

## Praise for *All the Shining People*

“In these refined, sophisticated stories, characters mingle and interact, sometimes aware of one another, sometimes not. *All the Shining People*, like real life, often takes you places you absolutely didn’t expect to go.”  
—Gil Adamson, author of *The Outlander* and *Ridgerunner*

“In these nuanced and inventive stories of connection, identity, disappointment, and love, Friedman explores how we find ourselves in history, living our particular cultural narratives with all their charm, difficulty, and contradiction. With compassion, insight and understanding, she asks, how—living in the diaspora of self—can we find our way home? What is it to be emigrants from our own lives and how can we find our place? Ultimately, what is it to have a relationship with self, culture, place, and people? *All the Shining People* finds the universal in the local and it shines.” —Gary Barwin, author of *Yiddish for Pirates*

“A smart and adventurous collection of stories that makes visible the South African Jewish diaspora in Toronto. Reminiscent of David Bezmozgis’s *Natasha and Other Stories*, Friedman’s characters are vivid, desperate, and self-aware. She writes them beautifully. These are subtle stories that simultaneously make the world feel large.”  
—Catherine Bush, author of *Blaze Island*

“Remarkable in its scope and its multiplicity of voices, *All the Shining People* is a dazzling debut from an immensely talented writer. With astonishing compassion and insight, Kathy Friedman has conceived a cast of characters so real they leap off the page. These exquisite stories reveal the fragilities of human connection and our desperate need for redemption. This is a stunningly assured collection that is at once fiercely political and intensely intimate, darkly comic, and devastating.” —Ayelet Tsabari, author of *The Art of Leaving*

“Powerful and haunting, Kathy Friedman’s characters leap off the page with their journey for belonging. In these stories, people search for connection in community, in their cities, and within their own families, while at the same time juggling the question: Where do I come from? Friedman’s sharp voice and keen attention to detail will reel you in and never let you go.” —Sidura Ludwig, author of *You Are Not What We Expected*

“Kathy Friedman’s glowing narratives and polished prose thoroughly impress as they shift from South Africa to envelop the Don Valley. And her characters’ emotions—so elegantly spotlighted and revealed—truly leave their mark. Surprising, inventive, and delightfully connected, *All the Shining People* is a moving debut.” —Derek Mascarenhas, author of *Coconut Dreams*

“A stunning and masterful collection. I found myself torn between devouring the book in a single sitting and savouring slowly to prolong the magic. True to its name, these stories so beautifully capture the prismatic ways humans illuminate, whether through life-changing kindnesses like seeing those who feel invisible or the harsh light of having one’s flaws suddenly come into focus. In a pointillistic fashion, each story simultaneously offers a profound glimpse of the Jewish diaspora experience while contributing to larger themes like the inherent tension of trying to belong anywhere, both geographically and spiritually.” —Leesa Dean, author of *Waiting for the Cyclone*

# All the Shining People

Stories

Kathy  
Friedman



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# All the Shining People



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## At the Bottom of the Garden

We lived in Durban, South Africa, until I was six and a half. At night, small lizards encircled the house and pressed their white bellies against the windows, enchanted by the light. Longing to be inside with us, cockroaches spread their stiff wings and threw themselves at the glass veranda door. Once we found a shed snakeskin on the back step. The snake was thicker than our father's wrist.

Early in the morning, before the day began to steam, our father would lead me into the bathroom and lift me onto the basin, where I sat, knees to chin, watching him shave. From the moment he wet his shaving brush until the last remnants of foam were washed from his face, he didn't look at me, but I could tell he liked having me there, having me close. I stayed quiet so he could concentrate. When he finished, he let me stick bits of

toilet paper to the spots of blood left behind. This was how I worshipped him.

Sunday afternoons, after a braai in the garden with all the cousins, half drunk from the whiskies our grandpa kept pouring, our father would have a sleep. I'd settle in the family room with my little sister to watch TV. Reruns of *Shaka Zulu* were always on. We'd crunch Simba chips and drink sweet milky tea while Shaka impaled his rivals on tall spikes, and the walls seemed to shake with our father's dreams. Shaka was a great and ruthless king, but just watch him when the White men bring trinkets, turning his face side to side, having never seen himself in a mirror before. If Lindy, our nanny, had finished her work for the day, she was allowed to join us. She always sat on the floor. Sometimes, my head hot from the tea, I'd fall asleep in Lindy's lap before the program ended, carried off by her breathing and our father's snores.

Nearly every week, Lindy used to take us to the zoo in Mitchell Park. She'd thump down on one of the benches meant for her race, slip her feet from their rubber sandals, and fan herself with a magazine. If there were other children, she'd talk with their nannies in her clicking language and leave us on our own. One time, a huge grey bird, thinking I wanted its babies, swooped down to claw and peck at me, and someone else's nanny had to step in to drive it off. It took six stitches to sew my scalp back up. Everyone said

I was a brave boy because I hardly cried. That night, from the top of the stairs, my sister Leora and I saw Lindy, head low, getting a talking-to from our father in the entrance hall, and by the end of the month she was gone. She left her pale pink uniform folded in the servant's hut at the bottom of the garden. I began having dreams that made me wake up calling for her. But Lindy didn't come back. Our new nanny was gap-toothed and lazy, our mother said, always giggling over the gate with her boyfriends. Finally, after two months, Lindy returned to us, walking sway-hipped and proud across the garden again with a basket of clean-smelling laundry on her head.

Soon, Uncle Noah and Auntie Cheryl took our cousins Sam, Rachel, and Levi to Australia for good. It was raining the day they went, hard slashes that scoured the leaves and dirt from flower beds and pushed our cousins into a rented hatchback bound for Jan Smuts Airport. We stood under the dripping eaves of their empty house and waved and waved. The following Sunday, our father made a l'chaim to "the severed limb of our family's tree," his face red from whisky and the smoke off the braai, and everyone talked about the time Levi licked battery acid off his arm, thinking it was marinade, and how shikkered Uncle Noah had been at our parents' wedding, until our mother said, "Oh for heaven's sake, they're not *dead*. I just talked to Cheryl this morning," and even the birds in the pawpaws went quiet.

## 4 All the Shining People

One day, during a family meeting at the kitchen table, our father announced we were moving to Canada. He was a judge, and his decisions were final. Men started coming to the house to pack our things into boxes. My mom's best friend kept teaching me to write with her thick red pencils, until one afternoon she said this was to be our last lesson, and she knelt down, wrapped her freckled arms around me, and leaned her chin against the top of my head. When our granny and grandpa came for Pinky, he nearly chomped Grandpa's hand off. "Isn't it incredible," my mom said, while Granny bandaged Grandpa's hand, "how a dog just knows these things."

IN LONDON, RAIN BEADED the streetlamps and the black roof of the taxi that took us to the hotel. Our mother liked to tell us how advanced the English were, how civilized, but the streets here were just as crowded as the Indian market back home, only duller, with tall rows of flats crushed miserably together, and the weather far greyer and colder than the mild Durban winter we'd been told to expect.

We had to share a room at the hotel, my parents in one bed, me and Leora in the other, the lamps off and a panda bear plugged in beneath the window, its weak glow smothered by the heavy curtains, so that each time Leora's breathing deepened, a dark terror laid its fingers across my

throat and I coughed. My father became wild with anger at me as the night wore on. Finally, just before dawn, he shoved me into the bathroom, but rather than sitting me on the basin he yanked me across his lap and laid on three surprising strikes with his leather belt. Afterwards I curled up on my side crying silently. He'd smacked me many times before, but never with a belt.

When my mom found out about it, she said I could choose any toy I wanted from Hamleys, the world's biggest toy shop. But first we had to see the palace where the Queen lived, guarded by serious men in tall furry hats. My parents were proud to show us the royal palace. They said she would still be our queen in Canada.

We took so long at the palace that we only had two hours at Hamleys to explore seven floors full of toys. Then we'd have to go back to the airport for our flight to Toronto. I stayed with my mother while Leora bounded off with my father. We were to meet back at the cash registers at two on the dot.

My mom and I agreed to hurry past the bears on the ground floor—pink, purple, yellow, and green, striped and spotted bears—some the size of a birthday card, some as big as my mom. In one aisle, I found a five-foot-tall Paddington Bear and rocked him back and forth in a death grip until my mother said, “We’re not taking that on the plane, Ken Joel Kaplan,” and pulled me away, past the

plush dolphins and kangaroos and dinosaurs and unicorns, towards the escalator. As we glided up to the next floor, I noticed an open door which led to a large storeroom, where a ginger-haired shop assistant was feeding live goldfish, one after another, into an enormous tank. Twice I saw a pair of great snapping jaws close over the wriggling fish, but before I could point out the scene to my mother, we'd arrived on the next floor.

It was the science and games floor. My mother said we should keep going, I was still too young for these things, but I reminded her that she'd promised me I could choose any toy in the shop. All along the wall, candy-coloured test tubes steamed and hissed above silent blue flames. Through the long corridors of spy kits and detectors of pirate treasure, we made our way to the back. Passing through velvet curtains, we saw a screen churning with planets and faraway galaxies. Thumb-sucking boys and girls waited their turns to examine the universe's mysteries through a toy telescope. I wanted to stay and have a look but my mother reminded me we didn't have much time. We parted another curtain and entered a long passageway, its high walls hung with faded tapestries, its ceiling the same porridge grey as the sky over London. Or maybe it really was the sky; it was impossible to tell because the passage was full of pale-yellow smoke that stung the backs of our throats. Above us, a shiny purple helicopter raced and dipped. A matronly saleswoman, her

skin mottled like old parchment, leaned from the window and asked if I wanted a turn at the controls. But my mother tapped her watch again, so we had to shake our heads sadly and walk towards the exit sign, glowing green through the smoke at the end of the long hall.

That door led us straight to another escalator, this one heading to the upper levels of the shop. It was already half past one — time, which had stretched like a rubber band the night before, was now flying from our fingers, and we had to hurry to choose my new toy. Up and up we went.

But where I'd expected to find stacks of action figures and radio-controlled cars, I instead saw shelves that were almost bare: the odd fire engine and plastic army set mouldered in boxes sealed with yellowed tape. The dull lighting shimmered strangely, and even my mother's features became indistinct. A gaping hole in the ceiling didn't seem to allow in any light. "It looks like the building's been bombed," my mother said. She wondered if we'd entered an abandoned wing of the shop by mistake. Together, we set off again, trying to find the right path.

A bag of Simba chips caught my eye. I stopped to examine the pink-and-yellow bag, bending close in the milky light to decide if it was real, and when I looked up, my mother had vanished.

Wailing loudly, I dropped the chips and ran to the end of the aisle. There, from the corner of my eye, I noticed

movement along the far wall. I chased after it, calling for my mother, but instead I saw the familiar figure of Lindy. The strap of her right sandal had broken, and she was limping. I threw my arms around her leg, buried my face in her pink uniform's rough material, and sat on her foot, letting her drag me to the back of the shop and towards a pair of large oak doors.

In front of them stood a doorkeeper: my father. In South Africa he had been a respected judge but here he was dressed as a simple shop assistant, and his unshaven face wore a look of distaste.

"Your pass?" he demanded. He spoke in a low rumble that my mother always said could terrify the innocent and the guilty alike.

Lindy slipped her passbook from the pocket of her apron. My father examined it. Nestled deep in his skull, his black eyes burned. "Do I need one too?" I asked. But just then the great doors swung open, and my father stepped aside to let us enter.

The hall of justice was smaller than I'd expected. The floor was pockmarked as if from minor explosions, and a layer of fallen plaster dust covered the shoulders of the men. The light was even thicker and dimmer here, and through the twilight I could make out two long tables facing each other on opposite sides of the room. All the men were White. Some were in suit jackets and ties while



others wore fancy costumes—superhero tights, a wedding gown, the brown robes of a monk—and they were jumbled together so that it was impossible to tell the judges from the accused or the mad. Her big, rough hand around mine, Lindy led me to a couple of empty seats in the corner, away from the men. I told her that I'd already been punished once that day, for coughing too much. "They're *my* judges," she whispered, squeezing my fingers. "Do you understand?"

Her trial was brief. When the men called her name, Lindiwe Nkosi, we rose together and stood on a dusty rug embroidered with peacocks in the centre of the room. They asked if she had loved me and if she had already forgotten me. Was it true she had put her pink palm on my forehead when I was sick? Did she or did she not leave our employ for two months? Lindy gave no answer; not a single muscle moved in her inscrutable profile. And yet, after each question, the men wrote furiously on yellow pads and whispered into each other's ears. They only directed one question at me: "Do you love her the most?" and I began to weep.

We were led to a carpeted room with a wide feather bed and told to rest and wait for Lindy's sentencing. From my father, I knew that before the accused is sentenced he has to be convicted of a crime, but Lindy said that here, no one was ever convicted. "We go from judge to judge," she said. I asked if she thought my tears might have moved them but

she said that the judges were never moved. They left us in that room for so long I fell asleep. In my ear, a high, clear voice, trilling like a bird at the bottom of the garden, told me it was I who was guilty, guilty forever, and that the love I had confessed was not enough to save me.

## Twist

When the lights went out, Kyla was standing contrapposto, her hands behind her head, while the students drafted long charcoal strokes. She held the pose until Tobias said she could put on her robe. After a few minutes, someone knocked at the door and told them there was a blackout across the city, and Tobias dismissed the class.

She dressed in the pitch darkness of the washroom. The building was empty by the time she'd finished. Tobias hadn't waited for her. But then again, they rarely spoke at school. Kyla was trembling, coming back to the body she had to vacate each time her robe came off. Attempting to live *la vie de bohème*, she was starting to suspect she wasn't made of strong enough stuff.

A little Swiss-German guy with spiky grey hair, Tobias had approached her a year ago when she was on her bike, at

a stoplight, leaning against a street sign to keep from losing her balance. The light changed and changed again as they talked. She was broke and the pay was twenty bucks an hour, so she agreed to meet him the following day.

The café Tobias suggested was a narrow sunny room near the reference library. Ficus and Boston ferns were tangled in pots in the many windows. At a booth in the back, Tobias told her that the secret to a good pose is what he called “twist.” All the drama, all the enigma that the model embodies is derived from twisting her shoulders or hips. Twist implies movement, it implies action, change. Kyla looked at his slim, tattooed arms, at his eyes, lined from years of laughing, and felt something inside her give way.

She got a bikini wax in preparation for her modelling debut. “I just want it to look neat,” she told the woman. “A neat little triangle.” Holding Kyla’s skin taut with one hand and spreading hot wax with the other, the woman asked why she had so much hair down there. “Are you Greek? Italian? Turkish?”

“Jewish,” Kyla said.

“What a shame,” the woman said, yanking the thick hairs out by their roots. “The Jews are always suffering.”



KYLA WALKED NORTH ON McCaul, then west along Dundas. It was 4:40 p.m. Traffic was heavy, the powerless streetcars stalled in their tracks. The narrow Chinatown sidewalks were thrumming with old ladies in sun visors, stooped over folding shopping carts. Fat rabbits and ducks hung upside-down in restaurant windows beside roasted suckling pigs and impossibly orange squid. Men were packing up their vegetable stands or spraying down the sidewalks, nudging the smell of dead fish and garbage off the hot pavement and into the city's sewers. At the corner of Dundas and Spadina, a man wearing aviator sunglasses played a keyboard ecstatically. His arms had been amputated above the elbow. With the power still out, the intersection was chaotic: no one was directing traffic. Pedestrians streamed in all directions.

She turned north onto Kensington Avenue, where the second-hand clothing shops were shutting their doors on the funk of incense and faded cotton. On a patio, aging men in denim vests were throwing back pints of beer. She spotted the woman she privately called Ursula, after the Disney villain (due to her meanness and size), unpinning velvet jackets from the display outside her shop. Kyla waved.

Normally, you'd hear reggae from the corner at the top of the street, but the Jamaican patty place was dark. Two guys with long dreadlocks sat cross-legged on the sidewalk

thumping djembes, their wrists encircled by thin leather bracelets. On Baldwin, a girl Kyla had seen around the neighbourhood paced in front of Chocolate Addict, hawking melting ice cream bars for a dollar.

Kyla lived above one of the shops on Augusta that sold colourful spices and dried beans in bulk. You got up there by climbing a fire escape off the alley. She'd thought Tobias might be waiting out front of the shop to surprise her. That was a disappointment. Too hot in her tiny apartment without the fan on, she sat on the fire escape and ate cold spring rolls from her fridge. The alley reeked of stale beer and piss. She didn't linger.

Instead, she zipped her guitar into its soft case and headed over to the park to see if anything was going on there. Sure enough, her friend Sue was sitting on the scrubby grass under a tree, talking to a guy. Large sunglasses were propped on top of her hair, which Sue had recently started dyeing black and decorating with red flowers, their little faces trembling as she laughed.

"Kyla!" Sue shrieked. "You should play something for us. Play us something you wrote."

"You're a musician?" the guy asked.

"Hardly," Kyla said, kicking off her sandals and sitting down. "I play at open mics sometimes."

"Kyla," Sue said, "this is Juan Carlos. He's visiting from Guadalajara. He says it's the San Francisco of Mexico!"

“Nice to meet you,” Kyla said. “Do either of you have any weed?”

“That stuff kills brain cells, you know.”

Kyla turned to find the very last person she wanted to see: Joshua Feigenbaum. “Yeah,” she said, “so does going like *this*.” She lightly smacked the side of her head.

“Look, guys,” Josh said. “Ice cream bars! Sorry, Kyla, we’re one short.”

“Wait,” Sue said, “how do you two know each other?”

“Through Nurit,” they said at the same time.

“Oh yeah,” Sue said. “I completely forgot you were friends with her.”

“Best friends,” Kyla said.

“This is *awesome*,” Juan Carlos said, half-closing his eyes before the emphasized syllable, as if reaching deep inside himself for it. “Ice cream bars, man! It’s a sign. Tonight is going to be perfect.”

“Where’s Nurit?” Kyla asked Josh.

“No idea,” he said.

“Shouldn’t you know? What if she’s stuck somewhere?”

“What do you want from me?”

“Nothing,” Kyla said, slipping into her sandals. “Absolutely nothing. Anyway, it was nice to meet you, Juan Carlos. Have fun in Toronto. See ya, Sue.”



AT HOME, KYLA OPENED all the windows, stripped to her underwear, and searched her usual hiding spots until she found a pinch of old skunk wedged between the never-cracked spines of some textbooks on her shelf. It was still light out, and although she couldn't be seen from the street, it was possible her neighbours were enjoying a free show. NAKED MADWOMAN RANSACKS OWN APARTMENT. It comforted Kyla, in a way, to imagine her most private moments being observed and chronicled, if only in someone else's mind.

Still on edge from the heat and running into Josh, Kyla settled back on the futon. The weed in her pipe glowed as she sucked in the smoke. Things had already been tense between them when Nurit met Josh, but Kyla believed their friendship wouldn't have ended so abruptly, so angrily, if not for how smug Nurit became after she got together with him. And anyway, Kyla thought, scraping her hair into a ponytail just to get it off her neck, it was easier to blame Josh than conclude that the friendship had been a sham from beginning to end: two lonely girls who tried endlessly, and failed, to wring some comfort from each other.

Was that it, then? Was neediness the only thing that had drawn Kyla to Nurit's room every day after class, to flop on her narrow bed while Nurit put the kettle on, ran a towel under the door, and lay down beside her to get high? They would dissect whatever had happened to them that



day, discuss their favourite albums, masturbation, sexual techniques (Kyla had never had an orgasm, and she used to shake down Nurit for tips). She loved to watch Nurit muss her blonde hair when she was thinking, her pretty face drawn into a firm point, her small jaw set. “I’m a seeker,” Nurit had announced the first time they did coke together. “A pursuer of deeper truths. That’s what makes me different from all these other cunts.”

Despite the air of straight-shooting confidence she liked to project, Nurit was hopelessly fragile, like a declawed Persian cat with nothing but attitude to protect it. She asked constantly for reassurance. Once, after humiliating herself at a house party, she’d asked Kyla, “Do you think it was okay how I freaked out?” Her distracted fingers were massaging a sore spot on her neck.

“Here,” Kyla had said, “let me do that.” She settled in behind Nurit, who leaned into her hands.

“But seriously,” Nurit said, “do you think my reaction was justified? Oh, that’s perfect. Right there.” At the party, a guy Nurit had been dating non-exclusively for three weeks went into another room with a younger girl. Nurit, who was fantastically drunk at the time, had smashed a lamp against the wall. Kyla sort of admired her for doing it, but that was different from thinking she was justified.

“Well,” Kyla said, “he did tell you from the start that he only does open relationships.”

“But I was sitting right there. It was mortifying! Don’t you see what I mean?”

What Kyla saw, sitting on her futon and looking back, exhausted her. She’d thought they were striving, together, to find broader ways of being and living, refusing the conventional matrix that would try to stifle them with families and careers. But as it turned out, Nurit had *wanted* convention: to be swept off her feet by Joshua (puke) Feigenbaum. She became so holier-than-thou, just like him. If Nurit were there in Kyla’s apartment, for example, she’d have mulled over the things Kyla loved: her oversized yellow teacup (the only cup she owned), the colourful cushions she’d brought back from Peru, the enormous painting of a screaming monkey in a suit and tie that her friend Todd had rescued from a dumpster because it was “freaky, but cool.” Nurit would have sipped her herbal tea and sat back on Kyla’s futon, hugging her knees and judging her silently rather than just coming out and asking what the hell she was doing with her life. Which would have been a good question, actually, because Kyla had no idea.

It was sweltering in there, she knew that much. At Tobias’s, she could drink fresh lemonade in his backyard or they could jump the fence at Christie Pits and splash around in the pool before devouring each other in bed. She hauled herself up from the futon, threw on a clean T-shirt and shorts, and grabbed her guitar again. Out on the fire

escape, a stiff breeze had risen. Thin brown leaves and dry maple keys swirled in the corners of the alley. She locked her door and walked north, where the first signs of gentrification were slinking onto her street: a store selling pricey retro housewares, a new tapas restaurant. She walked north towards Tobias.

When Kyla had finally told Nurit about Tobias, she'd said that they wanted their relationship to unfold organically. He encouraged her to have her own life, to have lovers her own age, not to commit to him until she was ready. But in bed, he looked at her like she was something he'd lost a long time ago and couldn't believe had found its way back to him. That look was addictive. Nurit had responded badly, saying the whole thing sounded tacky and calling him a sleazebag, all without ever having met him, and just because he was forty-six. "What do you want me to say? I hate to see you keep getting involved in stuff like this."

"You could start by saying you're happy for me."

"You always do this," she said. "You get mad at me for having a different opinion."

"I really like this guy."

"Then I kinda feel sorry for you."

Kyla hadn't known what to say, so she'd picked up her purse and slung it across her shoulder.

"Right," Nurit had said, mussing her short hair. "I should probably get going, too."

Kyla heard five quick bangs and turned to see fireworks rising from the park at the far end of the street. An approving roar went up. She was really upset. But why? Another series of bangs. Sometimes it has to be okay to just hate people, she decided, you don't have to climb inside everyone's soul or figure out why they piss you off... because she really hated Joshua Feigenbaum. Whatever space was empty inside Nurit, he filled it up. And she filled him. Was that why Kyla resented them? Because they were so good for each other? Or because she hadn't been enough for Nurit? It was all very upsetting. Kyla turned away from the couples and bicycles passing her on Augusta and headed west along a quieter street.

Two elderly men were sitting together on the porch of a red-brick duplex. Hanging baskets tufted with flowers swayed above their heads in the wind.

"Smile, little lady!" one of them said. *Leetle*. "Still so young!"

"Oof," the other said, "it no hurt your back?"

"My guitar? It's pretty light."

It was nobody's business whether she smiled or not. Sometimes Kyla felt like her face was made of tracing paper, as though anyone could peer right inside her. With most of the girls she'd grown up with, you had to drape yourself in fashion or bitchy comments to be safe from gossip and exclusion, but she and Nurit had never been like that with

each other. Their hearts were always exposed. Nurit used to say, “We were a classic case of love at first sight.”

Nurit had cornered Kyla at a welcome barbecue during frosh week to ask if Kyla knew where she could get her nipples pierced. Finally, Kyla had thought, someone else who refuses to make small talk. It turned out they lived on the same floor at Whitney Hall. Nurit was from Israel; she’d left to avoid army service. Her mother was an alcoholic and her dad was doing time for tax evasion, though Kyla only learned these things later. They couldn’t get enough of each other. Kyla remembered looking at Nurit, this pale intense creature wearing a hat with a leopard-print band and small silver hoops along the rim of her left ear. She remembered wondering why Nurit had chosen *her* to ask about nipple rings. Later, Nurit had admitted how much Kyla had intrigued her, the silent girl peering in from the edges of the party, although she obviously — and Nurit said this last part with flattering pride — had more style than anyone else there.

So, Kyla had introduced her to the city whose periphery she’d lived on for nineteen years. They’d pre-drink in their dorm rooms, then swagger down to Peter Street in black nail polish and halter tops from Goodwill. They’d be surrounded by spray-tanned girls with navel rings and breasts pushed up to their chins, but they’d ignore them and dance furiously, dance for hours. Saturday

mornings, they shopped for paper lanterns and straw hats in Chinatown, taking a break to stuff their faces with cheap bánh mì. They'd discuss straight girls who wore ties and if they wanted to move to a commune after they graduated. Kyla thought Nurit was beautiful—small and hot-tempered—and soft inside with a thin brittle coating, like a marshmallow that had caught fire. It seemed perverse to Kyla that Nurit wanted to be her friend. But she was happy to show her around town until Nurit met other, more interesting people.

A MULBERRY BUSH DRAPED itself over someone's backyard fence. The berries had been mashed into purple marks on the sidewalk by passing feet. Kyla turned down a back lane. She was sweating under the weight of the guitar and she was thirsty, and it seemed like madness to have become involved with a Swiss-German guy who didn't have a phone, to undress in front of strangers for money, to perform alone with just her voice and guitar, and every other way she was surely wasting her youth. The only thing she knew for certain was what she didn't want for herself: she didn't want to teach at a school or work in a bank or be like Nurit.

The other girls at Whitney Hall had disliked Nurit right away. Lana, who lived on their floor, used to ask Kyla if she didn't think Nurit was kind of fake and pretentious. One

day over coffee and grilled cheese sandwiches at the cafeteria, Lana's roommate called her out on it. "What the hell, Lana?" Yeo-Jin said. "Stop bitching about Kyla's best friend."

"Does it bother you?" Lana asked.

Kyla shrugged and spooned more sugar into her coffee. And so Lana kept going on about Nurit's artificial laugh.

She had never stood up for Nurit. Guilt—is that what had tracked its footprints over everything? The way Kyla saw it, Nurit had run her household since the age of fifteen: buying groceries, cooking, making sure her mother went to AA meetings. So what if she bragged sometimes? Kyla was from Forest Hill; Lana was from Thornhill. Kyla's father had a veterinary practice and was raking it in—who were they to judge? But she'd never said anything because she saw Lana's point, too. The problem was that she always saw everybody's point.

"What do they have against me?" Nurit asked. Kyla had told her it was Yeo-Jin's birthday and their whole floor was going out; she should come. Kyla hadn't realized (meaning, no one had told her, but she probably could have guessed) that everyone but Nurit had been invited. Kyla admired Nurit, she *worshipped* Nurit, but she had always felt a small burst of pleasure when the others excluded her. It was as if she were getting back at Nurit for being better than she was.

"Yeo-Jin likes you," Kyla said. "She told me once. I'm sure Lana just forgot to invite you."

“What did I ever do to them?”

“Nothing,” Kyla said. “But maybe you could let them in a bit more. Sometimes it’s sort of like you’re trying too hard.”

“Let them in? Are you kidding? Those stuck-up bitches would rip me to shreds.”

Nurit was very lonely. Their first semester at school, she called her friends in Israel all the time, trying to convince them to visit her. A year later, when Josh came along, she was ready to twist herself inside out to be with him.

Kyla walked the back lanes thinking she was about to discover hidden treasure, something no one had noticed before. She used to think she was some kind of rebel for choosing a different route, but all the alleys were the same: garage doors and crumbling wooden fences, glimpses into identical backyards, weeds pushing through gaps in the asphalt, everything crackling from the summer heat. She remembered something her mother had once said during an argument: “Nothing anyone does for you will ever be enough.” Her mother’s face had been flushed, and Kyla was so angry she could have bitten it. Now, the back lanes weren’t enough for her anymore. Even Tobias wasn’t enough.

She thought of the moment she’d known that her friendship with Nurit wouldn’t last. It was a month after Nurit got back from New York, from a trip sponsored by an Orthodox Jewish outreach group. They offered free airfare and a week’s meals and hotel accommodation in exchange



for attending lectures every morning about the dangers of intermarriage and the joyfulness of Jewish law. It was supposed to be a joke, the only way Nurit would ever get to New York. She met Josh on the trip. “He gets me,” Nurit told Kyla. “Have you ever felt that way?” It was how Kyla felt with Nurit, but she didn’t say anything. If it weren’t for Josh, Kyla figured that Nurit would have returned to normal after a few days back in Toronto. Everyone else Kyla knew who’d gone on the trip had chalked up their newfound spiritual discoveries to brainwashing. Instead, Nurit started attending services with Josh. One night, on Tisha B’Av, a holiday Kyla had never even heard of, she agreed to go with them.

It turned out Tisha B’Av was about mourning the disasters of Jewish history, starting with the destruction of the ancient temples in Jerusalem. The rabbi spoke about the need to fight contemporary injustices. Kyla liked that part. But when she read the prayers’ English translations in the siddur, she remembered she was saying things she didn’t believe, in a language she didn’t understand.

Afterwards, Nurit’s cheeks were red as they waited in the evening’s fading heat for a streetcar. “That was magical, right?” Her voice was far away.

“The best thing about it,” Josh said, swinging her hand in his, “is the way they stick to tradition without hiding from the modern world. They’re all about engagement.”

“Don’t you just feel like everyone there was so spiritual?”

“I don’t know,” Kyla said, “it wasn’t really my thing.” Nurit turned away without replying, stuffed her hands into Josh’s back pockets, and drew him towards her for a kiss. Kyla knew as soon as she’d said it that something was going to change. It was like waking up to the first frost of the year, a cold vapour between them that was starting, imperceptibly, to harden.

Some time after that night, Nurit decided to take revenge for the injustices she’d faced at Whitney Hall. She stole Lana’s credit card number and began using it to buy gifts for Josh on eBay that she couldn’t otherwise have afforded. Lana’s bills went to her parents, but the amounts were small enough that they never noticed. “How can you do something like that?” Kyla had asked. Meaning: how can you be so trashy? It wasn’t long before all Kyla noticed when they met for coffee was Nurit’s flaws, her low-class striving.

KYLA TURNED RIGHT ONTO Tobias’s street into a vinegary cloud of air. Crabapples were piling up on somebody’s lawn, their hard flesh rotted, fermenting into mush. When she was a kid, her little brothers used to have crabapple fights with other boys on their street. They’d come home sore but grinning, heroes returning from battle.

Modelling for Tobias's class for the first time, Kyla had felt heroic just for going through with it. It was the third day of her period. In the abstract, she'd romanticized her new job—a muse to young artists!—but as she snipped off her tampon string in the washroom and *prayed* the thing wouldn't leak, she thought she was going to faint. She had to take deep breaths before she could drop her robe and stand, naked and exposed, before the thirty strange pairs of eyes that were scanning her clinically. That's right, she'd thought. Here I am.

Kyla saw Nurit defenseless when she went with her to get an HIV test. Tears had rolled from Nurit's squeezed-shut eyes as the needle jabbed into her arm. Her nails dug into Kyla's hand, but Kyla didn't flinch. "You're doing really awesome," she said. She stroked Nurit's hair. "I can't believe how awesome you're doing." Nurit had only nodded, but it was enough.

Some teenagers were lounging in front of the Catholic school as Kyla went by. "Hey," one of the boys called, "you know how to play that thing?"

"Nope," Kyla said.

She could feel their eyes on her as she used the pay phone in front of the school: she still knew Nurit's number by heart. Kyla hung up when she got her machine, but she put in another quarter, and another, then dimes and nickels until all her change was gone, listening to the sound of Nurit's voice.

She crossed the street and climbed the tree outside Tobias's window. It was a cherry tree. Tobias invited the kids on his block to pick cherries when they were ripe. You'd see their small bodies shimmying over the branches, their mouths stained scarlet and dripping with juice. He mixed the cherries that were left with sugar to make jam, so they wouldn't go to waste. Once, Kyla had spent a whole day making jam with him in his sunny kitchen. They barely talked all day and were too tired at the end of it even to make love. Their hands were scarlet. At night, they heard the cherry branches scraping against the window.

His bedroom was dark now. Kyla took her guitar case from her shoulders and unzipped it. She cupped three of her fingers into E major and then walked them into a C. She sang to the open window, naked and exposed, but Tobias didn't come. She knocked on the window frame. "It's me," she called to the empty house. "Tobias, it's me. Let me in."





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