

*Divine
Dynamite*

A JEWISH REGENCY
ROMANCE

Loving Arnold

INFILTRATING THE TON
A NOVELLETTE

SARA ADRIEN



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AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

Have you ever wondered what happens after the prince and princess kiss in a fairy tale? What exactly is their happy ending?

In this novelette, I am exploring how some of my favorite characters fare after they found one another. This is a sequel of *The Pearl of All Brides*, the story of how Arnold Ehrlich fell in love with Hannah, the Rabbi's daughter. The two of them couldn't be more different and yet they embark upon a wonderful love story that shows how common roots can bring two people together. But many questions remain unanswered and their happily ever after will once again be in jeopardy.

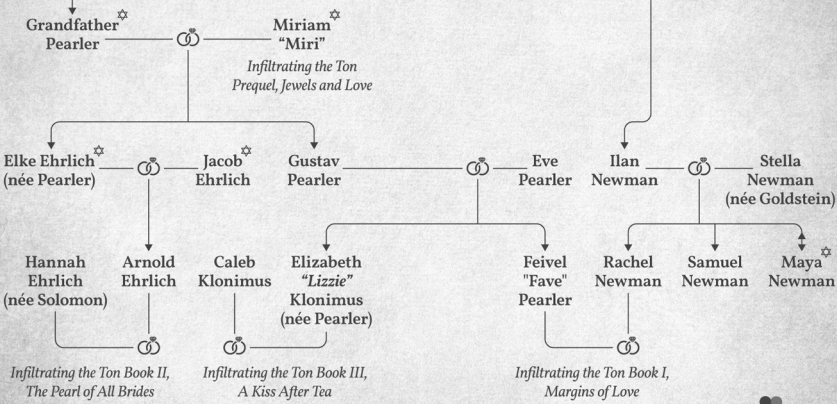
Of course, Arnold and Hannah don't do it alone either. Their friends and families are with them every step of the

way. I hope you will enjoy meeting the characters from the *Infiltrating the Ton* Series and the *Diamond Dynasty* Series. Even Greg Stone gets his love story in the *Check Mates* Series. I am including the family trees so you know whose story is in which book. Stay tuned and enjoy *Loving Arnold!*

Love,
Sara Adrien

PEARLER FAMILY

NEWMAN FAMILY



Legend:
[☆] Deceased ♂ Married

KLONIMUS FAMILY



KLONIMUS FAMILY

Diamond Dynasty

Pavel Klonimus — Chawa Klonimus (née Berger)

Gideon

Raphael (Raphi)

Caleb

Benjamin "Ben"

Aaron

Nathaniel "Nati"
Book VI: In A Perfect Moment

⚭

⚭

⚭

⚭

⚭

Rosie
Diamond Dynasty
Book III: In Tune with His Heart

Delilah "Laila"
Diamond Dynasty
Book I: Instead of Harmony

Elizabeth "Lizzie"
Infiltrating the Ton Book III: A Kiss After Tea

Esther
Book IV: In Just A Year

Peter Primrose (Liora's brother)

Liora
Diamond Dynasty
Book II: In Eternal Love

Aurelia

⚭

Book V: In A Precious Vow

Legend: ⚭ Married

PEARLER FAMILY

Sara Adrien.com

MEET THE CHARACTERS

Arnold Ehrlich, the converted rakish hero of this story is a hot and talented jeweler aged twenty-four. He is Fave and Lizzie Pearler's live-in cousin and since he's been orphaned, is like a son to their parents, Eve and Gustav. Arnold married Hannah Solomon and just returned from a long trip to America, the subject of which is *Infiltrating the Ton*, Book 2, The Pearl of All Brides.

Hannah Ehrlich, née Solomon, is Arnold's wife and the daughter of Chief Rabbi Solomon. As the oldest of eight siblings, she cared for her baby sister, Ruthie, after their mother died in childbirth. She wrote the Community Circular, the newspaper for the orthodox Jewish members of the synagogue before the building collapsed and she traveled to America with Arnold. Read their love story in *Infiltrating the Ton*, Book 2, The Pearl of All Brides.

Feivel “Fave” Pearler is Arnold’s cousin and the son of Gustav and Eve Pearler. He is the most talented creator of intricate jewelry designs and a devout reader of Greek mythology. To stay in the hot and sexy shape they are in, Fave and Arnold fence every morning in the attic of their home. Read his love story with Rachel in *Infiltrating the Ton*, Book 1, Margins of Love.

Rachel Pearler, née Newman is a Swiss Jew and Fave’s wife. She speaks six languages and recites trivia when she is nervous. Her father, Ilan, is a merchant who brings the most delicious (and seductive) jasmine tea to the Pearlers. Her love story is *Infiltrating the Ton*, Book 1, Margins of Love.

Lizzie Pearler is Fave’s sister and Caleb Klonimus’ bride. She is a bubbly Jewish princess and the only female jeweler among the cast of characters. Read her love story in *Infiltrating the Ton*, Book 3, A Kiss After Tea.

Eve Pearler is Fave and Lizzie’s mother, and Arnold’s beloved aunt. She took Arnold in when he was orphaned and loves him like a son. Eve has magnificent rapport to the ladies of the Ton but fell prey to blackmail by an evil tongue in *Infiltrating the Ton*, Book 1, Margins of Love.

Gustav Pearler is Fave and Lizzie’s father, and son of Izaac Pearler. He is Arnold’s uncle. Pavel Klonimus (see below) is one of Gustav’s most trusted business partners and friends.

Gregory “Greg” Stone is an old friend of Arnold and Fave. Now a member of parliament, Greg enjoys privileges that the Jews cannot attain because Greg’s parents converted to Christianity. Stay tuned for his love story in *Check Mates*, Baron in Check.

Master Jing Tao is Caleb’s friend and kung fu instructor. She appears in *Infiltrating the Ton*, Book 3, A Kiss After Tea. Stay tuned for her own love story in the *Infiltrating the Ton* series.

Pavel Klonimus is an old family friend of the Pearlers. Together with Izaak pearler, Arnold’s grandfather, and Rabbi Solomon’s father, he came to England and built a successful jewelry business. Read their story in the *Infiltrating the Ton Prequel*, Jewels and Love.

Pavel and his six sons do not hide their Jewishness. Pavel’s sons each have a book in the *Diamond Dynasty Series*. Their names in order of their ages are:

Gideon, whose love story In Tune with His Heart is book 3 of the *Diamond Dynasty* series;

Raphael “Raphi”, whose love story is *Diamond Dynasty*, Book 1, Instead of Harmony;

Caleb, whose love story with Lizzie Pearler is *Infiltrating the Ton*, Book 3, A Kiss After Tea;

Benjamin “Ben”, whose love story In Just A Year is book 4 of the *Diamond Dynasty* series;

Aaron, whose love story *In Eternal Love* is book 2 in the *Diamond Dynasty* series, Book 2;

Nathaniel “Nati”, whose love story is part of the *Diamond Dynasty* series.

CHAPTER 1



November 29, 1813.

Arnold swallowed hard as he paced the halls of the House of Lords. It was less than a week until the King's Winter Ball, the Day of the Competition for the Crown Jewels. A clock over one of the doors ticked quietly, and Arnold, heart pounding, watched the long hand trying to catch up with the small one. Parliament had been in session since November fourth, and it had a way of carrying on until the summer. But he couldn't wait that long. He needed the permits signed and stamped. And he needed to win the competition, or else ... if his luck didn't align with his heart, where would he go with his young wife? What would their future hold?

He'd peeked inside before the other parliamentarians arrived. His old friend and schoolmate, Gregory Stone,

had a seat in the second row on the far left. Arnold had helped him to deposit his papers there. Jews usually didn't get to enter Parliament; this was his first time. The hammer-beam ceiling in Westminster Hall took his breath away. It was a stunning depiction of Britain's pomp and largesse, the ordinary hypocrisy he knew and navigated expertly—as long as he wasn't ousted. And that was at stake right now.

The clock's long handle had barely moved, but the pit of Arnold's stomach grew painful. He hated leaving his future in the hands of others. They couldn't possibly understand how much it mattered. He leaned against the door. The halls were quiet, but he couldn't hear what was going on inside. The intricately carved set of wooden doors shielding him from those who controlled the country made him feel like an outsider, as if he wasn't British enough to see how his home country was ruled. His fate.

He caught the bang of a gavel, followed by the rustle of people moving. Instinctively, he found a nook and pressed his back against the wall. He was British. An upstanding citizen. But Jews could never be too careful. They didn't have a place in the House of Lords. Or the Ton, Britain's gentile aristocracy. And that was exactly where Arnold saw his future—among the Ton, who would reject him if they knew he was Jewish. They would know as soon as they saw his beautiful young wife by his side. And how could he not show her off? She was too beautiful to hide, too smart to go unnoticed. His habitual camouflage as an assimilated Jew had an expiration date.

The doors opened and a horde of loud men emerged

in white wigs of varying lengths and all their finery. One of them even donned an ermine-collared robe. Arnold pulled his top hat low on his forehead, hiding his face in a shadowy corner.

“There you are. Let’s go.” said Gregory Stone, his childhood friend—the only person privy to his secret.

They rushed through the long hallway just like they did as boys at Eton, and later as students at Oxford. By hiding his Jewishness, Arnold had earned a gentleman’s education.

Arnold and Greg climbed into Arnold’s phaeton that was waiting with his driver outside the Cotton Mill side of Westminster, intentionally avoiding Soane’s ceremonial entrance.

Arnold couldn’t wait any longer. “So tell me, is there any chance?”

Greg ruffled his papers.

Arnold shifted in his seat, urging Greg to speak.

Greg cleared his throat. “I’m working on it.”

“What’s that supposed to mean? If Hannah doesn’t get the permit to build her factory where the synagogue was, where will she put it?”

“I know, I know.”

“She wants to lift the poorest Jews in the community out of poverty... away from this feeling of powerlessness. But how will they get to work if the building is anywhere else?”

“Arnold, it’s a noble cause. Hannah has all my respect. But it’s not up to me. See?” Greg produced a map showing the plot in question, north of Aldgate. “The original

building was designed by George Dance the Elder, do you know who that was?"

Arnold shook his head. He held one end of the map, assisting his friend in the narrow phaeton to stop the map rolling up.

"He was the City of London surveyor and architect from 1735 until he died in 1768."

"What are you getting at, Greg?" Arnold feared that this lecture would end with bad news.

"The Great Synagogue was consecrated on August 29, 1766. Rabbi Schiff was chief Rabbi then."

"And what does this mean?"

"Think about it from the Lords' perspective." Greg gave Arnold an understanding smile, but Arnold had no empathy for titled noblemen. "He designed churches, city halls, and the synagogue along with some mansions that are of great value these days."

"Greg, get on with it. What are my chances?"

"Some Lords feel that a monument to the Jewish community ought to be erected. And such things take time, as you well know."

Arnold sank back in the bench and raked both hands through his hair. He couldn't believe the hypocrisy. Again and again, he underestimated the superficiality and insincerity of the pompous men who wore shutters when it came to real people. Politicians were figureheads amassing power and riches, rather than acting in the citizens' best interest.

"Monuments," Arnold mumbled. "What the people need is work to earn a living, not a commemoration of their existence."

Greg grimaced. "I realize this is nonsense—"

"Bollocks! How come a dandy fella like you can't sway those ... those..." Arnold made a fist but had nothing to hit. It wasn't Gregory's fault. He was just the messenger.

"It's because they don't know you. Or Fave. Or Gustav. Or Eve and Lizzie." Gregory had a way to calm Arnold. Always had, even back at school. Since their days at Eton, throughout Oxford and even now, Gregory had been Arnold's and his cousin Fave's best friend beside the Klonimus brothers.

"What do you mean?"

"They only think of Jews as some Zanies." Greg stopped when his voice flared and Arnold recoiled. Arnold knew he was right about the cliché that the poor Jews were viewed as old-fashioned and inferior but it stung nonetheless. "There is a certain stigma—"

"I know! And that's what Hannah wants to tackle! She wants to give them jobs, so they get out of this rut! She wants to lift them into our day and age!" Arnold was passionate about his wife's cause. Not only because he loved her so, not just because she was brilliant, but because she had a sense of social justice unlike anyone else he'd ever met. He no longer just wanted to do her a favor; she'd inspired him. If Gregory could get the permits to build Hannah's button factory where the synagogue had collapsed, she could be the inspiration of hundreds of London Jews. The stigma against Jews might change. And then, maybe then, Arnold and his family could step into the light as Jews.

Many of the Jews in London these days were immigrants from Eastern Europe. Back there, they didn't have

citizens' rights. Since most Jews were hardworking and spoke several languages besides Yiddish, they were tradesmen ascending in society—but only to a certain point. And that was the point that Arnold and his family had secretly surpassed.

On the European continent, Jews weren't allowed to hold property, study, or work as gentiles. Even in England, Jews were banned from university—unless, of course, nobody knew they were Jewish. That was the premise upon which Arnold had built his assimilated life among the British aristocrats. But that was no longer right. His orthodox wife, the gorgeous, smart, and good-hearted Hannah, had changed his life. Now *he* had to change their circumstances.

The carriage rattled along Pall Mall. To his left was St. James Park. Almost home. What would he tell Hannah? Arnold's thoughts darkened as he worried about introducing his sweet wife, the love of his life, to the Ton as the Rabbi's daughter. It was preposterous. He would either jeopardize the Pearler's livelihood or have to leave Town with Hannah. But what about his business and his future? Would he have to live secluded in the country? Hannah would wilt without her connections within the Jewish community. And they needed to win the competition to infiltrate the ton. If they didn't, none of the permits would help.

CHAPTER 2



Meanwhile, at the Pearler's palatial house between St. James Palace and Green Park, Hannah was hoping for Arnold to return with good news. If only she could have gone with him and spoken up for herself. But she was not only a woman, she was a Jewish one on top. None of the parliamentarians would listen to her. And what was worse, it would hurt her chances if they even knew she was behind Arnold's petition to run the button factory.

Over the past few weeks, since Arnold had been so busy with the competition for the crown jewels, Hannah had read everything she could about buttons. She'd read the *Book of English Trades* and knew all sorts of things that she had never imagined before. Most shirt buttons, for instance, were made in Axminster, in Devonshire, but metal buttons were usually from Birmingham. Her mind still on the drawings of button makers, men using pulleys to drop stamps onto the metal discs supplied by joiners,

she shook her head. That wouldn't work for mother-of-pearl, it would crush the material. Her mind trailed off to the artful designs she hoped to make in her factory.

She descended the grand marble staircase, holding up the front of her gown so she wouldn't trip. Unused to living in this elegant home, where she was welcomed and pampered like a princess, she tried to comply and dress her role. As the wife of the gorgeous and talented Jewish prince, Arnold, she had to meet certain expectations, albeit she didn't know exactly what they were. His family was as assimilated to the Ton as a freshwater fish to the salty ocean.

Eve Pearler saw her in the hallway and waved her over to have tea. "Oh Hannah, dear. Join us!" Eve was Arnold's aunt, who'd raised him like a son since he was orphaned, which made her Hannah's de-facto mother-in-law. Poised with a strong hand, Eve was a businesswoman, strong alongside her husband among the social elite. She brought clients to her husband, Gustav, and their boys, Fave and Arnold, that would pay well and return often. In short, Eve knew how to get money flowing their way.

Hannah entered the living room to find one of Eve's lavish teascapes with a footed crystal bowl at the center. Pears boiled in red wine were tinted pink. Their stems stood upward like obedient little gnomes. Hannah chuckled. They gave her inspiration for a bedtime story for her younger siblings—a fantasy of little pear gnomes dancing on a frozen pond that sparkle like crystal. There was also a platter of meringues with glistening preserves, probably red currant. Hannah's teeth gnashed from the tart jam before she'd even tasted the pretty little cakes. She wanted

to pick a biscuit from another platter, but if she removed one, she feared their well-balanced arrangement would collapse. Oh well, she wasn't really hungry these days anyway. Nothing attracted her fancy except Eve's fresh-smelling jasmine tea. Hannah helped herself to a cup and took a seat.

Just as Hannah blew gently on her tea, letting the warmth of the cup warm her hands, Lizzie stormed in, bubbly as ever. She was the rightful Jewish princess here, an effervescent blonde with as much poise as her mother. With her came Rachel, Fave's young wife, his perfect match, graceful and intelligent beyond measure. Hannah liked them all and coveted their ability to navigate social events that still intimidated her.

"We were just discussing the outfits for the competition, dear. If you're free today, please join us at Mme. Giselle's. We included you in the appointment for a fitting," Eve said.

Hannah would do whatever was asked of her to conform. Not that she ever expected to, but at least Arnold should know she'd made every effort. She wanted to impress him and please his family but she was an orthodox girl from another part of London and doubted she'd ever belong.

AN HOUR LATER, Hannah found herself in a stuffy dressing room at Mme. Giselle's millinery. Purple drapes provided some privacy from the bustling Oxford Street just a few feet beyond the walls. In here, it seemed as though time had stopped to allow ladies to dwell on the finery they

cherished, from shiny silks to fluffy gauze—a place Eve and Lizzie knew well. But for Hannah, it was still an over-the-top world of luxury.

She picked up a triangle of almost translucent fabric sown into soft layers.

Lizzie plucked it from Hannah's hand. "That's not what *you* need, dear."

"What is this?" Hannah took it back. She had plenty of sisters and knew how to regain an item that had caught her eye.

"A fichu, of course," Lizzie said, absent-mindedly.

Hannah gave her a puzzled glance.

Lizzie exhaled deeply. "You don't know much about fashion, do you?"

Hannah shook her head but gave her sternest big-sister glance that demanded an answer. Another skill she'd honed as the Rabbi's eldest of eight.

"A fichu is a neck shawl. You can tuck it in or even tie it in the front over your gown"—she signaled to her chest—"for extra coverage, you know." Lizzie smiled indignantly. "Which you won't need."

Hannah's eyes grew at the prospect of low necklines that could be redeemed with such a scarf.

Lizzie crinkled her nose. "You have to let this modesty go. You are beautiful, married, and a model for some of the most precious jewels ever brought to St. James Palace. Don't hide under layers of fabric. We see you anyway."

That gave Hannah pause to think. She'd been in a rut of humble and practical dresses, but maybe it was time for a change. Before she could decide, she found herself balancing on a stool that was surprisingly

stable. Mme. Giselle tucked and probed her in the most unladylike manner, sending Lizzie into fits of giggles.

“Your dress, my dear, shall be yellow silk with a delightful orange overlay.” Eve nodded at the modiste who probed Hannah in the most unladylike places.

“Why do I need such an extravagant gown? I am sure this won’t be necessary—”

“Oh, but it is, my dear,” Eve said. “You are one of us now, and you will model Arnold’s creation.”

Hannah bit her cheek before she spoke. She was no doll to dress up, but she knew how important the competition was for her husband.

“Eve, I am ... ehm... most grateful for the generous offer to fit me in such a gown but isn’t it better if Lizzie and Rachel modeled the jewels?” In truth, Hannah would prefer to read a book to her baby sister than parade priceless tiaras at Prinny’s winter ball. At St. James Place no less. In a fairy tale gown meant for princesses, not the Rabbi’s daughter.

“Tsk, ts, darling.” Eve placed a perfectly manicured index finger on Hannah’s mouth and shook her head.

Hannah glanced at it cross-eyed as anger bubbled up. “I’m not a toy, and I won’t be silenced!”

“Nobody’s trying to silence you, dear.” Eve stepped closer and leaned in. “But we don’t speak about the value of our accessories in front of the help,” she whispered, softly-spoken but authoritative.

“Please don’t make me go to the ball.” Hannah said quietly but directly to Eve’s blank stare while the seamstress inserted some pins in the seam of the gown.

Lizzie watched, frowning, while Rachel pressed her lips together compassionately.

Eve rested her hands on Hannah's shoulders and stepped behind her so Hannah had an unobstructed view of the mirror. "*Maidale*, sweet girl, what do you see?"

"Ah ... ehm ... I see me? Hannah Solo—Hannah Ehrlich."

Eve gently removed the pins that held her hair up. Then she reached out her left hand as if waiting for something to materialize in it. And it did! The modiste approached with a light-yellow translucent shawl and wrapped it around Hannah so she seemed to float in a cloud. Then Eve spread Hannah's hair under the scarf and across her shoulders.

"Let's try again. Hannah, tell me what you see." Eve waited. She didn't appear to be chastising Hannah, rather, she seemed to be helping her reach insight using a Socratic method of questions.

"I see my hair. It's long. And the soft scarf that feels like a cloud."

"Go on, *Maidale*, sweet girl."

"I am ... the dress isn't finished yet, but it seems like a combination of fluid gold with flames."

Lizzie clasped her hands together and tucked them under her chin. Rachel smiled and remained silent.

"What do this image and dress remind you of?" Eve asked.

"I'm not sure what you're asking. Such a very expensive dress. I have nowhere to wear such a thing. What if Ruthie were to spit on—"

"Hannah, I adore Ruthie as if she were my own. You

know that. But there is no place for a baby girl at the winter ball. When you dress for the occasion, dear, you keep in mind who will see you there.” Hannah nodded but held her breath as Eve continued. “What do you think Arnold sees in you?”

Hannah slouched, and her gaze dropped to her hands that moved as if wringing an invisible rag. “Me.”

“What does that mean, Hannah?”

“I don’t follow. Can I step off the stool, please? I’d like to go—”

“No!” Eve’s hands flew back to Hannah’s shoulders, and she nudged the young girl to stand up straight. “Look at yourself and tell me what Arnold sees. He loves you with all of his heart, I have no doubt.”

“But I’m not like anyone who fits into his world,” Hannah mumbled, suppressing pesky tears that pricked her eyes.

“Stop, Hannah! Please!” Eve now stood in front of her and lifted her chin to force eye contact. “You are a smart and beautiful young woman. He chose you. I can see what he sees, why can’t you?”

Hannah frowned, no longer able to hold a tear from rolling down her cheek. She sniffed and wiped her face with the back of her hand. She had all the confidence in her mind and her ability to lead her community. But here in the Pearler’s world, she was outdone.

Eve chuckled. “You’re so young, my dear. And a lovely lady, especially when you use a tissue instead of your hand.” She held her hand out and the seamstress placed an embroidered handkerchief in it. Hannah sniffed hard, making Rachel and Lizzie laugh out loud.

“I’m sure that you’ll take Arnold’s breath away when you stand by him at the winter ball.”

“I’d rather stay behind.” Hannah winced at saying the words out loud.

“Oh, but you will not. Your husband needs you by his side. This is the biggest day in his career. A turning point for your life together. Your place is on his arm, as you support one another.”

Hannah’s eyes grew big, and she could no longer hide the tears. “H-he needs me?”

“Of course he does! He chose you. And I fully approve. But now you have to face the challenges of life together and grow as a couple. It’s never going to be just you or just him anymore. You are one. Husband and wife.”

“And I-I-I can’t let him down. I can’t leave him alone at the competition?”

Palms up, Eve gestured the finale of her inquisition and stepped back with a bright smile.

Hannah took a deep breath.

“Oh Hannah, you’re beautiful!” Lizzie declared with dreamy admiration as she pulled Hannah’s gown to flare around her.

“You look like a lily,” Lizzie said in delight. “Your cinnamon-colored hair is absolutely divine, and the colors suit you magnificently.”

“Isn’t it too much?”

“It’s barely doing you justice, dear.”

Hannah examined the design more closely. There were several layers of golden yellow tulle. She ran her hands along the bodice and twirled. The bottom flared and the

upper part wrapped her in an ethereal glow of soft warm hues and fabrics.

For another moment, Hannah admired herself in the dress. It wasn't too revealing but showed off her best and most feminine features. Until she'd married Arnold, she only ever wore sensible dresses, easy to mend and wash, so she could devote her attention to raising and caring for her younger siblings.

"Are you certain that I am an ... ehm ... apt model for the jewels?" Hannah asked Eve.

Eve stepped to Hannah's side in a caring and supportive way that Hannah'd missed since her mother had died.

"The jewels can only reflect light if they catch it. You, my dear, emit sparkles brighter than the stars. They go deep and last. Arnold loves you and we all adore you, *Maidale*, darling girl." Hannah blushed as Eve enunciated every word with gravitas.

"Plus, you're a member of the family now!" Lizzie said brightly as she held some ribbons against Hannah's hair.

Hannah's stomach churned. She liked Arnold's family far more than she'd ever admit to her old self. In some ways, she felt as if she'd betrayed her old life. Now, there was no room for subdued manners, modesty, or even frugality. The Pearlers were never just content. If anything wasn't perfect, they worked to make it so. And Hannah quite liked that. She was sick of the "it is what it is" approach shared by many in her community, it was acceptance of mediocrity and complacent defeat. Hannah had no room for that in her life. She wanted to rise above limiting beliefs. Not because she was a woman, but

because she knew she could. Granted, she had no clue how to go about it, but it would mean the world to her to impress Arnold. He surely impressed *her* every day. And Arnold's family was magnificent. Maybe they just had to accomplish their goals together, as a couple? Eve was right, they were growing up together.

"I just hope I can do my husband and his pearl tiara justice," Hannah mumbled.

"Hannah, come with me." Rachel took her by the hand to help her off the stool and, before Hannah could blink away a tear of happiness, pulled her into another room at Mme. Giselle's.

This one was even further back, tucked away in an otherworldly corner of the shop. It was smaller and entirely covered in unholstered benches. The walls were lined with rose fabric a few shades lighter but almost the same as the heavy drapery around the small window. An ethereal glow gave the room a mystic sheen.

Hannah gasped as Rachel pulled her inside. "What is this place? Are we allowed to be here?"

They stopped at a large walnut table with a spread of various undergarments on it.

"This is where you get some pretties, dear. It's not for Lizzie, she's unmarried. But we can let our husbands' riches buy something they enjoy in private." Rachel trailed her fingers along some ivory corsets and strappy things that Hannah couldn't name.

"I don't need this." Hannah hugged herself both for courage and stubbornness.

"Oh, believe me, you do," Rachel said as she picked up a

piece attached to two other pieces, stiff to reveal the shape of a slender woman's body.

"Fave loves these. Our husbands are as close as brothers—"

"Does that make us sisters?" Hannah asked.

Rachel pursed her lips and put her index finger over her mouth. "Yes, I'd love that." She gave a fleeting smile and seemed rather industrious in examining the tiny underthings.

Hannah huffed at a garment Rachel held up. She had sisters. Many. And none of them wore unmentionables of this caliber. But she wanted to befriend Rachel. She admired her wit and poise. Surely their connection would be close as they lived under the same roof. A new home, new life, and new family for Hannah. She wanted to embrace it and opened her heart.

"All right, so what am I looking at?"

"The correct question is, what are we giving your husband to look at?" And with that, Rachel waved over the shop assistant who took Hannah's measurements. Everywhere. In much more detail than anyone ought to.

CHAPTER 3



At about the same time, Arnold and Caleb faced Gustav Pearler in his office.

Arnold stared at his uncle. “You can’t be serious, she’ll be compromised.”

“What choice do we have?” Gustav was pale, his eyes inset with large dark circles. He appeared small and frightened in his high-back chair, like a king on a throne that had grown too big. “The thieves are only targeting us. I asked around, and only Pavel and our shops have been hit. And they keep coming back.”

“But nobody saw them?” Arnold raised his eyebrows as if incredulity might make the problem disappear.

“I did,” Caleb interjected. “When my father and I went to see Taylor, Davies and his son carried gem boxes outside.”

“That’s not enough to warrant suspicion.” Arnold knew there was no love lost between the Klonimuses and

their rivals from across the street at Piccadilly Circus. But theft?

“There was also a woman with blond waxy curls in a hood. They gave her money, Arnold.”

“Caleb, you don’t mean...?”

Caleb nodded. The pair had grown close during their travels and Arnold trusted him.

“I’ll call in some favors, Arnold. But there’s little time,” Gustav warned.

“What do you mean?”

“The Marquess of Lambton asked me for a favor, and I was too distracted with the competition. I shall grant his request and ask for a favor in return.”

“What do you need me to do?”

“Can you get some samples of Hannah’s buttons?”

Arnold hadn’t even thought about the buttons! He’d been so consumed with the permits for the factory and the competition that he forgot what the factory was supposed to make. Silly buttons. So silly that they could make or break his future.

“I’ll help you,” Caleb said, but Gustav waived him off.

“You don’t have time. You have so many pavés to set with Lizzie, you can’t afford the time.”

“Then Gideon will,” Caleb said. His brother Gideon, the eldest of Pavel’s sons and a pillar of the family had been attacked and nearly lost his eyesight. He couldn’t make any jewels for the competition, so he assisted everyone and tried to help wherever he could. Everyone counted on him.

Arnold was so annoyed that Lizzie had to step in to

help and put her reputation on the line that he had to leave. Fave was nowhere to be seen, and Hannah had gone out with Aunt Eve. He couldn't focus on his work. Life had been relentlessly about work, work, work. The competition was all-consuming. He hated loose ends, and the competition was one, the outstanding permits the other.

He returned to his phaeton and started driving to no particular destination. Storefronts with colorful window displays swept past him, but he paid them no attention, remaining in his head and thoughts, with little regard for his surroundings. The chimneys of the buildings along The Mall emitted large puffs of smoke, which dissipated into the chilly air. And there, the dirt hung in a mist of stench like a premonition of bad fortune. Arnold's spine tensed at the prospect. His mind circled the variables that needed to align for his life to return to the path he'd chosen. He attacked this problem from every angle, like finding x or y in a mathematical problem. In an algebraic equation, he could move the variables to different sides of the equation and then divide both sides by a number to solve it. But life wasn't a dry theory, it was more complex. He couldn't pluck Hannah from her life and just insert her in an equation with the Ton that would make sense.

He needed to win the competition to earn his place among the Pearlers and to nudge their business into Prinny's impending reign. Surely his father wouldn't stay on the throne much longer. A change in monarchs was their chance to step into the light as Jews among the ton. The blackmail and intrigue this year had cost them too much—not money but faith in humanity.

Except that stepping into the light wasn't an option

anymore. His orthodox wife couldn't blend in with the Ton. And what was truly odd was that he didn't want her to blend in. He didn't want her to adapt to the gentile ladies as Lizzie had. It wouldn't suit her. Hannah was the personification of all that was precious about Judaism, the warm communal blessing of their shared heritage. She linked him to the people he'd been cut off from all of his life.

Arnold stopped the phaeton when he saw the Pillory at Charing Cross. Beside it was a statue of a rider on a horse, set on a high plinth. The bronze of Charles I had replaced a medieval monument. The Eleanor cross had been there for hundreds of years until Cromwell's revolutionary government destroyed it in 1647. Arnold had seen paintings of it at the museum. The current sculpture was conceived by a Frenchman of all people, Hubert Le Sueur. A monument to the famously executed King, posing ascendant despite his downfall. It gave Arnold pause as he considered the statute of a fallen royal, the place where a religious symbol had been desecrated. Napoleon controlled most of Europe and yet right here, in a large square, was a French statute of their fallen king.

Arnold reached the site of the former Great Synagogue, where he'd met Hannah, and his life had changed. And so had hers, not only because he swept her into that life-altering kiss, but also because the building had collapsed, leaving her past enveloped in ruins. Arnold considered it his responsibility to ensure her safety and well-being in her new life by his side.

He walked up the steps that used to lead up to the large entry door of the otherwise inconspicuous building.

Construction rubble, remnants of the fallen roof, cracked under his steps. He glanced at the contrast of his still-clean handmade leather boots that were probably more expensive than anything remaining here. What a special place this had been. Not that he'd ever attended services, it was unthinkable to risk being found out as a Jew. But as Arnold walked around the ruin and ducked to pass under some string separating a particularly splintered column, he couldn't help but think about his grandfather.

Izaak Pearler and Pavel had been invested in this synagogue. They'd known Hannah's grandfather all too well. All three had started their lives as young immigrants in London, and each had defined their connections to the Jewish faith differently, but with equal love and devotion that had rippled through the next generations.

Arnold leaned his hand against the splintered pillar behind the rope. It soared to the sky as if it could one day support another roof. But that depended on him, didn't it? There would be no new building here unless he could secure the permits. The button factory would be like the statue of the fallen king, a reminder that the future occupied the same space as the past. The Jews in the community needed a way to forge this future under the new reign more than a monument to the past. Arnold wanted to honor their Jewish heritage and his grandfather's legacy while giving the Jews who lived here now a place to work. A place to thrive! He'd worked with pearls and jewels all his life, but with Hannah's inspiration, he could accomplish more than professional success. With her help, he could change the lives of the poorest Jews and tackle the clichés that clung to them. With Hannah by his side, he

could adorn them not with riches but with sparkling success as artisans.

He closed his eyes as the cold pricked his cheeks. He had to succeed. But how? He blinked and took in the pile of rubble in front of him. It was all too fitting that his one spiritual moment in the Great Synagogue was when it was in shambles.

A shimmer under some broken bricks in the corner caught his eye. A sparkle in the sunlight. A flash of metal. Arnold scrambled through the rubble to uncover ... the treasure.

CHAPTER 4



Later that night, Arnold walked into his new bedroom. Aunt Evie had refurnished it to be suitable for him to share with Hannah. It was an adjustment having an apartment with his wife in the same house he grew up in. He walked through their little sitting room and into their bedroom, where he found Hannah on the chaise near the little secretary table, hugging her baby sister Ruthie. He couldn't believe how beautiful his young wife was and how much he adored coming home to her—the love of his life.

After Hannah's mother had died in childbirth, Hannah became like a mother to her baby sister. The little girl was one year old, with chubby legs that stuck out from between layers of white lace. Even her socks had lace.

Arnold approached Hannah, walking only on the carpets to remain quiet. The elegant Persian silk rugs were thin but dense and muffled the sound.

“My father was delayed, but he should come to pick her up soon,” Hannah whispered.

Arnold bent down and took in Hannah’s magnificent scent. She was too good to be true, with beautiful cinnamon-colored waves draped over her shoulders. And yet, she was here and real, smelling like Ruthie’s baby powder and raisin biscuits. Arnold chuckled. Anyone close to Ruthie would be covered in cookie crumbs.

“He’s downstairs already,” Arnold said as he picked up Ruthie to carry her to her father.

When Arnold returned, Hannah had fallen asleep, sprawled over the covers. He didn’t want to wake her but couldn’t help but place a little kiss on the tip of her nose.

“What took you so long?” she mumbled without opening her eyes.

She shifted and her hair enveloped her beautiful face. She was gorgeous, especially unkempt and sleepy. A familiar pain flooded Arnold’s inside, above all else, he wanted to keep her safe and happy. “I sent your father and Ruthie off in my carriage. It’s cold outside.”

“Thank you.” Hannah smiled, her eyes still closed.

“*Nito farvus.*” You’re welcome, Arnold added in Yiddish. With just the two of them, in complete privacy at home, he felt safe living out traditions. Proud of his heritage. Hopefully, this safety would last.

“Shall I let you sleep?” Arnold whispered into her hair as he stroked the stray strands out of her face. He was willing to let her rest, but his body hardened as he looked at his wife. He cradled her head in his left hand and unbuttoned his shirt with his right.

Hannah wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him in. "I've been waiting for you."

Her bright white teeth were cold and deliciously seductive. He wanted to kiss her more, reveling in the knowledge that she wanted him as much as he wanted her.

Arnold leaned on his elbows and slipped his hands into the folds of her robe. "What are you...?" He looked down at her and swallowed hard, agog. His cock twitched. "Mrs. Ehrlich, what are you wearing?" His mock authority disguised heartfelt shock as he eyed the two-tone golden brocade of a slim-fitting corset. He'd never seen her in anything like this. Ever. The Rabbi's daughter! A wide smile spread over his face.

"Rachel recommended it," Hannah explained, blinking her eyes open. "She thought you'd enjoy French undergarments as much as Fave."

Cousin Fave and Rachel had gotten married a few weeks before Arnold and Hannah. Fave was only eight weeks younger than Arnold, but he'd gone into his marriage rather inexperienced, while Arnold had vastly more female conquests. Despite all he'd seen in his twenty-four years of life, no woman had ever had such an impact on him. Hannah wasn't merely his wife, she was the love of his life.

* * *

ARNOLD TRAILED his hands along the bones of Hannah's corset. Even Hannah had to admit it was scandalous and wicked the way it flattered her narrow waist and delicate

hourglass figure. And it was permitted, even for an orthodox woman, if only her husband saw her in it.

“Oh!” Hannah gasped as Arnold shrugged out of his clothes. His wide shoulders flexed as he pulled his breeches down and let them fall to the floor. She’d seen him naked many times now, but the effect was the same every time—her mouth grew dry while her middle grew moist, an odd dissonance in the anticipation of the most exquisite pleasure she’d come to expect. “Oh, dear!”

“Oh dear, what?” Arnold came back over her, completely naked. His eyes were hooded, his pupils large and black.

Instead of speaking, Hannah combed her hands through his dark hair. She adored the strands in front that seemed to stand up when he paid her attention ... down there. He kissed a trail of sparks along her thighs while he stroked her legs with one hand. With his other hand, he fumbled along the bottom seams of her corset. It bothered her a bit that he knew where to find the hook to undo it. Arnold had undone corsets before, but this was *her* first time wearing one.

“You’re all mine,” she said, eager to claim the chiseled perfection who kissed her most privately.

“Absolutely. Completely. And forever,” he answered with a kiss in between each word.

She felt his breath intimately, attuned to his tender nibbling down her center.

“And you’re all mine,” he added as his fingers found her entry.

She welcomed him already. This was Hannah’s undoing, and she wanted all of him. She pulled him back up

and awaited his tongue with her open mouth. They had a rhythm already, a treat for the senses. A tune of pleasure. She clenched his wicked fingers as he deepened his kiss.

Arnold didn't disappoint. He never did. His kiss was sensual, possessive, and deliciously warm.

He was bigger than Hannah and kept one hand down there while his other freed her breasts from the corset. To her surprise, they popped out under his expert touch, and he didn't even break their kiss. But then he moved down and paid attention to her breasts, nibbling a trail of fire from the base to—

“Ouch!”

Arnold froze. “What happened?”

“I'm not sure, but it hurt.” Hannah bit her lower lip.

Arnold's eyes dropped to her mouth. He seemed torn between his desire to continue and the need to comfort her. “Why?”

“I don't know.” She shrugged and pulled him back to her mouth.

He followed hesitatingly and slowly unlaced the corset. Within a few moments, he seemed fully recovered from the interruption, ready to worship Hannah again. She felt like a lovely gift he was unwrapping. He savored her with kisses as, inch by inch, her light skin was revealed. When he finally undid the entire corset, she arched her back and he pulled it out from under her.

He kissed her belly and caressed her with his manly palms. “I'm glad life at your new home is becoming you.”

“I beg your pardon?” *What was that supposed to mean?*

“Well, you're enjoying the food, aren't you?”

Hannah frowned and cradled his face. “I've been so

sick every day, how would I know anything about the food?”

Arnold met her gaze. “I saw a tray of tea and biscuits. Didn’t you—” he stopped and took her measure. “Your arms are skinnier, but—”

“But what?”

Arnold sat up and gently tugged her to sit with him.

“You were sick on the ship, but I hoped you’d recover with the good food here. I didn’t mean anything by it.”

“Well, I haven’t recovered. Why do you think I’ve been locked up in our chambers since we returned?” He frowned. “You didn’t even notice, did you? You’re so busy at the Klonimuses’s workshop and with Gregory Stone.” Reproach surfaced in her voice.

“I am so sorry, my love.” He dropped his head. His gaze fell on her stomach, and he hesitated then tilted his head. “Hannah?”

“What?” She reached for the duvet to cover herself.

He took her hand. “When were your last courses?”

“Arnold!” She was an orthodox woman, not even her husband should ask such a private question.

“Seriously, when?”

She froze. There was ... no, actually. Her hand flew to her mouth. “In America!” Her eyes grew wide.

“You mean in August?” Arnold’s gaze was piercing. “Four months ago?”

Hannah nodded, unable to do the math herself. How could she have missed it?

Arnold’s hand came to her belly. Instinctively, hers joined his. A gentle touch. Full of promise. A future was growing out of love and tenderness.

“Oh boy!” he said.

She looked up at him. “Or girl!”

His mien had brightened, expectant and excited. And she was expectant now, wasn't she? His smile captured her heart, and she grinned too. Eve had been right; it wasn't just her anymore, it was both of them together. And now, even more.

CHAPTER 5



The faint scent of lemon woke Hannah. Her stomach hated mornings. And afternoons. And the times before and after. Few smells pleased her. Lemon was one of them.

She brushed her hair and pulled on her day dress. All her clothes fit well, and she couldn't yet see the slight bulge in her stomach that had made Arnold whisper tender declarations of love to her belly all night. "*Pitsel*, tiny," he called their unborn baby. Hannah had lived through so many pregnancies with her mother that she knew it was too soon to love the baby. But even she had a fuzzy warmth in her heart and stroked her abdomen at the thought of Arnold's baby within her womb.

As soon as Hannah entered the breakfast room, which was usually set up in the small dining room at the Pearler mansion, she was immediately sorry. A stately figure seated next to Gustav sipped from the Meissen mocha

cups. He must have been rather important for Eve to use her finest china.

Gustav waved her in. "Ah Hannah, good morning, dear. Come in, come in."

She stepped forward and hesitated before she curtsied. That's what Lizzie would do. She gave Gustav a disoriented look, begging for help, and he blinked warmly. Ah, this guest was a member of the Ton. The predators she didn't yet feel ready to face. Especially not today.

"This is my daughter-in-law, Hannah." Gustav patted her hand gently then turned to the other man seated with him and gave a half smile and nod. "The Marquess of Lambton."

The Marquess thought it unnecessary to greet a mere female with a word, let alone a whole phrase. He wore a red-brown pantaloons and the buttons of his waistcoat were pulled dangerously tight. Hannah guessed that his valet reinforced the stitches daily to flatter the man so the buttons didn't shoot off like bullets.

Hannah swallowed her pride and remained standing while she glanced at the table. This was not the day to have her introduction to the Ton. A cherry compote sat in a lovely silver boat-shaped dish, and little triangles of toast had been prepared with a white cheese spread and leaves of mint. Hannah swallowed a gulp of vomit. Where had the lemon scent emanated from? As she studied the beautiful display of food, her stomach growled. Loudly.

"Help yourself to anything you like, dear," Gustav said without glancing at her.

"I shan't be long, Gustav," the official-looking man said.

He reached out to a plate of small round shortbread with custard-filled centers, each with a blueberry on top. A dusting of powdered sugar made the cookies appear adorably like Ruthie's pompom hat. The bearded Marquess took the shortbread and tipped the plate until they all slid onto his. A whiff of lemon drifted Hannah's way and she had to have one. Just one. He really could have asked before he'd polished off the entire plate.

She inclined her head. "I bid you a lovely day." Maybe there were more of these in the kitchen? Or at least the lemon custard.

"But you haven't eaten yet, dear. Don't fast on my account," Gustav said gently. He consistently did everything he could to make sure Hannah felt at home at the Pearlers' house.

"I-I-ehm..." Her eyes jumped from the pile of scented shortbread on the guest's plate to the untouched filo dough nests with green peas on the table, and the radish sandwiches on dark bread. Hannah swallowed hard. Only lemon appealed to her appetite.

"Oh my, what a ... pardon me," the Marquess rose and reached his plate to her. "I shouldn't have taken them all. They just smelled so good."

Hannah's eyes grew wide. She wanted the lemon curd, more than anything, but not from his plate covered in crumbs. One particularly large cookie crumb was stuck to his mustache. Pearls of sweat beaded on his forehead and the flakes of skin peeled from the bottom of his reddish nose. No, not even shortbread was worth that.

"I'll just withdraw to my chambers and wait for Arnold."

Gustav's glance was not so warm anymore. "Take one. I'll ask the chef to bring some more upstairs for you as soon as our meeting ends."

She reached to the plate and gingerly retrieved a small cookie that had lost its blueberry pompom somewhere on the pile on the Marquess' plate.

As Hannah darted to the door the Marquess asked, "Do you like it?"

She hadn't planned to eat this one, rather, it would land straight in the flowerpot by the stairs, hopefully, degrade to soil before anyone could find it.

Hannah searched Gustav's face for help, but he frowned with a strictness that Hannah would expect from any father-in-law but hers.

She hesitated. "I was going to save it for later, when Arnold comes home."

"Oh, don't be silly. Have this one and tell me how you like it! Pardon my oversight, I regret depleting the supply utmost. Seeing you enjoy this one would appease me immensely," the Marquess said with a smirk that unsettled Hannah.

Gustav smiled at his guest and gave Hannah a sideways glance that demanded she eat it. She inhaled deeply and parted her lips. Her hand brought the cookie closer. But she couldn't do it. No, it was too disgusting. She just ... oh no. She ran from the room as another wave of sickness overcame her.

* * *

ARNOLD CAME HOME. Hannah didn't dare get out of bed even though she wondered what made him come home mid-day. She pulled the covers over her head and dwelled safely in the dark, drifting off to the blissful sleep that relieved her of her nausea.

"She did what?" Arnold's voice thundered through the halls.

Hannah sat up and straightened the cover. He would dart into their chambers any minute now and chastise her for the terrible impression she made of her first introduction to a member of the Ton.

She heard his footsteps on the stairs. "Hannah!" He opened the door and she saw the disheveled Arnold, red-faced with ... was that fear in his eyes rather than anger?

"Hannah, my love, what happened this morning?"

"Whatever do you mean?" She was the pregnant wife aggrieved by the discomfort of her condition, wasn't she? She rubbed her belly for good measure, using her femininity for power. Then her heart sank with remorse.

Arnold took a seat at the edge of their bed. "Uncle Gustav said you met the Marquess of Lambton at breakfast."

"I didn't have breakfast today."

"That's not the point. What happened?"

"Nothing." She twirled a lock of her curly hair around a finger, but it didn't work. Arnold was worried and she couldn't distract him. Enough!

"Do you know he didn't even greet me with words? He snorted at me. What am I, a horse?"

Arnold let go of her hand and rubbed his eyes with the

bases of his palms. “You are not a horse. I know it. He knows it.”

“Well, I curtsied. Shouldn’t he have said something pleasant?”

“Hannah, yes, he should have. But do you know what this meeting was about?”

“Shortbread with lemon custard and blueberry pompoms!”

“Blueberry what?” Arnold huffed, clearly irritated.

She didn’t like it. “Never mind. Why did you come home in the middle of the day? Don’t you have work to do?”

“I came to get some of my tools. But now I can’t go back without fixing what you did.”

“What did I do?”

“You showed the Marquess of Lambton that he makes you sick.”

“He doesn’t! The idea to eat from his plate does.”

“Same thing.”

“Why does this matter so much?”

“He owed Uncle Gustav a favor, which he might have repaid until you made your little appearance this morning. Greg needs his sway in parliament to obtain your permit.”

Her hands flew to her mouth and another pit of discomfort formed in her stomach. This one had nothing to do with her pregnancy. Hannah wanted to vomit at the thought that she’d just thrown another obstacle in the way of obtaining the permit. With the baby on the way, she needed the factory as much as the community. She could not bear to admit it, but all her hopes for a trouble-free

future with Arnold depended on this permit, which was, in turn, necessary to build the factory. She could stomach not fitting in if her factory was thriving. But what if the permit never came?

“Oh no!”

“Exactly.”

“How can his word hold any sway, his buttons were ivory!” Hannah’s eyes were wide-open as she put all her observations together with her recent studies of her new trade.

“What does that have anything to do with it?” Arnold was irritated.

“Well, it’s illegal to wear imported buttons. Where would he get ivory in England?”

But before Arnold could respond, the door flung open, and Eve floated into the room.

“Should I have knocked?” she asked as she took a seat on the bed next to Arnold. Hannah flushed, probably turning beet red. “I heard about the little incident this morning, dear.” Eve patted Arnold’s upper arm. “Let me take it from here.”

Arnold rose and gave his aunt a tender kiss on the forehead. She closed her eyes and smiled just as she did when her son, Fave, did the same. Hannah could tell she truly loved Arnold like a son. Arnold laid his hand on her belly for a split second, and Eve’s eyes darted towards the gesture.

Before he left, Arnold pressed a fleeting kiss on Hannah’s lips, indicating he held no grudge. Relief and gratitude flooded through her. She was ready to do whatever it took to please her husband, for his attentions and

sweetness made her happier than she ever could have imagined.

After Arnold shut the door, Eve smiled warmly at Hannah and her gaze dropped to her stomach. Hannah was already so flushed, she surely betrayed their secret.

Eve raised a brow and smiled. “Mazal tov, *Maidale*, sweet girl. I will always be there for you and the baby.”

They sat in a moment of silence, their worlds settling closer yet as their families were joined by the prospect of a baby.

“So, you’d rather spill your stomach’s content than eat from another man’s plate?” Eve burst into laughter. She clapped and got up to find some paper and a quill. “This is what we’re going to do...”

Eve taught Hannah that dealings with the Ton were like navigating the jungle. Hannah penned an apology to the Marquess, informing him of her circumstances and the unpredictability of the feminine condition. Eve would arrange for a parcel with two dozen shortbreads, adorned with swirls of lemon custard, and sugar-powdered blueberries to be delivered to his home along with an old bottle of Gustav’s finest Chateau Le-Monde liquor, and the entire thing would be forgotten.

“But *he was* in the wrong, Eve,” Hannah said as she sealed the envelope containing her apology. She hated her new role of the apologetic housewife, for she was all but that.

“Yes, he was. But we need vastly more important favors than his propriety.”

And so Hannah learned to swallow her principles in support of the family’s endeavors. Or was it the family

that supported her in obtaining the permit? It was a wash really, for it didn't matter. They were a family now and helped one another. With the baby on the way, the permit was her ticket to a future among the Pearlers. It was an absolute requirement for her life with Arnold and she was terrified of what would happen if the permit never came.

CHAPTER 6



The next day, Arnold took a cleansing breath of the crisp morning air as he stepped outside his home. The Pearler's house was located across from Green Park, close to St. James Palace, and within a short walk to Piccadilly. He couldn't imagine living anywhere else, nor did he wish to. But if they lost the competition, he feared he might have to move away with his young bride because the Ton wouldn't accept the Rabbi's orthodox daughter in their ranks. And Arnold couldn't risk Uncle Gustav's and Fave's business with the Ton, nor Grandfather Pearler's legacy.

He'd taken the back door and exited through the garden, as cousin Lizzie usually did, clutching a precious parcel he'd wrapped in velvet and tucked under his coat. He was on his way to the Klonimus workshop, where he hoped to find a moment between the bustling preparation for the competition to polish the treasure he'd found in the synagogue ruins. The Pearlers' workshop was far, and

he loved his phaeton, so usually, he cherished every opportunity to be seen in it, but it just didn't seem as important these days. Plus, he wasn't working in the workshop now. The goldsmiths had been sent home until further notice because only family was allowed near the jewels for the competition, a precaution in light of the thefts. Their salaries continued, of course. Uncle Gustav would never jeopardize the livelihoods of his esteemed staff, nor risk an uproar against him, especially not if mere money could solve the problem. They had enough of that.

The gravel path along Green Park crunched under Arnold's steps. Most of the trees to his left were bare already, but fallen leaves still crackled as he strode toward the paved street. He caught another rustle and turned. Something hurried into hiding. A squirrel? No, bigger.

He shrugged and kept walking, holding his parcel closer. It warranted his protection. He picked up his pace and paid more attention to the noise behind him. Someone was following him. He'd learned the kung fu skill of developing an awareness of his surroundings from Master Jing.

There! Someone jumped off a tree. No animal was large enough to make such a thump.

Arnold ran the last few meters to the busy street. Carriage wheels, horse hoofs clip-clapping on the pavement, and people calling to one another quickly drowned out the footsteps behind him. He crossed the street without regard to traffic and dove into a bakery.

. . .

RAPHI, Pavel's second-oldest son, opened the Klonimus' back door to Arnold's knock. Raphi had come to know him well because his workstation was next to his younger brother Caleb's spot, which was now where Arnold worked. Arnold and Caleb had traded places for the duration of the preparations for the competition. During their time in America, Arnold and Caleb had grown very close. Caleb and his family had Arnold's unreserved trust. They were invested in this competition together. But for Arnold, there was more at stake than for the others.

"I brought some pound cake," Arnold said.

All heads turned toward him. Caleb had five brothers.

"From Laila's Bakery?" Nati asked, the youngest Klonimus at the tender age of thirteen. He shared the same healthy appetite as the others.

"What are you talking about? Laila's Bakery has been closed for years," Gideon, the oldest, admonished him.

"*Gornisht*, nothing," Nati mumbled in Yiddish as he walked away with his head low but the pound cake in tow.

Arnold saw Raphi stiffen at the mention of Laila's name. Everybody knew he'd been in love with her since they were children, but she'd been married to his best friend and moved to the countryside. Raphi had just returned from Italy to help with the competition but he was as heartbroken as when he'd left.

Arnold gave Nati a warm smile. "I think you'll like this one regardless." He opened the parcel with the large round pound cake that Nati had placed on the table. It would feed a buffet of Aunt Eve's tea parties, but it might only be a small refreshment between meals for the voracious Klonimus clan.

As Arnold took off his cashmere coat and settled into his workstation, Raphi sat on the edge of the scuffed wooden tabletop, which had indentations from sharpened tools. Arnold untied the leather strap of his etui of tools without paying Raphi any attention.

Gideon approached and gasped when Arnold opened the velvet parcel.

“I bore this from the shul yesterday,” Arnold said.

Gideon remained speechless as he held the magnificent diadem for the dressed Torah scroll, the Keter, a crown of about two pounds of solid silver, repoussé, and chased with gilded cast and hammered attachments.

The other boys gathered around.

“Where...?” Clearly in awe, Raphi was unable to continue.

“I just saw something shiny and dug it up. It must have fallen off and been left behind.”

Silence cloaked the room. All the young men had passed their Bar-Mitzvah age, which meant that they were grown men for religious purposes, they’d read from the Torah and reveled in the wisdom and honors bestowed upon the Jews from the ancient words. The Klonimuses and Arnold shared the devotion to their heritage and the feeling of pride and honor that came with being Jewish. They were also all jewelers, albeit the youngest ones were still in training. So, what were they to do with the lost diadem of the Torah that had no temple to live in?

“I’ll polish it. It needs a bit of repair, see?” Arnold did the only thing he could do—be a jeweler among his kind. He pointed at the cracks and dents in the Keter.

Raphi reached out for the Keter and took it away to

wash, polish, and start repairs. Gideon gave Arnold a nod that meant they'd help him restore it to the glory it deserved. The Keter was in good hands now and he'd lock it in their workshop later. Nobody worked there and it would be safe.

A few minutes later, Arnold had settled into his workstation and was working on the tiara.

"*Vos hert zich?* What do you hear around?" Arnold asked in Yiddish.

"*Gehnaivisheh shtiklech*, tricky doings," Raphi responded.

"You still suspect your neighbors?" Arnold meant the Taylors, gentile jewelers who had been competing with Pavel for decades. And who'd never hidden their disdain for Jews.

"Papa is *farmatert*. Tired out." Raphi dropped his head and hopped off the worktable.

"So is Uncle Gustav. *Ikh bin bazargt*. I'm worried." Arnold looked at him and didn't pay attention to the comb he'd just attached to the tiara frame in his hand. "Oh, dear!" Two prongs of the comb had broken off and the frame was bent in an unprofessional lopsided way.

Before Arnold could get upset, Raphi took the tiara frame. "I can fix it. Give me half an hour."

"You really can fix anything," Arnold said with a mix of hope, gratitude, and jealousy.

"Only jewels." Raphi humped and took the frame to his workstation.

Arnold retrieved a heavy velvet pouch containing a few hundred pearls. It was time to pierce the final pearls in the tiara for the competition. Just a few more finishing

touches. He swallowed hard. This was the jewel for the pivotal moment in his career. In his life.

“Ben, come here,” he called to one of the younger brothers.

Ben was eighteen but already in his first year of study in Edinburgh, a bright and able fellow. Arnold had promised Pavel to teach him how to set pearls, and he needed help. He had thousands to set and only a few days to go.

Ben proved himself an eager learner with skillful fingers and a keen sense of the pearls’ fragility. He’d splintered the first one but none since. In only half an hour, he’d drilled through eight.

“These files are amazing, Arnold,” Ben marveled at Arnold’s set of tools. “Where did you get them?”

“I made them myself,” Arnold said.

Ben dropped his hand file and laid the pearl he’d been handling on the piece of felt before him. “Really?”

His admiration warmed Arnold’s heart. He’d never known what it was like to have a little brother. Fave was only eight weeks younger, but Ben was only eighteen and looked up to Arnold in a way Fave never had. Grandfather Pearler had taught Fave and Arnold the jewelry craft at the same time. But here at the Klonimus’ workshop, Arnold got to see what it was like to mentor the next line of jewelers. And to experience the joy of watching their talent blossom.

Arnold wondered what it would be like to have a son. Or daughter. It didn’t matter whether their baby would be a boy or a girl, he’d teach his child everything he knew. Then he’d learn new skills with them. The next generation

had to be better, luckier, wealthier, and happier than the previous. That was his family's ultimate goal, and he agreed. But only now, with the prospect of becoming a father himself, did he understand his responsibility for nurturing others to lead into the future.

The rest of the day, Arnold worked alongside Ben. While Ben drilled tiny holes in the pearls, Arnold set them one by one on the tiara. It was part of a set and some of his best work. They must finish in time for the competition. There was more at stake than ever. He was nervous. Had Greg made any progress?

CHAPTER 7



December 1, 1813.

The day had an air of change. Arnold had washed and gotten dressed in a daze. He wasn't even sure if he'd thanked his valet, which was most unlike him. A baby. Everything would be different with a baby.

He gripped the wooden railing hard as he ascended to the fencing room in the attic. Swordplay would be good now. He needed to burn the energy and tension away before returning to work with the Klonimuses and their never-ending brotherly competition. But what he saw when he entered gave him another blow. The early rays of sunlight tinted the façade of their house golden, but Arnold feared that the happiness in his heart about his impending fatherhood could be overshadowed by the

news the day would bring. Cousin Fave stood by one of the windows, his face ashen. Arnold's stomach dropped. Clearly, something was amiss.

He stepped closer to Fave. "*Vas iz geshen?*" What happened?

"They got into our vault," Fave spoke as if the words tasted bad.

"Here? At home?" Arnold was alarmed. His entire family lived in this house, everyone he loved. His beautiful wife. The new baby in her womb.

"No, at the workshop." Fave turned to him. "Pieces are missing, there are scratches on the vault, but no signs of a break-in." He was scared. More than Arnold had ever seen him.

"What did they take?" Arnold kept the jewels for the competition at the house so he knew those weren't affected, but his pulse began to race. "Tell me, what did they take?"

"You know they got the rubies from Pave—"

"From us, tell me. What did they take from us?"

"The Keter and a few aquamarines. A bit of gold and—"

Arnold didn't hear anything else. The *Keter* was the crown of the Torah, resting on the wooden shafts that extend above the scroll. It symbolized endearment and veneration—and two pounds of solid silver. Arnold squeezed his eyes shut as he envisioned the loss of the treasure he'd found among the shambles of the old synagogue. It was gone. Miniatures of the Ten Commandments were etched into its side with ornate vines along its

length and several little bells suspended from rings. Arnold had taken it to the workshop with nothing but good intentions. He was a jeweler, after all, even if he'd specialized in pearls. He wanted to add a few pearls and semi-precious stones to restore it even better than before for when the new synagogue would be built. But now ... how could he explain to Hannah and her father that he'd lost the *Keter*?

"Who would steal a religious relic?"

"The magistrate won't look into it, not if it's Pavel and us," Fave ventured. Arnold understood that it was impossible to link the theft from their vault to Pavel's because the Klonimuses were openly Jewish and the Pearlers mustn't risk being found out.

"So we find out ourselves. We do everything else ourselves, Fave."

"There are no traces to follow. Nobody saw, it happened late--"

"Do you mean this could be connected to the night ninja?" Fave shrugged, his forehead furrowed as he stared out the window. That would make an investigation dangerous indeed. Arnold knew when his cousin was scared, this was it. "I have to speak to Gustav."

He was almost out the door when Fave grabbed his arm. "Wait. I need to tell you something else."

Arnold nodded.

"But only you. At least until after the competition." Fave rested his hand on Arnold's shoulder the way he communicated that he was sharing a secret. And Arnold never betrayed secrets.

Fave took a steadying breath, evidently building courage. The sun had risen, and the bright rays sparkled in Fave's golden curls. His furrowing brow indicated that he'd lost his carelessness, his naivety dwindling under the pressure of the competition and the blackmail of this past year.

"Cous, you can tell me anything."

"I know, Arnold, I know. But it's not my secret to tell."

"Whose secret is it?"

"My wife's."

"Rachel has a secret..." Fave's eyes glistened with pride and happiness.

Arnold knew exactly how he felt. He felt the same. But he couldn't quite tell him—or could he? Arnold opened his arms wide and gave Fave a brotherly hug.

Fave raked his hands through his hair. "It's just that I feel ... it's ... and she's..."

"Exhilarating and terrifying, that's what it is!" Arnold added. The moment he uttered the words, he wanted to bite his tongue.

But it was too late. Fave searched his face wide-eyed. "How long have you known?"

"A day." Arnold rubbed his neck again. It really was growing tense today.

"You mean, we're going to have babies at the same time?" Fave beamed as he used to as a little boy.

Arnold took a break in the Pearler's drawing room before he returned to the Klonimuses. Lizzie had returned to work on the tiara with Caleb, Eve had to make some social calls, and Gustav had left with Pavel to inspect the

work of Pavel's sons. Only Fave, Hannah and Rachel remained.

"I'm going to name my son Izaac, after grandfather," Fave said, pride shining in his eyes.

Arnold cleared his throat. "That's lovely, Cous, a grand gesture. Grandfather would be terribly proud." Fave smiled but Arnold continued. "The thing is ... I'm the older one, and I'll name my son after him. Izaac Ehrlich."

"You told him?" Hannah asked in unison with Rachel. They smiled at each other with sisterly love and clutched one another's hands.

"Of course, you would. Silly me." Hannah beamed at Rachel. They were both fetching and filled Arnold's heart with warmth. Their family was growing. Finally. After all these years in isolation guarding their secret Jewishness from the ton.

Fave made a disgruntled face like his mother did at bad gossip. "That sounds terrible!"

"What do you mean it sounds terrible?" Arnold asked.

"Well, his name is Izaac Pearler!"

"Grandfather's name, yes. Not my son's, no. My name is Ehrlich, so my son's name is Ehrlich. He will carry on my last name ... that's the natural way of things."

Fave pinched the bridge of his nose between his index finger and thumb. "Arnold, of course, your son's name will be Ehrlich. But not Izaac. I'm taking the name."

Rachel rose slowly from her perch on the settee and strode over to Fave. Her waist was still slender, but with the empire waist fashion these days, Arnold really couldn't tell if she was showing yet.

"Darling, what if we have a girl?"

Fave rubbed his neck. “I suppose that’s a possible outcome.”

Arnold chuckled and shot Hannah a glance, who remained seated. She glowed serenely. How had Arnold missed it till now?

“Well, I’m not calling my daughter Izaac.” Rachel tugged on Fave’s arm for emphasis.

Hannah giggled, reclined in her spot among the pillows with her feet up on a stool.

Fave took a deep breath, then turned to Arnold. “We let nature decide.”

“What do you mean, Cous?” Arnold asked. “It hardly depends on the weather.”

Hannah snorted, and Arnold gave her a serious glance, which made her laugh out loud.

“Listen!” Fave said as Arnold propped his hands on his waist and took that wide, menacing stance that usually impressed people—present company excluded.

“Whoever has a son first, will pass on Grandfather’s name.” Fave searched Rachel’s face for approval.

“And if we have a girl, we’ll name her after my sister?” Rachel whispered.

Arnold knew Fave wouldn’t contradict her; her family mourned the loss of her little sister daily.

Fave nodded. “Maia.”

Arnold turned to Hannah, who was still laughing, stroking her belly. She appeared at ease and comfortable in her role as the brooding hen. How quickly the hatchling had grown up, Arnold thought.

“All right, Cous. Whoever has a son first, will pass on Grandfather’s name.” Arnold reached out for a handshake,

but Fave wrapped his arms around Arnold and drew him into a hug.

Then he whispered, so only Arnold could hear, "Izaak Pearler has a better ring than Ehrlich."

Arnold broke the hug to give Fave a push as they broke out in hearty laughter.

CHAPTER 8



Mrs. Ehrlich,

You are forgiven for your transgression, and I return your missive with my congratulations on your first child. Best wishes to your budding family.

Thank you for the delicious treat, albeit a bribe was unnecessary. Rest assured I will consider the buttons on their merit as soon as I see a sample.

Sincerely,

Arthur Saye, Marquess of Lambton

“*W*hat do you think he means by ‘on their merit?’” she asked Arnold as they strolled around the corner to Piccadilly. It was a chilly morning, but the crisp cold air allowed Hannah to

breathe easier. The world had an unbearable stench these days.

“He wants to judge the sample buttons. If they fit his agenda, we shall have his support.” Arnold was the perfect gentleman and rested her gloved hand on the crux of his arm. She could feel his stress about the permit, and while he held her supportingly, she could tell he was steadying himself.

Everything was different now. The prospect of the baby had changed Hannah’s drive. She’d stay here in London, close to her father and siblings. Close to Arnold’s family, which meant they’d be near the Ton, too. She’d have to find a way to fit in. Or at least get along with them. If she didn’t, she’d risk Arnold’s business in London, or she’d become one of those wives that have to be tucked away somewhere for the season. Both outcomes made her taste bitterness. It wasn’t in her nature to be handled; she was a leader. And if she wanted to lead, she needed a factory. And to have the factory, she needed the permit. For those, in return, Arnold and Gregory needed the necessary support among the Lords. Step one, therefore, would be to impress the Marquess with the sample buttons to secure his support.

Hannah had never been to the Klonimus’ house before. Not even Pavel’s shop. It wasn’t far, and she enjoyed walking alongside her husband. She wore the lovely mink that Eve had given her and imagined she was in a dream with a prince. Her prince. Nobody in this part of London knew the old Hannah, the mousey girl in woolen dresses who smelled like a kitchen. She was still there for her siblings, of course, but her father had a full staff running

the household, a governess to educate her younger sisters, and a cook. Hannah got to be a sister, rather than a maid of all trades, and she had much more free time. Time for her husband. And her business. Now was work time, for she was going to the workshop to learn button-making.

“Good afternoon,” Gideon greeted Hannah and Arnold as they knocked on the back door. Arnold knew his way around and strode in as if he belonged there.

“*Channi*, I didn’t have a chance to congratulate you personally. *Mazal tov ve siman tov*.” Gideon smiled at her warmly as he wished her luck for her marriage—or the baby? Did he know?

“Thank you so much. It’s nice to see you’re well.” She smiled but couldn’t help but inspect his eye. There was still a light scar, but it seemed completely healed.

“I no longer need the eye patch, so all seems well from the outside.” He smiled, but Hannah recognized his twitch—he wished to change the subject. “Did you bring any shells?”

Arnold retrieved a velvet satchel with about a dozen oyster shells and handed it to him.

Gideon took them and led the way to the kitchen.

“Are we working here?” she asked.

“Yes, it’s a rather messy process.” Gideon pulled a crisp white apron from a hook on the wall.

“But you took jeweler tools—”

“Yes, Hannah, these won’t rust. They stay sharp even in salt water.” He dumped a cup of salt into a big ceramic bowl and added the shells. “Did you have a design in mind?”

“I think a simple round button for dress shirts could be

a good start,” Arnold said with a dangerous gleam in his eyes. Hannah had come to recognize this look. Caleb and Fave were the same—the jewelers were always competing to be the best and fastest.

Hannah was amazed how sharp the instruments were. The files cut through the shell like little saws. Arnold got five flat buttons out of one shell, Gideon seven. Hannah’s dried and turned brittle in her hands. She made one crooked button.

After they’d cut the circles out of the shells, Gideon brought Hannah to a polishing stone that looked like a stationary mill. That job was easier. She didn’t even mind the muddy slop.

Gideon hovered over her. “We keep the shell wet so it doesn’t break, and the water helps against the polishing dust. You don’t want to breathe that in all day.”

When the mother of pearl discs had been polished, they resembled coins, not buttons. Arnold took Hannah to his workstation and showed her the tools he’d made. Her wonderful brilliant husband had improved on existing tools to streamline his pearl business. On the ship returning from America, he cursed hundreds of times when he was missing one of his inventions. “They save time and effort! And they’re more precise!” he often told her and Caleb, who’d remained incredulous and just kept working. Arnold was ahead of his time. Hannah could only hope she was, too.

With a thin file like an elongated screw with very sharp windings, Arnold drilled a perfectly round hole in the disc. Then another. When there were four, he took a little piece of sandpaper and polished the sharp edges.

He blew on it and handed it to Hannah. “Voila, a shiny new button.”

She beamed at him. “This is the first one for my factory.”

* * *

ARNOLD’S HEART skipped a beat when he saw the sweet smile on his wife’s gorgeous mouth—the one he couldn’t help kissing. Even now in front of Gideon and some of the younger Klonimuses, he claimed just a tiny touch of her smile to his lips. She was too sweet to resist.

But could he keep her smiles coming back? What if he didn’t get the permits?

“Gideon, could you please show her how to add a rim and some carving? She can use any of my tools. I have to step out for a moment,” Arnold said to Gideon, who sat down at his workstation.

“Hannah, I’ll be back in less than an hour to walk home with you. Please pardon me, I need to see Greg again.”

She nodded and sat on the chair he pulled over for her. She’d be busy learning this new craft. He wouldn’t be missed. And he knew the only place safer than with him or Fave was with any of the Klonimus brothers.

CHAPTER 9



Arnold found Greg dining with a few men at Whites, the gentleman's club at 37–38 St. James's Street, where card games, debauchery, and politics were always on the menu. At least it was only a short walk.

"Arnold, old lad, it's been years since I've seen you!" One of the well-dressed men smiled, a bit crookedly, and Arnold smelled the whiskey on his breath.

"Hart and Gransom, how do you do?" Jonathan Hart and Alfie Gransom were old schoolmates from Eton.

"Hiding that new bride of yours away, are you?" Gransom said.

Arnold and Greg shot each other a conspiratorial stare but both knew to navigate the situation. Betraying his secret wasn't an option, although clearly, word of his marriage had gotten out.

"She's safe and sound at home, you know how the ladies are with their tea. It starts in the morning and spans the afternoon. I shan't be missed even later tonight."

Arnold's cliché against women earned a gurgling round of agreement.

Greg stood, wiping his mouth for show. "Pardon me, gentlemen. I have a rather delicate bracelet to purchase from our friend here, and I must inspect it to ensure the pearls are worthy of their recipient."

"Who have you tucked away, Stone?" Hart asked, but Greg had already pushed Arnold away from the table.

They retreated to a dimly-lit back room used for private meetings, which had older and outdated furniture.

"I can't believe Alfie Gransom still drinks like that. It's going to kill him." Arnold opted for small talk, but Gregory appeared rather distraught.

"I spoke to Jonathan and his father. Small bribes will sway them, which takes care of the majority. But we have a problem with Lord Falmouth."

"What sort of problem?"

"He wants to see samples of the buttons to consider their artistic value."

"Why does he suddenly care about art?"

"He doesn't. Prinny does. And if there isn't going to be a monument, there better be an art studio instead of yet another factory that shoots more soot into the London air. His words, not mine."

Arnold rubbed his neck. "That's odd."

"The interest in art?"

"Yes, the Marquess of Lambton—"

"I know, he's on the Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art with Falmouth," Gregory said.

That explained it. Prinny had them on a mission. And with a bit of luck, Hannah could sell the buttons as art.

Maybe the jewels could also be art for Prinny? If so, and if they won the competition, the Pearlers might stand a true chance to become crown jewelers. Arnold felt a headache building. He hated unanswered questions, and the same ones had been occupying his mind lately.

Arnold squared his shoulders. “When do you need to show him the samples?”

“I don’t suppose you could bring me some tonight? He’s due here after eleven.”

Arnold retrieved his pocket watch. It was five in the afternoon. “I’ll be here at half past ten.”

* * *

BY THE TIME Arnold was back at the Klonimuses to pick up Hannah, with Gideon and Raphi’s help, she’d carved a whole set of women’s buttons and another for men.

Gideon wiped his hands from the white muddy debris of the polishing stone. “She’s been sitting in this same chair since you left.”

“You two are incredibly well-suited,” Raphi said with a grin. “She’s making the mother-of-pearl jewels all on her own.”

“She what?” Arnold dashed over to Hannah and bent over her, much closer than Gideon and Raphi had dared, but not as close as he wished. Her flyaway hairs tickled his chin, and he felt her heat on his chest as he leaned over and—what was this? “How did you make daisies?” Arnold knew the technique, but his wife had excelled in just an hour of learning the craft. He was in good company indeed.

“Oh, I used this thing, it has the perfect shape to notch the edges and shape them into petals. The center hole is where the pollen would be.” She unfolded a small piece of white linen. “These are for the gentlemen.” She slid the cloth to him. The men’s buttons were plain white discs with silver rims.

Raphi came closer. “I helped a bit, but she did all the design work.”

Arnold turned them over in his palm and noticed a loop for the yarn. “Did you use the curved file to make the hole perpendicular to the button’s surface?”

“Yes, this one.” She’d instinctively used them for the right purpose as if she knew his mind, not merely his heart, body, and soul.

Arnold couldn’t believe his eyes. He’d arrived expecting a few round buttons, hopefully with evenly placed holes. But what they’d produced was art indeed. “Lord Falmouth wants to see a set of samples. Gideon, could you spare a presentation box?”

“Certainly, follow me.” Gideon was as courteous as ever. Whenever Pavel wasn’t near, Gideon was in charge. And he ruled the clan of jewelers with love and dignity just like his father.

Hannah clapped and had a bounce to her step. “Do you like them? Do you like them?”

“They’re the most beautiful buttons I’ve ever seen.” He only had time for a cursory glance at her brightly sparkling eyes, but it was enough to lock the memory of this precious moment away in his heart. Her cinnamon hair still bore the sun-kissed highlights from their journey by ship, but the wispy fly-aways always made her reach

out and tuck them behind her ear. Oh, how he loved tucking them back himself, touching her, feeling her lush hair when she rested her head in his hand and opened her mouth for a kiss.

His body hardened, and he swallowed hard, unable to look at Gideon and focus on the boxes. Awkward silence fizzled while Hannah gave him a dreamy gaze. Could she be privy to his thoughts?

Gideon retrieved several presentation boxes from under a counter. "I have walnut, maple, and mahogany."

"Oh how pretty! They're like little doll beds for the buttons," Hannah exclaimed.

Gideon grinned and Arnold laughed. She always made him happy, a source of calm energy, even when their future hung from a thread as thin as a spider's web.

Hannah retrieved the velvet-lined cushions from the walnut box and switched it with the mahogany one.

"Why did you do that?" Gideon asked.

"The grey buttons on the cream-colored velvet in the darker wooden box gives a better contrast of colors." She pointed at the folds where the buttons could sit, even though they were meant for gems. But she was turning her buttons into jewels, wasn't she?

A few minutes later, the white daisy buttons sat in neat little rows on mossy green velvet in the lighter box, and the silver-rimmed men's buttons sat on the cream velvet as if they were shells in the same bed.

Arnold checked his pocket watch. "I'll walk you home and take these to Greg."

CHAPTER 10



Arnold picked up pearl after pearl and set them on the pins in the tiara. One more day until the competition. Just one little day and his fate would be decided.

Gideon approached him from behind but didn't look at him. "You're out of sorts. Don't worry about the jewels, I saw them. They're magnificent." Arnold followed his gaze, which led to the flashy storefront of their competitors across the street. They had underhanded methods of capitalizing on the hard work and success of the Klonimuses. And he suspected they had entered the competition through some shady dealings. Now they were Arnold's problem, too.

"I am worried."

"Prinny has to choose us as winners. Our rivals are Taylor and Davies," Gideon added.

Arnold knew this meant little, for the Klonimuses would never admit that their competitors' creations were

worthy of praise. Taylor had an eye for good material and used stones sparsely, but the beauty of his pieces would be in the eye of the beholder. Prinny. The Prince Regent had the riches of the Realm at his disposal. Would the Pearlers' jewels be enough to impress him?

Arnold sighed. "I hate unanswered questions, Gideon. I don't know about the competition. I feel as though I'm blinded by variables beyond my control." He polished the tiara and bent back down to continue his work. Only the finishing touches were left to do.

Slam. Gideon hit the workbench with his fist. "Come on!"

"What's gotten into you?" Arnold raised his eyebrows at Gideon's outburst.

"I hate seeing you like this. You can't be defeated before the battle starts!"

"Before it starts?" Now Arnold had enough. "You're jesting! I went to America and back. I created a sustained supply of gems when there was no prospect. And now I have to get permits for a woman to run a factory! Do you know what the Lords think of that? A woman with a factory? If they knew she was Jewish—"

"They don't know?"

Arnold growled at Gideon's naivety. "Of course not!"

"But Hannah is the Rabbi's—"

"Daughter, I know. She's quite Jewish. You don't have to tell me."

"How are you going to bring her to the Ton? You mingle with all the gentiles and they don't know?"

"I haven't introduced her yet. Not officially."

"You can't tuck her away!"

“I won’t, believe me. I couldn’t even if I wanted to. She’s spirited, smart, and...”

Gideon’s arm rested on Arnold’s shoulder. “You’re going to own up to it.”

“To what? My wife? I love her, I stand with her—”

“No, Arnold, at the ball. None of us will hide that we’re Jewish. Your secret will come out by way of association.” Gideon’s deep voice was filled with certainty.

Arnold had no time to process what his friend had said. There was an expiration date on his secret. He had to step into the light, or it would burn him alive.

“Come on now.” Gideon signaled and took his hat as he opened the door. “Let’s take a look at the competition, so you know one of the variables at least.”

Arnold followed him across the street to the imposing old storefront of Taylor’s shop.

The little bell over the door rang as Gideon stormed in.

Arnold froze, surprised by his friend’s confrontational approach.

He recognized the hunched figure in a black velvet coat. As he came closer, Arnold tried not to breathe in the stench of the unwashed beard and white flakes on his sagging shoulders. Taylor, a spindly old man, jerked back and knocked over a velvet cloth. Arnold’s velvet cloth. A gleam of silver reflected from the shiny surface of the counter. Little bells jingled under the cloth.

“Where did you get that?” Arnold growled. Taylor was truly the sleazy jeweler that Pavel and his sons despised. Rightfully so.

“Oh this, ehm ... it’s an antique.” Taylor mumbled.

“We’ve yet to date it and figure out the purpose of the two holes here, but we suspect it’s been used to adorn a knight’s lance when it wasn’t in use.” Taylor cleared his throat and gave Arnold and Gideon an authoritative look.

Arnold and Gideon’s eyes met, and Gideon winked, giving Arnold the lead.

Arnold’s hands flew to Taylor’s collar, and he pulled him easily over the counter. Arnold had to rein in his fury. He was strong, well-built, and in training, while Taylor was a frail old man, wearing shoulder padding to seem more imposing.

“I will ask you once, where did you get this from?”

“It was at an auction—”

“Nonsense!” Arnold spat. “There are no auctions this close to Christmas.”

“You wouldn’t know that, Jew.” Taylor’s wide ugly smile flashed tooth stumps as dirty as if they were rusted.

“This is a Keter, a diadem for the Torah. You stole it from our vault!” Arnold dropped Taylor, who stumbled to the floor.

Before the old man could regain his balance, Gideon scooped up the Keter and said, “Show us your pieces for the competition.”

Arnold had never seen Gideon use such a dominant and dangerous tone before. The Klonimus brothers had a wealth of talents to discover.

The old man gurgled a laugh. “Nervous, aye?” He bent to open a wooden drawer behind him and retrieved an open-faced display case.

“You are shameless!” Gideon roared as he bent over the ruby necklace.

Taylor had reassembled the pieces from the Klonimus' vault into a piece to enter the competition. He must have taken, stolen, or sent someone to steal them.

"You can't prove anything, Jew boy! Now get out!" Taylor snarled.

Gideon clenched his fists as if he were going to knock Taylor dead, but Arnold knew how such a scenario would play out in court if Gideon went to trial. Taylor would accuse them of being Jewish, so no defense could hold in court. They had to solve their problems without outside help, as usual. Better to maneuver around the gentiles than to confront them. Arnold pulled him out and across the street.

One more day, he told himself. And they would step into the light.

CHAPTER 11



Greg had personally delivered a note from the Marquis of Lambton.

I AGREE with Lord Falmouth's assessment of the button factory's merits and look forward to presenting the proposal to the Prince Regent. Once the permit has been issued, however, we ought to circulate a report with the architectural design and a list of patrons...

ARNOLD HELD the missive and looked at Hannah. She threw herself in his arms and stood on her toes. "You mean, you got the permit?"

"We got the permit." Arnold grinned, madly in love with the beauty whose mouth nearly touched his.

“Well you got it but I will put it to good use.”

“So you shall, my love.” He inclined his head, leaning forward to take her mouth as she turned her head.

“But why can’t you get justice for the theft? Taylor stole the Keter from your workshop,” she added. That was his Hannah, always striving for fairness, justice, and equality. In another time, she’d be mayor or run her own country. But he didn’t have the heart to tell her just how dangerous the new world was that she’d married into. And time had almost run out anyway. Tomorrow, the competition would decide their fate. Today was the last to hide behind the shroud of secrecy that had lulled him and his family in a false sense of security for as long as he could remember.

“Did he try to pawn off the Keter?” she asked.

“I think so, yes.”

Arnold sat at his *escritoire* and unfolded the velvet enveloping the Keter. It was safe—for now. The jewels for the competition were ready, but the uncertainty still hung in the air. Would they be safe at the winter ball? Was he putting the life of his beloved wife and his unborn child on the line by taking her?

As his mind drifted, his hands traveled expertly across the repairs that Raphi had done. Excellent work, Arnold concluded. If he didn’t know spots had been welded and hammered back into the intricate ornamental swirls, he wouldn’t see it now. Time to add to the Keter. He wanted to give it some pearl accents to make up for nearly failing the community that worshipped with the Torah and had prayed before the same scrolls that this Keter had adorned for decades.

He fastened his wooden ring clamp on the Keter's lower rim. It felt different securing such a large piece, for he usually worked with much smaller jewels. After a bit of fumbling, Arnold secured the clamp, but the Keter still rolled on the table before him. He lost patience and turned it upside down so it rested on the top rim like a cylindrical crown sitting on its tips. He wiggled the clamp to ensure it was tight and had just picked up a file with his tweezers, ready to set the first pearl when he heard a click.

Hannah gasped but he didn't stop. She leaned closer over him. He felt her breath as the tiny hairs on his neck pricked up. "Something's inside!" Her voice was curious like that of a child finding a birthday surprise.

At first, Arnold thought he'd cracked the welded repairs by exerting too much force on the shape. He picked up the crown and noticed a piece of metal on the table. Curious. Nothing seemed out of place.

He examined the Keter carefully and noticed a small channel set into the material. It had been perfectly invisible. Now that he'd found it, he realized how brilliantly it had been hidden.

The piece that had fallen out was a little silver stick, a bit tarnished but otherwise without damage. It had elongated scratches like a key ... it was a key! The shank of a key without the bow. Small rectangular indentures caught his eye. The bits. But how would they ... he slid the key between his fingers until he touched a notch. Resistance. He pushed against it with his index finger and dislodged a rod with a click. He pushed harder with a small screwdriver from his pouch.

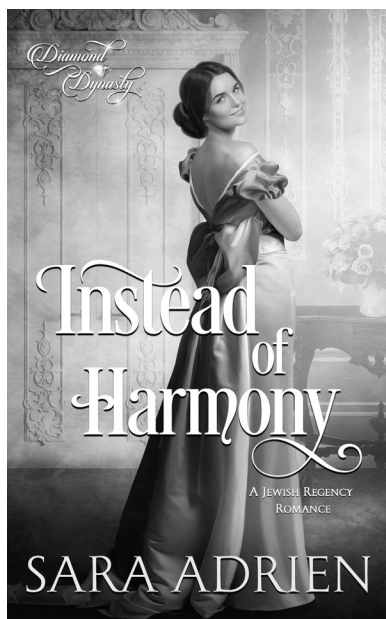
There! The bits twisted out of the shank. It was a

SARA ADRIEN

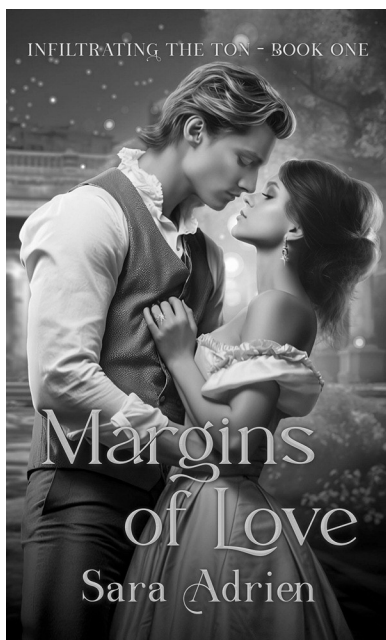
hidden key in the Keter of the fallen synagogue. But what did the key unlock?

THE END

TO FIND out what the key unlocks, join the Klonimus brothers as they search for a treasure and find love along the way in the *Diamond Dynasty* series, which begins with Raphi and Laila in *Instead of Harmony*.



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