for even though she had finished the story at three in the afternoon, her eyes were still wet with tears.

The baby was due on March 16, 1947, but at ten in the morning on March second, a couple of hours after Stanley had left for work, Rose, still in her nightgown and propped up in bed with *A Tale of Two Cities* leaning against the northern slope of her enormous belly, felt a sudden pressure in her bladder. Assuming she had to pee, she slowly extricated herself from the covering sheet and blankets, inched her mountainous bulk to the edge of the bed, put her feet on the floor, and stood up. Before she could take a step toward the bathroom, she felt a rush of warm liquid flowing down the inner halves of her thighs. Rose didn't move. She was facing the window, and when she looked outside she saw that a light, misty snow was falling from the sky. How still everything seemed at that moment, she said to herself, as if nothing in the world were moving but the snow. She sat down on the bed again and called 3 Brothers Home World, but the person who answered the phone told her Stanley was out on an errand and wouldn't be back until after lunch. Then she called Dr. Jacobs, whose secretary informed her that he had just left the office on a house call. Feeling some panic now, Rose told the secretary to tell the doctor she was on her way to the hospital, and then she dialed Millie's number. Her sister-in-law picked up on the third ring, and thus it was Millie who came to fetch her. During the short ride to the maternity ward at Beth Israel, Rose told her that she and Stanley had already chosen names for the child who was about to be born. If it was a girl, they were going to call her Esther Ann Ferguson. If it was a boy, he would go through life as Archibald Isaac Ferguson.

Millie looked into the rearview mirror and studied Rose, who was sprawled out on the backseat. Archibald, she said. Are you sure about that one?

Yes, we're sure, Rose answered. Because of my Uncle Archie. And Isaac because of Stanley's father.

Let's just hope he's a tough kid, Millie said. She was about to go on, but before she could get another word out of her mouth, they had reached the hospital entrance.

Millie rounded up the troops, and when Rose gave birth to her son at 2:07 the following morning, everyone was there: Stanley and her parents, Mildred and Joan, and even Stanley's mother. Thus Ferguson was born, and for several seconds after he emerged from his mother's body, he was the youngest human being on the face of the earth.