Chapter 13. Grade 7

I

Jay Cooke Junior High School was nothing like what Josy had expected. There were no cockroaches in the lunchroom food, taunting by upper grade students turned out to be minimal, and the teachers were for the most part sympathetic. She learned that Cooke, like the nearby Logan Demonstration Elementary School, was also a center for teachers in training. In addition to neighborhood children, selected students from all parts of the city came there, which helped the school maintain a high academic reputation.
She now found a broader and more motivated group of classmates. The extra challenge made her love the school. Later she came to appreciate that what she had learned at Cooke served her well as a base for high school and college studies.

For the first time she had a different teacher and went to a different room for each

class. Her favorite was Miss Smith, the elderly English teacher. On the few occasions when she discussed grammar, Miss Smith explained it so effectively that years later, Josy continued to rely on her guidelines.

Miss Smith was very understanding. Once, she asked everyone to bring in a favorite book for silent reading. During class, she happened to glance up and spotted Josy convulsed with laughter. Getting up in annoyance, Miss Smith strode directly over to Josy's seat and glared down at her threateningly. Despite the teacher's proximity, Josy continued to laugh even harder. Then Miss Smith noticed that the book, *Don Quixote* was open to the story about the knight-errant's attack on the windmills. At this point, with an understanding nod she smiled, patted Josy kindly on the head, and returned to her desk.

Gone with the Wind had just been published, and was the source of tremendous excitement, and high on the best-seller list.

"This is really not a great work of literature," Miss Smith declared to the class. "The proof is in the characters. They never change over time. Scarlett O'Hara remains the same selfish, petty woman, unconcerned with anyone but herself throughout the years. She never develops. In real life people grow and change. But Scarlett O'Hara never changes. She's exactly the same immature, egotistical person at the end of the story that she was at the beginning.

"And I predict," Miss Smith continued firmly, "that one or two years from now, *Gone With The Wind* will be lying around on some library shelf, completely forgotten and collecting dust, just like most best sellers of past years. We'll never hear of *Gone With The Wind* again!"

So much for Miss Smith's literary pronouncements!

Another teacher who impressed Josy that term was Miss Shirbraun, the cooking teacher. Tremendously large, both in height and breadth, she must have weighed well over two hundred pounds. The sight of her scowling face and booming voice was enough to send chills through the hearts of most of her students. Everyone stood in awe of Miss Shirbraun. Some even trembled visibly in her presence.

She taught her girls to prepare stewed prunes, creamed dried beef, shepherd's pie, and made-from-scratch mayonnaise. The girls had to eat everything they cooked. When it came time to eat the mayonnaise, Miss Shirbraun pulled apart a couple heads of lettuce, passed out one leaf to each girl, and then stood over them all, watching sharply to make sure that everyone swallowed her entire portion, spooning up all the mayonnaise in which the lettuce was swimming. She insisted that they finish every drop. The girls, glancing helplessly at each other, close to nausea, picked at their "salad". But nobody dared leave even a trace for Miss Shirbraun to find as she came around table by table to inspect their plates.

Four girls sat at each table, every girl assigned a number (Josy was a Number Three.) One day when the subject of the lesson was preparing pie crust, Miss Shirbaum instructed all the Number Threes to go to the main counter and measure out two tablespoons of butter from a huge jug. Josy, scooping out too much, used her knife to remove the excess from the spoon and slide it back into the jug.

A few minutes later Miss Shirbraun's voice came thundering across the room.

"Who is the slob that smeared butter back into the tub?" she roared.

Josy froze in her seat. Shaking with fright, she made a quick decision to own up to nothing. She had never realized it was wrong to return excess unused butter to the tub that way, and besides, she had seen a couple other Number Threes do the same thing.

Silence reigned. Everyone stared straight ahead, motionless, hardly daring to breathe.

Again Miss Shirbraun's voice shook the room, "Who smeared the butter back into the tub?"

Still silence.

"Very well!" declared Miss Shirbraun, "I want every Number Three to stand up,"

Knees shaking, Josy rose with the others.

"Now I'm going to ask one more time," Miss Shirbraun threatened. "I'll know from the look on your face who the guilty party is! This is your last chance to confess. Who put the butter back in such a disgusting way?"

Still no reply.

"All right, then." Miss Shirbraun rose and went from table to table, repeating her question. Voices quavering, each Number Three denied any involvement in the crime. Finally she came to Josy.

"Did you do this disgusting thing?" she demanded.

Had Miss Shirbraun not shouted so loudly or glared so threateningly, Josy might have confessed. But the volume of the teacher's voice and her demeanor were so frightening that Josy lost all courage. Besides, she saw nothing so terrible about smearing butter, as long as it was clean and unused, back into its pot.

"No, Miss Shirbraun," Josy shook her head from side to side, forcing herself to form a vivid mental picture of another girl doing the damage.

Miss Shirbraun glared suspiciously for a long minute. Then with a withering glance she moved on to the next Number Three. She never did learn the identity of the guilty party.

On another occasion, all the Number Threes were instructed to take the largest bowl they could find out of the bottom dish cabinet. By the time Josy's turn came, only one enormous container two feet in diameter remained. As she picked it up, the bowl split in two, one part in each of her hands. All the Number Threes around her paled.

"You'll have to go tell the teacher," they whispered, trembling for her.

Verna Blackman, the Number Four at Josy's table (and at that time her best friend), raced up to the teacher and sang out, "Miss Shirbraun, Josephine broke her bowl!"

A hush fell over the room.

Miss Shirbraun never looked up from the open book on her desk.

"Why doesn't Josephine come and tell me herself?" she muttered, not once glancing up from the page.

Drawing a deep breath, Josy squared her shoulders and walked resolutely to the teacher's desk, carrying one half of the broken bowl in each hand.

Miss Shirbraun put down her book. Carefully she took the two pieces and examined each carefully. The class waited in silence. Then finally she looked up.

"This is not Josephine's fault," she announced quietly. "You can see from its edges that the bowl was already cracked before she even picked it up. You see," she said, holding up the two pieces of porcelain, "the edges along the crack are dirty. They're darker than the rest of the bowl. That means the crack was already there. Josephine had nothing to do with it."

Nodding curtly, she dismissed Josy back to her table. Everyone breathed a sigh of relief. Out of the corner of her eye, Josy noticed Verna Blackman looking a bit crestfallen and clearly disappointed.

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One cold wintry night Cooke held a parent-teacher program, and Malvina attended with Josy. As they left the building at the end of the evening, an exceedingly obese women approached them on the outside steps, asking if she could walk with them and hold on to Malvina's arm. Her home was half a block away and she was afraid of falling on the ice. Malvina agreed and they set out, conversing along the way. Josy recognized the woman as Miss Harkness, a Geography teacher. She told them how, when she was a child, her parents had taken her to visit dozens of foreign countries, enriching her with first-hand knowledge of what she would eventually end up teaching. As they parted at her door, she confided to Malvina how distraught she was by the Pennsylvania state legislature's most recent decision. Next term Geography would be replaced by Civics in the school curriculum.

"It's a grave, grave mistake," she warned. "This will be a dreadful set-back for our children and our whole country. It's a dangerous situation."

Josy never forget her words.

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It was around then that the radio came abuzz with the announcement that Edward VIII, King of England, was abdicating the throne to marry the divorced commoner Wallis Warfield Simpson. Everybody was agog over what amounted, in those days, to something close to a scandal.

"Such great love," most people were saying. "Imagine! He's giving up the throne for her."

The next day Josy was standing with her parents on the corner of 10th and Duncannon, waiting for the C bus to town, while her father and mother discussed the situation.

"What does he need the throne for?" Malvina suddenly concluded. "Who needs the headaches! With all the trouble brewing in Europe, he probably made the smartest decision of all."

Jacques slowly nodded in agreement. It was a unique conclusion in 1936, yet one that would be picked up by more and more people as time went by.

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Josy liked all her seventh grade teachers except for Mr. Hill. He taught Hygiene, and his full name was Clarence Meredith Hill. The very sound of it sent chills through her. His every movement, the way he spoke and moved and conducted himself, all somehow made her think of a spooky haunted house in the Charlie Chan stories, full of mysterious sliding doors, secret panels, unexpected trapdoors, all menacing, with potential evil lurking at every turn. Although Mr. Hill never once raised his voice, he could fix his students with so icy a stare that it penetrated to their very bones. To Josy he seemed the very personification of villainy.

Tall, thin, aloof, smirking, and shifty-eyed, he seemed to sense exactly who wanted to hide from his gaze. Then, slowly and deliberately he would call on that person. Coldly, with a sneer, he would zero in on his victim. He never addressed anyone by name, only by row and seat number.

"The last girl in the first row," he would drawl out languidly after a question and, with an unbearably long pause, eye each pupil slowly and deliberately. He would take his time singling out his choice, clearly delighted to see everyone squirm.

Josy was that last girl on the first row. It seemed to her that she got called on more than anyone else. She tried to sit motionless, eyes lowered, hardly daring to breathe, des-

perately trying not to draw attention to herself. It wasn't that she didn't know the answer or that he had ever scolded her. On the contrary, he often stared fixedly at her after she gave her answer, considered it for an agonizing minute or two, and then slowly remarked, "Yes, that's right!" before proceeding to his next victim.

She soon learned that most of her classmates (every girl in the room and most of the boys) reacted the same way. They were all deeply relieved and openly joyous to learn that they were assigned a different Hygiene teacher the following term in 7B.

By the time 7A ended, Josy felt completely at home at Cooke. On the last day of the term, just before summer vacation, Dr. Risen made a speech. He was the History teacher, middle-aged, balding, yet the object of amorous crushes among several girls in the class.

"You are now going into 7B." he announced formally to the class. "What a shame! I liked you all so much up to now. But, if you're anything like my earlier students, you've lost all your innocence."

"You came in so naive," he continued. "Children in 7A are polite. They're sweet and darling and speak in low respectful voices when they first arrive. Then over the months they change. This class won't be any different from any other, I can tell. I can see it already in your eyes. You're no longer the lovely, innocent children you were when you first came to Cooke."

Like the others, Josy glanced around the room uncomprehending. Had she really lost her innocence? If so, what was it and where had it gone? She felt no different now that she was going into 7B, only less frightened and more comfortable at being in junior high.

"Well," she thought, "It must be true, even if I don't understand it. After all, Dr. Risen is a teacher, and teachers know just about everything."

II

That summer, one year after her trip to Mexico, her cousin Alejandro and his mother Gucia came to visit for July and August. Despite the numerous spats she had had with Alejandro the year before, Josy was beside herself with delight. It would be like having a younger brother in the house, she told herself. Impatiently, she began counting the days till they arrived.

From the moment of their arrival, however, it became apparent that they would not be the easiest of guests. When Alejandro, at his mother's urging, took a bath, Malvina had to run water for him. When he left the bathroom dirty, she got down on her hands and

knees to scrub the tub, only to have Gucia come in a few minutes later, shut the door behind her, take her own bath, and again leave the room in disorder.

After cleaning up twice in the same hour, Malvina decided that the only way to survive the summer would be to take everybody to the shore, where life was less formal and most bathing done in the ocean. Next morning they all took the train to Wildwood.

They chose a hotel just a block away from the boardwalk, and they stayed for two weeks. Here Josy met two girls who would become her life-long friends: twelve-year-old Shirlee Granoff and her ten-year-old sister Millie. She met them in the lobby the morning she arrived, and by the next day the three of them were inseparable.

Malvina, Josy, Alejandro, and Gucia.

Their father Sam worked for Mr. Bass, owner of the hotel, doing odd jobs of carpentry, electrical repair, and plumbing in exchange for a rent-free room in the basement. Two double beds took up the entire space, and here the whole family slept: Sam, his wife Eva, her two elderly parents, and the girls. Every time Josy stopped by, the beds were unmade and the minimal floor space around them lay heaped with underwear and dirty clothes. Mrs. Granoff lounged around in her housecoat most of the day. While she whined languidly about how tired she was, her husband scurried about doing repairs, running errands, and attending to chores for both the hotel and the family, always jolly with a pleasantry or two.

Malvina looked askance at Josy's friendship with the two girls.

"Such odd people," she remarked about the family. "Look how they live!"

Josy, however, saw things differently. She firmly resisted all suggestions to search elsewhere for company.

"Look, Marvin Bressler and his parents are here," Malvina pointed out. "He's such a bright boy, and he has such a nice group of friends. Why don't you go join them instead of wasting time with the Granoff girls?"

Marvin, thirteen years old and staying at the same hotel, had gone to Sunday School with Josy. He and another student from the Arbeitering Folkshul, Martha Yanishevsky, had

Shirlee (left) and Millie Granoff.

been inseparable from her friend Ruth Novak a couple years before, and at that time Josy had ached to be included in their outings, but they had completely ignored her. Now she wanted no part of his company.

Instead she spent every available minute with Shirlee and Millie. They went to the beach together, ate lunch together, and went walking on the Boardwalk each night. Most days, the minute she woke up, she got dressed, ate breakfast hurriedly, then ran downstairs to knock on the Granoff's door. At other times, they would come upstairs for her.

One morning she came into the hotel lobby to find Shirlee punching away on a typewriter in the adjoining office. Josy was fascinated.

"Mrs. Bass said I could work the typewriter," Shirlee explained. "And she gave me these notes to type for her."

"Oh, let me try," Josy begged.

"Oh no," Shirlee answered. "She said nobody else could do it. Only me."

"Oh, come on now, how is she going to know?" Josy asked. "It's not like hand-writing--it's typing. All typing looks the same."

Grudgingly Shirlee gave in. Josy went to work, punching in several words with enjoyment, taking turns with Shirlee to complete the project.

Later that day Shirlee reproached her. "Mrs. Bass is mad at me now," she said. "She knows I let somebody else type."

"How could she find out?" Josy cried out in surprise.

"Because," Shirlee answered, "you type harder than I do, and your letters were all darker than mine!"

On the beach one day the three of them made a pact, as they bobbed up and down in the water, to always stick together "like glue". It was a solemn oath, and in the years to come they would often refer to themselves and their friendship as "glue".

Josy and Alejandro spent many happy hours on the beach with the girls. At the time

he spoke no English, and it seemed to Josy that he was nastier and even more mischievous than the year before. His mother screamed at him constantly, often chasing after him waving her fists and threatening with curses in Spanish. Nothing seemed to have much effect, though; he got ever wilder and more cunning.

One of his pranks involved Willie Bass, son of the hotel owner. Willie was about eighteen, not very bright, but trusting and gullible. Alejandro, only eight, clearly had the advantage. Somehow he managed to convince Willie to exchange language lessons. For each word that Willie taught him in English, Alejandro promised to give him the Spanish equivalent.

Alejandro soon amassed an impressive English vocabulary, and Willie came up with a smaller but sizable list in Spanish. Alejandro insisted that Willie practice over and over to improve his pronunciation, then try out his words on Alejandro's mother. With a sense of importance and accomplishment, Willie drew himself to his full height and proceeded earnestly, addressing her in clearly enunciated Spanish. It took no more than three or four words to make her gasp. For each expression that Alejandro had learned in English, he had supplied Willie with a Spanish obscenity.

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Early on Sunday evenings all summer long, free open air concerts were held on the beach. With little else to do on Sunday nights when the town was emptying out of weekend visitors, these were always well attended. One night the announcer, in a sudden burst of mellow good will, called out from the stage, "We've been playing such a nice variety of songs for you in these cozy little music fests. Tonight let's reach out to the rest of the world. Would there happen to be, at this moment by any chance, anyone here from, oh, let's say – Mexico?"

Before he could move along to name some other countries, Jacques jumped up with a great shout of recognition and screamed at the top of his lungs, " Yes! Yes! Right here!" while everyone seated around gasped in amazement. Then the band struck up the tune of "Cielito Lindo" and congratulatory remarks came flying at them from all directions. In 1936 the chance of anyone from Mexico appearing in such a small town, so off the beaten track and peopled almost exclusively by locals and nearby renters was remote to the extreme. Though Alejandro and his mother were surprised when it all got translated for them, what they later recalled most vividly was the reaction of Jacques, excited and almost out-of-control, to this strange coincidence.

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One day Mr. Granoff announced that he knew where to rent a rowboat. He and Jacques agreed to take the children crabbing. Early Sunday morning they set off for Wildwood Bay. From an old fisherman's shack near the water they rented a rowboat, along with crabbing traps (one per person) and two enormous wicker baskets to hold their catch. Each trap was a metal cage suspended by a long chain on one side and a rope on the other. The old fisherman demonstrated how to use the contraptions.

"Hold the rope in your left hand," he demonstrated, "and the chain in your right, like this. Then lower the whole thing into the water.

"As soon as you feel a tug, pull hard on the chain. This slams the door shut and the crab gets caught inside. Then yank the whole business up, let go of the chain, and that opens the door and drops the crab into the basket. That's all there is to it."

It sounded quite simple. Eagerly everyone piled into the rowboat, two to a seat, and each father took a pair of oars and steered them out to the middle of the bay.

There the trapping began in earnest. One after the other they caught crabs. Dozens of small red ones came squirming into the traps, each load dumped from its cage into a large basket at either end of the boat. Everyone except Josy grew more and more adept at handling the cages. For some reason her trap remained empty. Occasionally she pulled on her chain and examined the contraption, only to find seaweed tangled inside. Minutes dragged by, then half an hour, finally an hour. Still nothing. She grew restless and discouraged.

"This is no fun," she moped, "sitting here in the hot sun, doing nothing. All I catch is seaweed."

Suddenly the boat lurched. She felt a powerful tug on her chain, so strong that Jacques had to reach over and help her pull it up. Together they struggled, and after two or three long moments, they finally yanked the cage out of the water. There inside, tearing vigorously at the walls of the swinging basket, squirmed a gigantic black crab three times the size of anything the others had caught. The creature wriggled and scrambled, clawing wildly at the sides of the cage so violently that, when Josy and Jacques finally managed to pull the door open, the crab took a mighty leap and sprang out onto the floor of the boat.

Screaming, all four children jumped up, hysterically trying to get out of its way. With the boat rocking perilously, both fathers shouted wildly for them to sit down, while Mr. Granoff rowed desperately trying to keep the boat from overturning, and Jacques dropped to his knees, crawling around the bottom of the boat to capture the crab. It was a frantic few moments until he finally trapped the creature and dumped it into the basket, and the boat eventually steadied itself.

"That's a very special crab," the old fisherman noted when they got back to the pier and showed him their catch. "It's not often you see a black one like that—and look at the size of it!"

Josy was exhilarated. When they returned to the hotel, Mr. Bass prepared the crabs (there were a couple hundred of them), bringing out several enormous pots for the cooking. That night all the guests dined on fresh seafood. To those who had gone crabbing, dinner tasted better than anything they had ever eaten, especially since they had caught it themselves.

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It was too expensive to stay at the hotel for the whole summer, so Malvina went hunting for cheaper accommodations, and she found a bargain. It was an old house just two blocks away from the hotel, a huge, rambling four-story structure that the owner agreed to rent for a ridiculously low price. It had no hot water, and only one cold-water tap in the kitchen. There was no bathtub, and the only toilet was an out-house located behind a few trees in the side yard. But the place had numerous bedrooms on the second and third floors, and an enormous open porch surrounding the ground level facing the street. Moreover, it was close to the beach. Josy referred to it as "The Ancient Castle".

They used it only to eat and sleep, spending most of their time on the beach and the boardwalk. On the few occasions when somebody wanted to take a bath, a huge iron tub was lugged in from the yard and kettle after kettle of water was heated on the stove and poured into the contraption. Everyone but the bather left the kitchen. No more than five minutes were allowed for washing, rinsing, and drying off. After that, the soapy water was emptied out, one bucketful at a time, onto the grass in the yard before the next person got a turn. The whole procedure was complicated and unpopular, undertaken only when inclement weather prevented visits to the beach.

Despite all this, they found the place diverting. Friend after friend came to stay, some for several days at a time, many whom they had not seen for months, even years. Yetta Davidson, whom Malvina had known back in Chicago, came by herself from New York City, where she now lived with her son Uryon and her male companion, an eccentric sculptor whom she referred to as "The Artist".


Yetta Davidson.

Esther Carson, a nurse who was also originally from Chicago but now lived in Pittsburgh, made her yearly summer pilgrimage to

see the Feldmarks and the ocean. Numerous other people arrived from Philadelphia and various other near-by places, all to enjoy a free vacation at the shore. There was plenty of room for everybody. As usual, Malvina did all the cooking, never complaining about the extra work, offering hospitality to one and all. There were days when Josy was unsure exactly who was staying in the bedrooms upstairs. There were so many rooms and so many guests that it was hard to keep track of them all, and people came and went continuously.

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The summer flew by, with lazy days spent on the beach, and evenings on the boardwalk. Josy, Alejandro, and the Granoff girls found a gaming arcade where one slot machine off in a corner (improperly set, they later found out) always yielded winning numbers, no matter how low the score was that came out. Between the four of them they collected dozens of coupons during the next few weeks. Eventually they had enough to trade in for a full set of Blue-Willow dishes. Though of the cheapest variety, this was still a prize. The owner, astounded, reluctantly handed over the plates, cups, and saucers, enough to serve six people.

Josy, Jacques, Gucia Margules, and Alejandro.

Then Shirlee innocently remarked how it was impossible to ever lose on that machine. Angrily the owner ordered his helpers to take the contraption off the floor. When they returned it a few days later, the machine was back in place reset, doling out winning points only occasionally. Meanwhile the four of them gleefully divided the dishes among themselves, all feeling they had amassed a fortune.

Back home, the Granoffs lived deep in the heart of South Philadelphia. Since this was at the opposite end of the city, Malvina predicted that once the summer was over, Josy and her new friends would drift apart. However, for the next several years Josy would board the C bus almost every Saturday morn-

ing for Broad and Arch Streets, where she changed to the Number 9 trolley to continue the ride all the way to Hoffman Street where her friends lived. It took her took over an hour each way. Spending the entire day there, she seldom returned home before eight or nine. On other Saturdays Shirlee and Millie would come to see her. Despite Malvina's prediction the friendship grew ever stronger.

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Back in Philadelphia again, Alejandro captured the hearts of the Sokoloffs, the Feldmarks' neighbors. Emma and Simon fussed over him, lavishing him with gifts and attention. They even gave him a doorstop from their apartment (a small but heavy statuette of a miniature squat bulldog). Decades later Josy would come upon it in Alejandro's home in Mexico, long after he had forgotten who the Sokoloffs were.

Since they lived only a few minutes' ride away from the Feldmarks, Alejandro got to see them often. At one point he got furious at Emma when she referred to him as "that little Spanish boy". In a rage, he sprang at her, pummeling the astonished woman with his fists. It took several grown-ups to pull him away.

"Yo soy mexicano, no español!" ("I'm Mexican, not Spanish!") he shrieked vehemently.

Gravely Emma apologized, never having realized that Mexicans resented being identified with their "conquistadores". After that, Alejandro kept his distance from her. The bulldog doorstop must have been a peace offering on her part.

By September it was time for Alejandro and his mother to return to Mexico. Josy tried in vain to convince her aunt to stay a few more weeks.

"Halloween is coming," she cajoled. "It's a wonderful and important American holiday. No child should ever miss it!"

But by the middle of September they got ready for their departure. Leaving first for New York City, they stayed a few days with friends there before boarding the ship to Vera Cruz (it turned out to be the same ship that Malvina and Josy had taken to Mexico the year before).

Malvina went to New York with them, leaving Josy, now back at school, home with Jacques. Originally they had planned for her and Jacques to join them the next weekend by train, but at the last minute Stashek sent his wife two hundred dollars to buy some extra items before leaving the States. The money reached Philadelphia just a day after she had left for New York.

After much deliberation and a lengthy long-distance telephone conversation, her

parents decided to send Josy to New York by herself ahead of Jacques to bring the money. As a twelve-year-old travelling alone for the first time, they decided she would be less nervous or conspicuous if she remained unaware of what she was carrying.

The night before she left, Jacques slipped the money into her suitcase without telling her. The next day he put her on the train, and Malvina was waiting for her at the station in New York when she got off. The plan worked perfectly.

Josy never forgot that train ride. She felt extremely proud to be travelling out of town alone for the first time. As the train approached New York, she saw an enormous rock, high as a small building. Grateful for the wonderful summer she had just experienced, she silently named the formation "Granoff Rock" to herself in honor of her newfound friends.

A few weeks earlier Malvina had written to Ben Weintroub in Chicago mentioning that she and the Mexican relatives would be staying in New York for several days. He had sent her a "due bill" (a credit voucher) good for one week's free stay at the Piccadilly Hotel at 227 West Forty-fifth Street in Manhattan. As editor and publisher of *The Chicago Jewish Chronicle*, he often received such payments instead of cash from clients who advertised with him. Whenever he had extra ones, he sent them to friends.

Upon first arriving in New York, Alejandro, his mother, and Malvina went to stay at the apartment of Rosita, a business acquaintance of Stashek's. Rosita was a classically beautiful woman, full-figured and provocatively dressed, typically Spanish-looking, with her dark hair severely parted in the middle and held back in a bun by a jeweled comb. All sorts of gossip circulated about her. She was rumored to have dallied with several men while visiting her mother in Mexico City two or three times each year. Among these was a well-known general who, brandishing a pistol, had once threatened another of her suitors. He knew that Rosita would eventually return to her husband and child back in New York City, yet this never seemed to bother him. But a rival locally, that was another story. At home in the United States Rosita seemed the perfect wife and mother. Mexico, apparently, brought out a completely different side of her nature.

Josy overheard her aunt and Malvina whispering about how Rosita, with just a certain look and gesture, could command men to do her every bidding. But when she inquired exactly what these looks and gestures were and asked for a demonstration, Malvina abruptly changed the subject. Josy found it all very intriguing and mystifying. She never did get a proper explanation about those powerful looks and gestures, though she wondered about them for a long time.

Rosita once ran her fingers through Josy's hair and rhapsodized over its bright auburn color and thickness. She prophesied that one day it would become Josy's crown-

ing glory and attract men. That intrigued Josy greatly, but it was the only thing she ever learned from Rosita about the ways of the world.

When Jacques arrived that Friday night, Malvina and Josy left Rosita's to join him and move into the Piccadilly Hotel. The manager explained that, because of a convention in town, only two rooms remained available, and these were located on different floors.

"You and your husband can stay on the fifth floor," he assured them, "and your daughter can have the room on the third."

"Nothing doing!" Malvina retorted angrily. "I'm not leaving a twelve-year-old by herself so far from me in the hotel! You can do better than that!"

She continued to insist and after arguing for a while, the manager remembered that the bridal suite in the penthouse was vacant.

"But it's the bridal suite," he explained. "You don't want that!"

"That's fine" Malvina retorted. "We can all stay there."

After lengthy negotiations, he finally agreed to accept the entire week's "due-bill" for their three-day stay in the penthouse.

The suite was the epitome of luxury. It consisted of an enormous bedroom with a canopied double bed, several pieces of richly antique furniture, and a magnificently furnished sitting room that could comfortably accommodate twenty guests. In addition there was a huge foyer with crystal chandeliers dangling from the ceiling, matching crystal sconces on the walls, and a broad silk couch where Josy slept. Two lavish bathrooms trimmed with gold fixtures, an adjoining kitchen replete with numerous appliances and gadgets, and an enormous dining area completed the arrangement. The bridal suite occupied the entire top floor. From its windows on all four sides they could see New York City spread out like a lighted jewel box far below.

They stayed in the bridal suite for the entire weekend. Malvina phoned her sister-in-law, insisting that she come at once with Alejandro, Rosita, and all of Rosita's family to see how lavish the place was. Next morning Malvina called everybody she could think of in New York City and nearby Paterson, New Jersey, friends and family both, to come see the magnificent accommodations. Several came and gawked.

Despite the numerous spats Josy had had with Alejandro, she grew sad when it came time to say good-bye. He and his mother sailed for Mexico on Sunday afternoon. For a long time after their departure she continued to miss having them in the house. It had been more than their actual company, she concluded, but their presence as family that had helped make that summer so unforgettable.

III

Back at school, Josy liked being in 7B. She settled in comfortably to its routines, now familiar and natural.

Malvina bought a season's subscription for a single seat in the top level or amphitheater (the "peanut gallery") of the Academy of Music. Each week, either Josy or one of her parents went. One evening Paul Whiteman led the orchestra in a jazz concert, but Jacques attended this one. People in nearby seats expressed surprise that he was the one to go; they expected Josy to prefer jazz,

She enjoyed most of the concerts, but there was one thing that annoyed her and everyone else close by. Two seats away sat a middle-aged man who persisted in humming and singing along with the music. He conducted from his seat, waving his hands and stopping only to explain passages to his wife sitting meekly beside him. Jacques related how he had once turned to the man and remarked, "I'm sorry, but the orchestra is playing so loud I can't hear you!" This sarcasm fell on deaf ears. The man merely smiled, toned down the loudness of his humming for a few minutes, then resumed his former volume.

Late in September Malvina decided Josy should have a new piano teacher. Instead of the dour Mr. Katz, who had taught her for the past two years, Malvina chose a vivacious young man named Frank J. Potamkin. Mr. Potamkin was in his early thirties, with a determined and businesslike manner, enthusiastic, extremely personable. Lively, jovial, energetic, with a spring in his step, he was deeply passionate about his theories of teaching. He was also adept at relating to students regardless of their age. Never once did he raise his voice to any pupil during a lesson. All of them liked him immensely.

He drove to most of their homes, allotting a different day of the week for each neighborhood. In all, he taught over fifty pupils, ranging from preschoolers to several adults older than himself. He also composed music. His publisher was Elkan-Vogel at Sansom Street just off Seventeenth. The firm was much smaller than its nearby competitor, the better known Theodore Presser Company a block away, but just as prestigious. Sometimes Mr. Potamkin would slip one of his own pieces in with the other music he assigned his students. Though a fine performer and respected composer, he was most outstanding as a teacher. His book *Piano Pedagogy* presented his theories vividly.

At the end of each lesson he would stand in the front-door hallway of the apartment discussing these theories with Malvina as she paid him for the lesson. His price was three dollars, a sizable sum in those days.

"Most pupils," he explained "spend very little time practicing. Now I want to get as much out of that time as possible. So no scales, no arpeggios, no exercises! Ever! Why

waste time on such things and be bored when they can enjoy real music? Practice directly from the piece itself. And if a scale happens to be part of that piece, so much the better—they'll get all the practice they need right then and there."

He insisted that learning music be reinforced not only by hearing, but by sight and touch as well. He considered it indispensable to develop motor memory to help the hands find their way along the keys, as well as visual cues to be found in the sheet music. He called this his "eye method".

Frank Potamkin.

Sometimes he sounded pompous and egotistical, "lecturing" for as long as fifteen minutes in the hallway before leaving to go on to his next pupil. After the door shut behind him, Josy would joke that Mr. Potamkin's "Eye Method" as really his "I method". But she realized even then that what he said made sense, and later she would find his theories applicable to many types of teaching, not just piano.

On her first lesson Mr. Potamkin tested her sight-reading, which was weak. Then he assigned her four pieces: Bach's "Praeludium XXI--Toccata", Chopin's "Prelude # 20 in E flat Major", a number entitled "Dance" that he had written himself, and a fourth piece that he let her select from a few he played for her. She chose Handel's "Gavotte in B flat" for its lovely melody.

"Now," he explained, "I want you to start every new piece using both hands together. No one-handed work ever!"

As she listened, astonished, he went on. "From the very first time you play it, I want everything perfect. Everything! Pay attention not only to the notes, but also to the expression, the loudness, the softness, the staccatos, the crescendos, the phrasing, the pedaling–everything!

"It all has to be perfect from the very start except for one thing: the tempo. Go as slow as you want—I don't care how long it takes— but everything else has to come out exactly, perfectly right."

It was a novel approach, one that later made sense to her. Compared to the incessant arpeggios and Czerny exercises that she had plodded through for Mr. Katz, and the endless monotonous scales for Mr. Connor before him, this was a delight and, to her amazement, proved effective.

Another surprise was that Mr. Potamkin demanded every piece be memorized.

"It's not finished till you know it by heart," he insisted.

She found this out in her second lesson. A few evenings earlier, she had happened to run across him and his wife at the Academy of Music during a Philadelphia Orchestra concert intermission.

"So how are the pieces I gave you?" he asked, after introducing her to his wife Eugenie Miller Potamkin, a concert pianist in her own right.

"Oh, they're easy," Josy replied. "I know all four of them already."

"Really?" he exclaimed, glancing askance at his wife. "That's pretty fast! All four? In just three days! Are you sure?"

"Oh yes, all four," she assured him.

"Well, I'm certainly looking forward to hearing them next Wednesday," he told her as the lights flashed, signaling that the concert was about to resume.

That Wednesday he asked her to start with the Bach. As she reached for the sheet music, he asked, "What's this? I thought you said you knew it already."

"I do," she replied.

"Then you don't need the music," he said. "Go ahead and play it from memory."

"Oh, I can't," she answered.

Then he gave her a lecture. "Not until you can perform completely from memory do you really know a piece.

Malvina, listening from the kitchen, was delighted. Whenever Josy had been asked to perform in an assembly program at school, she had always insisted that her classmate Verna Blackman stand by the piano to turn pages for her.

"Verna gets all the attention, not you!" Malvina pointed out repeatedly. "You sit there playing and doing all the work, while she stands there doing nothing, and everybody looks at her."

It took several weeks for Josy to fully learn those first four numbers by heart, but the experience gave her new confidence. Her friend Verna, though, was quite put out that Josy no longer needed her services during assemblies.

In those first four weeks of lessons with Mr. Potamkin Josy made more progress than in the full two years with Mr. Katz.

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Verna Blackman was tiny for her age. With rapidly blinking black eyes, dark stringy hair, and a full figure, she was completely different from Josy, who was redheaded and very tall, having already reached her full adult height of almost five feet eight inches. Josy

liked Verna because she was so lively and full of fun.

Verna's mother had died when she was very little, and her father had recently remarried. The stepmother showed little interest in Verna. The father owned the company that produced Blackman's Chocolate Syrup, and he and his new wife traveled out of town continuously, leaving Verna behind in the care of a housekeeper. Sometimes Verna invited Josy to stay overnight at her house in the Oak Lane section on Nedro Avenue, but only when her parents were away. The housekeeper, after giving the girls supper, disappeared into her own room for the night, leaving the two of them virtually unsupervised. Then they would spend most of the evening making "phony phone calls".

The big attraction in going to Verna's house was that her telephone was "unlimited". This meant they could make as many calls as they liked without incurring any extra charges. Josy's parents, like most of their friends, had "limited" service that entitled them to only forty-five calls a month, after which they had to pay extra for each call. So going to Verna's was a special treat.

Drug stores were their favorite targets. They would dial and ask the pharmacist, "Do you have Prince Albert in a can?"

Assuming that they meant pipe tobacco, he would answer, "Yes", and both of them would then scream with laughter, "Well, why don't you let him out!"

This gave them no end of entertainment until eventually the housekeeper found out and informed Verna's father, who allowed them to call only friends. Not to be deterred, they phoned various boys from their class, impersonating the voices of other girls and claiming to be madly in love with them. When Verna's father asked if she had stopping calling drug stores, she was able to respond truthfully in the affirmative.

Sometimes she stayed overnight at Josy's. It only took a visit or two before Malvina and Jacques voiced their disapproval. At Josy's thirteenth birthday party Jacques, usually so hospitable, actually put Verna across his knees and spanked her. She had gone into his bedroom, opened a desk drawer, pulled out sheaves of papers he had brought home from work, and strewn them around the room. Oddly enough, instead of getting her angry, the spanking actually made her laugh. She seemed more comfortable now, as if she finally understood her limits, something she deeply missed at home,

IV

Malvina and her brother Ben had not seen each other since their mother passed away in 1934. Now almost two years later, a penny postcard arrived one day in the mail.

Ben and Liba Margolius in the 1930's.

It was an invitation to the wedding of his older daughter Mary. She was marrying Mitchell Greenbaum on November 10th at Shaare Zedek Synagogue on Fifty-second Street. Later they learned that the groom's father Tevyeh (or Thomas, as they called him), was one of the founders of this synagogue in West Philadelphia.

"You know," Malvina told Jacques, "it's not Mary's fault that my brother Bennie behaves so badly. Why should she have to start married life explaining a family feud to her new in-laws? Let's overlook everything for her sake and go."

They went unannounced to the synagogue and Mary was overjoyed. She kissed and embraced them both right there on the sidewalk outside the synagogue. Even Malvina and Mary's mother Liba, who had never gotten along too well before, hugged, while Ben wept unabashedly into his handkerchief. Then suddenly the mood changed.

"I'm not going inside," he announced.

"Why not?" everyone asked.

"Because it's a synagogue and I don't believe in religion!"

A big uproar ensued. Ben plastered himself to the side of the building, refusing to budge.

"I won't go in," he shouted. "I won't go in! I don't believe in religion!"

After beseeching him with all types of arguments, they reluctantly left him standing alone outside while they went indoors for the ceremony.

After it was over and people began coming out, another noisy encounter took place.

"Nobody can make me go into that building!" Ben stormed vehemently, as family members and friends all took turns pleading with him to come inside to the basement for the reception.

"I don't care if it is my daughter," he shouted. "I'm against all religion!"

Finally, one of the calmer guests had an inspiration.

"The basement," he pointed out to Ben, "is really not part of the synagogue. It's just another part of the building—it has nothing to do with religion. It's just a reception hall for meals."

Somehow this convinced Ben. He allowed himself to be led inside, still mumbling that religion was "the opiate of the masses". Nevertheless, a semblance of harmony was restored. When he finally agreed to eat something in this less-than-holy environment, as long as everyone knew exactly how he felt, tension abated. An uneasy truce was established, not only between Ben and his new in-laws, but between him and Malvina as well.