

thirteen



Minna knew about hiding, begging to be found. Her in cellars, beneath bridges, by cutting off a toe, or a finger, when they came to take you to

Her own as a child, under steps, father's, in his voice. There was hiding underwater with reeds for air. Hiding disappearing the parts they'd want fight the czar's battle.

But it was one thing to hide yourself. It was another to be hidden, under a glorified sack, while near strangers and total strangers witnessed your bridegroom witnessing that it was in fact you underneath, that you had not run.

(And where would you run?)

This was her wedding, then. In Ruth and Leo's clean wooden house, with two other Jewish families, and Otto and his wife— whom Ruth invited at the last minute, to Max's annoyance—and Jacob clanging out a beat with two spoons against his knee—he wouldn't say where he'd learned to do such a thing—and a

woman whose name she would never remember humming above the spoons, and Minna under the bright obliteration of her veil.

She determined, at the start, to use the veil to her advantage, to wander through the ceremony unseen—privacy, at last. But as events progressed, as Minna was led to the *chuppah* and made to sit (the poles were too short to stand under) and as an unfamiliar man's voice began to pray behind her and the dim form of Max came to occupy the stool to her side and as Minna found herself unable to weep, as she was meant to do, she discovered that her strategy was flawed, for it assumed that the face was honest, that to hide the face was to hide one's true feelings, or lack of feeling. It forgot that the face could be its own means of hiding, that without her face Minna was nothing but stubborn, unsubtle parts. Right now, for instance, she might have twisted her face into something that looked like weeping, but she could not make her body shake. It was as the magician had said: the body knew nothing but what it was: sensation: the smell of flour, the cool slime of sweat at the small of her back, the pull of Galina's mother's too-large dress across her shoulders because she'd sat without sight and couldn't adjust it and no one had helped her to adjust it and she was being pulled backward on the stool as if attached to the wall by a rope between her shoulders, as if they were reeling her in and laughing because they didn't want to focus on the fact that she wasn't weeping and that they therefore weren't weeping.

If the bride couldn't weep, who would?

A cool weight was placed in her hands. Her veil was lifted. Max nodded at the wine cup, nodded at her. His lower lip hung open, his brow showed its wrinkles; at least, Minna thought, she

The Little Bride

had her own hair. She drank—chokecherry wine, she learned later, though now she only registered it as the strangest sort of grape, a tacky grip in her tongue that caused tears to well in her eyes at last and she was momentarily grateful, but now the veil dropped again. The cool weight was taken away. A hand— Ruth's?—grabbed her wrist and pulled her to standing, or rather to crouching, to clear the *chuppah*, and began leading her in circles around Max. Seven, Minna knew, though she could not count, she grew quickly dizzy and let Ruth do the counting, Ruth do the pulling. Hunched, she felt like an ape; veiled, like the shadow of an ape, following its own wrist round and round. In her gauziness she thought of Galina laughing—oh, how she would laugh!—and from Minna's throat a panicked giggle rose up which she didn't bother to squelch. The men were beating their hands against their laps, trying and failing to keep time with Jacob's spoons, as unskilled at unison as men singing in *shul*.

Minna grew dizzier when Ruth sat her down. She closed her eyes, though it made little difference, simply black traded for white. She thought she might be able to cry now, out of sheer misery, but couldn't manage even the slightest shiver of her shoulders. Her head felt like it was still being dragged in circles. She concentrated on the one beat that kept time with Jacob, which must be Otto's, she decided, and pictured the gentile chapels down in the mine, salt-dug rooms with salt-carved icons and salt lanterns, *lickable chandeliers* her father used to call them in his good moods, he knew because he prayed in those rooms, or pretended to pray in those rooms, to those long-melting icons, so that he could rest. And Minna knew, from walking across Beltsy's Out Bridge on a Sunday morning, past where the white sides of lard

hung on hooks, and from walking through Mikhailovskaya Plaza in Odessa on any morning, she knew the gentile melodies were simple ones, led by one voice and followed as one voice, like a soft, grave agreement. She felt a longing to go home with Otto and his wife. She wanted to be taken in as a child, to be sung to as if an infant.

The beating stopped. Max had her hand again. A ring, which Minna guessed Max had sold something far more necessary to buy, though she didn't yet know what. She thought of the seats on the train, the endless rolls and cups of coffee of his absent courtship, his desire to promise what he couldn't give her. The ring slid over her finger and seemed to disappear, and she itched to feel it with her thumb, this new ornament with its weightless weight, its covenants of an entire civilized race, but Max held her thumb against her hand and her fingers against her other fingers and said, Minna, you are consecrated unto me.

The table, shining. Globes of fat in the chicken soup. Gravy slick as rain. A silver fish, caught and gifted by one of Otto's sons. Fish! And the carrots: the shocking, flamboyant carrots rolling in butter—had carrots ever been that color? When had Minna last eaten a carrot? She had to stop herself from reaching into the bowl, grabbing, squeezing the sun into her throat—

Then she was blind again. At the back of her head was a clenching—Ruth's hands, knotting, replacing the veil with a blindfold. Minna had never heard of this custom—if that's what it was. She moved her hands to her waist, knowing what she