The Honourable Road

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Summary

A Multi-chapter Season 5 AU (5x09): Sydney Katz was offered a placement in London. What if circumstances meant that she and Maggie build a life in Canada

24/03/19: Lin Family Drama - Maggie and Sydney try to communicate through trouble. (Part 1/5)

Notes

It always bugged me that Syd left so suddenly - not even genius doctors can do this easily (plot device) and I have a weakness for friend commentary of UST
I usually map out my fic in advance so I have a rough timeline worked out but feel free to offer suggestions.
Crooked Pathways

The Honorable Road

Chapter One: Crooked Pathways

“Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms and like books that are now written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer.”

Rainer Maria Rilke

Sydney was expecting either stolen jewelry or burnt strudel.

Contrary to popular belief the Katz family was not and never had been a paradigm of unshakeable virtue before her coming out. There were a few members who had strayed from the acceptable pathways with varying degrees of outrage attached.

Case in Point to this Reality: Jeremiah (Jerry) Katz

Jerry Katz was her uncle's son on her father's side. Syd's family was not shy about boasting about their children and Jerry, and Sydney had occupied the uncomfortably unsubtle mantle of 'favored child.' for most of their childhood and adolescence.

He had tumbled from grace about 15 years before her, but apparently, a long string of larceny convictions and less than legal businesses was no match for a lesbian daughter.

The bitterness hit Syd every time he innocently posted family photos online or messaged her every week no matter what time zone they were in respectively. Their outcast statuses were different but he never once turned his back on her.

It was possible the knitted rainbow bear sitting on her pillowcase is stolen property, but 'Edger' was still one of her most treasured possessions. This gift of acceptance and a natural instinct towards fixing things are why Syd automatically said yes when Jerry had texted this morning pleading for help.

Anything would be better than sitting and obsessing over the fact Maggie was apparently deliberately ignoring her and that Round 3 was turning out to be yet another failed reunion.

She was one bad day away from using 90s romcoms as insperation

It just wasn't fair that hospitals made their employees take time off so regularly; medicine and Edger were her only solace.

So in an odd way she was looking forward to handling Jerry's collection of eccentricities and dramas.
"Hey Syd, I need your help. I didn't have anywhere else to turn and besides the Aunts are always boasting about your talents in the field."

Jerry's familiar tone echoed in the hall; before she could ask for clarification, the need for it becomes a moot point as a second person shuffled painfully through the door.

Sydney did not need to be an OBGYN to know that the woman in front of her was pregnant and uncomfortable. Her every movement spoke of pain and trying fruitlessly to shift weight to a better position. All her expertise did was to afford her the opportunity to overlay the pale complexion and temperature spikes with many diagnoses.

"Sit down, now. I will get you some water" Syd said sharply, guiding the older woman to the couch and elevating her feet before heading to the kitchen.

"This is Amara we met in Jordon...we had a plan to live off the grid but..." Jerry began as he took the seat opposite.

"Right now I don't care about your Bear Grylls fantasy or the fairy tale. All I care about is the baby. Tell me about the baby" Sydney corrected sharply reaching for a blood pressure machine and a portable fetal monitor.

"I am about 14 weeks along, but we didn't exactly have the best equipment at the commune, so that's a guess. There does not seem to be a complication I have escaped, and things just seem to be getting worse. Jay convinced me to come home with him - even though I always wanted an intervention free birth" Amara replied softly

"Well, babies very rarely stick to the schedule of mere mortals. Has there been any monitoring of the pregnancy so far?"

"Not in the conventional sense. I am training to be a nurse so that I could monitor vitals" Amara supplied sheepishly knowing the rebuke she was about to receive.

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"I can recommend you to another great clinic, Jerry. Once everything is stable, I don't need to be involved" Syd says quietly.

The cousins were packing an overnight bag for Amara and unpacking the suitcases in Syd's spare room where Jerry would stay until they had a clearer picture of the situation.

"Why on earth would we want to do that? There is nothing better than family in any situation. Isn't that practically the Katz family motto?" Jerry seemed confused by the dilemma.

"Well, that's rather the point. It's either the Katz or me right now; we aren't exactly a package deal anymore." Syd was resentful of the catch that still trapped in her throat even though she should be used to the status quo by now.

"Are they still going on about the curse even after all you did for Rebecca? You damn near wore yourself into the ground consulting every night and not to mention flying here again." Jerry was indignant

"It doesn't matter; you know that. I broke up with a perfect son in law to live in sin. Mom and Dad are not going to defy the Torah for the sake of a daughter, who they never understood particularly
well anyway.

Jerry swept her into his arms and hugged her.

"If I had been in Canada you better believe we would be going to Toronto Pride. You aren't cursed to me, and you never will be"

Syd was grateful for the show of support, but the Katz family grapevine would not stay silent for long. There would be plenty of opinions when the relatives descended.

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"Jackson, can you give me a hand with this admit please and then page, Dr. Lin for me?" Syd called as she entered the hospital's main reception area.

This night proved that she had been right to accept a recertification of her privileges at Hope Zion even if her primary purpose for staying in Canada wasn't bearing fruit.

"Maggie?" the nurse and oracle of all knowledge at the hospital managed to infuse the question with far too much subtext for Syd's liking. However, he did guide Amara to a wheelchair and grabbed an intake form.

"No - the other beautiful impossibly stubborn OB GYN resident named Lin" she muttered sarcastically under her breath.

"Just checking." Jackson quipped

Syd had never had particularly high defenses when it came to Maggie Lin, but this week was a new level of vulnerability. She had been doing the best to avoid the other woman, and yet ironically Syd was still hurt to realise that Maggie had been doing the same.

Syd felt like a teenager or at least the version of that wasn't obsessed with getting into medical school and outpacing her feelings.

Maybe this was her act of atonement for her earlier indecision. She would wait for as long as Maggie needed to believe her.

Come what may.

She was all in for the long term.

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"Dr. Katz needs you."

Maggie looked up from the lifeless cafeteria panini as Jackson slid into the seat in from of her.

"Syd shouldn't be sending you to do her dirty work. It's not going to make my process any faster. Tell her I left for the day" Maggie grumbled assuming that Jackson was up to speed on Lin-Katz drama Round 3.

"Syd the lovesick traveler isn't requesting you. The formidable Dr. Katz has summoned you to her presence. There is an important distinction there, one a lowly nurse cannot ignore." Jackson clarified before digging a stick of gum from his scrubs.
"She isn't even on this week, and you are about as lowly as Dawn's ego " Maggie only felt a little bad for tracking the other doctor's movements so closely, but her dignity could only take so many hallway encounters.

"You should know better than to think that sick babies work to a timetable," Jackson replied as he followed her to the bank of staff elevators.

"I wonder if it is too late to change my specialty to Pediatrics or Geriatrics?" Maggie mused out loud

"For your heart? Absolutely"

"Thank you, Dr. Phil."

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"Maggie this is my cousin Jerry and his girlfriend, Amara."

Sydney did not look up from the observations she was writing, but there was a gentleness to her voice that was confusing.

That was neither a friendly greeting of a colleague or the scared overtones of someone newly outed. Her interactions with Syd were about as predictable as the American political climate.

Maggie's customary greeting to new patients was interrupted by the beaming smile that overtook the older man's features. The Katz resemblance is unmistakable with the pale skin and red hair.

"You are Maggie? Syd is nuts..."

Maggie had often wondered what was with members of Syd's inner circle greeting her as if they were meeting the solution to an enduring mystery, with that deep curiosity and open speculation.

Sydney barked out a quick rebuke in Hebrew. Jerry seemed strangely immune to the menacing glare of Dr. Katz and replied to her in a teasing tone.

"Well now that we have introduced ourselves. What have we got Dr. Katz?" Maggie asked as she slipped on a fresh pair of gloves and moved to the end of the bed.

"Amara Sampson is 20 weeks pregnant. She is complaining of persistent joint pain and headaches, limited prenatal support or workups. I have requested full bloodwork, and she will be admitted for 48-hour observation." Sydney automatically falls into doctor mode.

"What can I do to help?"

It was easy to fall back into their professional rhythm. A silent language of requests and suggestions flowed between them as they worked to get a comprehensive picture of mother and baby.

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The Baby Katz would be a dream teaching tool for residents.

Maggie's doctor's instincts were at war with her human empathy as she stood outside the on-call room and reviewed Amara's test results.
The needs to prioritise was automatic - none of the results could be considered good, but there were a few that need to be addressed right away, or they risked a succession of organ failures.

Amara and her baby were about to graduate to the category of high-risk pregnancy and formally join this hospital's long term case load.

Right into Maggie's carefully constructed Syd Free World.

For there was no doubt that she would be involved. Maggie had long expressed an interest in such cases to anyone who would listen at the hospital.

Maggie suspected that she would still be invested in this instance even if her future specialty was orthopedics.

A distracted Alex had been less than understanding. She had angrily claimed that Maggie would probably let Sydney Katz drop in and out of her life for the next several decades without complaint. The senior surgeon had asked caustically if Maggie planned on being maid of honor at Syd's wedding?

The answer was yes.

It wasn't an attractive thing to admit and nor would she ever be turning the experience into a Modern Love essay but Syd exerted a gravity all of her own. Maggie could no more leave Syd and her family to suffer along than she could have left Alex to deliver Luke with strangers.

Maggie slipped into the room and saw Syd in a fitful sleep. Her commitment only become stronger as she watched the familiar restlessness lurk at the edge of her former mentor's features. She was loathed to disturb the limited amount of rest that Syd undoubtedly received, but they had decisions to make.

Their narrative would have to be paused for a little while.

"How bad is it?" Syd's voice seemed to load in the stillness.

"Baby Katz will need all our expertise."

Maggie reached out her hand and interlaced their fingers and refused to let go.
Baby Katz's heartbeat was still strong enough.

There wasn't much else to recommend the current situation, but it was a major point in this baby's favor. There is also the psychological reassurance of the parents being soothed by the repeated measure, especially when their stays in hospital are going to be long term.

"How is Hour 18 shaping up?" Amara asked as Maggie read the flashing vitals.

"Holding steady. The signs are better now that your infection is under control. Can I ask you a question?" Maggie kept her tone light and conversational.

"Why didn't I get help sooner?" My only excuse, which isn't one, is that I come from a family of professional nomads. My parents are environmental activists, and we lived in more countries than I can name, and I am the product of 'unofficial homeschooling’ and barely have an official identity to speak of further back than 2014. I took the self-sufficiency thing too far just because I starting nursing training in Amman."

"Far from the craziest set of circumstances we have encountered, but things are going to have to change now. There aren't any nomadic equivalences to emergency baby monitoring" Maggie cautioned softly.

There was something uncertain in her eyes. "I will do whatever you need me to do," her voice dropped to a conspiratorial whisper "Besides Dr. Katz can be a little scary when she is giving instructions."

Maggie smiled "There is nobody who will fight harder to get your baby into the world healthy." as Amara began to drift back to sleep. Surprisingly she didn't seem overly affected by the constant rhythm of the hospital and maintaining a regular sleep cycle.

Currently, the extent of her and Syd's communication was clinical notes in Baby Katz's Chart. There were no texts to speak of personal or otherwise.

Maggie tried not to be disappointed, but self-delusion never was a strong suit.

Hope came in an unusual form.

There was a copy of Sydney Katz's work contract in her locker.
There was something wrong with Amara's ability to regulate fluid.

There was also something wrong with Maggie's ability to form whole sentences around Sydney.

Their only true language was medicine. The two doctors could discuss and debate that for hours and frequently did. However, any attempt on either side to broach more personal topics failed miserably. The most innocent comment (about a new hair cut) seemed to do nothing but trigger old wounds.

Fortunately for the first problem, Hope Zion had some of the latest monitoring equipment and very competent multidisciplinary teams. If Amara's illness was a chess match then they were mounting a credible opening defense but they couldn't currently treat the cause.

Amara was presenting with an AT, an atypical version of 'Mirroring Syndrome' as a complication of severe Congenital Pulmonary Airway Malformation. Maggie’s hypothesis that this unusual scenario was the result of a preverbal 'perfect storm.' The genetic condition combined with immune vulnerability to exotic infections that weren't detected early.

Trust a member of the Katz Family to be exceptional in every way.

Jerry was wracked with guilt that he had so readily crossed so many borders in South America without inquiring about vaccine statuses.

Syd, of course, dealt with the problem with characteristic directness. Maggie wasn't entirely sure she ever left the hospital between managing a full case load and overseeing Amara. Every gentle overture from their workmates was rebuffed though Billy had made it his intention to make Dr. Katz laugh at least once a day.

Somewhere during the day, Syd did manage to slip a copy of a renewed lease agreement in Maggie's locker with the note.

"I want to get better at hellos as well."

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They could not seem to control the infection rate.

Sydney seemed to take the fact that Amara was still developing a series of infections to be an insult against her skills as a doctor.

Maggie just wished she would stop finding Syd adorable at 3 am as they raided the online medical libraries to look for possible solutions.

"There has to be a way of getting on top of this. What are we missing?"

"We will but do you really think that hashing it out at 3 am is going to get us anywhere. This case isn't like TV; there will be no magical solution the longer we look at it."

"You don't have to stay" Syd snapped knowing that she was overreacting but powerless to put up a more measured response.

"There are many things I didn't have to do when it comes to you but surprise, I am still here" Maggie
snipped back "Heaven forbid the great Dr. Katz can't do everything on her own" Maggie was equally frayred and had lost all manners some time back.

"I just meant that you have been here a long time and could use some rest is all" Syd gentled her tone and smiled wanly.

"Once again I am here by my own choice. You never could understand that, instead always presuming the best course of action a head of time." The words were bitter.

Maggie was still seething when she found a travel mug of coffee and a batch of cookies in her locker. The accompanying paperwork was a set of Jewish community fundraisers for the 2018-2019 cleaner year.

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The Lungs were going to be the problem area.

Identifying the problem, unfortunately, didn't automatically mean identifying a solution, no matter how clear the clinical symptoms.

"Hey what did that book ever do to you?"

Maggie looked up into Alex's amused gaze as she slammed yet another journal article closed.

"Nor provide me with any answers," Maggie said grumpily before gratefully accepting the coffee offered.

"Baby Katz" it was more of a statement than a question.

Maggie nodded wearily. She and her best friend were still at something of loggerheads when it came to Sydney. Alex disagreed with Maggie's devotion, and the other doctor was adamant to stay on the case.

"Let me take a look. Two heads and all that" It was the surgical equivalent of a peace offering and Maggie silently handed a pile of journal articles.

They worked in silence for several minutes before Alex couldn't resist commenting.

"I am surprised at how low key Dr. Katz is being. I was expecting fresh floral arrangements in the ward every morning or stars named after you."

"Syd is Jewish; I am pretty sure most of the stars are already claimed in some text, and she would never risk the infection transfer" Maggie replied before highlighting several lines.

"So she is keeping the courting till after hours?" Alex guessed - trying to offer a proverbial olive branch. The reliable sources of gossip hadn't provided any clues though there was much speculation.

Maggie recognized the gesture for what it was. Besides, it is hard to stay mad at someone who has seen you through the worst of times without comment. It wasn't Alex's fault that Syd's best qualities weren't so readily on display like Charlie, Joel, and even Gavin. The Chief Resident just hadn't learned the language yet.

"Paperwork. Syd is courting me with paperwork in my locker."
"Is that some lesbian code?"

Maggie laughed "No - I have accused her more than once of being gun shy and afraid to stay. She is inundating me with her contract, apartment lease and volunteering schedule to prove that she is here to stay. Besides walking six blocks every morning to enable my addiction to Pink Bean's Coffee."

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The pressure was building in both a medical and personal sense.

Maggie figured she owed Syd at least one more.

Not that she could claim any particular logical reason for when she slammed Syd against the locker room wall and kissed her as she was pulling off her scrub cab.

The desire for oxygen become annoyingly persistent long before either of them wanted to stop. Maggie hasn't realized how much she had missed mussing Syd's hair until she was given the opportunity to do so again.

"I can't do the surgery next week. Doing Becca's surgery just about killed me and showed me up in front of a bunch of interns. I can't do that again. I won't. My head will be too divided."

"I already called in Shiloh at Morningside. She has already applied for privileges here and is bringing a set of interns with her to observe. Neither of us will be touching the theater beyond placing the hallway." Sydney broke into the space between them.

"I want to trust you, I really do but I can't. My heart is not up for another fly by Katz encounter. If we go any deeper I may not be able to pull myself out again" Maggie confessed quietly.

"I'll wait and let me prove to you that I am here to stay. I won't make any demands on you, date whoever you want, go to Crab Shack every night" Syd began

Maggie sighed "That won't happen either Syd. You never believed me before, but I was never as successful at casual relationships as you seemed to think."

"A stalemate?"

"Against all the odds we are going to save your cousin's life. Have faith Syd; nothing is hopeless" Maggie whispered with a sad smile.

Sydney had to change her strategy.

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Life often comes down to the presence of outliers.

In the end, it was Dr. Billy Scott who broke the stalemate

Three weeks later.
Amara's daughter wasn't the only thing on the cusp of viability.

Billy had become almost as invested as they had in the case and had practically become Maggie's shadow when his duties allowed. Thus he had a front row seat to their trials and tribulations.

"You aren't very good at living in limbo you know. You should stop before you and Syd are basket cases" he said as they shared a quick lunch.

"I am not the person to talk about a psych rotation" Maggie grumbled as she attacked her 4th sandwich from Syd that week.

"I am serious. Some people thrive on indecision and making pros and con lists. They enjoy waiting for the winds of fortune. You are far too much of a surgeon to ever let that happen. You are a come or go person." he explained before swiping her offered second half.

Maggie did not immediately raise any objections.

"I could see right away how you felt about Dr. Katz. You weren't fooling anybody. You think you are protecting yourself from further harm, but your heart is already in there with her. Do you honestly think friends do half the things you and Syd do?"

“There aren't going to be any clean breaks for you - it is always going to be messy compound fractures." Billy sighed and shrugged.

"For what it's worth I think she would spend the rest of her life trying to make you happy if you let her."

Maggie figured she didn't have much dignity left to this particular junior doctor, but he was gracious enough to ignore her tears.

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Sydney Katz was exhausted.

She often felt annoyed at people for overusing the term, but today it felt especially apt.

Sydney was sick of running projections for survival and coming up short. She was tired of giving up control to another surgeon who didn't understand the case.

Above all, she was simply sick of feeling like a failure at every turn. It was unlikely that this cycle was to change anytime soon. Amara wasn't out of the woods yet.

Sydney was wondering which ice cream would be her companion tonight as she opened her locker. Rocky road and mint chocolate chip were neck and neck when she noticed a foreign object in her empty locker.

Amara's latest kidney results and a gift certificate to the Kosher Cafe, Entitling the bearing to 10 breakfasts.

"Trust can be earned - carbohydrates are always helpful. 10am" ML

Sydney cried as she sent an affirmative text.
Chapter Notes

This is the result of me spending the day starting auditing for work. Won't keep up this pace but should be fairly regular

I am dyslexic - E does a great job. The remaining mistakes are my own

Chapter Three: Road to Her

Every day that they could give Baby Girl Katz was a bonus.

Sydney, Jerry, and Maggie were huddled together in a booth at The Haim Cafe. Dr. Shiloh Gregory had refused to let either of them lurk in the hallway. She had a firm 'no family and no medical staff relatives' are allowed to observe operations rule. Apparently, Maggie not being family was an irreverent technicality to the hyper focused fetal surgeon.

"What's taking so long?" Jerry asked for the second time that hour.

Sydney reached over and stilled his hands as they continued to shred a mount of napkins.

"It's not going to feel like it to you, but we are right on schedule. Besides this is a delicate procedure, delays don't always mean problems. That is why doctors always give a range of times."

Jerry glanced between the two of them with a nervous smile.

"I couldn't hold down a thing but at least let me buy you lunch. It's the least I can do for crashing your date spot, and I know you have been giving up your lunch hours to sit with us."

Maggie still felt the thrill to know that one of Syd's family was so readily accepting of their relationship, even though dating wasn't really what they were doing.

She and Syd were simultaneously not ready to date in the conventional sense and caught in a space that when beyond dating.

"Doctors will never turn down free food," Maggie said agreeably before reaching for the menu.

"What should I start with for an introduction to Kosher Breakfasts?" Maggie asked.

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Sydney Katz was somebody who liked to talk.

It struck Maggie during their third breakfast meeting that how different the circumstances were. For most of the proceeding three years, all their interactions were squeezed between other conflicting obligations like the hospital or Israel. Now, there were no such concerns.

They had all the time in the world with no end in sight.
Apparently, Sydney Katz was a chatterbox outside the hospital setting. This characteristic was equally charming and endearing at the same time.

"We never had a pet when we were younger because Becca and I could never agree on what to get. Besides all the Katz children from all branches were expected to be in accelerated programmes so there wouldn't have been time to look after a dog properly. I've always wanted a pet of some description though."

Maggie considered this as she tucked into her deconstructed bagel.

"Do you want to know what I think?"

"Always."

"I can see you with a parrot - not one that is in a cage or anything but one that has free range of the house and knows hundreds of words."

Sydney blinked in amusement "Why would you think that?"

Maggie shrugged self consciously "You are so the type that would need a challenge, need to earn your pets respect and fuss over making the perfect environment. Dogs or cats wouldn't challenge you enough."

Sydney laughed delighted "I love that you make my controlling, perfectionist ways sound charming instead of annoying."

"Why do you always say things like that? Be down on yourself so much?" Maggie said, reaching to grab Syd's hand. "I always wondered why even before, you have no reason to be so self-deprecating all the time."

Syd toyed with the remains of her Israeli Breakfast Special plucking up a piece of cheese.

"Aside from medicine there isn't a lot I can look back on with pride. I've made mistakes in the last three years on my grand journey of self-discovery. It's not like Eat, Pray, Love with convenient little montages and beautiful settings." Syd confessed in a quiet voice.

"Look at you with your modern day movie references" Maggie coaxed gently before continuing seriously.

"For most of your adult life, you have had two major aspirations - dominating the world of OBGYN and holding yourself to high standards within your community. You are allowed a few missteps when standing at forks in the road. Nobody is perfect at human relationships at any time much less before 30, even prodigies."

Syd interlaced their fingers. She was pleased to realize that everybody here was affiliated with her faith in some way and was in no doubt about their relationship.

"I must have done something right to have you as a champion, Dr. Lin." Sydney wanted to say something about how Maggie was in her prayers every night, but that was too intimate. Instead, she kept things light.

"I would have had such a crush on you if we met in high school or college. It would have been embarrassing; there would have been hearts and daisies in Chem Class" Sydney laughed softly.

"As it was, my draft evaluation for you was mortifyingly verbose" Syd didn't add that she had gotten
a highly amused colleague at Morningside to edit a generic one.

Maggie was beaming, her eyes dancing with joy "Don't put me on too much of a pedestal, I was strange and weird. Dec and I weren't exactly conventional" she cautioned.

"Can I read this professional love letter of yours one day?" Maggie was doing the eyebrow thing that meant that Syd would probably be digging it out from somewhere

She didn't mind in the slightest.

"I am sure I can be persuaded, Dr. Lin. You are known for your powers in that area. At least when the subject is me."

"Those are fight words, Dr. Katz" Maggie parried back pointing an accusing finger.

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Maggie enjoyed learning about the Jewish Community

Of course, some of Maggie's opinion were influenced by the teacher. Watching Syd explaining the finer points of her time in Israel was just so enjoyable only because it made Sydney happy.

"We should go there one day. You can show me the sights; maybe we can do stint volunteering at the camps, especially if there is such a need for maternity clinics." Maggie said suddenly, interrupting a rant about lemon trees.

Sydney paused their current pattern because they didn't make joint plans too far in the future. They were going to enjoy being in their together bubble for awhile.

Planning a trip to Israel definitely counted as planning for the future.

"I would love to. Let me send you some information packs. We can start planning, once the baby is born" Sydney rambled enthusiastically.

"I would also like to take you to China to meet some of my father's relatives. We haven't been there in years but there are still some amazing sights in our home providence. We could do a tour of the train system" Maggie's eyes were alight with the possibility.

Maps were going to be a feature of their breakfasts now.

Finally, they were in the same space psychologically, physically and geographically. There was a sense of hope floating between them that was new and so enjoyable.

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Sydney had acquired a family by proxy.

The two of them had become fixtures at the family run Haim Cafe as it became their agreed upon meeting spot for both work and personal engagements. Of course, these two aspects overlapped more often than not, but they both liked it that way. There was a reason that so many medics and shift workers dated within the workplace.

Haim Cafe was relatively close to the hospital, so the café staff were very used to a steady stream of hospital employees at odd hours. They thought nothing of supplying a revolving cycle of coffee, smoothies, and biscuits.
Sydney was a different story.

Sydney had confessed that she had come to this cafe at some of her lowest points and burst into tears when asked a simple hello in Hebrew. Three generations of the Stien family had gathered around her and gently probed until they had gotten an abridged version of Syd's story.

A friendship was formed in tea and tears.

The whole cafe staff always seemed to be invested in her successful relationship with Maggie. Typically she found the grape vine intrusive, but now that her true desires weren't secret she was thrilled to have such a cheer squad.

"Have you thought about what you will cook for her?" they asked

"You should wear the green dress when you meet her parents. That looks lovely on you." They offered their unsolicited opinion once learning that it was the big weekend for the pair.

She had worn the green dress.

"Do you think Maggie is eating enough. She sounds like she is losing weight" they whispered conspiratorially as they ladled fresh soup into Maggie's bowl.

"You must promise to bring the children here. We want to see more of the Katz in the future" Grandma Stien said commandingly as if there was no doubt in the world of their future together.

Sydney agreed with a delighted laugh.

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"If you can believe it Jerry would be considered conservative for my parents."

Amara's soft and reflective tone startled Maggie and Billy who were doing yet another measurement of the baby's growth and positioning. Everybody was relatively happy that both mother and child had stabilised as best as possible for 25 weeks, but it was still touch and go, weekly monitoring was essential.

"The guy that looks like he should be cast in a Guns and Roses Biopic?" Billy asked with his typical lack of filler or tact.

'I always thought he looked more like Ed Sheeran" Amara laughed "but yes he went to university, mostly pays taxes and didn't even hesitate to help out when all this happened" she says gesturing to her stomach.

Maggie looked confused "Why wouldn't he be willing to be involved?"

"Hey, don't you have a date soon? I know that Syd was looking forward to taking you somewhere. She was all excited before" Amara diverted, glancing at her wrist watch.

"She was pulled into an emergency surgery, so we will more than likely crash on the couch with a salad and ice cream," Maggie said with a shrug.

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Jeremiah Katz was not looking forward to seeing his father.
Of course, that wasn't an unusual state of affairs.

Most of his relations may have labeled Jerry, the lovable rogue. The one who could be counted on to get anything that was needed, even rare spices for rituals that weren't supposed to be imported without a license. He was even something of a hero for planting seedlings from Israel in their grandparent’s garden as an anniversary present.

None of that mattered to his father in the slightest.

To James Katz, he would always be the boy with huge, God given potential who had squandered it both in the religious setting and in worldly ambitions. He had been on track to becoming a gifted young scholar of the holy texts before rebellion had gripped hard and fast.

Now he was about to have a child out of wedlock with a woman who was essentially a one night stand. Jerry had let Syd used the word girlfriend because she was still inherently conservative Amara, bless her empathetic soul, had understood instantly and had fallen into the role naturally.

"Jeremiah."

"Hi Dad - how are you and Mumma doing?"

James Katz had aged since the last time Jerry had been home. The younger Katz wished that there wasn't justification for the frown lines on his face.

"We are both fine, son. Sydney's friend said that you needed to talk to me about something important" he gestured vaguely at Maggie who was in the chair beside him.

Sydney had wisely desired to stay away from this meeting, not wanting to amp up the drama. James hadn't commented on the situation with his brother’s family and was unlikely to do so, but there were limits.

Maggie had insisted on coming though both to offer moral support and to answer medical questions. He was grateful.

"Dad, I am having a baby."

James Katz did not say a word merely blinked at his son for several long moments, it was a familiar look.

He left without saying a word.
Celestial Navigations

Chapter Notes

Just a warning things aren't as simple as this chapter may imply - 26 chapters to go :-)

Please give me feedback for this one - I'm conflicted.

Chapter 4: Celestial Navigation

All babies were miracles.

It was a truth universally acknowledged.

To a lesser or greater extent, most OB-GYNs and related practitioners believed that adage to be true. There was a lot of work and luck involved in getting babies into the world safely, with or without complications.

The only variation was in whether they attribute it to a divine invention, the dedication of scientists or a combination of both.

Maggie fell somewhere in the middle of the two belief systems.

She suspected that being in the middle was an excellent metaphor for her life in general.

There was a second truth that was not so readily acknowledged inside or outside the medical profession.

Babies were also a metaphorical earthquake in the lives of those around them.

In joyous situations of long for, treasured new life, the fault lines are shallow, and the foundations are rearranged to an improved version with the baby at the center of it all. There is a seamless integration into a new family united, whatever the particulars.

In less joyous situations the fault lines are numerous, and there are continuous aftershocks. The demands often challenge love and happiness. The extra food and supplies cause stress on the relationship. The real world can often have a corrosive effect, complications or not.

Maggie was not sure where Baby Katz fell on this continuum.

As she watched Jerry and his family huddle in an increasingly vocal conference, the junior OBGYN suspected that the baby's physical stabilization was not the only one required.
"She will convert, and you will do the right thing and marry this girl."

Maggie felt a bit like she was in a live action Jane Austin novel.

Despite her reputation as being laid back and easy going Maggie wasn't a stranger to conservative values. Her father's side of the family was forever lamenting the downfall of their 'westernized relations.' The Lin twins were forever the subject of dire predictions about their loss of status and marriage prospects. In their grandmother's opinion, this amounted to the same thing.

She still relished the gifts they both sent every year and proudly kept their photos on the mantel with all the other relatives; Maggie is the subject of much boasting at the weekly games night.

The experience with the Katz was different though, so different.

The three family members huddled in Syd's too small apartment looked like this truly was a matter of life and death. The particulars of the medical complications were secondary.

"You cannot bring such shame on the family, think of your sisters and brother."

"Don't you want to finally join the ranks of the family as a decent head of household. We have ten grandchildren we would be proud to add another but only in the right way."

"This is your chance, Jeremiah. Do the right thing for once in your life."

Syd has explained that it wasn't so much 'Jewish Conservatism,' what they were witnessing was conservatism finding a Jewish outlet.

"He's a straight man bringing in the next generation - many families would be delighted."

Maggie and Sydney were watching this from a distance on the second sofa. Their relationship was an open secret. Maggie had greeted them in the one bedroom apartment at 7 am in the morning.

To continue the Jane Austen theme - their relationship was every implied but never declared.

***

"What is she doing here?"

Maggie freely admits to being naive when it comes to tenants of violating Jewish laws and customs.

Being raised by two liberal academics in a socially liberal part of Canada has profoundly shaped Maggie Lin's world view. Their parents agreed on little towards the end, but their mutual sense of social justice remained.

Therefore Maggie genuinely could not understand how anybody could shun Sydney. Surely, all her incredible qualities would outshine the antiquated notions? Or at least lead to some flexibility.

Sydney is the exception to rules in so many fields why not this?

How was it possible to place so much disdain into a single pronoun.
Jerry and his parents were sitting in the relatives room, waiting for the results of the milestone scan. Maggie is there to support Jerry and to translate.

Sydney had just entered the room and paled when she saw her aunt and uncle.

"Shalom" she whispered softly, clutching the print out like a security blanket.

Hesta Katz bit out something Hebrew and turned away.

If possible Syd paled even further, and Jerry looked horrified and quickly hissed at his mother to be quiet.

Maggie's heart had clenched when Neishama had rejected Syd now her heart all but broke as Syd took a deep breath and bravely entered the room anyway, placing the results on the table.

"Syd is here not only because she is family, but because she is working round the clock to save the baby, respect her or leave," Jerry said in English.

His parents remained implacably silent and did not acknowledge their niece as she sat at the other end of the conference table.

"As if we could respect a dyke bitch who brought shame to the family and shamelessly promotes the taint she brings," said a drunk vaguely intoxicated voice from the doorway.

All doctors have trained events like this to occur. The belligerent patient or family member who was mean spirited with or without the aid of stimulants. Maggie had often been congratulated on her ability to stay calm and level headed.

There was a correct way to approach this.

Maggie is firmly convinced that there is no sound quite as satisfying as the sound of a bully's nose cartilage cracking as she rammed her hand expertly against the new comer's face. She had enough sense to, both as a doctor and the survivor of many school yard scraps, not to use full force.

There wouldn't be any permanent damage, but he would be sore and bruised for days.

Sydney gasped in stunned horror.

Any immediate reaction is sidetracked by the sound of enthusiastic cheering from the staff in the hallway.

***

"You shouldn't have done that Maggie."

"So you have said, quite a few times now."

They both have enough general training to know that the hand is bruised and strained rather than broken but Syd is still treating the examination like an elaborate surgery.

"I was always going to be on the receiving end of a backlash. It's just the way things are; move your fingers."
"I don't care," Maggie said, obligingly flexing each joint.

"Violence isn't the way to solve this. You are a doctor, you are held to a higher standard here, especially when you are at this point in your career" Syd lectured carefully looking at the worst of the skin abrasions.

"I don't care" Maggie repeated wincing slightly as the rubbing alcohol was applied with more force than was strictly needed.

"You are a surgeon, Maggie. These hands are immensely valuable; you can't just do things like that." Syd looked concerned as she flexed the third finger.

"I don't care."

"They won't complain, way too much provocation and Noah is not exactly a shining light but...."

"Nobody puts Maggie's girl in a corner" Billy Scott is doing a poor job of concealing his amusement as he and Alex shuffle into the private exam room.

Syd glared at him. "Do not encourage her."

"Here are the X-rays for our wounded hero, everything is perfectly fine," Alex said briskly handing over the film and giving Maggie a broad grin.

Syd studied the films while the three friends chatted and made plans to meet up for dinner. It didn't take long for the other two doctors to realize there were still unresolved domestic disputes and make excuses to leave.

The strapping was done mainly as precision and for the sake of surgeon’s hands and Syd's perfectionist ways.

"At least consider that I am very attached to your hands and need them in working order," Syd said finally with tenderness.

"When it comes to certain things I am very ambidextrous."

"You need to consider that I am in this now. You may be resigned to such treatment or feel like you deserve it, but it is never going to be ok with me. I will defend you." Maggie replied thoughtfully.

"I love you too much to let you be tortured for being the beautiful soul you are."

"Don't distract me, Lin. It's important to work" Sydney replied gravely. "and of course I love you too, My Knight Defender."

They proceed to violate many of Dawn's carefully constructed no fraternizing debates and policies. Maggie is proven to be highly ambidextrous and very capable when it comes to making use of limited space.

Sydney Katz loses her nickname of Dr. Stone Face.

There is not enough concealer on hand to make it less visible.

Neither cares.

***
Jerry Katz is used to feeling guilty.

All his adult life he has lived by code to be sure his system is based on illegal activity but its ok as long as nobody vulnerable or related to him got hurt. He had immense freedom to travel anywhere and do anything.

Now there was an ever increasing web of people getting hurt and nothing he could do to stop it.

Except maybe this one bit of paper.

***

Amara Sampson is used to feeling guilty

She had never been able to be as free spirited as her parents wanted or as conventional as her contemporaries seemed to expect from her. In the end, she had found a somewhat peaceful life training to be a nurse and living on a commune.

and then there was the former scholar with the long red hair and a poetic soul and far too much tequila.

Now there was an ever increasing web of people getting hurt, and nothing she could do to stop it.

Except maybe this one bit of paper.

***

"They do not want her, do they?"

"Stop making a sweeping generalization, Maggie. You know there is no formula for these experiences."

Maggie was pacing the length of Sydney's apartment. The small space was not providing a satisfying distance for her long limbs. Syd and Snowball the cat sat on the couch, watching with varying degrees of interest.

"They are caring for her and doing everything because it is the right thing to do. They both believe in the scantily of life so they would never disregard her entirely or jeopardize the pregnancy but neither Jerry or Amara is connecting to her as an individual being"

"Stop it!" Syd exclaimed more firmly. "Trust my experience on this"

"You are overly sentimental - people express emotion in different ways. People get attached at various times. There is no aspect of preparing for a child that is formulaic or precise. Hollywood has done our profession no favors by presenting new mothers as either utterly besotted or completely detached."

"It's more than that," Maggie said stubbornly.

Sydney beckoned Maggie over to the couch and coaxed her to stretch out with her in the senior
"You may be right, and if you are, we will deal with it when the time comes. Presuming all goes well, we have at least 12 weeks to monitor and observe and intervene if needed."

Maggie slowly began to relax under the gentle touch in her hair.

"She would have had her birthday about this time, wouldn't she? Baby Lin?" Sydney asked softly after 10 minutes of comfortable silence.

The silence with Syd were some of her favorites.

Maggie flinched "How on earth did you remember that? It only occurred to me last week?"

"It may have sounded like romantic hyperbole, but I wasn't joking when I said I thought about you every day. I have a mental encyclopedia of our moments together, and it wasn't difficult to make the calculations."

"I guess I am just sensitive about the investment thing, you know. I would have done anything you know, to make sure my kid was happy and loved" Maggie whispered with a distinctive catch in her throat.

"And you are going to display that in the future, but right now you need to grieve and have a private place in your heart just for her."

"Some fun date I am" Maggie joked sleepily.

"I wouldn't be anywhere else"
Points of Orientation

Chapter Notes

This chapter is a tribute to Saving Face (2004) one of my favourite movies.

Chapter 5: Points of Orientation

"My family is obsessed with wallpaper."

Maggie is never sure if Syd is literal or fugitive when she goes off on tangents in the early hours of their days off. Sydney is a chronic insomniac and her girlfriend half suspects that if they weren't here most days now, the redheaded doctor would spend her night time playing online chess and debating Jewish philosophy in two languages.

"Mmmm?" Maggie queried taking the opportunity to run a soothing hand through Sydney's hair.

"Your strange daughter has done the right thing and reported the signs of her best friend; all must be right with the world. The fact that she is devastated and barely sleeps is secondary."

"Strange daughter does the right thing and accepts a proposal, even though half the community knows the rumors" Syd's voice is getting increasingly fraught.

Maggie hummed gently and pulled Sydney closer, doing the familiar ritual of easing the tension simply by listening.

"Of course the Katz have a ready-made pop up Jewish Wedding on hand for Jerry and Amara. Let us all just conveniently ignore how they are feeling. It's the appearance of conventionality that matters not the substance, wallpapering a smooth, shiny surface makes everything alright."

"Breathe Syd; you are ok. You got through it, and Baby Girl Katz has plenty will and plenty of support. They aren't scared bullied kids; they will make their own choices." Maggie instructed firmly.

Maggie felt protective of her girlfriend; She is carrying many burdens and conflicting expectations. For the majority of her life, this is done in stoic silence.

Their relationship works by creating a safe space for both of them, but sometimes Maggie dreams of time travel to take away all the hurt that started it all.

It's an uncharacteristic flight of fancy, but she fantasizes of protecting young Syd and replacing all the shouting with words of encouragement and support.

At least she is here now.

Amara Sampson and Jerry Katz were heading to the altar six weeks before the baby's inducement date.

The viability of more than one life was at stake with this decision.
Alex Reid intimidates Sydney Katz.

There are many reasons for this. The chief surgical resident has an ease and charm with people, both personally and professionally that Syd will never have.

Alex seems to effortlessly walk a line between domestic life and career advancement that is just baffling. Who continues Boards while in active labor for heck sake?

She is also Maggie’s best friend

There Sydney has decidedly mixed emotions when she sees an angry looking Alex standing in the group office assigned to doctors who were pursuing research grant work as well.

“What the hell is this?” Alex asked angrily slapping down a pile of papers. "Jean wanted me to me to pass these on."

“Please sit down Dr. Reid." Sydney struggled to keep her voice even and inviting.

"You're leaving again? Swanning off to London of all places as soon as your new cousin is born?" Alex all but seethed with anger and defiance.

"Please sit down, Alex. You are not the first pregnant woman to come in here and yell at me. For your comfort, yell at me from a seated position. Your Edema does not look comfortable" the rebuke was mild but pointed.

Alex conceded silently but continued to glare.

"I am not going to London, nor I am leaving Maggie. Tobin General is just not taking no for an answer, what you saw was an incentives package" Sydney explained patiently. "Not my acceptance of the placement."

Alex does not look at all convinced, but some of her anger is deflating.

"I don't think you realize how much power you have over Maggie, you wrecked her three times - yet here she is back for more" the scorn and cynicism hurts, but Sydney supposed she deserves nothing less.

"I don't trust you, but she adores you, so I guess that has us at an impasse. We'll be okay as long as you don't pull crap like this" Alex said gesturing to the files.

"I will earn your respect" Sydney vowed almost inaudibly.

"Consider this a probationary period" Alex uncomfortably heaved herself up, for a moment looking like every pregnant woman she has ever known

"I am sorry about your mother," Syd called out as Alex reached the doorway.

"Well, you could always rely on Martha to be spectacularly dreadful with her timing. Wrecking balls of life are practically a Reid family tradition, why not death too?"
"We'll be ok, Katz just be more careful this time. I can't nurture any more heartbreak; I'm all stocked up on pain right now. Let me just watch my best friend be happy" Alex pleaded as she leaned against the door.

"There is nothing like a happy Maggie Lin."

They shared a real moment of solidarity and agreement on that simple fact.

**

"So has your cousin's wedding given you any ideas?"

Sydney usually liked to keep a reasonable distance from the trainee doctors, but there was no stopping the great enthusiasm for the life of Dr. Billy Scott. Besides, he was practically her shadow when it came to the weekly monitoring of Amara, and he was hassling Shahir for Team Baby Katz tee shirts.

Sydney snorted as she handed him a stack of files to review "I am not giving her a flat pack wedding with a rented Chuppah with all the personality of a Strudel commercial."

Billy wiggled his eyebrows suggestively "so you and Maggie are.."

"I am a lesbian Dr. Scott, my future spouse is always going to be she, allow for generic pronouns please" there is still quite a thrill to saying that out loud with conviction.

This pronoun evasion was a lie, of course, she would marry Maggie, or she would marry no one, but of course, that wasn't acceptable to say that yet. She was still on the outer of Maggie's wider friends and family, Syd had to earn their trust.

It may feel like they are in a beautiful universe of their making, but any realistic relationship involved more than one role.

"You don't fool anyone you know; you would have married 100 times over if given a chance. Just don't make her doubt that again. The girl seriously lacks in any skills to get over you a fourth time. There isn't enough Ben & Jerry in the province."

"Any hospital will be lucky to have you Dr. Scott" Sydney complimented with an amused smile.

***

"So are you here to stay, Dr. Katz?"

Jackson Wade is making ideal conversation after they consult on an ER admission with unstable gestational diabetes and a UTI. Syd was pleased to be back in the rhythm of consulting work.

"For the foreseeable future yes" Syd confirmed as she signed off the required admission forms.

"That's good, you fit in well here. The patients seem to adore you. 20 families have followed you here."

"Our Dr. Katz seems to inspire great loyalty in people, staff or patients," a new voice said dryly as Zach Miller joined them "What Jackson means is, have you and Lin finally stopped your dance of angst and sexual tension. It was getting annoying."

"I apologize for that" Sydney retorted drily "We are getting there" she normally avoided these
workplace entanglements, but she read the sincere concern in the question

"Maggie means the world to me. I won't hurt her again in that way. We are doing our best to communicate like adults this time."

"Then welcome to the big dysfunctional family of Hope Zion." Zack declared happily.

"It's good that you have the whole Pride thing down, ask Shahir for medical merch with Pride affiliations. He can hook you up."

She did not have the faintest notion what this merchandise would entail but she resolved to find out.

Sydney just hoped there weren't any elaborate hazing rituals to be endured with her membership.

**

"I love you."

Maggie was surprised to feel Syd embrace her from behind and nuzzled her face into the crook of the other woman's shoulder. The strict prohibitions on no PDAs in the hospital were up for negotiation.

They were standing in the park a few meters from Hope Zion, in full view of the assembled masses.

This development was excellent news to be pondered other time.

"Your friends just gave me the 'Hurt Maggie, and You will Pay' speech. There were different variations, but that was the main theme" Syd muttered with a laugh.

Maggie's face fell, and she turned in the embrace, her face intent.

"I am so sorry for that Syd. I think the wedding and the thing with Martha are making people far too reflective, but it's none of their business. I can.." Maggie began.

Sydney places a quieting finger on her lips.

" I love the fact that you have so many protective friends. I wouldn't be worthy of standing here if I didn't endure their skepticism. I almost broke their friend's heart after all."

Maggie moved to protest but Syd grabbed her hand, and they began walking around the large circular track.

"I am worried I am pushing too far from tentative dating to timetabling a family birth. This pattern is not exactly easy going material" Sydney confessed with a worried frown.

"Says who, Dr. Phil? I have no problem with our pace or a front row seat in the unfolding Katz saga" Maggie disagreed happily.

"On roughly our six conversation you were consoling me through the after effects of my miscarriage. By our 10th I was adding and abetting your decent into an existential crisis. We have never actually followed the guidebooks."

Maggie pulled Syd into a firm hug "Urge me not to leave you. Isn't that what Ruth said to Naomi?" she crooned softly.
"So you have been studying, huh?" Sydney was profoundly affected by both the tone and the implications of that one passage and its more liberal interpretations.

"Only selectively I am afraid, and I still have much to learn. If you are willing to teach your favorite student again." Maggie confirmed.

"The point is Syd; we are a package deal, dramas and all."

Sydney felt her heart sing.

***

They were holding hands in public.

This gesture was both and once profoundly simple and a definite statement.

They entire Katz clan is gathered in a hastily rented hall. There were several stragglers from the hospital who effectively made up the bride's party while monitoring her vitals periodically.

Syd was, of course, stuck in the middle. Jerry and Amara were united and uncharacteristically admitted that the two are respected as guests, but their status wasn't defined.

Her parents were studiously ignoring everyone; both were resentful in their own way. Her mother resented the endless supplies of grandchildren that her husband's family produced, while the maternal line struggled for every birth. Her father resented the presence of yet another outsider.

To her credit, Amara had learned the rituals well, and this kept the gossiping and pointing to a minimum, especially as she had consented to all the fussing over dresses and makeup.

The free food also absolved a multitude of sins.

Sydney gripped Maggie's hand more tightly as she considered that there would be no family celebration for when she married, she would be lucky if half a dozen of these people attended her wedding or even acknowledged the event occurring.

"Dance with me?" Sydney asked suddenly as they watched from the relative safety of the far corner.

"What?" Maggie said through a mouthful of cupcake.

"Dance with me" Sydney repeated as her favorite song came on over the average speakers.

Maggie allowed herself to be dragged to the dance area, collecting a smile from Jerry along the way.

There was no ambiguity to the movements. There could be no excuse for how close they were. They were dancing just like every other couple in the room, complete with soft kisses and familiar words.

The time for denial was over.

Sydney barely flinched as she saw her parents leave the room.

Lines are in place, and choices made.

The dance continues.
I wrote this on my phone so may have a few mistakes.

“Then he said, "You will undoubtedly quote me this proverb: 'Physician, heal yourself'—meaning, 'Do miracles here in your home town like those you did in Capernaum.'" Luke 4:23

"What's got you beaming like the first years in their first surgery?"

Maggie was oblivious to the surly note to Alex's question as she hummed while setting up the ultrasound machine for the senior surgeon's wellness scan.

The humming continued as she helped Alex settle on the bed and started to apply the gel to the probe. The smile offered was radiant.

"Ready to meet Luke's brother or sister?" this was probably close to the 400th ultrasound Maggie had observed or performed, but you wouldn't know that by looking at her.

"Only if you quit with the Manic Pixie Dream Girl routine girl and tone down the smile several mega watts" Alex snapped struggling and failing to find a comfortable position.

"Right," Maggie said slowly finally reading the tension and obliging schooling her features into a more serious expression, her brows creasing in concern.

Alex felt like a jerk who got their kicks from crushing the dreams of overeager Labradoodles; None of this was Maggie’s fault, and she had earned her happiness on so many levels.
"Sorry, you know that dealing with my mood swings is part of the best friend manual, right?" She apologized, grabbing Maggie's hand with a gentle squeeze.

"Don't worry about it and I will endeavor to keep my Pixie tendencies to a minimum. Besides, it takes more than a weakly delivered insult to scare me" Maggie said with an easy shrug.

"After all, she is training in dealing with my Israel Disposition by now." a new voice commented dryly.

Sydney Katz greeted them both with a broad smile before taking over the ultrasound equipment from Maggie and handed her girlfriend a piece of paper. In Alex’s estimation, the two began so sort of Vulcan Mind Meld of couple communication.

Alex meanwhile was struggling to communicate with herself let alone Charlie or her brothers.

Maggie read the content before breaking out into a grin.

"Have I told you lately that you are brilliant, Syd, because I think it bears repeating"

"Why thank you, Dr. Lin, but I can't take too much credit. BGK is a fighter." Sydney automatically used Billy’s nickname for the newest Katz.

"If you two have finished flirting over oxygen saturation and growth charts. I have charts to complete and terrible clinical notes to grade." Alex tried to tamper her jealousy.

The two blushed but quickly returned to the task at hand, but Alex couldn’t hold a grudge, this is what people want when they commented on the early days of her relationship with Charlie. The mating and courting rituals of doctors were interesting ones.

Alex shot them a weary smile.

***
"I wouldn't recommend any of the pastries at this time of day."

Alex looked up to see a vaguely familiar woman standing next to her in the hospital cafeteria. She was about 28 weeks pregnant but looked like she had earned every one of those 191 days the hard way. Her arms bear the bruises of too many IV lines and her looks angry and irritated.

Alex is relating to her on so many levels. The pain and confusion. Therefore, she resisted the urge to ignore the overture, time to be a vaguely human expectant mother.

"Thanks but this cafe and I go way back. Are you coming or going from a clinical appointment?" Alex asked as they shuffled further in line.

"I was aiming for a celebration. My latest test results are 'brilliantly stable, and I figured the baby, and I deserved a treat."

"Congrats. You must be Amara then. I'm Alex, a friend of Maggie's, she and Syd were jubilant about the scores" Alex said holding out her hand. "Also future mother of a daughter. Can I tempt you with a mixed berry Smoothie?"

Alex waved off Amara’s attempt to pay and led the way to a quiet corner.

“Is this your first?”

“Second. I have the son called Luke” Alex typically avoided the new mother bonding, being too focused on medicine, but she had been at loose ends of late.

She handed over her phone with the obligatory few selfies. It was strange to realise this was the first time she considered adding the sonogram photos.

“I can’t imagine this one making it to that stage. Nothing has seemed to go right. My achievement for this week is making it an entire romance novel” Amara said tiredly.
“You are in the best of hands, but it’s tough and don’t knock the stamina of reading – it’s not easy having the energy for two.”

“I know more about building a portable generator in a rainstorm than preparing for a baby. Some nurse I’ll make, huh?” Allowing my own body to collapse before seeking help? ”

Alex shook her head and laughed

“There is a reason for that. ‘Physician heals thy self’ is thrown about so freely. There is a difference between having the knowledge and applying it. I could tell you some stories of the staff here, safe to say you aren’t the first to ignore symptoms.”

“Especially when your parent’s idea of stability is only attending two protests a week and remembering to check homework” Amara commented

“Have I been there Just buried my alcoholic mother and tried to convince my brother to quit hiking K2 and deal with emotions.”

Alex was pleased that her simple offer seemed to have eased some of the tension of the younger patient; she made a mental note to chat to Syd about who was doing the prenatal counseling.

In turn, Alex felt a slight lessening of the conflict that haunted her day and night. She was going to be a mother in a few months, regardless of how bonded she felt.

“Physicians heal thy self” indeed – maybe she Amara could go to a group session together.

Conflicted Mothers of Daughters had a ring to it.

***
“I’m here to volunteer for the programme. Are there any slots open?”

Maggie looked up from the notes she was reading to grin broadly at Jerry Katz as he nodded in the small reception area.

"For the NICU volunteer rotation?" she clarified as she ushered him in.

Jerry hesitated, for somebody who looked like the cross between an almost-made it rock star and the Archeology professor everyone had a crush on, Jerry looked surprisingly insecure.

Then again he had a fair amount of insecure about, fatherhood, convictions and disappointed family did not make a good mix.

He was trying though.

"I heard that you need people to hold the babies who are sick, talk to them and sing to them, is that right?" he asked tentatively.

"Yes unfortunately with so many drug problems and unsettled parents, Hope Zion has plenty babies in need of extra attention. It's one of my favorite jobs, helping out when I can" Maggie explained as she handed Jerry some paperwork.

"I figured I should get in some practice as not to be one of those parents but maybe you don't want somebody with my record here?" Jerry flinched reflexively.

"There is a list of prohibited convictions. I don't think you are automatically but let me know when you get to that section, no outstanding warrants, right?"

"No I am clean and have met all my probation milestones to date, have done all the restitutions and started a steady job" Jerry suddenly felt like he was trying to make an audition or interview.

"Let me chat to the Charge Nurse; they have particular policies in place."

Maggie offered him a comforting smile.
"I figured I would find you here, did you forget our dinner date?"

Maggie jumped at the sound of Syd's gentle whisper. She had become thoroughly entranced by the motion of rocking the baby to sleep; it had taken a long time as his addicted limbs were jerking and spasming periodically.

"Oh, heck Syd. I completely forgot. We just got carried away, jamming to a medley of Beatles and Nursery Rhymes." Maggie explained indicating the figure still sleeping in her arms.

Sydney crouched down beside the rocking chair, habitually glancing at the monitors by the incubator. It was not strictly her field, but she didn’t dislike the NICU as much as she claimed.

"I am hardly going to begrudge these guys their cuddle time, sweetheart. I get unrestricted access to your hugs anyway; I am big enough to share with the NICU graduates." Sydney said with an affectionate grin.

Sydney did not add that there was nothing she would rather be doing right now. Maggie looked beautiful as she whispered endearments. This moment was all her dreams embodied, somebody who understood both her medicine and her passion.

It was yet another image to add to an ever growing list of favorites. It made Sydney sad to think that she had squandered three years of this happiness but they were stronger in 2017

“How about we tag team the end of your shift here and then we can grab a pizza on the way home. I finished some cookies yesterday.”

Neither of them mentioned the casual comment, but it made Maggie smile.
“Sounds like the best offer I will get in a while.”

***

Jerry couldn't believe how unfair life was sometimes. His faith had never been especially strong as an adult but the last few weeks confirmed it.

The only thing Sydney had done 'wrong' in her life is violating the bizarrely restrictive Leviticus. The best thing that could be said was that some members of their family did not actively hate her.

In contrast, the only thing Jerry had done is refusing to abandon a one night stand when her health started to fail. He achieved more scriptural violations in one week than Sydney managed her entire life. He was back in the fold simply because he reached the level threshold of committing to get his life back together.

He thought this while watching Maggie and Syd give up their date night to comfort sick babies.

Jerry would not be able to volunteer – his record was too spotty. It was a stupid idea. There is no way he could compete with church ladies and doting grandfathers.

Would his daughter fare any better?

He is managing to stay straight for four weeks so far. Could he do this for at least 18 years? It is not like he could opt out if things got hard.

This pattern has been his MO for the last 20 years.

What kind of role model would he end up being in the end?
“What’s your favorite color?”

“What?”

“I feel weird being married to someone I know so little about. We could play 20 questions” Jerry suggested.

The newlyweds were lying together in a hotel room. The Katz family had chipped in to offer an abridged honeymoon that was doctor approved. They had no desire to use the time for its intended purpose, but they had plenty to talk about in the coming days and weeks.

Besides Sydney needed one place where she wasn’t in doctor mode. Maggie was probably sick of date night being interrupted even though she never mentioned it.

Jerry had received a text from Maggie.

“Can’t directly do NICU work but lots of other roles in Community Outreach, ring me” Jerry had been pleased, not a total rejection.

“Green. My favorite color is green.”

“Best place you have traveled? Most memorable experience?”

This question led to long stories of every topic from Mongolia to Meat in Memphis. Both enjoyed the art of storytelling and had many highlights in common. They both agreed that they were lucky that mutual interest and companionship extended this far. They were on the shaky ground, but at least they could be friends.

“Am I ever going to feel anything beyond doubt and terror? I am in the best place for the baby and me, but I am still afraid.”
“I’ll let you know if I figure anything out. It’s all I seem to be feeling and gratitude to you. Let’s not make any hasty decisions. We have a few months let’s use that time to map out a plan. I am there for it all, no demands or judgement.”

Amara believed him.
E did a masterful job with this - my computer kept changing to Norwegian and rejecting spell check - not fun.  
(also probably shouldn't write on my phone during a family reunion)  
I will write a Valentine Day Interlude next - just need the trope.  

Also, apologise to my sister who is a Dula and informs some of Maggie's opinions without knowing it.  
We will always disagree on medicine but I love you and your hippy ways.  

Forks in the Road

*Oh girl that feeling of safety you prize*
*Well it comes at a hard, hard price*
*You can't shut off the risk and the pain*
*Without losin' the love that remains*
*We're all riders on this train*
*So you've been broken, and you've been hurt*
*Show me somebody who ain't*

*Human Touch - Bruce Springsteen*

It is nearing Valentine Day's Day, and Maggie was in a dilemma.

In her 31 years on the planet, she is wary of embracing Valentine's Day; this is true both as a teen and an adult. The prospect of big romantic gestures did not fit into the pattern of her previous relationships, Gavin tried his best, but he wasn't really in a position to honor any promises.
She hadn’t dated any other women seriously enough for this to become an issue not that being women automatically meant you were subscribed to the holiday.

As with everything Sydney was the exception to the rule. She needed to thread the needle between intimate but not too close at this stage.

Flowers were out because Sydney had allergies and much preferred to have things that lasted longer.

Chocolates were out since Sydney does not have a particularly sweet tooth and enjoys far more savory foods.

Jewelry was out. Sydney did not wear much jewelry and besides when Maggie did buy Syd such things she wanted it to be for a much more important reason.

This problem called for a shopping trip with Alex.

**

Maggie supposed conflict was inevitable between the two of them.

Their personal and professional lives are too heavily intertwined to avoid conflict entirely. They are both characteristically stubborn and prideful to a fault.

Let alone adding the complicating elements of Syd's family.

"You need to lower your liberal expectations of hearts and roses, Maggie. There aren't any swan songs here."

"I don't know what that means and who said anything about hearts or roses. You make me sound like something off an advice column" Maggie argued as they walked to meet Becca in the ambulance bay.
"You expect my parents to come around because they love me. In their mind my coming out is a failure of will. I don't love and respect them enough to fit the mold; desire or no desire." Sydney held a stalling hand.

"It's not rational or right, but it is the way they feel. You can't will them to change with your liberal language and impassioned speeches any more than you can convince Snowball to fly." Sydney continued with a sigh.

Maggie stopped Sydney from walking further.

"I get that; I do, and I promise not to punch any more of your relatives, but you need to let me be in your corner. There is nothing wrong with who you are now. Your parents have a right to believe, but they cannot demand you to as well especially not on my watch." Maggie cautioned softly, squeezing the other woman's hand.

"Were you brought up on a diet of Arthurian chivalry?"

Maggie laughed and corrected Syd “A mix Chinese Folklore; more Buddhism and Confucius.”

Sydney kissed her on the cheek.

“My parents aren’t dragons but thank you for willingly taking on the role. I feel like since I met you I have gained more than I could ever lose, no matter what they say.”

**

Rebecca Friedman is in a far from an ideal place to be entering labour.
If you listen to all the latest books and self-help gurus, childbirth is a sacred process and women are just waiting to be coached into a state of serenity. Maggie thinks that women enter labour however they are in life. At its bare biological mechanics, the act of giving birth is merely an ultimate stressor to be managed.

Coming to labour after enduring multiple rounds of chemo is not ideal.

Her doctors are doing their best to balance chemo and keeping the baby healthy, but it is a delicate balancing act. Becca has remained stable for the last weeks of her pregnancy, but stable is not the greatest starting point when it comes to giving birth either natural or assisted.

"Looks like he is finally ready to enter the world," Maggie said with a broad grin to both expectant parents.

"The question is, is his Mumma ready to go straight from L&D to full strength chemo?" Rebbeca said dryly, but she was still rubbing her belly tenderly, wincing slightly at the contraction.

"Ah, but the advantage is we can go all out on the counter measures as well. Memorial and Hope Zion are both home to some top rate anti nausea drugs and oncology nurses" Maggie replied as she quickly filled out all the admitting paperwork for the C section.

"Is everything going to be alright with surgery and her immune system?" Samuel Friedman looked caught between pacing and praying, an odd look.

“All the protocols are in place. We know how to be careful” Maggie said soothingly.

“My husband is a champion of late night googling, for,” Rebecca said with an affectionate nod to the notebooks stacked on the bedside of her hospital room.

**

Rebecca has evidently inherited the Katz stubborn streak for she insists on being admitted to Hope Zion and having Maggie as her attending physician.
There was no talking her out of the idea, and she glowered and guilted her parents into silence with a surprisingly accurate review of Maggie's credentials.

"I want to see my sister; she should be here for me. I've earned the right not to consider her sin; I may not survive this and Syd needs to be here" Becca hissed fiercely, looking almost identical to her sister at that moment.

The other three occupants of the room collectively moaned at the prospect and rushed to deny what she said.

Rebecca looked over their heads at Maggie.

"Find said sister from wherever she is lurking." the words were both a command and a plea.

Sydney is the embodiment of a dream birth coach. She talks her sister calmly through the pain and lays out exactly what is going to happen. She navigates the thin line between risky medical procedures and Jewish customs. Becca laughs as they share childhood stories.

Maggie may have imagined a softening in Mrs. Katz expression as she worked her anxiety into a row of intricate stitching.

**

"Why won't they at least let you in there to spy on me?"

Maggie laughed as they sat opposite each other in the hallway outside the theatre.

“Precisely because I would be going there to spy on your command”

Jerry and Samuel were on a mission to find Kosher snacks and Becca’s favourite baked goods for when she was feeling healthier. Jerry is an instrumental reason Becca feels as she is. He had worked
tirelessly to help control her pain and other side effects.

“This side of the operating room sucks” Sydney complained snappishly, glaring at the wall clock as if it was personally responsible.

“It really does. I can rustle up an Operation board game set if your withdrawals get too severe” Maggie joked as she pulled a scrunched scrub cap out of Syd’s hands.

“Tell me something about yourself that nobody knows” Syd offered instead.

“I don’t hate Celine Dion to the degree that my music taste implies I should.”

“I struggled to enjoy Israel as much as my roots suggested I should.”

“I wanted to be a triplet for a while.”

“I wanted to play professional Chess and possibly follow Judit Polgár.”

“I am going to marry you” you could rely on Syd to make such a statement both casual and resolute. The tendency was adorable.

Maggie grinned broadly

“I know that already” there was laughter in her tone.

**

Maggie liked Rebbeca's husband a lot.

Sydney often said that Samual was a good man. He is within his rights to exert a high level of control over Becca, but yet he doesn't seem inclined to do anything like it. He refuses to entertain the idea of leaving Becca even though there are whispers in the congregation about both the Katz name and the number of miscarriages they have endured.
Now Maggie can see this reality first hand. As they waited for Baby Friedman to be checked over by the neonatal teams and Becca was reviewed by oncologists.

Samuel and Jerry are sitting together. Several Jewish texts are sitting between them, and Jerry is supporting the younger in practicing his prayers and rituals for new fatherhood.

Samuel is treating Sydney with nothing but respect and warmth, even when Maggie held her hand.

Samuel refused to allow any other family members to disrespect either of them.

Samuel is doting on his wife, attentive to her every need, even the challenging ones; when Becca’s lips are crusted and bleeding with thrush and angry Graft vs. Host Disease.

Maggie felt a stab of both tenderness and envy. She hoped that if anything happened to Syd that she would be in the same position; Also that she could be half as strong and resolute in each of her decisions.

**

"You should not have encouraged her sin you know."

Maggie barely resisted the urge to jump. Mr. and Mrs. Katz are wraith like presences in the hospital and Becca's room. This statement is the first time either of them has acknowledged her directly.

"We are going to have to agree to disagree on your definition of sin" Maggie replies not looking up from her paperwork.

"She could have lived a perfectly normal, God fairing life if you have not encouraged her in this direction. Now we barely see her, and when we do, she is unrecognizable to us."

Maggie clenched her fingers around the pen, scratching out her signature angrily.
“What you see in her is genuine happiness. What you were asking her to do is live a lie, to silently
shoulder your condemnation” Maggie bit out in an angry whisper.

The two blinked at her owlishly at her while getting ready to protest.

“She is not asking you to change, to join a new congregation, to challenge your Rabbi. All Syd
wants is to do her her job, live her life and practice her faith”. Maggie continued softly. “Who she
loves won’t change this in the slightest. Incidentally nor does it alter the lives of the countless babies
she has done everything humanly possible to save, including your grandson. Despite knowing the
reception, she was likely to receive.”

Oddly they did not seem to have a response to this and did not comment any further.

Maggie was included on their coffee runs though.

Small victories are worth celebrating.

**

"You have a nephew."

Sydney is too overwhelmed to answer the delighted statement directly, but she shuffles closer to
Maggie. They are both standing outside the nursery, watching Sammual and a newly recovered
Becca dote over their yet to be named son. His grandparents are on the other of the incubator,
grinning broadly and offering prayers. The family rabbi is on the way to the hospital to conduct the
formal ceremonies, now that both mother and child are stable.

Somewhat shockingly the fractures in the Katz family unit are holding steady as well.

“Against your predictions he is meeting all the milestones and has excellent Apgar Score adjusted for
induction” Maggie could not keep the boastful note out of her voice, reaching to squeeze Syd’s shoulder.

“Thanks to your quick thinking and decisive action,” Syd said, resting against the taller woman.

“I had a fantastic teacher you know specialty”

“You could have a specialty here – high-risk obstetrics – oncology and maternal infection” Sydney mused thoughtfully.

“I think for at least a little while my days are likely dominated by bringing little Katz into the world,” Maggie said with a wistful smile.

For some reason that comment made Syd blush, but she refused to allow diversions.

“Before you grow concerned. I’m not neglecting my career- there is no reason I can’t do both. It's my choice to make” Maggie argued firmly.

Sydney hummed neutrally. They were obviously going to be revisiting this topic in depth, possibly with diagrams and flow charts.

It seemed like the senior doctor wanted to say more, but she was distracted by the sight of Rebeca holding up the baby, grinning broadly.

Samuel beckons them to come closer. Her parents nod in approval.

A small victory is still a victory indeed.
Interlude One: Valentine's Day

Chapter Summary

Because we didn't get nearly enough tropes with this couple.

Chapter Notes

I hate Valentine's Day on principle as a socially awkward geek evidently, my love of tropes and this couple won out.

The Road Home

I did then what I knew how to do. Now that I know better, I do better”

Maya Angelou

“We need to go shopping.”

Alex Reid is surprised by the statement, with the occasional exceptions her best friend does not enjoy shopping, and the younger doctor notably avoids it after shifts.

"What pray tell has inspired this sudden move? Luke and I have quality plans with Cartoon Network” Alex offered, sliding over a plate of fries.

"I am indecisive about what to get Sydney for Valentine's Day - it's the first non-Jewish holiday we will commemorate and I want to make it special for her since she has never celebrated it before. She is not as disinterested in such things as her reputation implies” Maggie continued

Alex snorted in disbelief; Maggie certainly brought out a softer side of the OBGYN, but it is hard to
envision her being so tender hearted.

"So The Best Canadian Science and Medical Writing 2017 is out as a potential option?"

Maggie sighed "Syd peer reviewed the entries this year so gets free copies."

"She is obnoxiously talented isn't she?" Alex said without much rancor.

"A little bit." Maggie agreed with a sheepish grin and obvious pride.

Alex quickly morphs into the invested best friend and ignores her complicated feelings about the holiday and her strange impasse with Charlie. It was impossible to stay mad at Maggie when she is looking so whimsical.

"So what are you aiming for on a spectrum here - Cliché? Classic? Contemporary or something in between” Alex always liked to assess parameters first. For best friends, she and Maggie often display different takes in most areas.

"Something serious and thoughtful that does not scream I want to drag you to the nearest registry office" Maggie replied with a hapless shrug.

"Isn't that exactly what you want to do if given half the chance?" Alex queried with a mocking smile.

Maggie looked askance at the very notion "I am not going to embrace the cliché to that degree. Besides, I'm on a mission to win at least 20% of her family around first or at least convincing them to give up the notion of old world curses."

Alex stood up and grabbed her purse and rushed her friend out.

"Lucky for you Martha gifted me with an encyclopedic knowledge of all the best eclectic and one off stores in the wider province. We should be about to find something suitably meaningful without the crowds or drowning in fifty shades of pink. If memory serves me, there is even a second-hand store run by a local Jewish Association."
"Thanks, Alex"

"You are still in credit for the whole delivering my son thing, least I can do is to aid in your mating dance with Hurricane Katz."

“Jewish Commemorations are so much easier.”

Jerry Katz laughs at his cousin as she collapses disgruntledly onto the couch beside him and glowers disdainfully at the small number of bags on the coffee table.

"You did not enjoy a venture into commercial, secular celebrations then" he guessed offering a breadstick, a favourite of their childhood.

Sydney bit down viciously and huffed in agreement.

"The choices are mind boggling. The determinedly PC sales clerks kept stalking me and offering helpful suggestions on what Maggie might like. This advice includes a deeply mortifying explanation of what best nightwear would compliment my skin tone" Syd shuddered. "I could practically feel Grandmother's ghost haunting my every step."

Jerry pulls her into a consoling hug.

"It’s over now, and I'm sure Maggie will enjoy whatever you give her. You place far too much pressure on yourself to be perfect at everything."

Sydney pulled back as a sudden thought struck her.

"You don't think she expects me to buy any of that do you?"
"Do I look like somebody who would understand such things?" Jerry asked incredulously.

"In case you haven't noticed I'm not exactly drowning in female confidants. I don't think that Becca would ever forgive me if I brought this up."

"Ok, lay it on me," Jerry said. His protests were half hearted anyway.

He liked this side of his cousin.

Sydney knows that her nervousness is irrational.

She and Maggie are in a successful relationship; they are going on dates regularly. The two doctors have even agreed to have the first part of their date in Haim Cafe, mainly because the owners would never forgive them for not stopping in at least briefly.

This location is even neutral territory that they both know well.

Sydney is acutely aware that she is not the only one making changes and sacrifices in their relationships. Maggie is setting aside her expectations to build a relationship with her, one that moves at an entirely different pace to the norm.

Therefore Syd feels it is important to do regular couple things not connected to either the hospital or her ever evolving faith; fundamentally if she has committed to living a less restricted life than she needs to demonstrate it in tangible ways.

Case in point the effort to celebrate a widely commercialized day that has little connection to any religious roots.

"Breathe Syd- I am not going to question you on the latest developments in Twin to Twin Transfusion. The most complicated I intend to get tonight is which dessert we will be sharing" Maggie said with a gentle laugh.
"I can do that."

"And I am going to convince you to dance with me at some point this evening, just so you get fair warning," Maggie said sipping the wine.

"It's not like you desperately need your feet for surgery." Sydney agreed amiably.

Tonight is supposed to be about grand seduction.

That aspiration lasts about 8 minutes into their walk back to Syd's apartment, sharing bites of the cake they brought.

Sydney's phone rang, interrupting a debate about holiday plans.

Syd's playful expression immediately drains away.

"Becca, Becca calm down. I can not understand you. Exactly how high is his temperature? What are his other symptoms? No don't drive. Maggie and I can be there faster. We can make a call there." Sydney shoots her partner an apologetic look before giving her sister her full attention.

Maggie springs into action asking Jerry to meet them with the car and medical bags.

"Aaron has spiked a fever. Both Becca and Samuel are hysterical and on the verge of anxiety attacks. I don't think it is anything atypical, but I'm more worried about them" Sydney explained with a worried frown.

"Jerry is on his way. I figured he could help to keep every one calm."

Sydney is pretty sure she couldn't love Maggie more as she worked her intricate hairstyle back into a functional ponytail.
Maggie knows why they are terrified.

She can see that Aaron is okay. He is merely at the age when he hasn't quite got the knack of regulating his temperature. It is also possible that the anxious Friedmans have over swaddled him, listening to the predictions about a cold snap.

Sydney silently takes the baby keeping up a steady stream of comments and reassuring words.

Jerry springs into action and wraps an arm around his cousin in law who looks ready to faint at any second.

"I knew he was too healthy." Becca cried even though there was so such thing

"Aaron is healthy, Becca. Just the right amount"

"It's happening again."

"Aaron is just a little hot. We are here."

Maggie loses herself in the constant stream of counter arguments as Sydney runs a cold bath and instructs Jerry to get fresh outfits, of the summer and cotton variety. Becca and Samuel were directed to the couch with instructions to mix fresh formula.

Sydney is determined not to talk about medicine.

The problem is that medicine is something like her native language. It is easier to discuss medicine above anything, none of her inherent social problems come into play with science as the bedrock.

It is a nervous reflex that she barely clamps down on as Maggie hands her a neatly wrapped package that is decidedly bulky.
"I figured if I was going to be always making less than subtle comments than it was about time I contributed to the overall scheme."

Sydney laughed as she quickly unwrapped the ribbon, she is careful to preserve the paper, a piece will go into a memory box.

Lying in the box is a hand stitched quilt, each of the panels reflecting a scene in the Jewish Community and in particular the unique aspects experienced within Toronto. Blue and gold were the most prominent colours, but there were splashes of brilliant reds and green interwoven.

"Some Artist Collectives celebrate the Jewish traditions, and Alex helped me find one of their pop up shops"

"It's beautiful" Sydney is carefully tracing each detail, picking out the odd reference and smiling at each newly discovered piece of art.

"For my soon to be enlarged bed?" she finally guessed with a broad smile.

"Absolutely"

Maggie was not much of a crier

She has worked hard since childhood to avoid too many displays of emotion. Instead, she focuses on cultivating an easy going personality and friendly disposition; crying is reserved for private moments when she loses a patient or when she allows herself to think about the baby that she lost.

Rarely is she overwhelmed with such happy emotions to promote tears, suitably most of those instances revolve around Sydney too.

Sydney reaches and grabs her hand but does not stop speaking and explaining her gift. They are
sitting in Becca's living room by the fire.

A beautifully crafted scrapbook is resting in Maggie's lap. The paper is thick and beautifully patterned to reflect various nature themes.

"I almost gained the courage to call you countless times, in countless different countries or settings, even though I didn't quite manage it I did something else. I revised my old habit of photography, each of these scenes made me think of you."

Maggie offered a brilliant smile before diving into the pages, stopping to read Syd's neat handwriting.

A scene at sunset outside the rural clinic Syd volunteered at in Alabama USA. A young girl was holding the hands of her two younger brothers

A scene of one of Israel's many famed Kibbutz with Syd grinning in the foreground under a bright blue sky and rows of olive branches.

A beaming Syd in scrubs is competing without much skill in a soccer match outside a clinic in the Occupied Territories.

A snapshot of a fetal monitor showing a recently established heart rate with the logo of an English hospital.

A smiling Syd is standing outside an ancient synagogue and streams of pilgrims.

A simple snapshot of a boarding pass to Toronto, together with a Polaroid snap of the two them that Maggie honestly cannot remember taking.

Maggie pulls Syd into a hug, murmuring gratitude.

In the end, the night is perfect.
Of course, precisely nothing goes according to either of their relatively elaborate plans. They are sitting on the floor looking after a not particularly sick baby, dutifully taking vitals that did not strictly need monitoring.

Earlier in the evening, Jerry convinced Aaron’s parents to come with him to Synagogue as a way to come down and feel more centered. It is hard to argue against the logic of leaving their son with two doctors who specialise in the care of babies.

Mainly Maggie is enjoying watching Sydney bubble to the baby in a mixture of serious conversations and light hearted banter. Aaron is failing his determined efforts to grab a strain of his aunt's long hair.

"It never gets any less awe inspiring, does it?"

"What doesn't?" Syd asked still firmly entranced with her nephew.

"Seeing a previously struggling baby, thrive. Seeing all that hard work and medical planning pay off in the best way" Maggie explained.

"Not in my experience no, if it does that is usually the sign to leave your profession. Although, OBGYN is not known for high rates of burnout."

"Obstetrics is the domain of the committed" Maggie agreed, silently cheering as Aaron reaches his goal.

"Or for brilliant young doctors with a thing for authority, intricate medicine, and long term family relationships." Sydney teased as she brought Aaron to snuggle between them.

"I will not confirm or deny anything on the first count, but the rest is right. This field does suit me down to the ground. You and your authoritarian ways are something of an excellent bonus."

"Why thank you, Dr. Lin."

"This is without a doubt my favourite Valentine's Day," Maggie said sleepily.
"I have a high bar for next year then. This little delight is not going to be around all the time."
Sydney said holding Aaron above her head.

Maggie wanted to reply that Sydney had nothing to worry about, time together was all she wanted. However, they had reached the peak of the mush factor.

Jerry and the Friedmans struggled to contain their laughter when they returned about an hour later. The two doctors were lying entangled on the floor, sleepily reading feminist versions of fairy tales to Aaron. The youngest family member was curled up in Sydney's arms.

Nobody noticed when Jerry snapped a series of photographs.
Convergent Navigation Points

Chapter Summary

The moving in chapter

The one where my love of country music is blatantly obvious.
I also almost accidentally sent this chapter to a senior work colleague...mortification
junction.

Remember when old ones died and new were born
And life was changed, disassembled, rearranged
We came together, fell apart
And broke each other's hearts
Remember when
Alan Jackson - Remember When

Maggie is highly opinionated about the bed Sydney is buying this weekend.

Sydney Katz is not someone who characteristically invests in interior design. Her tastes are simple
and are needs based. She never quite resolved her conflicts about setting up a traditional Jewish
home enough to pay much attention when Becca penned with excitement about starting a life and
home as Becca and Samuel Friedman.

Maggie Lin elevates the purchasing of a new bed to an art form.

The saleswoman is enamored with her because she has done her research and knows exactly the type
they are looking for, the two women are engaging in an in depth decision about spring action and
style.

For once in Sydney’s life, she has little to contribute and just follows along, making agreement noises
occasionally.

There is a certain cliché in there somewhere.

By far Sydney’s favourite part is trying out mattresses with Maggie, cheerfully debating the various
merits. There is no real conflict as you will give Maggie her dream bed and pay whatever it costs.

It is on the 4th try that Syd makes an easy decision.

“Move in with me, officially” she blurts out interrupting the other doctor’s musing on dimensions.

“What?”

“You barely see your apartment, and it would be a shame for you not to get the full advantage of the
orthopedic support, especially when you pull a double” Sydney reasons nervously
“Are you asking me to go HR Official, Dr. Katz? Maggie asked interlacing their hands

“Yes”

+++ 

Maggie is genuinely thrilled to begin the process of moving in with Sydney Katz officially.

Sydney needs to pull a double shift, but she left a sticky note saying she cleared out several spaces if Maggie wants to consider where her stuff will go.

Surprisingly their divergent personalities tend to mesh fairly well so far. Syd is a perfectionist by nature, but she has easily accommodated Maggie into her space. Syd keeps a Kosher kitchen, but she does not expect Maggie to do the same and has even adorably nominated a designated 'Maggie's Shelf' in the fridge.

Maggie is amassing a collection of beautiful little post it notes from Sydney.

All the other significant milestones between them were fraught with tension and self-doubt. Syd regarding her faith and standing with her family and Maggie dealing with her commitment phobic tendencies and gun shy feelings after Gavin.

This moment feels entirely different. A significant component is governed both by practicality and aspiration. Maggie is not so wealthy that she can afford to pay utilities of a flat she is barely using. Sydney is going to need help with the final weeks of Amara's pregnancy and is fortunate to have the room to house four people, without getting into major conflicts, comfortably.

Their much considered bigger bed is arriving on the same day she is officially moving in.

The timing is perfect, for once.

Her clothes fit well into the spaces.

Her books fit seamlessly next to Syd’s

There is a shelf for her toothbrush and hairbrush

+++ 

Maggie is going to need to learn what it means to be a partner of a Jewish woman.

She considers this fact as she carefully places her medical textbooks next to Syd's extensive collection. On the other side of the wall, there is a set of Jewish texts and books. The signs of Syd's faith are everywhere, but they are not ostentatious.

Sydney is adamant to the point of vehemence that Maggie does not modify any of her liberal mainly atheist tendencies for the sake of their relationship or Syd's comfort levels.

"I love you for who you are, exactly as you are" was her only statement on the matter.

What Sydney could not seem to comprehend that Maggie felt the same way.
Maggie resolved to do some private study and see how she would fit in this path.

She often wonders if there is something there after all. It feels as if something has intervened on their behalf to get them here.

She has many years to consider this.

+++ 

Sydney has stored a pile of letters written to her new housemate dating back nearly four years

Maggie is very particular about respecting Syd's privacy and boundaries. There were so few people that respected her wishes in the past. There are still mainly scars from this and Maggie is determined not to add to them through carelessness.

However, where the rules not a little different if each of the dozen letter sets is unmistakably for her, from a total of 5 countries? There are stamps, postcodes, and everything.

Maggie is pondering this dilemma as she stares at the neat pile she had accidentally discovered while measuring the top of a wardrobe space.

Alex does not see any difficulty; she instructs Maggie to read them and understand Syd more. However, Maggie thinks that her best friend is influenced by her conflicts with her brother, Luke, and Charlie- Joel love triangle. Dr. Reed has particular feelings about gaining insight.

What ultimately sells it for her is seeing the doodle of Hope Zion on the front of the first letter, it is so whimsical and not like Syd that it tugs at Maggie's heart.

“Dear Maggie, - Tel Aviv

My sister is very ill, and you might be able to save her. This fact alone is one of the great ironies here.”

There is a drawing of the two sisters as children at the bottom of the two sheets.

“Dear Maggie, Tel Aviv

I broke up with my girlfriend. Layla deserves far more than I can give her. My heart is already taken whatever happens. ”

“Dear Maggie, Cleveland

I have always known I was a coward at heart and today proved it. There were a million things I should’ve said to you as you lay there.

First amongst them is that I love you, I never stopped”

Dear Maggie, Hope Zion

I dream about touching you.

I knew I was a lesbian right from childhood, but it took me nearly a decade to even have language for my feelings.
In my own mind I often wondered if I was somehow broken too. If I was too conflicted or strange.

You answered this for me with clarity.

Maggie is in tears by letter six and almost can’t bare to keep reading the neat, precise words.

+++ 

Maggie loves the fact that her hospital family is so invested in her relationship with Sydney, who was already something of an outsider.

Her friends have organized a working bee to bring her stuff over to their new place when Syd gets off shift.

Zach and surprisingly Dawn are bringing food over. Zach in particular seems delighted for them both and takes pride in their success as a couple. Dawn is trying the couple thing.

Alex and Charlie are putting on a united front and bringing moving supplies.

Billy and Jackson are commanding music for the evening, luckily Syd’s apartment has balcony space and a big lounge.

Shahir has carefully nurtured a Peace Lilly set for them as a housewarming gift.

Amara and Jerry have contributed two new lounge chairs. They reasoned that the two doctors will spend many evenings going over cases.

Amara had placed South American throws over each to give them a touch of color.

+++ 

"I read your letters."

Maggie considers many ways to tell Syd of the invasion of privacy, but ultimately she blurts it out when they take a break over pizza.

Syd pauses "I rather suspected you might find those" she seems largely unaffected by the reality, although she is distressingly real and hiding her emotions to Maggie who never trusts face value.

"They are beautiful; I especially love all your doodles. Why didn't you send any of them, I would have liked to receive them." that is a major understatement and Maggie can't keep the hurt entirely from her voice.

"I tried, but every time I went to post them, I managed to convince myself that I would be unfairly disrupting your life."

"You always did have a disturbing habit of making decisions for my good without consulting me. I was only your student for a short time Syd; I deserved to have the facts instead of a revolving door of goodbyes." Maggie's tone was arch, but there was tenderness underneath it too.

"I know" Sydney replied, Maggie, is pleased to see that this does not inspire an endless round of apologies.
"I was afraid to hold your hand, you are this bright and beaming person, and I convinced myself that all I could do is eventually dim that light, so I resolved that if I was ever going to return to you, I needed to do so with pride," Sydney explained softly.

"I guess it was convenient that Alex and I were running the study then." Maggie does not know why she’s hard; she knows it wasn’t that simple.

Sydney held up a finger and quickly moved to the bedroom.

She comes back 5 minutes later with a small envelope and gestures for Maggie to open it.

Inside are three separate tickets - each for the day before her birthday for the next three years.

“It’s a combination of hope and ridiculously high numbers of air miles. It was just a matter of when I asked you to forgive me.”

Maggie felt her heart melt all over again.

“Can I keep the letters?” Her question is tentative.

“Of course but why? It’s not my finest work. I was rambling most of the time, especially after Becca got sick.”

“Because they make me happy. Also Tel Aviv iii puts E L James to shame.”

“Who?”

“Never mind they are some references you don’t need.”

Sydney merely smiled enjoying that they have talked out a potential sore point so quickly.

They were finally getting the hang of this communication thing after all. Those letters were embarrassing but if they made Maggie happy it was a small price to pay.

Maggie led them to bed, quoting passages of her letters with surprising accuracy. That late night of drinking in Jerusalem had inspired Syd to write much of her suppressed desires down in black and white.

Maggie approved

***

Where do you place the memories of your unborn daughter?

There are guides for doing everything related to moving home from packing to placement. However, oddly enough there is nothing that advises where to place a memory box so it doesn’t disrupt your lover’s space.

Maggie is curled up on the couch, holding the box, the last thing she hasn’t placed. Syd is busy making them hot chocolate and what she proudly refers to as ‘Maggie’s Cookies.’

Maggie is too lost in her memories to feel Syd sneak up behind her and wrap her arms round her neck.

“What have you got there?” Sydney asked cheerfully
Maggie leaned into the embrace with a sigh.

“Told your advice about memories and hopes. Here is my memory box, it doesn’t fit as easily as everything else, funny that” Maggie replied.

“Ah it is entirely up to you but I have an idea,” Sydney said leading the other woman across the room.

There is a shelf of Jewish objects. Maggie is just learning the names and significance of, they are simple and eloquent. The mezuzah box for the holly text, the Passover plates and Candlesticks.

There is a small space above these objects.

Sydney gestures softly to the empty space.

Maggie blinks owlishly and protests immediately.

“Syd this space is holy. I can’t place these things here.”

“That is exactly why I suggested it. Baby Lin deserves reverence as well. It’s my space I can decide what goes there.”

With trembling hands Maggie does as instructed, blinking back tears.

The seriousness of the moment is offset by the delight of warm biscuits and coco but Maggie smiles every time she looks at the small box.
Destinations Unknown

Chapter Summary

Sydney meets the Lins

An excuse for Maggie exploration again.

Chapter Notes

Writing fic - especially this universe is my 'real life recovery programme.' :-)  
Thanks for all your kind words - means allot to me

Chapter Nine: Destinations Unknown

SONNET 116

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O no; it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests, and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.

William Shakespeare 116

Maggie is avoiding her mother.

This reality is not an entirely unprecedented state of affairs.

Rosemary O'Neal - Lin and her twins have a healthy and loving relationship, but none are without scars from the separation and the death of the senior Dr. Lin.
Rosemary is a liberal minded academic, but that does not inoculate her from a tendency to over parent, especially about life choices and plans.

Currently, Maggie and her mother are engaging in what the daughter refers to as the Sydney Stalemate.

There is nothing that Maggie can say that redeems Sydney in her mother’s estimation, even when Declan intervened with equally positive opinions.

“You are setting yourself up for heartbreak yet again Maggie”

“How can you forgive her so easily? She is not worth whatever you are investing in her”

“I would let her do it half a dozen times. It’s just the way things are”

They hadn’t spoken for two weeks.

***

Maggie knows she is in danger of getting attached if she was honest objectivity is a lost cause.

A byproduct of her moving in with Syd is that they are both are no longer allowed to work on Amara's case. Canadian law sees no distinctions in the sex of partner when it comes to enforcing treatment prohibitions.

Canada is annoyingly egalitarian like that.

Of course, nothing could stop them from having a more casual file at home with a combination of medical and nonmedical information. It is hard for Maggie not to keep glancing at the images, especially as Baby Katz develops more distinct features in the scans.
All the training in the world does not prepare you for an emotional sucker punch.

Maggie swears the baby has the Katz bone structure and Amara agrees.

Sydney can be more pragmatic. She knows the baby is not theirs after years of experience looking after other people’s children.

The principle is lovely though; she loves the idea of planning for children with the other doctor which makes her idle moments dance. There is no doubt they will have children whenever the particulars happen.

These aspirations will be enough to sustain her when the little Katz’s family moves on.

***

They are working well as a small unit of four.

Amara is insisting on doing the majority of the cooking, raiding Syd’s recipe books and learning each of their favourites. She is also working so that she can reenter studies when the baby is of age. Sydney offered temporary guardianship of her favourite anatomy flash cards.

For a lifelong wild child, Jerry is diligent about keeping a neat house; he does all the chores that his new wife can not, including handyman tasks.

Maggie is upgrading her partner’s antiquated technology, rewiring her stereo and TV, loving uploading Syd’s CDs and lectures onto playlists and purchasing an MP3 player. Syd’s relationship with her phone is apathetic at best.

Sydney oversees their weekend activities and sits up with Amara for night medications and general discomfort. There are some advantages to working in shifts. The two find a bond in the early hours
of the morning.

***

Maggie blamed her current predicament on inherited absent-mindedness and an overly helpful roommate who wasn't to know any different.

The mail she sent already contained the new address, thanks to a hospital giveaway.

Her mother had surprised Jerry as he got ready for the night shift and he offered to call Maggie home.

"Were you ever going to tell me or were you going to keep the apartment just for show?"

Rosemary is looking around the apartment with growing levels of disbelief. There can be no doubt Maggie lives there in a permanent way. On display is everything from med school graduation photos to the wall hanging from Maggie's grandmother.

“I was waiting until you could hear Sydney’s name without going into lecturing mode” Maggie did not sound repentant, and Rosemary did not miss the sarcastic commentary.

“At least invite us to dinner, let me meet her. I promise not to interrogate your girlfriend. This stand off has gone on long enough. ”

Characteristically little is resolved, but peace is on offer.
"Meeting my mother is going to suck."

Sydney gazed at her lover in genuine confusion.

"Half my family all but blames you for corrupting me. How is meeting a Professor of Economics going to compare unfavorably exactly?"

Maggie shrugs uncomfortably.

“She has very strong opinions about how we live our life, tact is not her strong suit or even in her deck”

“I broke her daughter’s heart more than once. I have earned her low opinion, love. Let her protect you, we are strong enough to overcome her opinion”

Maggie grins and nods but she still feels uncertain. It is so hard to know that people are still judging Sydney for past behavior.

“I will run interference for you”

“Always my knight protector, you adorable mushball”

Her high opinion is an ever fixed point. The real challenge is convincing the world.

It is a worthwhile price to pay.
Sydney is relishing the closeness to her sister.

The Katz sisters and their significant others are having a day at the park. Maggie and Sydney are joining forces to convince the couple that it is okay for both Becca and Aaron to reenter the world at a gradual pace.

A children friendly park with long nature pathways is an ideal start.

Syd works hard not to monitor her sister on a clinical level, but she is pleased to see Becca eating their light picnic with relish.

"How is Aaron sleeping?"

"Horribly but it is a sound we never thought we would endure, so it is beautiful at the same time. I am still trying to convince Samual that he can't spend too many nights only watching him sleep. He is too tall for permanent relocation to the rocking chair."

The husband in question is walking his son around the park, deep in conversation with Maggie about her studies of the Torah.

"Let him enjoy the miracle" Syd advised, "I can recommend a good chiropractor or two."

"I'm glad you still love these, I wasn't sure," Becca said, watching Sydney tuck into more Za'atar pita bites

Syd laughed "I have not changed that much, sis, my Jewish palate is still intact."

"Samuel and I have joined another Synagogue," Becca says casually.
Sydney looks ready to protest.

"I know you don't expect us to, but I am not going to sit in a congregation that loathes my sister, who is the shepherd of miracles. Samuel feels the same; he has enjoyed the research process with Jerry."

"Can I add that title to my CV? I think it could be my favourite of all time."

"You have enough titles, your CV in high school is four pages long."

Sydney grins at the good natured teasing; it has none of the tension that characterized the last few years.

"Besides I am most definitely making your dress when you and Maggie get married, sewing circle is a must."

"Is there something we should discuss, Dr. Katz?"

Sydney's love of pita snacks is unfortunate at that moment because her 7th pita bite lodges in her throat the moment she sees Maggie's mother and brother come up the path to stand in front of them.

***

In a feat of timing that is almost comical Maggie and Samuel approach from the other path, Maggie is cuddling Aaron as he fusses.

"Mum what are you doing here? We were meeting at 7:30?" Maggie asked coming to stand beside a panicky looking Syd as Becca silently took her son back.

"My meeting got canceled, so I thought we would surprise you."

"Mission accomplished then."
The Freidmans and Declan mutely agreed that this confrontation needs to occur with some degree of privacy. The three other family members quickly started walking towards the duck pound and sculpture park.

"Do you guys have a baby in the works too or are we just missing the two major life events. Does your belief system demand it?" Rosemary asked caustically.

Sydney flinched, but Maggie glowered at her mother's tone and gripped Syd's hand tightly.

"Our babies aren't going to happen accidentally, Mum. Don't be mean."

"Moving in together does not happen accidentally either."

"Mumma you have stonewalled my every effort to talk about Sydney with you. Don't act surprised when this is the result" Maggie countered firmly.

"That's because you have chosen someone exactly like your father, down to the prodigious doctor and penchant for travel."

"Fraud, Mom you are a respected academic and resorting to Fraud is the best you can do?" Maggie scoffed angrily.

Sydney began to tremble, looking for all the world like she wanted to reenact her track glory days but she remained rooted to the spot.

"Sydney is my choice, she will always be my choice; I am well past the age when such commentary is welcome." Maggie continued "Our issues are our own to respond to as we see fit. I am not sixteen dating a stoner anymore, stop acting like I am."

"You are well named after my aunt who was just as stubborn" Rosemary hissed, the unspoken family history remaining unspoken.
The silence that descended is tense and bristled with unspoken disagreement.

Sydney started to cry silently, her shoulders trembling and her skin went even paler.

At her heart, Rosemary is a compassionate person, and she is not one to willingly inflict pain. All the fight left her immediately; it almost resembled a physical force.

"I am sorry Dr. Katz that was indeed a simple and mean-spirited display of violently projecting my issues, in public no less. Please forgive me?" she asked with genuine contrition.

Sydney blinked at the abrupt cessation of hostilities.

"Okay," she said with a watery smile "Maybe we can go to an early dinner?" she suggested hesitantly, leaning into Maggie for protection.

"Only if you tell me your favorite Kosher restaurant and allow me to pick up the tab" Rosemary agreed to offer a warm smile.

***

Rosemary O'Neal- Lin has made an enemy of Rebecca Friedman.

The five of them are sitting in a booth at Sydney's favourite pizzeria. Samual is tending to Aaron for the night, leaving his wife with her sister, Maggie and the newly arrived Lins.

Sydney did not have the complexion or the constitution to hide tears especially well.

Becca is scowling between bites of pizza and garlic twists.
The socially talented Lin twins are carrying the majority of the conversation, and they manage to stumble onto a few relatively neutral topics.

"How did you decide on your profession, Sydney? I imagine with your test scores you were in high demand after all your rotations." Rosemary asked as she took a sip of wine.

"I believe that babies are feats of both amazing science and absolute faith, working in high-risk obstetrics is a natural fit for me."

"My husband felt the same way, in a way I envied the level of conviction, I am an economics professor simply by default for an affinity for numbers."

"I can't even claim an affinity for anything as generic as numbers," Declan said.

"Sydney and Maggie both saved my son's life, I am in awe of such talent, even if Sydney's cluttered our room with science experiments and injured strays." Becca states clearly.

"You too? Maggie learned anatomy so that she could tend the shelter animals during summer break and don't get me started on Experiment Land" there was laughing commiseration in Declan's voice.

"I drew the line at letting Maggie exhume anything, even though she was sure she could have saved Mr. Iggo, the goldfish."

Both Becca and Declan laughed at the mental image.

"Yes, we were both raised with geeks for siblings, you survived" Maggie grumbled good naturedly.

"What was wrong with Mr. Iggo?" Syd asked curiously

"Water Toxicity" Maggie replied thoughtfully.
In the movies progress is measured in grand moments in big discussions and declarations but Maggie is willing to debate a mock goldfish autopsy if this will create a moment or two of respite.

The tensions were still there, Rosemary still viewed prodigies as pretenders and commitment shy but still victories were still victories.
Interlude Two: A Decision Made

Chapter Summary

A painful decision is made

Chapter Notes

An important turning point chapter: Don't forget that Sydney is not always right :)
It just won't be an an easy process

Interlude Two: A Decision Made

Dreams pass into the reality of action. From the actions stems the dream again; and this interdependence produces the highest form of living Anis Nin - Collected Quotes

Amara and Jerry are avoiding them.

Of course living together makes it impossible to do this physically, in practice the newlyweds are becoming masters at avoiding meaningful conversation. Instead, they are playing model house guests to an almost Stepford Wives degree.

The excuse of wanting to give Maggie and Sydney space for the new phase of their relationship is wearing thin. The two doctors are too busy to luxuriate in any sense.

Sydney is re-establishing herself as a permanent staff member of Hope Zion and settling in the influx of patients who followed her to her new base. Dawn and the other administrators are in raptures about her because she brings in research grants and publishes regularly.

Maggie is establishing her career path, carefully negotiating the terrain of applying for staff positions and investigating new study opportunities. Sydney is adamant that she should be applying beyond Hope Zion, but they both agree that she can't leave the broad limits of an easy commute home.
They are not in a bubble by any means, but that does not seem to matter.

Alex is askance at the very notion of not having Maggie within natural range and vows to assist with the job search, even if it is with a bias a mile wide.

***

Amara does not have the natural disposition to deceive.

Her life to date mostly comprises of humanitarian efforts in remote regions and environmental activism. She is a product of extreme honesty and therefore lacks talent when it comes to convincing people to believe a narrative.

This characteristic is especially evident when it comes to two doctors whose training revolves around understanding people.

This fact is now apparent in her efforts to convince Maggie that she is fine. Of course, her high ground erodes some what due to the fact Maggie is leaning against the bathroom door listening to the older woman attempt to muffle her sobs.

"Amara I am not going to leave no matter how many times you say you are fine. Doctors are almost pathologically incapable of accepting that word at face value."

"You have a shift in 45 minutes." is the retort

"No, I don't that's Syd, All I am doing is grading case reviews and applying for jobs. All of my tasks are achievable right here. This floor is about 10000 times better than all my student flats."
"I am just hormonal, surely you of all people can understand this?" Amara moans, there is real frustration in her voice.

"The endocrine system gets a bad reputation. You can be simultaneously hormonal and have genuine problems at the same time. The pregnant body is unfair like that."

Amara lacks a suitable retort to this, but her silence is far from neutral.

"Amara, Sweetheart. Our bathroom is excellent; I have a deep abiding love for those tiles, but I know precisely how much your baby weighs right now. You are not comfortable, can we continue this in the lounge?"

There are several long moments of shuffling and awkward movements that characterize late stage pregnancy.

Amara looks too tired to muster being fake and merely clings to Maggie in a fierce hug.

***

Jerry Katz is praying

Sydney finds this concept different to reconcile, for most of her life, Jerry is subject to whispers as the family member who is a borderline atheist or at least lapses to an unforgivable degree.

When Jerry asks her to meet him at the local Synagogue, she assumes that it is to discuss Becca and Samuel’s transition to a new branch of the faith. Jerry devotes a significant portion of his (rare) off time to help them research the best fit for themselves as Conservatives and prospects for Aaron.

Instead, Jerry is hunching over a prayer book, obviously in private devotions. The Rabbi who Syd is yet to meet is keeping a watchful eye on him, apparently sensing distress but not yet willing to intervene.

Sydney slides into the bench beside him, happy to let him finish his devotions. She always relishes the silence in these places, so different from the constant noise of the hospital.
Jerry closes the book and stays stock still with his eyes closed for several minutes.

When he looks at his cousin, Syd remembers starkly the only time she attempted to come out to her parents as a teenager. The same tortured expression is in Jerry's eyes as if he expects to be damned either by his family or his God.

"I have something I need to tell you."

Jerry looks pale and clammy, Sydney is glad he is still sitting down. He seems on the verge of an anxiety attack, something he has not suffered since their grandfather died and he was expected to attend his first Shiva. Syd is fully prepared to repurpose a brown paper bag if his symptoms get any more pronounced.

Instead, she joins their hands and whispers softly.

"You and Amara are considering putting the baby up for adoption, aren't you?"

Sydney says this calmly, but Jerry still reacts as if he is struck by lightning and gazes at her blankly. His cousin is careful not to portray any particular emotion, but he still looks wracked with guilt as if the mere thought of such a concept is a grave sin.

“Come home, Jerry. We will make this work. Look”

***

"Honestly you two, what did you think we were going to do? Come at you with pitch forks, run you out of Toronto? No longer be you friends?"

Maggie and Sydney are now sitting on the couch opposite Sydney’s cousin, and Amara looks as if that hypothetical scenario is precisely what they expect to happen. They are shrinking from Syd's words, grasping hands for support.
Maggie knows it is deeply inappropriate, but she is distracted from the serious conversation by how utterly hot her girlfriend looks in full teacher mode, even if she is just wearing a baggie tracksuit.

She is hot for teachers, who knew that is her fetish.

Possibly the whole of Hope Zion which did not bother her as much as it probably should have.

"You have every conceivable detail of the baby mapped in a scrapbook" Jerry explains

"Your friends have tee shirts made in her honor."

"You both have an encyclopedic knowledge of her every measurement."

“Guys, we are a bunch of nerdy doctors and surgeons. Of course we are invested in the outcome, we have no life really. That does not mean you can’t talk to us”

The floodgates are open

“I have so many dreams for this child who has fought so hard to live. I am thrilled every time she meets a milestone. But no matter how I try, I cannot see myself giving this to her”

“We are just getting our lives together, everything could fall apart in a second. I am only on the second step” Jerry adds

“In 5 years I hope we will be ready to have kids but she deserves more than limbo”

Maggie goes to make tea this is going to be a long night.

***

"Here is a concise guide to Canadian Adoption laws for domestic placements," Sydney said calmly handing them each a stack of pages carefully highlighted.
"This is not an easy process nor should it be but there are people to help you along the way for every step of the way. At this stage, nothing needs to be finalized, and it is completely ok to be indecisive and confused" Maggie continues stretching as she tries to ease stiff joints.

"There are excellent social workers and adoption coordinators at Hope Zion. We can meet with them this week”

“Can we adopt her within the family? I want her to be raised in the faith”

Sydney pauses and fiddles with her glasses.

“It is too early to make such declarations. We have a number of steps to get through first. You will be able to make many determinations”

“We will be with you every step of the way”

No matter how much their hearts may break.

***

"Don't even think it."

Maggie blinks as Syd puts her hand against the taller doctor's lips.

Her gaze is firm as she stops her partner from voicing her thoughts as soon as their roommates left for a walk.

Maggie's dark eyes are dancing with speculation, and Sydney knows exactly where her mind is going.
"We are not adopting her Maggie. As tempting and romantic as it may be, adoption right now is completely impractical."

"Why is it such a crazy idea to even consider?"

"We are both busy doctors with hectic schedules on fast career tracks for a start."

"Just over 20% of surgeons our age and station have children in Toronto, including Alex who almost completed her boards in active labor."

Sydney is too suspicious of the prompt source to doubt its veracity.

"I respect your friend greatly, but she isn't a great point of comparison. Alex Reid is freakishly tenacious and superhuman."

"This would put far too much pressure on our young relationship." There is a certain plea underlying the statement.

"You were prepared to marry Hershel and have his children after ten weeks, how is our time frame any more drastic?"

"My impulsivity to marry wasn't a good thing Maggie." Sydney explains soothingly.

“Are we really judging our relationship on this exact timetable? We have been tap dancing together for almost 4 years”

“You can not deny that we are still on fragile ground. We know the pressure this would add”

Maggie winces as if sensing another stalemate on the horizon.
"I don't agree with you, but I will help, of course, I will."

Sydney looks up from the book she is reading and offers Maggie a tender smile as Maggie crawls into bed with her and buries her head against her shoulder.

"I know, my love."

Maggie can’t be mad at her partner. This is neither Syd’s fault nor responsibility. The rightness Maggie feels in her bones is not a rational argument. As faith minded as the Jewish woman is, facts will guide her in the decision for another.

“I love you very much”

They are not going to sleep well, there will be no peace tonight. Each of them will be consumed by scenarios. There are no easy answers to be found in the early morning hours.

There will still be searching.

***

"Ok do I need to give Katz a beat down, don't let pregnancy fool you I can scrap with the best."

Alex is horrified to see Maggie sitting in her apartment foyer, doing a poor job of not crying.

Maggie gives her best friend a watery smile and quickly wipes the tears that are still streaming.

Alex hums softly as Maggie crawls into her arms and they share a long hug.
“Don’t be mad at Syd. This is not her fault it’s just a matter of timing”

“What is the problem? She is usually the only one to tie you in knots”

“Amara wants to place the baby up for adoption and I foolishly don’t want to let her go” Maggie explains in a broken whisper

“Ah,” Alex says softly

“Let me guess Sydney is being hyper rational and won’t even consider it?”

“I left before she could break out the bullet points”

***

"I wish I didn't agree with you Katz, but I do."

Sydney looks up wearily from the paperwork she is only pretending to review in the break room.

"I'll take that backward compliment. Is Maggie ok?" knowing that Alex is the first port of call.

"She is heartsick but I think she will be alright, especially as they are looking at doing a family adoption. Her head is warring with her heart. Your logic is impeccable” Alex compliments with a sad smile.

"I know everybody thinks I am an 'ice queen' but I am just as attached to that little girl. It is just a matter of timing”

“You are not icy at all. I knew that when Maggie was injured. You would have lived in her room if
you didn’t have patients and an obsession with suffering nobly”

Sydney grins sheepishly

“I used to ration how many times I could touch her- it got pretty teenage like”

“Just wanted to check that you weren’t drowning in guilt. You aren’t the bad guy here”

“This doesn’t make the feeling any easier”
Road to Absolution: Part One: Casting The Net

Chapter Summary

The net is cast - the results aren't what anyone hopes for.

Roads to Absolution Part 1: Casting The Net

“Hope” is the thing with feathers -
That perches in the soul -
And sings the tune without the words -
And never stops - at all -

And sweetest - in the Gale - is heard -
And sore must be the storm -
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm -

I’ve heard it in the chillest land -
And on the strangest Sea -
Yet - never - in Extremity,
It asked a crumb - of me

Emily Dickson

The process is simultaneously straightforward and complicated.

Hope Zion connects to a network of agencies that facilitate and monitor potential adoptions and
facilitate the adoption process if that is the final decision made. There is variation between the regions in Canada. The fact that Amara's pregnancy is already so closely monitored and she is already in counseling makes the intake and interviewing relatively smooth.

The adoption specialist is careful to work around Amara's medical schedule as the due date approaches, as she is with everything, the student nurse dedicates herself totally to doing this properly.

The unraveling of painful revelations of her past, relationship with Jerry and uncertain future.

The lengthy and invasive mandatory psychology profiling

Both Amara and Jerry are adamant about preserving a future for their baby, a future that is bright and stable.

Despite their fears, all the doctors and specialists are supportive and nonjudgmental. Everybody still invests in the future of Baby Katz wherever she ends up.

The complication arises from their adamant belief that their baby needs to stay in the family and raised in the faith. Jerry is conflicted about his relatives, but the instinctive pull of the relationship is fundamental.

***

Even if Jerry is willing to consider his parents for guardianship, they are unwilling to take on the responsibility.

They are not hesitant to say this in no uncertain terms.

They are both in less than perfect health, and their youngest son is occupying most of their time with his troubles and effects at sobriety. This full home is not an ideal environment especially for a newborn baby who is likely to need monitoring at best and intervention at worst. The possibility of
his parents banning the child from seeing Syd or Maggie also freaks out Jerry.

Predictably they are not thrilled about his decision to place his child up for adoption nor to do so openly in such an official way. In Mr. and Mrs. Katz minds an eloquent and dignified solution is being wrecked by overly secular interferences. Jerry and his (secular) new wife and swanning off and ignoring their responsibilities.

It amuses Jerry in a dark way how quickly he loses his parents estimation again simply by doing the right thing.

Maggie is more upset than anyone in their little household. She tries to hide it, but the success of these efforts is debatable, nobody blames her, but their ability to help is limited and clouded by their pain.

"How could they reject her out of hand without evening offering to help in any way?" she stabs a piece of broccoli too hard to emphasize her point.

The cousin’s exchanges glances

"They are avoiding the public shaming. We almost inched our way into respectability for half a second. They are angry we gave such a vaulted position up" Jerry explains softly.

"In some way, this will be blamed on my ever corrupting influence too," Syd says dryly.

"Don't take too much credit. Your fall from grace is pretty spectacular, but my parents were perfectly happy finding fault with me long before I reached your spare of influence." Jerry says in an even tone before turning to Maggie.

"Don't worry the Katz tree is wide. We will find a solution that works well."

***
Jerry's more moderate siblings are too fertile.

Sydney's mother is entirely resentful that Jerry's side of the family is littered with grandchildren, even a couple of multiples in the mix. Her children, a doctor and a teacher have only produced one between them.

The brothers and sister are sympathetic and offer support where possible, but none of them are in a viable position to take on another mouth to feed. The economy is not particularly kind of large families at the moment, and they need to preserve resources.

They generously offer to split fostering duties if the situation becomes desperate, horrified by the notion of a branch of the system having a member of the family.

"Atheism is not contagious at 73 hours old" Maggie comments as they left another meeting.

"It is in our family." Syd disagrees with a tired smile.

Maggie tries not to feel disheartened. She is always slightly envious of the strength of the community Syd comes from, flawed as it is. She has been expecting a simpler process for finding a place for Baby Girl Katz.

She hates the feeling that a second baby she loves could slip through her fingers, for all intents and purposes as out of as the first.

There is a permanent feeling of anxiety settling in her bones, and she tries to avoid thinking about the worst case scenario.

This moment is going to be very hard.

**

Rebecca and Samuel would love to take the baby.

The three couples discuss the concept seriously over dinner. The Freedmen’s are a little enamored
with the prospect of a sibling for their miracle son, who will not have another biological sibling.

In a lot of ways, this would be an ideal set up. They both adore children, and she will be well cared for in both secular and spiritual life. Syd and Maggie are pleased with the prospect of having the baby in such close contact.

The role of doting aunt is an attractive one.

However, both of them are scared by Becca’s cancer, Aaron’s birth, and the miscarriages. Sydney can not sugar coat the reality. The baby is strong but still potentially fragile. There will be no definite answers until after the birth.

Jerry and Amara don’t pressure them in any way. Whatever happens, Becca wants to be involved, and Sydney delights in the fact at least some of her family is gathering firmly around both outcast couples.

There are amazing miracles of babies indeed.

***

Amara's family is not even an option.

They are all living in the remotest parts of the world living out a nomadic life of eco perseveration and promoting literacy in all areas of the globe. A noble endeavor but not one for a medically fragile infant.

Amara laughs when the social worker tentatively brings up the prospect of contacting them.

"They take pride in not being available. I would not even know where to start looking; my folks
were not ready to be parents let alone grand parents.

Nobody pushes her further especially when she adamantly rejects her siblings as potential matches. None of them have especially fond memories of being children of environmental heroes, but her brothers have the deepest resentments.

Maggie is privately relieved. She is already nervous about the adoption process, and the last thing she wants is to have to invent a game called Where In The World Is Baby Katz?

That would just be far too hard even to contemplate.

Sydney and her are in a tricky place. The adoption is always going to be emotionally draining. Non-doctors seem to believe that those in the profession have superhuman strength when it comes to coping but the opposite is true, they simply learn to compartmentalize the hurt to process later, after shifts.

Maggie is afraid there will be no later for this hurt like there wasn't when Joel died or when she first realized the baby had died.

At least she is not angry at Syd. There is a real risk that they will start to take the stress of the situation out on earth other, especially as they disagree on these circumstances.

Maggie is proud that they are staying strong together, but there is a fault line between that cannot be easily bridged. The sadness is a third person between them, dominating each of their silent moments.

Old patterns are creeping in. The rest of the staff seem to sense the potential for trouble and have taken turns offering distractions in all manner of forms.

Alex is making them binge watch obscure Netflix dramas and giving Maggie time with her honorary nephew.

Billy is lending Syd his entire collection of Sci-fi and Fantasy novels, Tolkien, Jordan, Marion Zimmer-Bradley. Sydney feels like a rebellious heathen but a thoroughly distracted one.
Zach and Maggie are co authoring a paper on pregnancy monitoring in trauma situations. It is a little weird, but they find a rhythm.

Sydney is volunteering a free health care clinic in several of the poorest parts of the city. She delights in the small kindnesses she can offer, from lice treatment to only listening.

++

There are other options.

The adoption coordinator is confident that they will find a couple that meets the criteria.

Amara is struggling to remain optimistic. Generally, she prides herself on being adaptable and not attached to circumstances. One of the few benefits of her childhood existence.

She can compromise on the life of her daughter.

Jerry is struggling not to cave. He has faith that he and Amara are in the right place. They could raise their daughter. If nobody can step up for the kid why not then?

Sydney is struggling with the knowledge that she is breaking Maggie’s heart again, even if it’s not directly this time. The technicality does not make the pain any less.

The worst part Sydney fears that she is rejecting the prospect outright for entirely selfish reasons. She is working so hard to maintain a semblance of peace in her new life, Maggie is her greatest gift, but sometimes she still feels like she is a giant house of cards.

A house is not ready for a third person.
Maggie is struggling not to enter the dangerous territory of ultimatums. She still bears the scars of her enraged mother resorting to this tactic, vile as it is. Anything to push Sydney out of her stubbornness.

Her mother used to use access to the twins as bargaining chips in a messy game. It was an awful time.

What kind of monster would say adopt a baby with me, or I will leave,

A desperate one.

++

“I don’t want to lose you., compartmentalizing”

Sydney whispers the confession as Maggie is halfway through the ritual of brushing out the elder doctor’s long red hair.

“There aren’t many surer signs of commitment than offering to adopt a baby with you, Syd” Maggie retorts

“I said that I would lose you not that you would leave” Syd corrects her as there is an important difference

“There are any number of factors that could go wrong, and I don’t want the pressure to be too much.”

There is very little that either of them can say.

“Billy is right about compound fractures.”

“What?” Syd asks struggling for the correlation.

“He told me I was trying to protect myself from getting hurt by you leaving but that we will always be messy with each other” Maggie gently places the hairbrush down.
“You are playing the same facility, my love. Our hearts are already in; compartmentalizing is useless here.”
Road to Absolution: Part Two: Road of Cranes

Roads to Absolution Part 2: The Road of Paper Cranes

The intuitive mind is a sacred gift, and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift. Albert Einstein

Maggie is courting her with paper cranes.

Sydney supposes there is a certain symmetry in this current campaign. As a couple, they seem to communicate better in the written word. Their efforts to support Jerry and Amara are worthwhile but draining. Their subsequent conversations just rehash old ground.

The campaign of paper cranes began two weeks before Amara's inducement date - just before Sydney reaches out to her synagogue to facilitate a wider adoption.

Maggie is on holiday with her mother and brother. The twins are helping Rosemary move into a new apartment and using the chore as an excuse to get away. There is a consciousness amongst Sydney and the Lins that Maggie needs space from the intensity of the situation and all the pressures the coming weeks will bring.

Sydney feels the same escape in volunteering with Jewish outreach.

Neither of them admits to this, but it is likely they need space from each other because the two doctors are at loggerheads as the deadline looms closer.

It seems that Maggie has found a unique way to communicate and to get her point across without the complexities of long distance communication.

There is a pair of red cranes in her locker.

The suspects are few, but the neat, precise hand writing is a dead giveaway.
Maggie is not an exception to the doctors have terrible handwriting rule, except that her mother insisted that she maintain neat penmanship in her personal life.

The habit is hard to break.

The neat handwriting is flowing along the planes of each of the cranes.

1) I was going to follow you to your next destination = 365 days out of career cycle anyway = care for the baby

2) Toronto is known for its flexibility around maternity leave and job share programs.

3) I need to consider part time, in any event, my head is still recovering.

Sydney is waverling with delight and dread. She is naive to think that Maggie who held onto her so tenaciously, despite all the evidence to the contrary, is unlikely to let the dream of this baby go. Maggie also knows her well enough to appeal to logic more than sentiment.

"Points for creativity, Lin"

***

There is a pair of green cranes in her satchel.

Sydney carefully extracts the two birds, enjoying the way the light catches the glitter in the paper. The precise creases are the product of surgeon’s hands, the bird’s wings and others features are razor sharp.

She is also curious how Maggie manages to sneak all these birds into their assigned locations in such a short time frame.

Sydney already knows she will collect these birds in a jar in her office, which is slowly becoming personalized anyway. Maggie grins when she places a photo of them on her desk.
4) We have a great support system in the hospital and our friend groups + Hope Zion affiliated nursery.

5) In your bag are four different possible schedules we could manage - differences are to account for changes in shift work and promotions.

6) In your locker is an approximate housing adjustment and costs we would make to stay in your neighborhood.

Sydney blinks because her bright partner is treating this argument like a thesis defense. They have exhausted all the emotive arguments and heartache, so Maggie is varying to the cognitive part of Sydney's brain. It is easier to quantify like this.

"Is there any origami paper left in the city?" she sends to Maggie jokingly

"It's from my Grandma - much easier to write with the fine point" is the prompt reply, accompanied by a photo of the three of them eating ice cream.

***

There are yellow cranes in her running shoes.

Sydney bites back a curse as she almost crushes the delicate paper.

By her count, she has a set of eight cranes pairs so far. There is no apparent order to the appearance, only that they are regular and each contains solid arguments and supplementary materials.

Sydney took a trip down to Staples just to find an appropriate folder to put the content in for review between or after shifts. She finds herself making her additional notes.

Maggie is scrupulous not to bring emotion into it - her only focus is how they would achieve this and why they would be suitable for the task. If Syd were still her teacher, she would have to give her full
marks for the comprehensive nature of her problem-solving.

21) We are Amara and Jerry's ideal candidates (see attached list)
22) The baby would have firm roots in three cultures and strong family connection.
23) Aaron will have a cousin as he grows up.

Sydney sighs in newfound exasperation; she is getting slightly worried that Maggie may not have slept in the last three weeks and replaced her sleep cycle with crane making. There seems to be no end to the flock.

"We are not that unique, love. It will be possible to find an open adoption circumstance that works for BGK. I love the yellow by the way."

Maggie sends back a photo of her curled up with her mother's gigantic Persian Cat.

***

There is far too much glee in Jackson's eyes when he hands her a pair of purple cranes the following morning.

It is still an adjustment for Syd, the idea that other people are so invested in her life and genuinely care about her happiness. It is, on the whole, a beautiful feeling but takes some time to get her head around as she at heart is an introvert.

Sydney slips them into her lab coat and tries not to be too distracted in her morning rounds and research meetings.

24) I have a list of people who are willing to be on standby if our shifts run over or we get calls for emergency.
25) Here is a list of health sciences students who Alex recommends for babysitting

“Recruiting our friends to do your work for you Lin.”
“I prefer to think of them as allies in a worthwhile campaign.”

Sydney had to laugh at that one.

***

"You know how to make a girl work for it, Katz."

This line is Bikky’s only comment as he hands her two black cranes from behind his clipboard after a consult.

Aside from the ever neutral “Team Baby Girl Katz forever.”

"I suppose there are worse things to be under siege by than paper girls,” Syd said jokingly.

Maggie is bored with generic colors and has doodled on these.

26) We meet all the adoption criteria
27) We could even be placed on the fast track to her medical needs

Sydney can only think of one thing to text

“‘I love you.’”
Naturally, Shahir’s contribution is a pair of rainbow cranes.

He is all but bouncing with excitement about the grand gesture. He presents Sydney with the birds with a flourish as they share lunch.

Sydney is frankly waiting for him to burst into a music number or to produce tee shirts.

28) The Jewish Kindergarten here is reformist
29) I have an essay on LGBT adoption in the Jewish Community, S has the paperwork

“How have you slept at all in the last two weeks?

“Secret Med School powers rock.”

+++ 

Becca has place spin on the craft idea.

Her cranes are blue and gold, familiar patterns from their childhood. They are delivered with a collection of Syd’s favorite snacks.

The handwriting is also her sister’s and is carefully printed Hebrew.

- Trust in Faith – The Book of John
- Trust the Path – The Book of Luke
- Trust in Love – The Book of Ruth

There’s a note that says

“How many signs do you need? Remember just because the road is hard doesn’t mean the choice is wrong”
Sydney sends a thank you note to her sister with a promise to read the assigned chapters tonight. If she has the energy, she will debate passages as they used to and she will Skype with Aaron.

+++  

A pair of tiny gold birds is sitting on top of Amara’s ultrasound machine, before her final round of tests.

The couple has been careful to the point of obsession about not influencing Syd’s decision, but they earned a say. This is their sacrifice, after all, is said and done.

Syd is half convinced that cranes will be a regular feature in her dreams for the foreseeable future.

30) We could not imagine a better future for our daughter  
31) You are a blessing and light in our lives. Whatever happiness you found for us.

+++c  

Alex does not say a word as she places a giant crane on Sydney’s desk. The orange crane is huge as it towers over all the other content.

Written on every conceivable part of the bird is writing in the now familiar script. Alex places a printed sheet next to the bird and allows Sydney to read in silence for a few moments.

“You people need to learn to send flowers and chocolates like the rest of humanity.”

THE REASONS YOU WOULD BE A GREAT MOTHER – 2017 edition

- Compassion to your patients  
- Fierce defense of family and friends  
- Uncompromising faith in the human spirit  
- Your sense of faith
Your entire belief system around children and their place in the world.
- Your love of education and teaching young minds
- Your desire to be the best aunt in the world
- Your sense of wonder in the world
- Great Katz genetics
- The fact that it is your biggest desire

Sydney is openly crying as she sends a complaint.

“I used to have a reputation you know. How am I supposed to make F1s tremble?”
“Corrupting you is one of my proudest achievements.”

***

Maggie loves spending time with her family.

They are relaxing, and for once in their lives as mother and daughter, they are not following any schedule except whatever strikes their fancy that day.

Maggie is interrupted from her crossword by delivery at the door. Cosmos, the cat, is most dissatisfied with her plans to move. He hisses and stalks out of the room.

“Dr. Maggie Lin?”

“That’s me” she confirms simply

Inside the box, there is a tall, beautifully made crane sculpture. The wooden figure is at once realistic and artistic; the wings have minute details and the colors shimmer in the light.

The note simply says

“You had me at reason 15”
Maggie is pretty sure her mother’s new neighbors think she is an eccentric weirdo as she does a happy dance in the yard and declares her victory to a bemused-looking cat.
Interlude Three: Reason 15

Chapter Summary

A wander through Maggie's psyche for a good cause.

Interlude Three: Reason 15

There are silver cranes in the bedside table.

Sydney is rapidly developing an instinct when it comes to uncovering Maggie's campaign gifts. The cranes are in places that are quite logical - not too visible but not so secretive that they may accidentally be overlooked or crushed.

This scavenger hunt is rapidly becoming one of the best parts of her day; she is yet to catch Maggie's little helper elves in the act, but she is not trying very hard either as everyone seems to be thoroughly enjoying being an active participant.

The steady rope of tension that is a permanent fixture in her body is slowly easing up. Maggie is reasoning this process out with her, just like the logic problems she still loves to do on the weekends.

It slowly dawns on Sydney that it is she who is acting impulsively not Maggie. She is the one exhibiting a knee-jerk reaction without slowing down to consider the practical reality. Cruelly she simply panicked because she saw such devotion in Maggie's eye.

It had given her flashbacks to when Layla asked to meet her parents after three months of dating.

All she felt both times were inevitable doom.

However, a sense of prediction does not make her omniscient, does it?

Today's offerings are resting on a thick notebook, and the notes just instruct the red-haired doctor to 'Read This - the cheaper and marginally less humiliating version of therapy.'
Sydney nervously flips through the papers; each entry appears to be a letter to a family member, and she instinctively tracks her name multiple times. This action feels highly invasive, but the intrusion is with expressed permission.

This title page says it is Journal 8/9 and in Maggie's loopy handwriting there is subtle.

"The Book of Sydney"

Dear Dad,

I am not as over Sydney Katz as I pretend to be.

I should be, there is no reason for her to dominate my thoughts, she is not willing to stay. She has made this painfully obvious on multiple occasions, usually just as my battered heart is entering the game. Sydney possesses a gift for timing like that.

The great irony is I think Syd believes herself to be in a contest with a harem of men and woman with whom she cannot keep up nor can she believe that I would ever want to be settling for her.

I blame you and Mom, it's not fair, and I sound like a therapy cliche, but I do.

You taught me, whether you wanted to or not, that intense feeling is dangerous to express. For as long as I can remember you both used feelings as a weapon to inflict the most harm and boy were you creative.

My takeaway lesson was perfect the art of casual and recreated Jane Austenesque misunderstanding in every relationship I am in; I lost the ability to communicate like an adult.

There is no way my heart is going to be on the line.
Still, there are 6010 miles between here and Israel.

I should not know that, but I do.

Sydney tries not to cry as she finished the first letter, she knows that Maggie did journaling as part of her injury recovery. However, Syd has flouted that the process is so personal, it hurts to think of her love in pain, and her insights are correct.

Dear Dad

You told me once that mum would always be your soulmate.

You had a terrible way of demonstrating this, but you were always so adamant I couldn’t help but believe you. Your succession of affairs with increasingly younger interns never shook your faith in this even if nobody else thought you meant it.

It drove her wild that you would claim to love her even after she found the lipstick evidence on your collar and everything, but you refused to stop saying it. Maybe your big academic brain just wasn’t made for such conventions as monogamy or something equally as cliched.

I think I get what you were saying now.

Not that I would cheat on Sydney multiple times, if I was ever insane enough to do it once she would leave before I could apologize.

I mean that my love for Syd goes against every single grain of rationality. We would fail everyone of those relationship pop quizzes or be a tough sell for any relationship expert. None of my friends can see the attraction beyond simply that I have a thing for people in authority.
I feel it down in my bones that I could and should make a life with this incredible woman that is about as gun shy as a deer in hunting session.

It would not be the first time I am the minority opinion in my own life.

Sydney winces at the image of young Maggie and Declan watching the decay of marriage. Maggie seems so conflicted; it makes her lover heartsick. She hates that their road was not smoother and they ran parallel to the elder Lins – not a good one but a real warning.

Dear Dad

I am too afraid to tell my therapist about Sydney Katz.

That is a weird thing to admit, my succession of shrinks but voluntary and mandatory, know some pretty intense things about me. I have plenty more graphic and disturbing skeletons in my closet than an almost ex-girlfriend who keeps reappearing about twice a year.

It does not change the fact I don’t want her or our feelings raking over the coals. They are going to tell me what my relationship means and why I am repeating this pattern. I don’t want to hear that, Syd gets enough judgment I don’t want to add to it even by proxy.

I could be tarring the whole profession with an unfair brush but that is the way I feel, and that’s all that counts right?

Did you and Mom ever try therapy?
Dear Dad,

I think I was always going to fall in love with another surgeon.

I am the very definition of a failure when it comes to the mystic notion of work-life balance. The quest to become a doctor is my life, and I am not particularly afraid of that.

I can only ever see my life working around another medic's schedule but, to be frank, I can only really see my life working around Sydney's schedule.

I have to have standards some though they may be few, so I am not going to embarrass either of us (even in an imaginary letter) by detailing all the things I adore about Sydney, but her mind has to rank up there in the top three.

I want to learn everything that she knows.

I want to spend the evening debating conditions with her and listening to her passionately defend her position.

I want to have her tear apart my journal articles and make them better; she makes my thinking so much clearer when it comes to medicine.

I want her to teach our children everything.

You would love Sydney, maybe not as a person right away but you would not be able to fault her skills or dedication as a surgeon.
She is everything I could aspire to want in a partner; I want to be a much better person for her. I know you had the same aspirations for both your marriage and us when that failed.

Mom only sees a replication of you, which is the whole level of Freudian I thought was beneath her. Of course she has a reason to be skeptical of dashing young medical prodigies, but even so, she seems to have blinders on in this case. What she does not appear to realize is that I have equal power to hurt her as well. I am far from a model of relationship stability. Just ask anyone of my ex-boyfriends. They can give you a litany of my sins chapter and verse.

I want to be better for her, and she wants to be better for me.

++

Sydney is torn between conflicting impulses; this is not a new sensation for her nor even a particularly new feeling when thinking about Maggie.

There is raw emotion in these words, and they don’t paint a rosy picture. Maggie is so brave; that she could not even think half her thoughts out loud much less commit them to paper.

To her great shame, she has only recently started to be honest even in prayer, confident that God is not looking for an excuse to condemn her for the contents of her heart.

Dear Dad,

Sydney is back and wants to try again.

We never seem to do things by half. Syd knew about my miscarriage before my favorite food. I knew her innermost thoughts and conflicts before we had shared a meal.

I am full of temptation that I can barely focus when she is around; my entire nervous system is recalibrated to respond to the Sydney Katz Frequency. I am trying to be rational, but my logic never sustains itself around this woman.
She can do nothing and light up the worst days. I just need to overhear her geek out with interns or arguing with the deli about the meaning of kosher and my time is bright no matter the drama.

She still wears her glasses when she is tired. This small change is both great news for me and terrible. She is so much more approachable without her flawless makeup.

I have to will myself not to touch her hair. I swear that this is often more challenging than a back-to-back theatre shift.

Not that Syd would ever be aware of this dilemma.

Unfortunately, I have the Lin family tendency towards avoidance, and I feel like a coward.

I know how much her declaration was genuine so therefore I run.

*+++++

Sydney needs to lighten both of their moods, so she opts for a playful text offering a glasses rule in their flat if her girlfriend desires such accommodation.

Maggie sends back a series of affirmative symbols and strange approximation of dancing.

Dear Dad,

I am writing this with Sydney sleeping beside me. We are getting to know each other slowly, through food and movie dates, she is even cooking for me.

She asks me to sleep with her, just sleep. She says she misses the feel of being beside me. It's such a simple request, but she looks at me as if she expects me to scorn her for making it and if I will think less of her for an appearing something close to human.

I often wonder if I can provide what she needs, knowing how badly she has been hurt, knowing how profoundly her world view needs to change. Her needs are so simple and not anything different than
we all hope for and aspire to in our lives.

Nobody touched her as if non-conformity is contagious. I firmly believe there is such a thing as benign neglect in adulthood and the Katz embody it. Their regard is so full of conditions and fishhooks; it is impossible to reach without bending to their will.

The thing is it takes so little to make her day; the fact I am offering a healthy amount of human contact and intimacy, holding her hand or giving encouragement during bad days.

She is flourishing like a flower desperate for sunlight.

The proudest achievement is only knowing I can have such a positive effect on another person, even if she leaves tomorrow I will never forget these flexible hours. I like knowing that we can be a source of comfort for each other.

Mum used to do the same thing with your tee shirts by the way; she craved you even as she resented you. So I guess a lack of clean breaks runs in the family. We really should work on that

Sydney is crying now; there is just such a simple eloquence to how Maggie describes her need for physical comfort As if it’s a normal spectrum of feeling rather than a character failing in need of mending.

There are very people who offer her any acceptance in her new life, either they are uncomfortable with the new Sydney Katz or can not understand why she won’t renounce her old life entirety. She felt as if she is betraying both sides of the equation and that she set to live in the gray area.

A lonely place to be

Dear Dad,
I want to ask a girl to marry me.

Any tips?

I know that Dec and I were far from planned. Oh I know you wanted kids and adored us to pieces. Let’s be real though, probably not right in the middle of both your placements and before either family reconciles to the idea of the two of you being more than a fling.

I imagined that this took the shine off proposal ideas, with the two grandmas bearing down, each with their opinions and tape measures. Maybe I am wrong? The one thing mom did not complain about was the early years.

Sydney needs to be married; she is just made to be a doting wife who fusses and feeds. Her sexual identity does not change that in any way. She just has the constitution to take care of people from the babies in her care to the people in her life. Syd finds happiness in the role of caretaker, and it does not matter that she is a hard-core surgical rock star at the same time.

You can do both now – a sign of progress if ever there was one in the world of medicine.

I just want to wake to her every morning, and I love the idea of writing joint paperwork.

It must be love to make a surgeon say such a thing.

++++++++++++++++++

“You realise I am going to start making your lunch from now on the right?”

Sydney wants to say so much more than that, but she suspects Maggie will read between the lines, the younger surgeon has been doing that since the day they met. She is not exactly known for her approachability and Maggie borne the brunt of her uncertainty.

Not that there is anything especially ambiguous about kissing your subordinate at every opportunity,
it is unethical but worth the moral qualms.

Maggie becomes a master and reading subtext and refusing to be scared off by randomness and mood shifts.

“Will they have the pita ball things?” is Maggie’s prompt reply.

“We are going to have to talk about your sodium levels.”

“Yes dear.”

+++++

Dear Dad,

I want to raise a baby with Sydney.

Of course, that is not a big deal. We have always been on the same page about kids. We will start a family soon or at least as soon as the process can go between two female surgeons. There is a fair amount of logistical planning to undertake in any event.

My problem is I want to raise a particular child with her, and my darling is being insufferably logical. We both lost our heart to that little girl long before either of us what actively admit it, still trying to maintain objectivity desperately. As soon as Amara and Jerry confessed to wanting to place her up for adoption, I knew that objectivity is a lost cause.

Unfortunately, Sydney Katz clings to logic like a security blanket. She has no reason to trust her heart yet, and this is the ultimate act of trusting instinct.

I am not so blind that I don’t know this does not look especially good on paper unless the paper is a romantic comedy script.

There is truth in what Syd is saying it is just that I can counter every argument if she would let me.
It is too early in our relationship, but I loved her for 9000 days.

We aren’t on solid ground, but the foundations are mending.

I could be overlaying my own experiences and losses onto this circumstance, but I am never going to avoid doing that. This reality does not make my logic any less valid; we are all products of our past after all.

This new addition is not in our plan but when has anything been in our plan. The baby needs us now; we can make any timing work if we put our mind to it. We can schedule our lives around this new addition to our lives, just like Alex with Luke and the baby.

I am going on faith it is simple and straightforward.

Syd needs facts, arguments, and counterarguments.

This situation is an interesting and odd role reversal, but I know that Syd is willing to listen if only I find right tactic. I have always been good at threading the needle both literally and figuratively. There is a way to make this argument seem both achievable and consistent with our current circumstances.

I also did like puzzles and Syd is like an evolving Rubex Cube – it’s an endless challenge but so very worth it.

I will play the long game, and I will win.

+++ 

Syd knows it is irrational, but she swears she can feel the presence of the elder Dr. Lin with her as she closes the book and begins to pray.

She is crying for a mixture of mourning and miracles, that she and Maggie are at this moment and that they face such a fork in the road. It is a real test of their relationship and the ability to
communicate on a fundamental level, but Maggie as she always has is giving Syd reason to hope.

This approach is a well-played strategy. Her girlfriend’s warfare is commendable for its simplicity and eloquence.

They will do this together and just maybe don’t need to make this journey alone.

“I will strive every day to live up to her expectations of me” she promised to both ancestor and deity.

The presences were on equally great footing tonight.
A Solitary Road

Chapter Summary

The end of part one - slightly delayed by me having to present 'real world' writing at a conference

Baby Girl Katz will eventually get here :)

Any name suggestions.

Chapter Notes

Mini milestone - I completed 30k in a month :) nice writing goal.

Chapter 12: A Solitary Road

The best marriages are the ones where we can go out in the world and really put ourselves out there. A lot of times we'll fail, and sometimes we'll pull it off. But good marriages are when you can go home and know that your vulnerability will be honored as courage and that you'll find support.

Brene Brown

Rosemary O'Neal - Lin is doing her best to be supportive despite her doubts.

Sydney Katz, to her credit, agrees to drive down to meet her for a private lunch. There will be few opportunities in the future for such meetings; everyone will be working as a unit to prepare for the arrival of the new baby and the legal milestones that will occur.

She needs to talk to Sydney in the eye of the storm.

Rosemary's twins are not exactly containing their enthusiasm at the prospect of a new family member. Declan insists on taking Maggie on a trip to the local bookstore to scoop out their supplies on new motherhood and adoption. He radiates excitement, and they even revert to their version of
'twin speech.' This mix of languages is, in reality, a combination of Mandarin, English and a touch of a Galactic, brought together in their unique brand of logic.

Rosemary is hoping that they will stay in town for many hours and resist the temptation to pre-plan the next 18 years of her granddaughter's wardrobe.

More likely it will be Harvard Medical School merchandise.

****

"You will have to forgive me. It is a long time since I taught Jewish students who observed the tenants. Is there anything in this that is prohibitive? Rosemary asks, she did not add that her academic pride forbade her from consulting Google in any depth.

She supposes she will be adding a 'Jewish Customs' folder to her bookmarks soon though.

Sydney inclines her head gracefully before smiling nervously. Her posture reflects either etiquette classes, fear or both.

"Are you ready for what this entails?"

"In my experience nobody, even doctors can prepare for the changes that children bring” Sydney replies evenly.

“True but surely you feel a level of responsibility for making room for a child in 4 weeks? As well as committing my daughter to the same undertaking” the rebuke is silent but unavoidable.

“I need to prove this to you, but my life shapes itself around being a wife and starting a family. Maggie simply brings illumination to everything I am already pledged to do.”

“You surgeons are not afraid of hard work either,” Rosemary says dryly
“I know you don’t trust me yet, but I promise that I will not do anything to hurt her like that again. We will have a good life with this little girl.”

“Maggie’s campaign of cranes bore fruit. She is happy to a degree I have never seen her” Rosemary concedes with a reluctant smile.

They regard each other plainly for a few moments both uncertain about the precise direction that this conversation is obliged to take; after all the circumstances are very unusual. There is no readily available guidebook that covers each of these conditions no matter how keen the academic motivation.

The crane carving is a beautiful touch as it provides an intermediary icebreaker as Syd recounts the delight in finding such a treasure in Israel years ago, long before Maggie re-entered her life.

****

"My parents are too cowardly to kill me figuratively or literally."

Rosemary is careful to place her cup down before answering the statement. The brilliant Sydney Katz suddenly reminds her starkly of her most troubled students who appreciate her actual logic and lack of judgment.

She still vividly remembers pulling Maggie out of a shift to sew up a graduate student who was distraught enough over failing a paper to attack his wrists instead of attending her office hours.

Sydney reads her expression accurately.

"Sorry, a touch of gallows humor. My community is well within its rights scripturally to excommunicate gay members and frequently does; families can choose to say Shiva and treat the event like death” her voice cracks only a little.
"Choosing to raise a child in my 'lifestyle' instead of 'doing the right thing by Jerry has set off a fresh way of panic from my parents, emergency rabbi meetings and all."

Syd keeps her eyes glued to the crane with a wistful expression on her face.

"My family is too bound to public opinion and delivery of my nephew to cause another public whisper fest, especially now that Hershel has found a new bride. That is something right?"

"A hollow degree of leniency, I suspect," Rosemary says gently "That must be a heartbreak beyond all measure."

"I can understand why I don't exactly fit your ideal mold; some reformist families refuse to take on this level of drama" her tone is bleak.

"On the contrary, Dr. Katz, I understand your position a little better and am proud to claim you as a future part of my family."

“It is it something about soul baring confessions that appeal to your family? I didn't exactly make any case for myself, yet Maggie still signed up for the ride" Sydney mused out loud.

"I think you've articulated your case just fine, Sydney."

Rosemary silently fumes, she is not proud of her conduct with regards to this woman or the pressure she placed on her eldest child, but the idea of rejecting the fundamental core of your offspring so thoroughly is inconceivable to her.

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Rosemary knew how much her daughter loves Sydney Katz

She may have disagreed with the pace and direction of this on and off again relationship, but she is not naive, and she does not ignore any of Maggie's gestures out of spiteful principle.
After all, Maggie refuses to see the two parts of her world as incompatible and just insists on changing the parameters as needed. It began when she turns 9 and insists that she will become a doctor just like her father, continues at 19 when she insists on bailing Declan out on her own without formal intervention. At just 29 Maggie determines the rest of her life with her partner.

Never is this fact more evident than when Maggie comes through the door and spies Sydney on the couch reading a novel.

"Hey what are you doing here?" Maggie rushes in and sweeps Sydney into an unselfconscious hug. "You have a shift tonight, don't you?"

"I pulled some strings, figured we could have a family celebration" Sydney explains softly resting her head on the other woman's shoulder.

Maggie's eyebrows are expressive, and she uses them to full effect as she looks between them, making a note of the tea, cake, and Kleenex. It does not take her long to make the connection and her expression switches between heart ache and fury.

"I'm going to...." 

"Enjoy cake and tell us exactly how many boxes we will be trying to fit into our cars on the way back" Sydney intercedes gently, smiling at Declan as he follows his sister inside.

Maggie slowly relaxes and allows herself to curl up against the smaller woman. Her eyes still betrayed underlying emotion.

"Hey Syd, congratulations, check out some of the great stuff we found" he enthuses, neatly ignoring his sister's fury with the presentation of books and resources.

It does not take long for the three of them to playfully start debating the merits of gendered clothing.

Declan is deliberately baiting his sister into a pointless squabble as only he can. All three of them know the truth, but they continue.
Rosemary is proud to see the protective instinct that her son developed in childhood is still present. They both provide anchors and counterbalances for each other.

Roots and Wings

"I have a special gift for you both"

Maggie and Sydney look up from the cake slices that they are sharing, surprised by the announcement as Declan has already been very generous to them but he is already bouncing into the back room.

"So I was presumptuous with this, but I was quietly confident that the campaign of cranes was destined for success." he calls as he brings a big package.

Under the wrapping, there is a beautifully designed bassinet that had a carved wooden frame, intricately shaped like the crescent moon. The padding inside is a mixture of bright colors. The pillow presents images with a herd of elephants in successive sizes. The legs are gently curved enabling a rocking motion.

“I went to school with a master carver, we did some work together, and he offered to carve me something instead of overtime” Declan explains with a bashful grin.

“My sister, the baby doctor, was always going to need this eventually. It just got pressed into service early; he was happy to make some adjustments.

Maggie moves to give her brother a long silent hug.

“Thank, Dec”
Sydney gently traces the structure, marveling both at its beauty and the gesture.

Before she formulates a possible reply, the twins grab her into a hug between them. There aren’t words to describe the pure healing that this moment provides. Her family’s once dominant narrative has competition.

***

The Katz family is apparently multiplying in her new living room.

It is something of an impromptu house warming party. If house warming parties included intimidating Jewish woman, who seem intent on guarding their sisters and family against all potential harm from whichever source.

Evidently, Rebecca refuses to let Sydney face this conversation entirely alone, and no amount of placating is enough to stop a short road trip.

Maggie and Rebecca engaged in a quick debrief of the real state of the world of the Katz family, and they both seem more appeased by the conversation.

Declan is encouraging a bashful Samuel to talk about his recent violin lessons.

The rest of them gather round the table discussing the logistics of adoption. The timetabling and interview demands are daunting. Sydney is frank about the objections that they are likely to face. At least in principle if not practice.

“Surely you don’t need to have all these meetings? You are perfect.”
Jerry and Amara are ecstatic.

Rebecca and Rosemary are united in indignation at the notion of rejection.

“We need to do this properly. Shortcuts are not ethical, especially if anyone raises objections later down the line. We need to be robust to any challenge” Maggie explains softly

“Besides we would have insisted on being at all these meetings regardless, so there isn’t much difference.”

Rosemary is content to watch as the new family members plan for the newest member.

She feels content, and she thinks of Maggie’s father at that moment. He was flawed in all measures that she values, but he adored the twins fiercely. Maybe it is good to remember this reality more frequently.

The battles were all worth it when they produced moments like this with her beloved children.

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"How bad are your parents likely to get?"

Rosemary thinks that she has redeemed herself in Rebbeca's eyes by both her softening towards Sydney and her offer to let the Friedmans stay the night in her newly furnished spare room.

Rebecca shrugs as she watches Samuel and the twins play with Aaron.

“They are mainly feeling betrayed. Sydney could only ever be adored or ostracized. Syd is right; Mom is more likely to avoid scandal than doing anything drastic or involving the Rabbi. We can only hope another son or daughter falls from grace.”
“What about Maggie and the baby.”

“It will be rough for a while, but sadly Sydney has far too much experience dealing with our parent's disdain. If Maggie can court my sister over four years, she can handle two stubborn people with more pride than sense at times.”

Rosemary gave a sad smile.

“We will have to do the welcoming until they come around. I hear you are a teacher, up to giving me a crash course in being a grandmother in the faith?”

“Count me in.”
Part II: The Road to Home

Chapter Summary

Baby Girl Katz makes her entrance!

The Honourable Road: Part 2 The Road to Family

There is a strength, a power even, in understanding brokenness, because embracing our brokenness creates a need and desire for mercy, and perhaps a corresponding need to show mercy. When you experience mercy, you learn things that are hard to learn otherwise. You see things you can't otherwise see; you hear things you can't otherwise hear. You begin to recognize the humanity that resides in each of us.

Bryan Stevenson

The Labour of Love

The baby makes a mockery of their plans.

Sometimes spontaneous labour happens especially when a sick body begins to recover, and the pregnancy hormones can take centre stage in one since it is a sign of recovery. Since the fetal surgery, Amara makes progressive improvements and is weaning off her medications beyond prenatal support. The last ten days in the hospital are relatively easy.

Still, nobody is entirely ready for the call at 2:11 am ahead of schedule to say, Baby Girl Katz is preparing to make her grand entrance. Their friends are not in the shift cycle for that day, and it falls to a very nervous foundation doctor to break the news to Sydney.

Of course, Sydney Katz is incapable of inadequate preparation so their 'Go Bag.' is a feat of master planning. Maggie jokes that an Emergency C section is not out of the question with the plethora of supplies. Dr. Lin draws the line at bringing too many medical supplies to their hospital. However, she does let Syd keep her favourite stethoscope, mainly because it’s a security blanket of sorts.
Maggie's contribution to the early morning hours is packing to remind Syd that she is, in fact, human and needs to do things like eat, change clothes and not harass members of staff. Therefore Maggie packs an assortment of Syd's favourite 'stress foods, blankets and prayer books. Her lover is very attached to the little bears that Jerry and Becca knitted for them, so she packs those.

Syd shyly asks if Maggie is ok to pray with her before they head to the hospital, they will have no time to visit the Temple. This gesture touches Maggie because the other doctor often draws lines in their home about being secular in their shared time together. As they sit in front of the prayer space, Maggie gets lost in the rhythm and peace of Syd's voice.

The next prayer is going to be one to welcome the baby into the world. Somehow this still time of just the two of them feels meaningful too. It is a time for reflection of how far they have come together and the journey that is still ahead.

The LEAVETAKING

They are not in the operating room for the emergency procedure. It is against hospital policy, and neither of them fights it this time. Amara and Jerry shyly ask if they can have just a little time alone with the baby in the recovery room before the handover, to say their final goodbyes in private. Jerry wants to say a few words of leave taking.

Maggie and Sydney wait in one of the family rooms, talking quietly and gratefully accepting the updates that the staff provides. Billy rushes in from across town and is in charge of distraction as they all mentally clock the progression in the theatre down the hall.

It is too early to rally the troops both literally and figuratively. If something goes wrong, it is best that they deal with the trouble quietly. Alex is going to kill her, but Dr. Reid's pregnancy is advancing, and she can't ignore that fact any longer.

At least that is what Maggie is planning on telling her best friend when she starts yelling. At least Charlie and Syd will run interference if things get too out of control.

Billy is gleefully collecting his winnings. Apparently saving lives does not keep people busy enough. Several betting pools exist around Baby Girl Katz on everything from her arrival to her name.

Sydney makes a game out of guessing the precise techniques and tries very hard not to critique her
students as she stress eats power biscuits. She is unable to pace because her lover just refuses to move from their entangled position on the couch. It is an obvious yet effective tactic as Syd is a cuddle bug and responds to her embrace much like a cat, relaxing almost in spite of herself.

Maggie runs through checklists on her phone, rearranging their timetable to accommodate the early arrival. Declan, her reliably insomniac brother, is online so she begins messaging regular updates.

He sends her every corny uncle meme he can find, and Maggie has no doubt he will be rocking some merchandise tomorrow.

Right on schedule an exhausted Jerry appears and offers them a wane but genuine smile.

"She is here."

The LAWYERS

The father and son who practice adoption law together are very excited for them and enjoy being part of such a warm and friendly case. They are both eager to come down to the hospital and help with any last minute paperwork. An adoption is not immediate, but they can finalize guardianship and liaise with the hospital to make everything as official as possible.

It is helpful if they have final statements from Jerry and Amara and witness all the final hospital forms. This reality prompts a private ceremony in the crowded room.

Jerry wants to name the baby traditionally. It is their parting gift to the child that is no longer theirs, no matter what the law says.
Her name on both the birth certificate and in their faith.

Jerry looks like he is struggling not to cry as he hands the baby to his cousin. Maggie is sitting beside her and Amara is resting on Jerry’s other side, but there is something holy about this moment for Syd, with all the battles the Katz cousins fought to find peace.

"Her name is Eliana" he reveals solemnly.

"My God has answered me" Sydney breathes translating automatically, but it sounds more like a prayer.

"Yes. Eliana Rebecca Katz - Lin" Amara confirms softly. “or whatever combination you decide to give her. ”

Sydney is silent as she gazes at her new daughter, memorizing every feature and the health that her brief time out of the specialist ward represents.

Maggie is caught between the beauty of Syd’s expression and the tiny hand peeking out from the blanket.

When Syd carefully hands over the baby, Maggie does not bother to wipe away her tears. Eliana feels so natural in her arms, sitting beside the love of her life.

“Hello Eliana, we are so delighted to meet you, my darling.”

THE LOGISTICS

The apartment is almost ready.

Instead of being able to spend massive amounts of time directly in the ward their friends have formed working bees, under Alex’s strict supervision.
The nursery is fully furnished, Declan’s bassinet taking pride of place amongst the increasingly personal touches. Somebody has even stenciled ‘Eliana’ amongst the themes on the wall.

The open plan lounge and kitchen is being baby proofed. Amara and Jerry’s old room has a rapid conversion back into a study. Maggie will be working from home for the first few months post maternity leave, so it is important to have that space.

The fridge is stocked with enriched formula and ready meals. There are snapshots of the newest member on the refrigerator door.

THE LESSON

Sydney does not even try to contact her parents.

Maggie is secretly very proud of her partner for not caving. The Lins are so supportive of them, and their extended friendship group, that any intrusion would be too painful.

They know the baby has arrived and so they silently agree to watch Aaron so the Friedmens can be involved with the new arrival. Everyone wants to see this as a positive sign, but the Katz sisters think it is more a reflection of the love of Aaron than a genuine softening towards their eldest daughter.

Sydney refuses to let their silence perturb her.

"They will come around or they won’t."

This philosophy is her guiding principle, and she refuses to let Becca intercede, no intervention can be given at this stage.

Syd refuses to do any of the things that would win her parents over. This little world she is building with Maggie means too much to be tarnished by constant prejudice.
This resolve isn’t perfect and days bring sadness, but the foundations feel unshakable for the first time in her life.

The greatest gift.

THE LUNGS

Eliana’s lungs are still the primary concern. They are responding well to the monitoring and steroids. Their growth and syndromes are well controlled. The signs are good for future milestones, but consideration still needs to be given to their premature status.

Some things can still go wrong with the incision site. Shiloh has one of her interns monitoring the pulmonary output hourly, and he shares his thoughts and findings regularly.

Eliana did not have an ideal start either in the womb or outside it, but she is making slow but steady progress towards health.

There is the prominent scar on her tiny chest that will grow with her. She will have to scare on her lungs, and there is a high chance of chest complications such as Asthma or Chronic Bronchitis.

She is going to live.

Their daughter

THE LOVE

There is no formula for bonding with a newborn child no matter how they come into the world. Books, movies, family, and strangers often claim that it is a magical, instant bond that is unshakable. For some people, it is, for others it is a much a harder road with many set backs.

Both Sydney and Maggie have given versions of this speech numerous times. In their line of work,
they see the full spectrum of bonding experiences, and it is important to convey this message.

The reassurances are running through Sydney's mind as they sit in the nursery listening to the soft beeping of the monitors. The logic seems hollow as they watch their daughter enter her first week in the hospital. The extended family is insisting on taking shifts, but it is a struggle for either of them to leave.

There is no problem bonding, but their relationship still feels in the abstract as they can only spend sections of time with her. Her incubator is becoming progressively more personalized, which brings comfort.

Becca gave her niece a quilt that drapes over her mechanical cradle in between interventions. It stuns Sydney to know that her sister made this years ago in preparation for this day, however, it eventuated.

Their friends at the hospital read about the 'Octopus Therapy' where Premmies find comfort in grasping a toy's legs. Eliana is currently clutching to a toy squid made out of two sets of their scrubs, infused as it was with their scent. For once, skeptical scientist Syd differs to that of a grateful mother.

Anxiety is still high despite everyone's best efforts.

Luckily the NICU nurses are experienced in all things anxious parents and are mainstays of support and logic. Their main nurse is particularly good at teasing Syd out of the worst of her anxiety, usually by inviting the younger doctor to read to her daughter and get lost in the rhythm.

Eliana will not need to stay here too much longer as her breathing, blood pressure, and weight is stabilizing, but Shiloh is insisting a very cautious approach as they may need to do secondary operations and she needs to be stable from infections.

Maggie has her hand in the incubator port, gently clasping her free hand smiling with each big breath the baby takes.

"So what are you doing next Friday?" she asks casually

"Depends on how much progress I make with the nursery in the mean time, why?" Sydney is too not paying much attention as she is watching her details on the charts.
"Think you can spare a few hours between your furniture battles?"

"Of course, what do you need?"

"You to marry me, preferably between 1 pm- 3 pm because that is when the Rabbi is free but he is such a sweetheart I am sure he would do it here at midnight if we needed to."

Sydney jerks her head up, almost sure she must have fallen asleep. Weren't they in the middle of discussing Maggie's publication schedule and restarting the cancer trial, specifically focusing on pregnancy?"

"What?"

Maggie is grinning at her broadly from her position at the opposite side of the pod area assigned to their little family.

"Check your glasses case. The nurses weren't too keen on my dropping to my knees in their pristine ward, so I had to improvise."

Sydney struggles not to tremble as she reaches into her briefcase.

Her previously empty case has a cloth resting in it, small cranes embodied on the surface, paper counter parts resting either side of a ring that glints in the fluorescent light.

They discussed rings one ideal night, and Maggie was paying attention. The ring is everything she hoped for; the simple gold band is traditionally Jewish, but there is an inscription on the inside.

"Here, always" there is a time inscribed, and it takes a while for Sydney to remind it is the date she agreed to adopt Eliana.

"Oh Maggie"
"I figure we should all have matching paperwork when Eli comes home" she explains softly joining their hands in a circle on top of the pod.

It is physically impossible for Sydney to launch herself at Maggie in the confines of this space but she does her best. The other woman is prepared and moves away from the machines, laughing as Syd kisses her on every spot she can reach in between repeating yes in multiple languages.
The Wedding

Chapter Summary

Self-explanatory title.

Officially in 'Part Two' of the story next chapter

The Weeding

I don't speak because I have the power to speak; I speak because I don't have the power to remain silent' – Rabbi A.Y. Kook

Few ceremonies inspire more debate, discussion, and dissension than weddings.

However, it is entirely possible that their hospital family has been living in a state of suspended animation waiting for this proposal to occur. People seem to come out of the woodwork offering a bewildering array of services in the lead-up to what Maggie intends to be a low-key affair, done primarily to formalise the situation before the adoption.

The notion that they will be having a second, bigger ceremony after the baby has settled in does not seem to register with the wider group. Hope Zion and its staff have endured more than its fair share of trauma and heartache, from deaths to restructures to failed clinical trials and everything in between; this is a stress reliever.

Rebecca delights in revealing that she is already in possession of the material and pattern to make Sydney a dress. The finished product won't be as elaborate as the traditional gown, but it will have to have the elements that define both their religion and her sister's style.

Becca's new congregation is working together on the project, very keen to welcome the new family. It still surprises the Friedmans how readily the Synagogue accepts their circumstances, from cancer
considerations to rewritten vows. Aaron is now a treasured member of the playgroup.

Alex is taking her best friend duty to a whole new level by insisting on taking on the lion's share of the planning so that the couple can devote time to Eliana. This role includes liaising with family, assigning roles for the Jewish component and meeting with the Rabbi.

Rosie and Martha, two of Maggie's favourite theatre nurses, reveal previously unknown baking talent and are joining forces and kitchens to produce a wedding cake fit for purpose. The designs look like something from Pinterest, and both of them are in awe.

Amara and Jerry are both artistically minded and work together to plan to add touches in the designated room of the Synagogue, including colour themes, ribbons, memory books and photo collages.

Sydney, in particular, relishes the sense of belonging because she still feels like something of a transplant to Hope Zion, but they have welcomed her into the fold without question or comment on previous actions.

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"Don't you dare."

Syd is adorably defensive when Maggie suggests that she can 'redo' the proposal in a more conventional sense.

They are doing an inventory of all the baby supplies their friends provide, making sure there is no specialist equipment lacking in the thick pile. It is mainly for show, Syd is too meticulous to let anything significant fall through the cracks.

However, it is a fun way to pass a weekend afternoon, going through all the little details that transform their home into a child-friendly place, ready for both a baby in general and Eliana, their daughter in particular.

"It is perfect as it is - you leave my proposal alone" Syd huffs defensively, folding her arms as if
Maggie might seek to recycle the ring.

Maggie is mostly joking, they defy convention in all aspects of their relationship, why start now but she also knows Sydney well, and beneath all her hard edges she is romantic with old-fashioned notions.

"No law says I can't propose more than once, you know. I am not going to take NICUgate away from you, promise." Maggie swears, trying to be serious but finding it hard not to be amused by the spectacle.

Sydney sends her a halfway suspicious look before returning to organising the picture books.

"We do need to discuss one final detail that our friends can't hijack for us," Maggie says "although I am almost positive there will be a few people trying."

"mmmm" Sydney is focusing on creating her indexing system.

"What is the family name going to be? I know there are specific Jewish rituals and expectations but what is your gut feeling?. I just want to marry you, so you get first dibs at making such discussions" Maggie does not say that she knows how conflicted her fiancée is towards her family at the moment.

Sydney blinks not quite believing that she overlooked such an important detail when she manages everything else from bank accounts to lease paperwork.

A sudden thought struck, and Sydney drops the books and hurries to their study, face alight with a beaming smile at some personal amusement.

"Wait a sec." is the only clarification she offers.

Her typically posed and scholarly girlfriend looks so much like a kid with a Christmas present that Maggie giggles as she moves to agree. She is proud of many of her achievements when it comes to their relationship but reacquainting Syd with her inner child is possibly her favourite.
"You realise I'm yours right? You don't need to sweep me off my feet with your towering intellect?" Maggie jokes as Syd comes back with a conference book for the Symposium of Israeli Obstetrics 2015. "Though I am no way opposed if you feel so compelled, especially if you wear your glasses when you lecture me about 'Out Dated Principles in Modern Prenatal Infection Care."

The outcome is entirely possible with Syd, her brain leaps all over the place, especially when emotion was brought into play.

"Hush you."

Sydney flips through the pages of abstracts with determination before stopping at a particular page and bringing it over to where Maggie stood.

"I may have completed those calculations a little early, to be fair Dr. Ward is a lovely man, but he can not present to save his life, he needs to stay with the pathology slides."

On the notes pages of the book, Sydney has written her name in both Hebrew and English, to be more specific, there is a different combination of both their names together ranked in order of preference.

Dr Sydney Katz- Lin is the clear favourite, denoted by multiple ticks and doodles.

Maggie neglects direct agreement in favour of sweeping Syd into her arms and guiding them to the bedroom, forever grateful that Syd's tiny frame made such gestures possible.

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Maggie knows too much to call this a breakthrough.
Breakthrough is an overused pop psychology term in any event. It implies that there is one solution for every problem. In Maggie's experience, there is no such thing as linear improvement; you move forward, you move back and you plateau.

Sydney’s parents left a note with the nurses, deliberately selecting a time when both of them are working.

A university fund is set up in Eliana’s name, at their discretion. The Katz are firm believers in the value of higher education; all their grandchildren will receive the same.

There is also a patchwork teddy bear lying beside the envelope. It takes Syd a moment to recognise her childhood bear that shows several patches and a new nose.

Sydney places low expectations on her parents and extended relatives, but she takes heart in the symbolism of the gesture and the care her mother took in the restoration.

She tells Maggie later that night as she lovingly places the bear on the toy shelf.

"It took me a lifetime to come to terms with my identity, and I was the definition of vacillating in the beginning. Perhaps I am unreasonable in placing such a timetable on people far more conservative than I ever was"

In Maggie's opinion this is being overly generous, but such compassion is so quintessentially Syd it is impossible to begrudge her a touch of optimism, especially when it boys the other woman so much.

'Patches' is an adorable bear and prompts childhood memories from Syd, so it's not all bad.

****

"Are you sure about this, Mumma."

"Yes Maggie, of course, I am. You are welcome to wear this at the ceremony."
Rosemary and her twins are spending the day going through boxes for any family mementos that she may want to introduce Eliana to into the future. Syd is adamant to the point of being dogmatic that their child's history is not dominated by Jewish roots going back 12 generations.

Rosemary commits to the wedding and the new arrival with alacrity, helping with as many details as possible and liaising with Becca on what she needs to learn both as a mother in law and a grandmother.

Maggie is holding a delicate necklace from Dr. Lin Sr. side of the family. The gold piece was beautiful, and the jade looks valuable, she can't remember the jewelry from childhood but that's not surprising, their mother retained primary custody.

Their mother by extension was a gateway to their experience of their paternal relatives.

Many years and milestones passed before any form of a ceasefire were reached, even then it was armed neutrality.

"Don't look at me like that, you two. It's taken me a humiliating number of decades, but I am at peace with your father, more important than that I recognise the role he and his legacy plays in your life."

"Thanks, Mumma," Maggie says gratefully.

Rosemary also insists that they add a pile of small garments that she receives from their paternal grandmother.

"I am not sure I can do these words justice, Gigi," Declan says for about the 10th time as he reviews the print of his role as a witness. Her characteristically laid-back brother is a bundle of nerves and comes close to sleeping with the printout.

"Dec - this is about as close to a shotgun wedding as two female surgeons are going to get. Nobody will judge your grasp of syntax, anybody who would is deliberately staying away" Maggie reassures.

"That does not matter; I am representing the family."
"Would you like me to call Jerry and Samuel and ask them to give you a practice run or two?"

It amuses Maggie to see how their little profile wedding is morphing into a major event for people around them; everyone wants to play their part and do the right thing, Jackson is supplying everyone with cheat sheets.

Families are often a combination of genetics and choices.

****

Maggie tends to place few expectations on her life.

She always knew she wanted to have children and spend her life with somebody, but the specifics never took shape in the abstract sense. One of the reasons she admires Syd so much is her unshakable resolve in meeting her aspirations.

Her top priority is finding somebody who understood or at least appreciated her dedication to her profession, the fundamental mistake her parents made is the inability to understand the competing demands on each others time.

Maggie thinks about her parents a lot as she waits in the quiet space off the main hall, waiting for proceedings to begin.

How the imprint of their marriage still lingers in how their daughter approaches life and love.
How the narrative with Syd is slowly undoing the worst of the pride, preconceptions, and prejudices.

In Syd, she has found somebody who meets all her criteria, even ones she was not consciously aware of but even more important than fundamental compatibility she knows the best and the worst of Syd and would not change a thing.

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Sydney's life is a succession of expectations either meeting them or failing them, often in equal measure.

The architecture of her wedding is long-standing, ever since the Katz sisters were little, the wedding was marked off as a milestone. Their father was happily putting money aside each year; dates discussed even before the groom reveals himself. Once Becca marries the perfect man in classic style the pressure on Syd increased.

It wasn't just 'Gay Panic' that made Sydney seek out Hershel.

The wedding she finds herself in today is nothing like the one she or her family envisioned, yet neither is the version of the Katz daughter undertaking it. In one situation the outside is perfect, the right customs, clothes and kosher food. In the other just about the only thing that was perfect is how she was feeling.

There are no multiple generations of relatives to fuss over her.

The church officials are lovely people, but it isn't the Rabbi who married her parents and oversaw her Bat Mitzvah.

The ceremony is among multiple obligations and borders on an afterthought.

The food is mostly store bought and an entirely random mix.
None of these facts matter.

Her soul is at peace, beyond any definition.

If she ever believed in miracles that simple fact is the ultimate example.

****

The ceremony itself is simple.

They are guided through the each aspect of the service and repeat the ritual words together.

The vows are both religious and secular, hastily agreed upon, The beautiful lilting Hebrew floats into
the room, said by both the officials and the witnesses.

Their friends are so excited they can’t quite be grave and severe but in some ways that make things
better. The relaxation symbolises Syd’s new life.

Declan and Alex represent Maggie, providing a hilarious and touching speech, tracing her life from
childhood from med school.

Becca, Jerry, and Samuel serve Sydney, accurately aware of the absences. They have a quiet dignity,
respectful of the traditions they are standing in for and there is a silent communication between the
four of them.

Everybody dances together – a playlist put together by Billy and Zach.

Maggie and Sydney sign the official documents, cut the cake and posed for photos.

Rosemary delights in serving all the food, and quietly watching her daughter beam with happiness.
She does not realise how much stress her oldest child carried until it begins to lift.
It is fitting that their wedding night occurs at the hospital.

Of course, all their friends try to encourage them to go on a traditional honeymoon night, but nobody expects them to take it, not with Eliana due home the following week. Instead, Alex sets up a takeaway spread in one of the break rooms.

They spend happy hours talking to Eliana and taking turns holding her and playing music. The baby is making a textbook recovery from her procedure and remains stable throughout numinous observations. Eliana is gradually losing the gaunt look that characterizes chronically sick and premature infants.

The ever-cautious Shiloh is talking about a discharge date and is confident they do not need to consider more surgery at this stage.

“Hey beautiful girl – you will be home soon” Sydney croons

“Eliana I am so lucky to have you and your Mummy in my life. We will be a family of three soon, four if I convince her to let me get a parrot for her bird.”

Sydney laughs at the pleading look that accompanies the last part.

Maggie has the charming habit of treating their new daughter as a confident, conversing on every topic imaginable, a running narrative of their lives and plans.

Eliana tracks these stories in her way, moving her eyes with increased purpose.
Their child is a whole mini galaxy of changes and progress, even though they bring enormous academic knowledge, both new parents can only view each step with wonder and the occasional snapshot for the album.

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"If I could have summoned enough bravery, I would have married you three years ago, scandal or no" Sydney muses, laughing at her new bride's determined effort to trace every strain of her now free hair.

"Bad idea, you did not corner the market on issues back then," Maggie says with a gentle laugh settling in for a longer conversation.

Syd could never naturally fall asleep no matter how active they were in the proceeding hours.

Sydney shifts their positions closer, hissing slightly at the protesting muscles and the marks on her skin. Their activities were vigorous and enthusiastic even if they were both in scrubs instead of gowns and the setting is the not quite complete bedroom.

"I am trying to figure out the exact moment I fell in love with you. I know that I was attracted to you right away, but I'm having trouble isolating the precise moment I knew you were the definition of my soulmate even if the notion is not in the teachings."

"When you ramped up your denial and avoidance to an Olympic sport? About the second or third ambush kissing moment" Maggie guessed without bitterness or resentment.

"I think it was when you gave me the last of your sandwiches."

Maggie quirks her eyebrows which naturally results in excessive touching for several long minutes.

Truthfully Maggie barely remembers the moment in question. Sydney just looked so haggard and conflicted after coming out in the on-call room that it seemed natural to feed her.
"I created a sport out of confusing and hurting you, yet you still worried about how much food I took in and how comfortable I was" Sydney explains with real marvel in her voice.

"Not enough people took care of you with your hyper self-sufficient ways. I could never be angry enough not to extend simple kindness." Maggie says firmly.

"I knew I could love you from our second or third shift, but I think it only dawned on me when they reported that attack on that Israeli hospital just outside the capital. First I was worried about you, but then I was worried you weren't taking care of yourself, eating enough, remembering to sleep" Maggie smiles sadly.

“I remember thinking I hope you have a girlfriend who will take care of you and remind you of your status as a mere mortal at regular intervals.”

Sydney kisses her softly.

"I did, in more ways than one, it was Layla, who told me with more tenderness than I deserved that my heart resides elsewhere and I needed to stop wasting both our time."
Interlude 4:

We all want progress, but if you're on the wrong road, progress means doing an about-turn and walking back to the right road; in that case, the man who turns back soonest is the most progressive

C.S. Lewis

Alex Reed freely admits to finding Sydney Katz intimidating.

Dr Katz has three attributes that do a number on Alex's psyche. The younger doctor is another female surgeon in a competitive field who seems to publish articles at a prodigious rate. Sydney is newly committed to Alex's best friend and makes said friend deliriously happy even in a web of complications and their new daughter. Lastly, there is the small matter of her being a specialist in pregnancy, prenatal health and all things baby, not the best combination when your relationship with both your boyfriend and your yet to be born daughter is ambiguous.

Still, Alex resolves to put aside her petty concerns and get to know Sydney as a person rather than an extension of the hospital and Maggie.

Inviting Sydney to lunch at her favourite cafe seems like a logical start.

Unfortunately, her mind struggles to stay on track when Syd casually asks how she is feeling after showing the obligatory photos of Eliana and Maggie in various states of happiness.

"I am not cut out to be a mother again; I am not connecting with the baby.”
Sydney blinks from behind her glasses as if she hadn’t just interrupted a casual talk about JAMA.

“There is a big leap between the two parts of those sentences; the connection isn’t an exact thing that flows from the placenta.”

“But I should feel something towards her” Alex says picking at her bagel.

“You are simultaneously running several clinical trials, grieving your mother, raising a toddler, supporting a crop of students and reacquainting yourself with a man you grieved for; It is ok to consider a drain on limited resources.”

“You don’t talk to a new mother…”

Sydney shrugs not distressed in the slightest.

“You know when these feelings become a problem if you have specific plans and can’t alter them etc. ” Sydney laughs softly

“First step: admit you are impressive, but you are not super human.”

Sydney keeps her secrets

Of course, all doctors are acutely aware of confidentiality both in their personal and professional lives, Sydney Katz more than most makes an excellent confidant.
They begin meeting up on a semi-regular basis in between schedules and baby duties, Alex is not the type to have a birthing coach or broad support system in the last few weeks, but both Sydney and Maggie insist on being present anyway, she and Maggie are evenly dividing the baby care duties.

Sydney does both 'official' and 'unofficial' ultrasounds helping Alex feel more connected to the life growing inside her, Alex's professional pride takes a hit going back to such medical basics, but it does seem to be an effective strategy. Sydney also helps her redesign her scheduling (they clash over colour coding) to reflect the new shape of her family better.

Syd sets her up with a colleague who specialises in prenatal counselling, who is senior enough not to fall for Alex's usual evasions and false promises. Alex has experiences with a lifetime of therapists both for herself and her family. This cycle all started with her mother's worsening mental state and the dangerous life paths of the Reed brothers.

Sydney chose well though Dr Zhan is ruthlessly focused and devoted to counselling as Alex is to surgery and promises a straightforward course of CBT with tones of narrative therapy. He even uses the metaphor of preparing for a hard surgery rotation, with steps, stages and learning measures. There are specific actions and outcomes and absolutely no childhood or dream analysis.

"Your blueprint is far from ideal, but it's not insurmountable, let's teach you how to meet your daughter half way without sacrificing the marathon that is your surgical career."

Motherhood does not come naturally to her.

It is too simplistic for Alex to entirely blame her mother, father and any of the blueprints in her life, although she is learning to accept just how much her childhood and impromptu guardianship sucked from her psychosocial development.

Her heart and soul consumes by surgery, and the joy of motherhood is also a derailment. She has to work at the most fundamental aspects of motherhood that most people claim come naturally from the bonding to the creation of the routine.

Sydney is monotonous in her opinion that Alex is not doing anything wrong and there is no exact way to undertake the pregnancy experience, that babies who live with the basics and a loving
foundation are resilient and can wait for their parents to join the bonding wagon. Dr Katz, being Dr Katz, even calmly asserts that they will overcome Post Partem problems if it comes to such an extreme outcome.

She takes heart in little Eliana's progress and how well Syd, in particular, is adjusting to the change in routine. Motherhood has profoundly changed the other doctor's life but not her temperament. Syd is still clinical about babies in general and is hyper-focused on her academic roles even while taking full advantage of great maternity leave and family support packages.

Alex has always thought highly of Hope Zion but is even more impressed when she taps into the support services; apparently, she does not need to do absolutely everything on her own.

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Maggie is her touchstone

Maggie is often her touchstone in small and profound ways, ever since they began this surgical path together, their personalities are different, but they mesh into a team of oddballs with bizarre relationship experiences to bond over.

The hard-earned peace she finds with Sydney is a joy to observe, there is a lightness to her expression that Alex has not seen since before the accident and the loss of the baby.

"Please let me know if I get overboard with the 'baby spam', Dec has cut me off at one email a day," Maggie says with a bashful smile.

Alex gives her friend a quick and a reassuring smile.

"Watching you and your new family is one of the joys in my life, don't ever think you are annoying me. Don't forget you are going to be returning the favour soon enough."

"How is Sydney doing? Do you have Paget diagrams on every surface yet."
“Syd is beautiful and amazing. She makes me so happy, Alex” Maggie looks as if the prospect is still awe-inspiring to her friend.

“She is your one, and you have finally reached a happy place with her after three years of pinning, you have the right to a little giddiness or allot.”

“I don’t have to compromise anything; she wants me to be an awesome surgeon even more than I do but she balances me at the same time because she insists on family time and hobbies.”

“Hurricane Katz has hobbies?”

“Mainly feeding me, reading poetry and critiquing popular science but yes she does.”

Charlie is going to be an excellent father

This fact is not a surprise, he is a fantastic people person and enjoys children in all forms, he accepts the Luke situation with more grace than she has a right to expect or rely on for the rest of Luke's childhood.

Luke is a central figure in his life now, in his right without any questions or hesitancy a pure love.

His experiences with the dead and the living dead give him a particular lens on bringing new life into the world; he is often quiet and reflective. He asks her questions, and they communicate much better than they ever have, not entirely but it’s an improvement.

He is also establishing new relationships with their colleagues and is the better for it. Oddly he and Sydney find a good bond, both guided by an intangible faith.
Her labour is relatively textbook

Indeed, anything is an improvement on how Luke came into the world if only because nobody is expecting her to make a complex diagnosis under time constraints this time. The labour happens more or less on schedule, and nothing dramatic happens between the onset of bonafide contractions and admittance to the hospital, she even has a functional birth plan.

Maggie is her birth partner and performs the job with her usual calm style, managing to make Alex laugh between bouts of pain. The hospital usually, if possible, ensure that a doctor's friends don't interact with them as patients, so it is her primary OB and a team of experienced labour nurses and no gawking interns.

Maggie is particularly conscious of this issue since being on display with a brain bleed and subsequent injury.

Charlie and Maggie are on either side of her, letting her crush their hands when the pain gets bad, and she weeps for her lost family members.

An eight-hour labour produces a healthy daughter who is far from shy about announcing her presence to the world; everything is somewhat traditional this time, Charlie cuts the cord, has the first hold and becomes wholly entranced with their newborn.

He shyly asks to call her after a favourite aunt and insists on honouring Martha with the middle name, even though Alex says he can pick anything.

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Maggie is all but vibrating with excitement.

Emily Martha Reed- Harris is reaching her recent milestones promptly, and Syd's student gives her
the all-clear for release home in 48 hours. Alex is not far behind her in the recovery stakes, but she is reasonably convinced that there will be no third Reed child.

The hospital family rallies around in full force, preparing the apartment and dropping of all the essentials for both the baby and the expanding family unit. Many of their colleagues are especially attached to Luke, so he gets looks of older sibling attention, complete with a whole new set of toys.

Charlie cannot stop smiling as they perform the first homecoming rituals, and this remains Alex of what a great man he is despite their numerous relationship troubles and turbulence ever since the accident(s).

They are not a conventional family, but then again her family life is a long line of twists and diversions, the foundation is strong and filled with hope. She likes to think Matha and Luke Sr. are proud of the progress she is making.

One of the first order of business is to have a double date between Emily and Eliana, who are both well enough for interactions.

Charlie and Luke both shyly ask to be involved in the playdate, not wanting to miss a single milestone.

"Oh she has grown"

Alex laughs at herself falling into all the baby cliches, but it is hard not to when every aspect of the pregnancy was so fragile. She half expects to comment about the smallness of her finger and toenails.

"Steady weight gain and vital functions" Sydney agrees proudly, as she places down her burdens of blankets, toys and bottles.

"Are Shiloh and the other doctors still happy with everything?" Charlie asks, smiling as the two babies are placed side by side, apparently demonstrating their different stages.

"I think our little girl is the pride of the Fetal Surgery field at the moment she is doing so well" Maggie can't help but boast as they hunker down on the floor.
Eliana offers Sydney a brilliant smile as she reaches for a long strand of red hair and responding to the soft stream of Hebrew and English.

"She is going to be multilingual before her first birthday" Charlie laughs.

"A scholar in the Torah in the making,” Maggie says as she gently strokes Emily's head.

Alex does not have such lofty goals for either of her children nor will she take to motherhood like her friends but there is one truth that she embraces. She can successfully be more than a young rockstar surgeon; there are no absolutes to live except in chemistry and pure statistics. These moments when her two identities could not be further apart are significant in their way.

She hopes that wherever Luke Sr and Martha are (if they are anywhere) that they find comfort in the changes, she is making in her life.
In growing pains are both physical and psychological.

"The thing is that love gives us a ringside seat on somebody else's flaws, so of course you're gonna spot some things that kinda need to be mentioned. But often the romantic view is to say, 'If you loved me, you wouldn't criticise me.' Actually, true love is often about trying to teach someone how to be the best version of themselves"

Alain De Bolton - Swiss-British Contemporary Philosopher

Something is worrying your wife.

Of course, this isn't an unusual state of affairs. Sydney fears as if the emotion is to become an Olympic sport somehow or a new grade to excel at, she hoards concerns and diverts them from every conceivable angle, no matter how unlikely the eventuality.

Syd's fingernails are what betrays her to those who know to long for the signs.

Like most, if not all, surgeons Sydney is fastidious about hygiene, especially regarding her hands, those perfectly maintained fingers are a piece of art. However, long before Syd even contemplated being a surgeon (though she probably started that journey in primary school), Sydney was subject to periods of intense anxiety.

The result of cycles of anxiousness is raw hands from OR grade soaps and bleeding angry nail beds.

Sydney being simultaneously secretive and incredibly open with you, she is acutely aware that one of your most significant problems in the past is her lack of communication, so she is always sharing
with you, how her day went, little things about Eli, various intrigue in their joint families and goings on at Temple.

In short, this is a model of depending intimacy for all newlyweds.

The glaring exception is why she is not sleeping and using the night feeds as a cover. Why she is starting to avoid your friends but firmly insist you go out at every opportunity. Thankfully she is spending a lot of time with the new reformist Rabbi, who is academically minded and debates Syd freely.

You cannot help but envy the easy intimacy at the same time as you admire it.

However, you have not wasted your years of being in love with Sydney Katz; she needs to reconcile something in her head before talking about it, forcing the issue is going to do no good.

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Sydney needs almost as much tending as Eliana

Eliana's needs are thankfully simple. Her medical needs are straightforward. Their daughter is gaining strength and stamina every day and is quickly settling into a routine, complete with regular sleep; her appetite is finicky, and their daughter will never reach the heights of her biological parents but she is thriving.
Sydney’s needs, as always, are more complicated to deduce.

She takes full advantage of Hope Zion’s maternity and new family package. Dawn is generous with benefits, but she spends hours sequestered with a research project.

She stays close to you whenever possible, proposing everything from movie marathons to family tours of the local gardens. Sydney seems to relish above all else the process of setting down roots in the community, learning all the details of being a new wife and mother.

You are in charge of convincing her that while it is possible that foundation doctors get more annoying every year, it is equally likely that she is just tired, not losing her ability to teach.

You take responsibility for ensuring that she does not work herself to complete disarray, since moving in with and marrying Syd, it has become readily apparent nobody has moderated her routines before. It’s possible her chronic insomnia is more to do with isolation than anything else.

You ensure that she does not work herself ragged, no easy feat when she takes all aspects of her life so seriously. Friends and colleagues often joke that (sometimes without humor) that you are overly severe this is true, but you are also calm. Sydney is equally serious, but she has a nervous energy to her that would exhaust all around her if you did not moderate the intensity.
Being a doctor does give you a few advantages when it comes to welcoming a newborn into the household, it does not make people immune from regular concerns, but it does moderate them somewhat.

You know that the vast majority of newborn fevers are harmless and that Eli is going to have more trouble than most keeping her temperature down. Some of your favourite memories are watching Sydney soothe a temperature spike with a bath and singing.

You are feeling confident that the worst of Eliana's health concerns are stable for the time being, that current symptomology are unlikely to be harbingers of crisis, especially as she remains bright and content.

Both you and Syd are familiar with having your sleep patterns in intermittent blocks, so the arrival of an increasingly vocal newborn does not distress you as much as it seems to other parents in your playgroup.

You feel grateful that Eliana and Aaron are progressing well despite their rough starts, there is a bumper crop of Hope Zion babies this year, it is a delight to see everybody's process and share in family dynamics.

Syd's bookshelves, previously the exclusive domain of textbooks and relics, are collecting photos of their family unit and the friends they have made along the way. You take special delight in how quickly Syd’s featureless apartment becomes a family home, right down to the schedules on the fridge.
You fall into equal yet separate parenting roles that play to both your different strength and circumstances.

You weren't lying when you told Syd you intend to take the year off between certification and applying for a full-time staff position. It makes sense for you to sign up for the majority of the appointments, check-ups, and playdates.

Sydney is a natural for the nighttime routine, especially now that she is in negotiations with Dawn to take over the of department head of obstetrics, this position is more administrative than putting in double and triple shifts. It will suit your new life and Syd's personality well.

You each have your private rituals with Eliana; you enjoy the morning bath and dressing routine, slowly working your way through the extensive wardrobe Uncle Declan brought, you read her a fable each morning.

Sydney gets their daughter ready for bed, chattering about her day and usually their plans for that weekend. They curl up together and read Jewish nursery studies, switching from English to Hebrew.

By far your favourite rituals are the ones you do together. Their family unit is everything you hoped for and so much more, during the sleepy time before bed the two of you read or talk about your day with Eliana playing on her floor station.

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It is the missing octopus that finally breaks the stalemate.
You notice that this is a familiar pattern with your wife. She comes out of high-stress situations with much greater ease than she does little things that break her stride or routine, a coping strategy from childhood.

Most infants have a favourite toy, and Eliana's is the Octopus that the Hope Zion staff made for her out of their old scrubs. It is her constant companion day or night; luckily some thoughtful person made the little thing cheekily nicknamed 'BGK' washable.

"I can't find it, Maggie."

The stress in Sydney's tone seems disproportionate to the severity of the crisis, Eli looks happy after the two of them went for a walk to Temple, Sydney, on the other hand, is frantically removing things from the stroller.

"What can't you find?" you scope Eliana into your arms before moving to stand beside Sydney.

"BKG of course."

You are relieved it is not anything more important, but you do not voice the opinion, silently searching the lounge where you last saw the absentee sea creature.

“How could I be so careless? She adores that little scrap” Sydney seems agitated.

“There are many places for him to hide, no need for panic stations yet, if it comes to it I will retrace your route.”

“He is irreplaceable. They made him, especially with all the right dimensions. ”

The mystery takes 30 minutes to solve. The Octopus is caught under Syd’s reading chair but is not the worse for the experience; you start humming the chorus of the Beatles song about Octopus Gardens
Eliana is delighted to be reunited and smiles happily, and Sydney holds her close making the toy dance, always keen to work on reflexes and balance. There are very few activities in Syd's mind that cannot be reworked into a coordination exercise.

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"What is wrong, my love?"

You can see that she is considering brushing you off, but she is a horrible liar. This fact is true both generally and when it comes to somebody who loves her.

“I have wanted to children all my life; it was one of the few certainties in my life, they were to be my life’s work in more ways than one.”

“Feeling a little overwhelmed with an adorable 24/7 example?”

“There are so many things to consider; I feel like I can’t control much of anything. ”
Becca is your ally in most things but never is it more evident on how she works in tandem to soothe her sister.

You always felt an affinity for Becca, her family and the role they play in your new relationship. However having her as a sister in law deepens this connection, she handles the situation with a combination of tenderness and exasperated fondness.

“This isn’t any different from when she prepared for Med School exams, think, fret and repeat. Don’t worry too much” Becca says confidently as she prepares dinner.

The four of you have Sabbath dinner every Friday while the babies sleep, Jerry and Amara often join if work allows. You learn the words and the rituals make you smile.

Becca and Sydney take the children for long walks, the sisters both better for the time together. You enjoy your time with Samuel who is relaxing into a more secular lifestyle.

There is no notable progress with the Katz parent, but neither do things deteriorate, and the photos Sydney send do not bounce back.

You accept that this is the pace of the family, things move in swings and roundabouts. There is nothing you will stop at in defending your wife, but you are not so tense about things.

"I think I am failing you and your Mumma, Eli."
You do not mean to overhear the whispered words, but it’s hard not to with the top of the line monitor in their joint study.

You smile at the use of the nickname you know Sydney does not approve of yet uses consistently.

Trust your wife to skip past all of the milder aspects of self-censure and go straight to failure. She never did learn the art of doing things by half.

It is a strange turn of events that their daughter has become something of a confidant for them both. Neither of them ranks communication as one of their strengths, either before the marriage or after the event but the long hours with Eliana makes the conversations more comfortable with the little person as a buffer against insecurity and self-consciousness.

“Would it help if I told you that I wouldn't care” you whisper as not to disturb the sleeping baby.

Sydney doesn't protest as you gently lead her out into the living room, obliging as you push her into her reading chair and beginning to massage her shoulders, wincing at the unmovable muscle fibers and pronounced knots

"Ok, so we are introducing a new nightly ritual." You joke softly

“You are an anxious person, Syd, that is nothing to be ashamed of, I didn’t ask a world-renowned surgeon to marry me any more than you agreed for the sake of my charm and knowledge of medical trivia.”

“Don’t be so sure, never underestimate the seductive power of medical scrabble.”

“My point being that you don’t need to pretend to be ok when you are not, I’ll have bad days too.”

Sydney sighs in annoyance.

“I feel like I was calmer when she was still in the hospital, and we were spending our nights calculating figures and saturation,” Sydney confesses quietly. “Isn’t this where relaxation starts?”
“In other words doing precisely what you have studied and trained for your entire adult life? With the bonus of my company and make-out sessions,” you ask with a playful tug of Sydney’s braid.

Sydney relaxes back into a hug still finding it hard to believe that you can ride out these storms and fits so calmly, you sometimes think she is waiting for you to see this all too much no matter what the pieces of paper say or the vows you took.

“I’m not good at change, Maggie. I just worry all the time.”

"You are basing this assessment on roughly a month of collectively knowing her and being the primary caregiver, give yourself time to breathe, remember we agreed to adopt, moved in, got married, brought her home in less than three months. I give you full permission to freak out every now and then”

Sydney looks up at her seriously and pauses, struggling to put words to her thoughts.

"You know that no matter how anxious I get you both make me happy right?"

Maggie kisses her forehead and smiles at Eli as she tries hard to stay awake but can't fit sleep for long.

"You find countless ways to tell me that, Syd and remember I love you anxiety and all so tell me when this gets too much if only to preserve your nails. We are a team now, in every way"
First Identity

Maggie loves being a housewife.

This fact is both surprising and predictable to the people around her.

She wasn't joking when she told Alex, Zach and Jackson that marring Syd was the path for her, no matter how unconventional the circumstances.

For a driven medical student Maggie's view of the future always remained relatively one dimensional. She knew she wanted to be a mother and have a medical practice, but beyond these bedrocks, the particulars never took shape.

Uncertainty and the desire to avoid was a prominent feature of her earlier life. There were just too many supposedly solid foundations crumbling away to feel entirely confident, her father, Gavin, the
baby, medical malpractice and the accident to name a few. This list does not include the problems of her closest friends. Maggie did not want to invest in future or new identity that many crumble just as quickly.

So her future roles of 'wife' and 'mother' remained just a hazy dream like her version of the Mirror of Erised

Her one constant was Sydney since the first time they met, even when she was 8, 379 miles away at times.

Sydney looks askance when Maggie tries to draw the analogy.

"You are my Mirror of Erised," she says as they finish reading before bed.

"You do realise that the Torah has multiple and explicit passages about condemning witchcraft, probably not the best strategy to romance a Jewish woman." Sydney shoots back without looking up from the novel she is engrossed in and wants to finish.

"Probably not and I'll work on my Hebrew poetry, but it doesn't make it any less true. I've caught you listening to the Stephen Frey Audiobooks."

"It's for the kids in the clinic, and you were going to start reading them to Eliana anyway." Sydney defends with a smile.

Maggie misses Hope Zion on one level, but she finds the change of pass restorative. Any pace in medicine is challenging, but when you factor in comas and death, there is allot to absorb with few concessions made. The tension of the emotion and physical demands of the last few years were starting to ease.

She loves taking Eli to the Jewish playgroup and watching her daughter play with her cousin and the other children. They are learning different nursery rhythms, and the other mothers gently correct her and Maggie just as gently soothe their fears about developmental milestones and the latest teething trends. Maggie belongs to a few local parenting blogs on Facebook and counts a few genuine friendships.

She loves documenting their daughter's progress in a variety of mediums. Sydney teases her and says that her office selection will need to be updated every month at the rate her wife sends them. As it is Syd's meticulous desk has eight different photos on display.

Alex keeps threatening to take the camera away.

Eliana is progressing well, her health is stable, and she is meeting all her milestones within acceptable parameters.

**First Reconciliation**

The Toronto Jewish Community is very small.

Maggie often forgets this fundamental reality.
To be more accurate the different branches of the faith live in small groups, bound together by a particular interpretation or inherence to a set of teachings lead by a specific Rabbi or Rabbi Council.

For obvious reasons, Syd and her new family left the Synagogue of her parents for one that is more liberal and Reformist; it is not such a difficult task, Canada having a reputation for fostering religious diversity.

This division does not mean that crossover is impossible.

A Jewish bookstore is a prime example of grounds for crossover. Eli and her mother are having lunch, well Maggie is having lunch, her daughter is mouthing the food with curiosity, revealing in crushing pieces of pastry.

"Dr. Lin, may I join you?"

Few people call her Dr. Lin anymore; she changed her name professionally as well as personally. Her friend, relatives, and colleagues made the traditions easily. Since maternity leave, she is 'Maggie' or 'Eli's Mom,' especially in the context when she has already exchanged pleasantries with several with several other mothers.

This particular voice is jarring for multiple reasons, just like when they met all those years ago. The tone and circumstances could not be more different, but Maggie is almost as clueless. This meeting is not a scenario she planned for, as far as Syd knew her former fiancee is studying approach in Israel.

There isn't a script for confronting the former fiancee of your Jewish wife when you are holding her daughter, expect there is.

Kindness and respect for a good man who is equally a victim of circumstance.

"Hershel"

Maggie nods to the seat across from them, and the young Torah scholar unburdens himself of a large pile of books before sitting nervously, searching for a topic but getting distracted by the slight of Eli as she buries into her mother's neck, silently confirming plans for a nap.

Maggie is equally at a lost for safe conversation points, but she wants to let Hershel set the conversation as she suspects he has some things to say. He is a kind and is not capable of being mean or cruel, even in the heat of his anger all those years ago. Plus they bounded over the presence of a gigantic tapeworm in his system, which earns yet of them a reprieve.

"I am going to teach several Torah portions to children next year. I have spent so long reading complex texts and debating sentence structure I am brushing up on my basics" Hershel says eventually, gesturing to the book piles in front of him.

First Anniversary

Maggie and Sydney forget about their first anniversary.
They have a pizza night with Rosemary and Declan instead.

They nominally remember the date, but it is not the most important milestone of that period. The two doctors got married purely to make the legal progress of adoption more accessible and to appease the traditionalist streak in Jerry and Sydney that is a mile wide despite their perceived rebellion.

Maggie and Amara bond over their spouse's quirks.

The lack of a formal ceremony hits Maggie suddenly, but inspiration soon follows even though Syd insists they don't need to do anything differently. She decides to broach the topic directly with Sydney as they finish reading a story to Eli.

"How do you feel about Montreal in the spring, Eli should be walking by then, or at least enough to marshaled by Alex and Mum for 100 paces."

Sydney is not talented and picking up subtle clues she is literal. She has been dropping hints over the months her wife is too focused on their daughter and fostering Maggie's career."

"It is lovely, but there are better places that we should take her on our own or we could plan a family trip. Why would need to use your mum and Alex?

"Well a) I have always wanted to go to Montreal with you and Eli and. brush up on my French) I want to marry you probably with every Jewish custom and daughter as flower girl."

Sydney blinks in surprise at the idea, but the image is immediately appealing, and she quickly abandons the clothes that she is folding to give Maggie her full attention.

"Do you want to?" she asks with a delighted smile and shining tears.

"Absolutely if you will have me again, complete with Hebrew verses and updated wedding dresses."

The First Overture

Sydney's parents and not ready to be conventional grandparents.

Rosemary O'Neal - Katz struggles mightily not to condemn the older couple and lecture them on the responsibilities of integrating into a liberal democracy. How the love of a child can be so conditional is baffling, and Rosemary knows she is far from the best parenting example.

Sydney insists that they must not be judged by conventional standards, in their way they are making process, it is just not on a scale that many people will recognise as such.

Sydney's mother still finches when they make overt signs of affection in their presence, even a simple kiss or hand hold.

Her father frowns when Sydney proudly introduces her wife at events, even though the opinion of the other people is most welcoming. He once asked his older daughter to be 'quieter' about her status, which ends in a screaming match.
The First Words

Elianna's first word was in Hebrew.

Of course, there is the age-old debate about what constitutes a word. The doctors are not immune from running endless conjecture about is the protracted' sounds is the start of the word 'mummy' or if she is pointing out the animals correctly in her picture books.

The First Misunderstanding

Maggie is primarily an observer of her daughter's Jewish education.

It is not that she feels excluded or disconnected from this part of her daughter's education, it is that she trusts Syd and Eli's other teachers more in this most critical task. In some ways, Maggie is as much of a student as her daughter. There are many things she still needs to learn and many subtle interplays about the literal translation of some of the texts and the practical applications, which are two different things.

The historical role of the woman is a sticking point.

"We are not going to teach Eli or any future son of ours any of this" Maggie says as she completes a reading for the night, as she glares at several passages in Leviticus.

"Of course we are," Sydney replays in a neutral tone as she unwinds her hair and dresses for bed.

"It says that...." Maggie begins in a heated tone of voice.

"I can quote the passages chapter and verse Maggie, and we will be teaching our daughter to read the same passages as she gets older" Sydney is uncharacteristically firm, she usually is keen to compromise on the topic of education.

Maggie gets ready to argue, but Sydney embraces her from behind and rests her head on her shoulder.

" Just because of you are learning the literal word of the Torah does not mean that we need to become literalist, sweetheart. It is our foundational text, but there are a thousand and one interpretations.

First Steps

Eliana is the star of the show.

Of course, this fact does not surprise anybody who is present. The youngest member of the Katz-Lin family is the delight of her parents. She is taking her role as flower girl very seriously. Aaron is playing the role of ring bearer for his Aunt's wedding. The cousins are walking down the aisle with Rebecca and Alex.

These weren't strictly Jewish roles, but Maggie and Sydney want the children to be part of the
ceremony. There is room for both secular and orthodox traditions in their lives.

Sydney often claims that she would not change a single thing about their circumstances, with their life together exceeds all her expectations, but Maggie knows how vital the seven blessings are and how much joy the solemn vows give her in this historic temple.

Maggie feels tremendous satisfaction in seeing the parts of their lives come together in this formal celebration both of their union yes but mainly the family they manage to build together. Hope Zion has representation once again, and Alex serves a witness. Rebecca and Samuel have been in charge of designing the ceremony space. Sydney's friends from the Temple are in charge of the music and songs are continuously flowing.

Sydney's parents are a quiet but surprisingly supportive presence, who warmly embrace their grandchildren and listen carefully to the Rabbi who is intent on welcoming them even though they have such conservative views.

Sydney is a beautiful bride, her traditional Jewish gown is made by her sister and fits her perfectly, the delicate pattern of flowers moving down the long sleeves and around the waist. Her long red hair is caught up in an intricate style, that Maggie finds mesmerising and itches to run her hands through it.

Rebecca surprises them by producing a replica dress for their daughter that mimics the flowering pattern. Arron's shirt has a rose in the corner.
Ruth and Neshama with problems, prejudice, and forgiveness.

Chapter Notes

My editor is away but I wanted to get this chapter up before going back to work tomorrow as I'll be busy in the next few days.
Will edit mistakes as I see them - still dyslexic though.
I hope everyone is staying well and safe with the weather extremes.

"When we are tired, we are attacked by ideas we conquered long ago" Friedrich Nietzsche

The present changes the past. Looking back you do not find what you left behind Kiran Desai

Sydney is on the verge of a panic attack.

Intellectually she knows ringing Maggie and talking through her anxieties is the best course of action. Her wife is one of the only people that can help her put situations into perspective when everything is too much to handle, especially now that they are raising Eliana together and are a family unit in every sense of the word. However, the coping strategies of a lifetime are difficult to break. As a child and teenager, Sydney's problems were hers to solve, and it is only recently that this changed to any significant degree.

Never is this more apparent than when it comes to confronting people from her past and Neshama in particular.

Ruth and Neshama are having another baby and are moving from Montreal to be nearer Ruth's family.
In a mean streak of the odds, the second pregnancy (Ruth's) was not going well either; she has several pregnancy complications. There are concerns about the quality of her placenta and the growth of the baby, reasonably common complications but Dr. Hodges wants her under observation due to family history of blood pressure problems and severe nausea.

The specialty of high-risk fetal surgery is a small one, and surgeons frequently refer patients to each other, as they move. Sydney knows Cullum Hodges well, by reputation and the conference circuit, the exchange case notes and treatment ideas on occasion. Unfortunately, she agrees with his assessment; she is the logical person to oversee Ruth's pregnancy and to intervene if the baby is distressed.

"Over my dead body will she come near my baby or me."

The words still echo painfully in her head sometimes in her head, professional and personal lives colliding in a nightmare scenario, in front of Maggie of all people.

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Sydney loves Maggie for so many reasons.

There are so many ways that Maggie makes her life worth living that she would struggle to name them all or do them justice.

This precise moment is a prime example.

The majority of people that find their loved ones curled up on the floor would want to leap into action, be unable to resist the urge pepper the person with a string of questions and platitudes.

Instead, Maggie hunkers down onto the floor not making a single comment until Sydney is leaning against her and her breathing starts to even out, even when all she does is offer an anecdote or two about Elianna.

Sydney struggles to speak, her breathing picking up, she plucks angrily at her scrubs.
"Breath Syd, there is no hurry. We have all day." Maggie soothes gently.

"You have all day to spend on the floor of my office and here about yet more of my Jewish issues?" Sydney says with a self-deprecating sigh.

"Of course I do, there is nowhere else I need to be"

"Ruth and Neshama are having another baby, and Dr. Cullum Hoggins wants to transfer her to my care."

"Ah - I wondered if it was her when Alex called what are you thinking, what do you need from me?"

"I want to help the baby. I am afraid to see them again. I feel so guilty no matter how many times I reason my way out of this"

"You know that whatever you decide, Eli and I will be with you every step of the way. You are not the same person as you were back then."

"We are a team for better or worse."

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"Why does Shiloh have to go on holiday?" Sydney is close to whinny as she paces the length of their bedroom for the fourth time.

"err because it is her 20th wedding anniversary and it's a spectacular time of year to see the Norwegian landscape?"

Maggie is a counterpoint to her wife's anxiousness, offering calm explanations to every concern that the other woman brings up, dismantling faulty logic and offering suggestions of less extreme interpretations.
Case and point, the notion that the other local fetal surgeon has gone on holiday at this time deliberately to cause maximum inconvenience to Hope Zion.

"I am sure Barry Hicks will take Ruth's case if it is going to stress you out too much, Syd. Her situation is delicate, but it is not overly complicated, the baby is remaining stable. Cullum is always conservative with his referrals. Other doctors can do this without such a high cost."

Sydney waves her hand dismissively

"I love Barry, he is a fantastic doctor, but his bedside manner is abysmal and coming from me that is saying something. No, I agree with Cullum I am the logical choice."

Maggie pulls her into a hug for the sake of both comforting Sydney and the carpet.

"That may be true, but that does not mean, working with them won't put a toll on you. You must not cast yourself as merely the villain of the story. You are in pain too."

Sydney sighs in agreement as she buries her face against Maggie's shoulder, inhaling the familiar scent.

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Neshama is not happy about this current situation either.

"The way he carries on you would think you performed The First Miracle on a daily basis and ushered babies into the world with a smile."

"Nish" Ruth begins chilling as the blood pressure machine starting beeping.

"Cullum tends to hyperbole, never met an adjective he didn't like."

Sydney responds never taking her eyes off the screen.
Ruth offers her an appreciative smile as Syd removes the monitors and begins charting the information and prescribes a new round of medication.

"Any chance I can graduate to the next level anti-nausea drugs, Dr. Katz? The regular stuff isn't putting a dent in my urge to cycle my organs every few hours. Now, that would be an undisputed miracle" she pleads with a weary smile.

"That I can oblige you with free of charge. You should start to feel better in about an hour but we will keep you here for observation and to finalise what dosages you need at home" Sydney promises as the nurse hangs the IV of replacement fluids.

"How is she getting this sick? None of the books talk about 24/7 sickness and barely keeping anything down. Ruthie is so weak she can barely stand at night" Neshama asks anxiously, never taking her eyes off her wife.

"Pregnancy is a tremendous physiological strain, bodies respond to it differently. The books usually only give a typical range of scenarios, we have this under control Neshama; I promise" Sydney tries earnestly.

Neshama smiles at her, and there is a silent, tentative peace between them and their shared goal, get and keep Ruth well.

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The peace lasts approximately 48 hours.

"So who is the unfortunate fool, that you roped in to be your bead? Was it, Joshua, no let me guess, Hershel?. He always followed you around like a lost puppy."

"Neshama Stop it!" Ruth sounds genuinely horrified and tries weakly to grasp her spouse's hand in protest.
All doctors are taught not to take patients outbursts to heart, you are in a position of high power, and they are at their most vulnerable, this power imbalance is inherently fraught, especially in Obstetrics.

Sydney knew a confrontation like this was coming. There was no storybook reconciliation the last time and being this close to her estranged family is making Neshama afraid. On top of that Ruth's is not feeling well and in pain that the staff is struggling to control. Ruth is continuously vomiting, and her body is rapidly weakening as a result.

She is a convenient target for anger on both fronts, especially when she rushes to visit them, dressed in more traditional attire from Temple under her lab coat. Dr. Katz is also the one saying that the baby's heart rate will need even closer monitoring as the umbilical cord is in danger of being compromised.

Sydney's wedding ring is glistening on her finger, under the fluorescent lights as explains.

A waiting game with progressively less ideal options on the cards.

"How is she still so sick? Where are your miracles now, Dr. Katz? Too busy pretending to be a good little Jewish housewife?" there is real venom in words but also the pain.

Syd is suddenly seventeen again looking at her crush as she leaves the community. Neshama glares at her from across the street, absolute betrayal in her dark eyes. At that moment the older girl's condemnation and contempt felt far worst than any verse in the Bible.

She is silent then as she is now, uncertain of what to say or do to make amends for the sins of both the past and present.

"Sydney is an excellent Jewish wife, mine in fact."

All three people in the room turn to stare at the unexpected interruption. Maggie is leaning against the doorframe, a scowl on her features as she faces down Neshama, heedless of the alarms in the room.

"Maggie, what you are doing here?"
Maggie holds up a wallet and strides into the room moving to stand beside her wife, instinctively reading the monitors and giving Ruth a sympathetic smile.

“I know you are worried Neshama, but this is not Sydney’s fault, do not take this out her. The past is painful, and I’m sorry about your family, but we are here now. There is nobody who will work harder to keep your wife and second baby well” she says firmly, physically standing between them to protect any future insults.

Neshama looks shamed by the words, refusing to look at the other doctor but she nods quickly.

“This isn’t helpful, Neshama. You have enough experience with bullies, do not become one” Ruth adds with a firm glare.

“Ruthie…”

“I can ask my mum to come.to never let.”

The threat has the other woman suitably chastised.

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" You could have dropped my wallet off at the nurse's station," she says quietly.

Sydney is too anxious to go straight home or back to Temple, so Maggie suggests a walk around the park with Eli, who is entranced by the ducks and enjoys the sounds of water.

"If things were dire enough for you to come in on a Friday afternoon I thought Neshama might take her frustrations out on you."

Sydney squeezes her hand "Try not to think too badly of her, Sweetheart. Neshama is under a lot of stress, and I represent a tremendous amount of pain from her past. She has a right to lash out, maybe not publically but it is forgivable."
"Just as it is my right to defend you, you aren't alone in this fight anymore. I am always on your side, by default, you know that. Whatever the circumstances, right or wrong."

Sydney leans into her shoulder, enjoying the warmth, trying to get her breathing under control and stop her thoughts racing. This time is emotionally draining, but they left on relatively good terms.

"I am so lucky to have you on my side. If you weren't here, I would spend the next 15 hours obsessing over details. It will get easier for everybody involved as Ruth and the baby starts to feel better" Sydney reasons softly.

"I thought about starting a clinic in Northern Alaska once, no ways for me to mess up my life there but I can barely cope with Canada's cold" her musing is almost to herself.

Sometimes it breaks Maggie's the images that her wife's simple words produce. Sydney is quite when she talks about her plans. If they haven't found their way to each other, Sydney would have spent her life alone, becoming consumed by work and guilt.

It makes Maggie all the more resolved never to let her go.
Neshama is taking her to lunch.

Out to lunch is a slight exaggeration; they are going to a cafe around the corner. Neither is prepared to be far from the hospital, even though Syd's favourite student is on shift and watching Ruth like a hawk.

Neshama is not a naturally mean person and did look genuinely apologetic at the outburst after they have Ruth's pain under control.

Lunch is an olive branch that Syd does not especially what to accept, but both their wives insist that this goes ahead; neither of them is going to deny their spouses.

"I am sorry for being such a bitch, Syd. You don't deserve that"

Sydney goes to protest as the waiter serves their meals with a smile.

"Don't offer excuses. Yes I have a right to be angry but Maggie was right I was a bully to somebody who is trying to save my wife again. self control."

Elaina and Sarah are regarding each other curiously. Sarah has her mother's wild curls and intense focus.

“If you didn’t tell my mother I would have been caught in a day or so. I wasn’t exactly subtle in my affections. You were the one with all the self-control.”

“Cowardice more than self-control.”

“That too but you had far more to lose than I did. There wasn’t much further for me to fall.”
“Unlike the golden child who was going to marry the Torah Scholar and give birth to three or four Rabbis and a housewife or two.”

“Are they talking to you?”

“Their favour comes and goes, depending on which way Rabbi preaches on the day. They adore Eliana though”

Sydney is somewhat accidentally having a childhood reunion.

Rebecca and her knitting group are volunteering to knit blankets for the high dependency unit and holding babies that are withdrawing from any number of drugs. Surprisingly, Jerry and Amara have tentatively asked to be part of the group. They may not be ready to be parents, but they both find peace in establishing roots in Toronto and serving the community.

For two suppose rebels they both have a firm sense of duty, and once they spend a few months reconciling to post-adoption fallout, the new Katz are drawn back to assisting at Hope Zion.

They have a knitting session in the park opposite of the hospital, finishing off a final set of summer blankets and booties. Sydney has no skills in the arena, but she is happy to spend time with her sister.

Neshama and Ruth come across them, doing the mandated light exercise as she is starting to feel better before moving back into the hostile near the hospital. If she stays stable, then they can reduce their hospital time to weakly visits.
Neshama freezes at the slight of her former friends in this unusual setting

"Neshama - great to see you again!"

Jerry being the naturally gregarious one is first to leap up and welcome her with a broad smile. They were close as teens, both being rebellious and non-traditional.

"You to Jerry" Neshama replies hesitantly stepping into his firm embrace.

"This is my wife, Ruth" she introduces, pulling back while eying Sydney and Rebecca wearily. She all but dears the Synagogue group to have an adverse reaction.

If one of them mentions a single word of Leviticus, there will be no stopping her.

All she receives in return are smiles, introductions and inquires about their health and that of their baby.

Neshama spent her whole adult life resenting this community and the people who witnessed her banishment. Maybe there are more variations to the people than an angry nineteen-year could credit at the time.

There is absolute peace in acknowledging this fact; it isn’t a perfect peace by any means but it more than she could claim for a long time.
Neshama and Sydney are bonding.

The tension between them eases as Ruth's pain is brought under control and the baby's statistics bounce back to within normal range. The couple graduate to the outpatient clinic and Syd supervises from a distance, ready to intervene if any of the chronic problems flare up to a dangerous level. It is a relief to them both that she is not the primary care physician this time around.

Still, the former childhood friends renew their relationship in a strange way.

Unfortunately, it is not in a format that either of their spouses can fully embrace as healthy and constructive.

Instead of trading anecdotes of motherhood, they trade stories of just how bad coming out to their family became and how the smallest bit of progress cannot be trusted.

Both Ruth and Maggie come from liberal families, so they find it difficult to comprehend what they hear. Despite the fact they have acted as confidantes in the past. There are certain things they cannot bridge in the orthodox childhood and adolescence. These moments are both insightful and heart rendering in equal measure.

Neshama goes into detail about how angry her parents were and how horrible the isolation remains for the entire family, even amongst the supposedly liberal branches. Her voice cracks only slightly when she recounts her brothers and their families ignoring her in the mall as if she was dead, down to the smallest child.

Sydney is calm almost wooden as she relieves the experience of Hershel and the almost wedding. Maggie wants to cry when Syd talks about her parents ritually disowning their oldest child in all but name, predicting a dark future and no redemption. Making matters worse the family rabbi offers religious legitimacy even though he was once a grandfather figure in her life.

This pattern of opening mental wounds and seeing how much they will bleed is not healthy or constructive, but it is difficult to offer a valid alternative when two friends are reconnecting and working together for the new baby.

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"Why didn't you tell me that your parents were so abusive in the beginning and that the rabbi was close to starting an exorcism for your 'lost soul'?

Maggie almost feels physically sick at the notion but keeps her focus on the baby food she is
preparing. There is a difference between hearing vague references and listening to a running commentary.

"Exorcisms are the domain of the Catholics, Maggie. It was more a series of lofty, adjective-heavy, Shabbat rhetoric." Sydney refutes with a shrug not looking up from the crossword she is completing.

"I'm serious, Sydney look at me."

Sydney obliges removing her glasses and setting aside the nightly crossword. There is a sad smile touching the corners of her lips, but she does not respond immediately. Maggie finds it at once endearing and infuriating; nobody can wield silence like Dr Katz, she is comfortable retreating into herself without considering for the outside world.

"My parents hurt me brutally in only the way family members can achieve but it wasn't abusive, they work within a particular framework that does not tolerate diversity. In the eyes of many what occurs is the ultimate act of love for a destructive daughter, it is no different than saving me from drugs or alcohol. It does not matter if I am 7, 17 or 27" Syd looks weary; this is an old conversation.

"They were close to having stuck off for 'Jewish malpractice' or something equally draconian measure!" Maggie is caught somewhere between yelling and crying.

"Maggie without much effort you could recount the story of my life with more accuracy than a second-century scholar of the Torah narrating his verses. There are still some realities that you cannot understand and will only serve to break your heart all over again." Sydney explains softly

"Ah yes, that is reserved for your new BFF and the suffering Olympics you are trying to play. Tell me something, how are the points given out? What exactly does gold look like in the end?

There is no time for them to hash out this conversation in detail to any conclusion. Maggie needs to finish a journal manuscript for a colleague heading on sabbatical. Eli needs to go to bed and Syd is in charge of that routine tonight.

"Don't use too much avocado; she wears it more than eats it" Maggie offers eventually before retreating into the study and closing the door softly.

"I won't - not at the prices they are going for these days" her wife replies with a weak smile.

It is at times like this that the unpredictable Toronto housing market is not an advantage. This apartment is beautiful and well set up for a family of 3 or even four at a pinch, but the modernist look does not handle volatile arguments well. There is no practical escape for two people who are duty conscious, neither will leave when work needs doing.

Syd loses tension in her favourite task, caregiving for their daughter. The baby enjoys nighttime routine and does not fuss for which Syd is grateful; silence is what she needs to work on her part in this latest argument.

She leaves Maggie to work for several hours before knocking on the door, a plate of biscuits and cheese in her hand, not a peace offering in so much as a talking point.

"My past is not comfortable nor bare, but it is blessed because the concurrence of events brought me to you," she says softly.
Sydney is holding Neshama's hand while they buy candles and a variety of holders. Oddly enough this is almost a replication of a teenage fantasy. Her 17-year-old self-did not have elaborate notions for her feelings, merely that they spend time together.

Candle buying made the top of the list and the full circle inherent in this moment reaffirms her faith that each other them is where they are supposed to be, no matter how rough the journey to get there was.

Neshama is going to tell her family about the new baby or at least try to indirectly. The Jewish faith honours children and births can act as a bridge across divides that seems insurmountable.

Sydney and Jerry are flanking her as she prepares to visit their childhood temple, attempting to find the strength to go in. Neshama wants to invite her favourite brother to Friday night dinner, hearing through the gossip mill that he is more liberal than older members. It is a flimsy hope to go on, but Ruth wants her to make an effort, knowing the toll this isolation still takes.

"You can do this Nesh. They don't have power over your self-esteem anymore" Jerry encourages as they cross the road before the Temple, all of the strugglings with the memories that this common pathway invokes.

They are all failures by any measures yet each still reveres this place in different ways, as with most things the experiences were not all bad or easy to leave in the past.

"If it comes to it and Daniel is not the man you think he is we will make a break for it before the pitchforks come out. There is a great coffee shop a couple of blocks over. We can drown our sorrows in caffeine before buying presents for our wives."

"Sensible advice from Jeremiah Katz, a miracle incarnate" Neshma says drily

"Marriage agrees with all of us I think, sands off the worst of our rough edges" he agrees readily.

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"Why didn't you ask me to help you?"

They have had this conservation in various forms before; Maggie is still dealing with a sense of abandonment. It takes more than a ring and baby to ease some burdens. Syd senses that her usual responses are not going to hack it, especially when Maggie is refusing to meet her gaze.

Maggie hates when she calls herself a burden.

"I was afraid you were a Magpie, taken with my knowledge rather than me" Syd blurs in a jumbled rush debating whether to turn on their beside light, Maggie remains silent clearly expecting more.

"It is not an uncommon scenario. We spend half our lives studying, emulation and adoration are familiar enough" Syd begins her hypothesis
"You are many things Syd, but you aren’t naïve. You knew how I felt about you; it was as plain as day. To claim otherwise does not suit you."

"Yes but that does not mean that we were in a position to be any good for each other. I needed to see you as a woman and future partner rather than a lifeline”

“So you ran away without so much as a goodbye on a half baked principle you didn’t bothering sharing?”

Syd knows that there is no winning this debate but she hopes they can come to compromise one day, no matter the external reality or circumstances.

“I was clumsy and judgmental, made a mess of things. You bore the brunt of my attempts at forging my path”

“It’s hard to forget even if I forgave you long ago. It’s hard to think of you in such pain at whatever age, that’s mainly what haunts me. Rather than my ego”

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Jerry provides a bright presence in the difficult time.

An expert at disappointing a conservative Jewish family he can relate to what Neshama and Sydney are going through and why they are doing it together.

"They are flush with the high of understanding, they are giddy with similarities," he tells Ruth calmly as they continue knitting "Ours is an isolated community and few people can relate to the details of being an outcast."

"Why do they take such pleasure in one-upping each other as if it is some game?" Maggie isn't working on a blanket she is absentmindedly practising rows of stitches.

"Because that is what they are doing. Syd and Nesh are reconciling the narrative in their head. Just like Misery Lit is the best selling genre. I certainly did the same with my past and drug addiction.” Jerry explains with a shrug.

"It is not good for them to do this" Ruth insists "Nesh is almost ignoring everything else that is going on” she says as she gently strokes her baby bump.

"They are having a version of a Shiva. The past is always a sharp picture, and it is a way to put it to bed with somebody who gets it."  

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"When Sydney was eight she attempted to Bobo our dog even though he was full of cancer."  

Apparently, the inability to provide context clues is a genetic trait. Maggie is having lunch with her sister in law, the outings between the two new mothers is a semi-regular occurrence, and the cousins are forming a close bond.
This time is a highlight of Maggie's month, Becca bears a resemblance to her sister with her humour and views on life. Syd’s sister is one of the few people who understands what it means to love Sydney Katz profoundly.

Every little story and antidote is a delight to hear and Maggie collects them like a treasure.

“She thinks that she can and should take on the burdens of the universe alone. It makes her horrible at letting people in”

“Not that your parents gave her much of an opportunity” Maggie muses

“Neither did I for that matter”

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"Why did you seek me out when you came back? You knew that the Mayo also has Clinical Trails of a similar nature. Ours wasn't exclusive. If I wasn't running a trial for cancers like Becca would you have come back?"

Maggie is usually a reasonably secure person, but this question haunts her in recent days, what exactly is their foundation built on if not a random chance?

Can it be taken away just as quickly?

"My sister is an Oncology freak show, I scanned all significant studies, her vital stats were just too weird for most studies and her determination to keep the baby excluded her from the rest. Reid- Lin was unique, more so than you believe."

"So is that your way of saying no?"

Sydney winces at the despondency in the other woman's voice. They are dealing with broader issues than merely the arrival of Neshama and all she represents. She moves about in bed and laces their hands together, uncoiling tense fists.

"If you have given up medicine and were halfway through a degree at Clown College I would have sought you out. This would be mainly to berate you for doing such a ridiculous thing but don't ever think Alex Reid's notions about cancer were the only drawcard."

Maggie remains silent, but she does not let go of her fingers, she traces the familiar feeling of Syd's wedding ring, enjoying its weight.

"Don't torment yourself with hypotheticals. You could have been Gavin's wife, or I could have stayed in Israel. There is nowhere I would rather be with. You mean the world to me, Maggie, from the moment I saw you."

"Hope is a many feathered thing, huh?" Maggie quotes softly

Sydney curls into the other woman, easing long limbs into a more comfortable position, her wife is not entirely happy, but it is enough for tonight. The storms are going to come again, but they will weather them together.
"I would have made a horrible clown; balloon animals give me the creeps not to mention enforced cheerfulness," Maggie whispers sleepily.

"You would still be a beautiful one if subpar. Thank you for staying here with me, even as I compete in the "Suffering Olympics."
A Peaceful Momentum: Part Thee

Chapter Summary

Conflict and Confessions

Chapter Notes

I have been at a work conference for a week- Fic was my down time

“I think... if it is true that there are as many minds as there are heads, then there are as many kinds of love as there are hearts
Leo Tolstoy, Anna Karenina

They both need to consider going to therapy.

Maggie will defend the path her life took and more importantly Sydney's place with her, but that doesn't stop their situation from creating unique stressors. The two doctors spend three years dancing in each other's orbits without committing fully to the process. The reunion defines itself by medical emergencies, personal crisis and emotional baggage, not to mention acquiring an ill baby before their first anniversary.

Nothing that they did was casual; this is both by individual temperaments and common tendency as a couple.

Her mother likes to say in a mostly teasing tone

"You were signing kinship papers before discussing types of pancakes.

The appearance of Ruth and Neshma is the course of this latest flare-up. Maggie has enough abandonment issues to fill a hypothetical Wiki page. Sydney is just learning to live in a single country again much less a marriage.

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Sydney resists in the strongest possible terms without resorting to breaking plates. Fortunately, over the last few years, she develops enough communication skills to discuss the matter openly without shutting down.

"We don't need it; we'll be fine once Ruth delivers a healthy son."

"These issues are going to come up again, Syd. We just need another trigger."
"We went to counselling before the marriage."

"4 hours of counselling in total does not count, especially when the core question is 'if I truly want to marry you.' It does not even count as a question."

"I don't have time right now; we need to focus on Eli at the moment."

"We will focus on Eli for the rest of our lives. This opportunity is fundamentally important, and I think you know it. There are many options for making our timetables work"

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They fight over Syd's long hours and the proverbial dam breaks.

Fortunately, Becca senses the problems and takes her niece to a sleepover with an open end date. The cousins are almost as close as siblings so it is no hardship. However, the look she gives them is withering.

Usually, they are both astute enough to stick to the topic at hand. However, on that day everything comes into play, from privacy to parenting. Maggie is slow to anger but when the fuse is lit, little can prevent the damage.

"Careful Syd, Canada may run out of sick babies for you to save, if you keep up this pace of avoidance."

"That doesn't even make sense. You know the Larsons are long-term patients, I delivered 1-5 without complication, number 6 is not going to another specialist."

"It makes less sense to offer a late night clinic for the 3rd night in a row when Eli isn't here" Maggie is struggling to undo her ponytail and winces as it snaps.

"Maggie if I was genuinely avoiding there are far more skilful ways for me to do it. Six conferences in the next year alone!"

"How noble of you, Doctor."

"What is wrong Maggie? I know you are not upset about my hours. You work longer than I and have less pay and sleep" Sydney attempts to mediate by putting down keys and purse.

"Because I recognise the signs! You are an expert at leaving. This technique is what happens when you get scared. Maybe you can marry Ruth's cousin and join a Jewish commune in the desert" Maggie hisses

So they were delving into a whole series of issues here, something is tormenting Maggie. Syd curses her single-minded focus and sometimes selfishness. Sometimes she fails to see the subtle signs, work is her retreat from emotional pain, but it is also a blindfold.

"Hey, there are no signs to see, Sweetheart" Sydney says in a rush hating to see the tears starting to form.

"You are pulling away from us."

"I'm a workaholic with poor social skills, but I am not pulling away" Sydney crouches down beside the other woman. "I made vows, but beyond that, there is nothing that brings me more happiness than being with you," Sydney says, sensing that this is going to be a familiar conversation.
"I can't keep triggering the same landmines, Syd. I can't keep feeling the same insecurities and fears."
Maggie says wearily, drained of energy. "You could tell me 100 times a day, and I will still be afraid, don't you see that?"

All Sydney can see is that not for the first time she causes Maggie pain. This notion seems like ice through her veins. It is not crucial that she is with her patient now, she is only in pre-labour. Some things are more important for this moment.

"I'll see the next person you reccomend. I'll do anything to chase these fears away, please don't cry"

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Maggie insists on individual therapy before they even attempt couple’s therapy.

"No, we are doing this together. There is no way I can face the prospect alone." Sydney grabs her wife's hand as if she Maggie was preparing to leave already.

"Eventually yes, but we need to tell our stuff first. It will speed up our progress if we feel stronger before tackling marriage. You feel like an outcast; I feel a sense of abandonment at the slightest change. Besides my Hebrew is not up to seeing a Rabbi yet and I think you need that, at least at first.

"I will still be here when you get home."

Sydney refuses to let go of her hand, looking genuinely afraid. Maggie knows that her experience with therapy is not positive, even though they were open Temple practices.

"I'll do my best to be as open as possible" Syd promises gravely.

"I know you will, but there is no need to try and be perfect for me. This process will not happen overnight" Maggie disagrees, placing a kiss on her temple.

"I'll try and remember that too. Pizza and ice cream night?"

" For the next week. If you want."

Maggie works hard to find Sydney an ideal therapist, and she is close to home, which helps a little.

***

"Fair warning I am walking cliche on several fronts."

"There aren't as many unique narratives in therapy as one would suppose. The individual circumstances are different, yes, but many common themes emerge, don't worry about it."

Maggie appreciates the joke and the relaxing surroundings. The office of Frank Kleinman PsychD is artistic, and it is clear his other passion is photography with the prints instead of certificates. Alex recommends her former mentor during her psych rotation. He is a senior psychologist in practice specialising in assisting other medical professionals.
"I worry about everything so no luck there. I'll try to keep things to my top 15 for the first day" Maggie promises dryly.

"You are my last appointment for the day; we can stretch to the top 20 if you like."

"My parent’s coping strategies boarded on alienation when they split. I spent med school in my father's shadow. My wife is devoutly Jewish, and we just adopted a baby who is the light of our lives."

"Efficient use of both oxygen and Fraud like time management but you know we are going to unpack each and every one of those right? You don't get actual points for economic word usage" Frank says lightly but with a serious undertone.

"I couldn't decide what to pick first so I thought you could have the option to choose a starting point."

"How about what made you choose to see me now?"

***

"Do you think there is a minimin entry requirement here, Sydney?"

Sydney pauses mid-sentence, not expecting the interruption. So far she thinks the first session is going well. The questions were predictable and easy to answer, the setting familiar and there are enough shared backgrounds to ensure smooth transitions from religious to mundane and everything in between.

It is especially comforting when they reach the topics of career; it is easy to get into the rhythm of talking daily life at Hope Zion.

"Of course not. You do an impressive amount of outreach and aren't even charging me full rate even though my insurance will cover it and then some"

"Congregation discount is a must. Besides, you do more than enough outreach of your own. " Roberta leans forward regarding the younger doctor severely working to maintain eye contact. "I know you are a brilliant surgeon and how firmly you believe. You don’t need to prove either of those facts to me. I don’t think any less of you for having doubts, struggles and being far from perfect."

"I know that" Sydney snaps defensively, this is a familiar refrain.

"No, you don't. You are a medical prodigy from a proud orthodox Jewish family. You bare the brunt of twin legacies neither of which are exceptionally forgiving. You don't conceptualise failure like most people do because it's all you know. If you fail, there are generations on your back.” Roberta begins evenly, not letting the other woman protest.

"You make things sound worse than they are. Maggie and I just had a rough patch with Neshma coming back with her second child drama. Don't make this more than it needs to be"

"If you believed that, you wouldn't have come to me Sydney. You know enough ten week ABA and couple therapy courses to work out a rough patch. My title is on the shingle; there is no simple, complex resolution here."
Sydney is crying, and for once she doesn't try to stop the emotions or hide away.

The car park of her therapist's office seems like a reasonable place to let her emotions out. There is no singular cause, nor is Syd feeling particularly sad. These tears are just a gauntlet of passion that this hour brings to the surface. Intellectually she knew this is likely to happen, but she didn't expect to sob so quickly.

"You had your walls for a reason Sydney, feelings of vulnerability and sadness are normal. Hug your daughter and get lots of sleep. Just because you don't need to be stoic anymore doesn't mean it didn't work for you in the past."

Consequently, if Sydney doesn't repress things, she needs to realise just how ambiguous her relationship with her beloved parents is and not just joke about it.

Sydney is now in danger of realising just how much her childhood and adolescence hurt. The repression and isolation, the false perfection that she can never meet.

How difficult it was to try and save Becca knowing that few people were willing to look her in the eye much less thank her for flying back from Israel.

It feels strangely liberating to give full vent to her feelings, especially when there are solutions in the works. There are places for her issues to go now; there is nothing to hide anymore. Maggie is often her touchstone but maybe its time for Sydney to build comfort on her own.

These thoughts are competing for attention, and the process is exhausting. Sydney reaches for the tissues and finds an unfamiliar shape in the glovebox.

Sydney laughs in delight when she gently pulls out a crane made of custom origami paper. The folds are of family photos, Eli's smiling face is prominent. The crane is small enough to pin to the mirror as constant reminder.

"I am proud of you for doing this. Remember we could argue every single day, and I will still be glad to see you. We are going to hurt each other but how much I love you doesn't change. Mx

***

"You were right."

"I was expecting you to hold out to at least the weekend for pride's sake" Maggie teases with a knowing smile.

It is the middle of the night, and neither of them can sleep, so they are sharing a tub of ice cream and discussing their respective therapy sessions. A long shift and a fussy daughter meant that this is the first real opportunity aside from a few quick texts.

"You like Rabbi Peterson then?"

Sydney canters her head, an unreadable expression on her face. However, her posture gives the game away. Dr Katz's body is not holding the tension that was so present in the last few weeks. Her
hands do not resemble claws as she samples the different flavours with enthusiasm. This quiet moment alone is worth all the effort.

"She is well qualified and is spectacularly uninterested or unimpressed by the number of articles I published this year or the new clinical trials," Sydney complains with a mock pout.

Dr Reborta Peterson is a counsellor and one of the assistant Rabbi at their reformist synagogue. She does not blink when several Katz families join the fold, and the rabbi is nothing but gracious with the difficulties that Rebbeca and Sydney still face.

"Didn't let you go on medical tangents?"

"On the contrary, she said I could talk about medicine for long as I wanted every 4th session but the rest of the time is the domain of feeling, family and faith. That is a direct quote. I like her though, she is respectful of our circumstances and didn't quote scripture at me once."

To prove her point, Sydney brings up her phone calendar and flips around on the table to show the appointment slots on Saturday mornings. In turn, Maggie reaches for her hand joints their fingers, feeling a surge of affection at the effort that her wife is making when it goes against her natural instincts.

"How was your session with Dr Kindrickson?"

"Productive but disappointingly cliche. Frank didn't even wait 20 minutes before asking me about the pain of both my father's legacy and the grand Lin Devoice. I'm vaguely surprised he didn't suggest I take a seat on the couch" Maggie smiles around a spoonful.

"He is the proverbial 'black sheep' in a family of MDs so he understands the ins and outs of our careers, he bypassed the speech on getting more sleep and work stress. I suspect the rest of my issues will keep us occupied for a while, but we had an excellent rapport going. Alex was right to recommend him to me."

"Plus he says that Eliana is adorable, which is always a good opening gambit with me."

"Which of the 900 did you show him?"

"The one of her playing with the PlaySchool doctor of course."
The Road Most Travelled

Chapter Summary

This is a dynamic we didn’t get to explore in the show so I wrote another chapter

Tensions and Therapy.

Insight into character comes from listening intently to the spoken word. The physical person, their charisma, charm and dramatic flair is more often used to persuade audiences, as they use these stealth tools of disguise and deception.

Maximillian Degenerez - Portuguese Artist

They are not progressing fast enough.

Of course, this is an assessment made by two doctors who measure success in particular ways. For most of their lives, both Maggie and Sydney have existed on the fast track to achievement. Interpersonal relationships were primarily secondary to a simple formula of work hard and make something of your life.

Both their therapists see no problem with the pace that they are setting, neither of them is ready for a couples therapy apparently. No matter how many times Frank and Roberta remind them that there is no timeframe to healing it is difficult for their clients not to bristle under their restraints.

There are tears at unexpected times and stopping them is more of a challenge than it used to be, denial in action.

They cling to each other at the end of each session feeling exposed and raw, as if there is no way out of this situation.

They find parenting easier now that they are less afraid to talk about the minor disagreements. Eli remains the centre of everything.

The find it easier to talk to other people, Maggie even finds herself talking to Charlie about the
people he sees and whether or not her dad will ever come.

Still the progress feels slow and hard. Almost reminiscent of the early days of their relationship when they fought for every inch of common ground.

***

**Understanding Space.**

"Loving you isn't an achievement, Sydney."

Sydney knows this on some level, and it is a conversation she has endured more than once from various people. However, she cannot help but fundamentally disagree. Whatever Roberta thinks, it is no easy feat loving somebody like her, who is so far behind the eight ball when it comes to relationships and the secular world.

It is an objective fact much like her red hair is a recessive gene, and she needs to be mindful of skin cancer in the future.

"Maggie doesn't deserve a prize for putting up with you."

"You don’t know what I have done." The words are almost automatic.

“Actually I do – you spend a considerable amount of time itemising your mistakes for me.”

“One of your inner narratives is that you are inherently damaged and bring people into a damaged orbit. You hold yourself to impossible standards and Maggie to dangerously low ones”

“What do you mean?”

“One Maggie did nothing but find a woman attractive and start a life with her. It is a natural shift and not a
burden”

“I…”

They sit in silence, the clicks of the clock strangely comforting. This is a familiar stalemate and it will happen more frequently in the months to come.

***

Understanding Memory.

"It's ok to think of Eli's sister sometimes."

The words are gentle, but they still sting and pull Maggie up short.

Talking about the miscarriage is easy on some days and harder on others. Frank handles this sensitively and lets her guide any and all reference to Baby Lin. For some reason, nightmares of this experience are haunting her this week for no particular reason.

Except that it is Gavin's birthday and she heard through the distant grapevine that he is not doing very well but might have a kid out there somewhere.

"Thinking about one child does not make you love your surviving daughter any less. Nor does thinking about the man that would have been your finance”

Maggie feels tears fall at the opening.

“In another life she would be close to starting school. It feels so weird at times”

It is a strange pain that is difficult to describe even in this context. The days working with mothers and the children is one of the greatest joys in her life but it comes at price. Just like Alex struggles
with the endless stream of drug addicts and dysfunctional families.

***

**Understanding Titles.**

"You need to stop idolising Maggie."

"She is my Beshert, of course, I am going to idolise her" Sydney is firm on this point and does not see the problem as far as Syd is concerned their relationship is conventional in all but terms of the gender. This office is one of the few places she can express such feelings openly.

“You don’t idolise her because she is your soulmate. You idolise her because she stayed. It’s a fact that torments you”

“The mildest of my torments”

“Yet it is one that is stalling your progress as we work together”

Sydney resents the int  but it is the role of the Rabbi to delve this deep to break these walls.

There were dark days after Nashama was excommunicated when she was sent to mandatory counselling, her sins on full display. There is a resent she hasn’t sought council in over a decade. Roberta’s practice is nothing like that, she is empathetic and kind. However the process is still draining and demands much for small gains.

Maggie is right, there is a Jewish element to the sessions that is vital to her healing, the conversation is a mixture of facts, faith and family. She would struggle to explain the balance to a secular professional, who wouldn’t smile at the tangents about making Shabbat dinner.

***

**Understanding Principles**
There were no easy answers when it came to expressing faith.

"The path you have chosen isn't easy, and you need to start pacing yourself”.

Maggie is struggling with sharing her daughter, irrationally the rituals that Syd and Eli share feel like they are excluding her. She suddenly feels empathy for Declan who wasn’t going to be their father’s legacy

“It’s irrational but I envy their closeness right now”

“That’s understandable and makes you a normal parent. Dynamics differ at different times “

“Do I need to convert?”

“Nothing can make that decision for you. Least of all when you are feeling uncertain about life in general”

“Do you find these long conversations exhausting?” Maggie muses with a wane smile.

“No more than you find a double shift with multiple deliveries difficult. You need to talk and I need to listen, it’s the way therapy works. There is no right or wrong feeling, even if your training says everything can be divided that way.

***

Understanding Absolutes.

"A fight isn't going to end the universe; you need to remember that."

Maggie hates fighting with Sydney because it disturbs every part of her being. There is just
something about when she yells that brings up all those memories she tries not to cry over anymore. Sydney is nothing like either of her parents.

"Wanting to leave does not make you your father and wanting to win a fight does not make you your mother. The sins of the parents are not a guarantee"

"Thank you, Dr Freud"

“You need to recognise your vulnerabilities Maggie. Fights are going to happen, it does not need to signal anything beyond irritation”

“I just hate how it makes me feel and I flunked my psych rotation rather spectacularly”

“You have mentioned this before… luckily I didn’t”

“The thing is Syd is temperament and stubborn. She wasn’t really joking about the Israeli disposition. Its my insecurities that get in the way. There were reasons we ran from each other before. Our lives are different now but I keep seeing the times she walks away from me”

“The old fears are the hardest to break, the ones with the deepest roots in our belief systems. Don’t be so hard on yourself for not ‘succeeding’ at the first hurdle

***

Understanding Uncertainty

"What happened the last time you got a B in college or a less than perfect review by your attending?"

Sydney wills herself not to react to the statement. As a general rule, the only past she is interested in is the distant past of the Jewish people both in Canada and Israel. Roberta knows this and treads lightly on Syd's childhood and youth unless it is going to be a focus for the session. Adolescence is not a casual topic of conversation.
"I didn't hurt myself or anything dramatic, I may be on many checklists, but I didn't reach that level."

"You are a doctor, Sydney. You know there are plenty of ways to hurt yourself that do not involve blood or physical pain."

"What would happen if you and Maggie got a divorce?"

Sydney pales at the thought but she trusts the older woman just enough not to bolt.

“It could be a possibility, even the best relationships fail with all the will in the world, even in our community” Roberta says calmly.

It takes all of Sydney’s willpower not to mutter a prayer or perform a ritual of protection. It seems wrong to even contemplate the prospect; her marrow feels cold.

“I….”

“You need to remember one thing whatever happens in the future”

Sydney eyes stay on the mural on the wall, it is her favorite biblical scene.

“You are strong enough to survive either way. Maggie is your wife and soulmate but you made your path alone. You are the person who challenged a long orthodoxy and carved out a new reality for yourself. It was messy and debilitating yet you were stronger for it”

It feels strange to have the situation framed this way, as an achievement rather than a failing. A Rabbi is telling her that she is a genuine member of the community. The absolution in Hebrew feels like a balm to the soul, old wounds feel less heavy for a second.

“You have a right to fail, just like everybody else but you haven’t yet”

“Will you say verse with me?” Sydney asks shyly as she traces the cover of the books on the table.
“Of course - would you like to lead?”

***

**Understanding Humanity**

"They were not that bad!"

As a general rule, Maggie Lin does not yell or raise her voice, but there is not a button that her esteemed therapist is not intent on pushing today. There is something about hearing the facets of her experiences laid out by somebody with no interest in sugar coating it that sets Maggie's teeth on edge. This situation is vastly different from the conversations with Alex and Sydney whose primary goal was to comfort.

"I wasn't referring to a scale of badness, Maggie, only that your parents did not treat you and your brother as they should"

"Do you know how many people I treated in the ER whose parents mistreat them?

"I can make a rough guess. Do you know how many people I treat who don't resolve their feelings while pointing out how minor their wounds are in comparison?" Frank Kleinman is soft as if he has all the time in that world and no patient backed up.

"Being free from overt forms of abuse, mistreatment or neglect is not the same as being in a healthy environment Maggie. There are entire textbooks on benign neglect for a reason."

“There is nothing like that in my life today”

“No but you are still afraid which makes it very relevant. I’m not judging your parents or their stills to care for you. The repercussions are important to acknowledge”

***
Sydney likes to run.

She knew this about herself in a metaphorical sense. Her entire adult life is a series of escapes; it is only in recent years that she found a touchstone in Maggie and the broader community of Hope Zion. Apparently, her enjoyment of running extends to the physical act as well.

It has become something of a habit after therapy to run around the park listening to her favourite verses before picking up dinner from Maggie's favourite takeout. The simple pattern eases the intensity of the conversations and allows her to go home in a lighter mood.

Her modest running clothes still feel strange on the famous track, but she feels no shame as she nods to the regular runners and walkers. To these people, she is not a Jewish woman struggling with her identity, she is merely an anonymous person doing regular exercise.

At least she is most evenings, but there are welcome exceptions to the rule.

Sydney is reasonably confident she will never tire of how Maggie's face lights up when she is happy and the fact seeing her after a long day is enough to cause such a reaction.

"Long day."

Maggie does not need to mention anything else. It is something of a universal doctor's code. A long day can mean anything from patient backlog, delivering bad news to admin systems being down. If you wanted to talk about the details, you would, but sometimes all you need is a hug from family. There is a solace in knowing there is somewhere to escape to when it is time to clock out.

Sydney interlaces their fingers, noticing the slight tremble but not commenting on it.

Sometimes the best acts of communication are the ones that pass unremarked or analysed.
Maggie enjoys the quietness of the Temple grounds.

Frank is right in a way; she is struggling to find her place within the Jewish community. The faith is such a central part of her wife’s existence and will likely be the same for their daughter if she does not choose a different path.

Neither Sydney nor their Rabbi says a word to her about converting. This decision needs to be a private decision to be genuine. Maggie cannot just convert because of her family, to do so would be bearing false witness which is not something Sydney Katz could ever accept, especially in her name.

Maggie can privately admit to waiting for a formula to appear. For there to be a sudden flash of insight once she goes through the rituals as either a wife or a mother. It's a foolish notion and one she knows that faith does not work like that, but it is how she guides her life all the same, by thresholds and balances.

"All things be ready if the mind be so."

Maggie smiles at the familiar phrase and the context. Sydney has come up beside her silently. It seems to be a habit of hers to move silently.

"You seem to be thinking deep thoughts, anything I can help with?"

"How did you know I would be here?"

"Oddly enough this seems to be as much your thinking spot as it is mine, Maggie."

"Must be your corrupting influence at work yet again" Maggie jokes with a broad smile.

"My influence is vast and broad" Syd agrees as they start moving in a slow circle around the acre of synagogue land.

"It's nothing that won't keep for another day, right now I would much rather discuss the plans for mum’s birthday party"
The Healing Road Part One

Chapter Summary

Sydney struggles and Maggie is steadfast

There are consequences to emotional healing.

Therapy is progressing well; they are talking about past, present and future. Their counselling is done both together and individually. There are no particular milestones or 'breakthroughs' as their relationship is fundamentally stable onw and does not require traditional couples interventions. However, achievements are deserving of celebration no matter how big or small in their day to day lives.

Maggie decides to start learning Mandarin again and forging stronger connections to their cousins in China. It is more apathy than lingering resentment that kept up the barriers between the extended family. The Lins come from a long line of academics and are surprisingly liberal, often at a cost in the communist superpower.

Sydney works through the idea that there is unlikely to be genuine lasting progress with the majority of her family, this opinion seems to solidify as she becomes more outspoken as a lesbian Jewish woman, without shame. Roberta helps her realise that the belief system she is resisting has no relation to her worthiness as a daughter, aunt or member of the community, that it is an impossible yardstick to measure herself against, the reality is harsh but healing in its way.

Maggie finally admits to the irrational guilt she carries about her lost baby. She is frustrated by the odd times that this absence effects. No amount of medical knowledge will substitute the human tendency to assign blame, especially in the middle of the night when she hears phantom cries. Sydney gently encourages her wife to reach out to Gavin on the anniversary of the miscarriage.

Sydney confronts her conflicts about past actions and her troubles as a closeted youth, highlighting more unsavoury activities that served to prove her 'straightness.' There is a mixture between confessional and confrontation of the pain. Maggie is horrified all over again, not by what Sydney had done by the tremendous pressure put on such a devoted soul, who wants to do nothing but serve her family no matter the price.
They work to examine the ways they each contributed to the breakdown downs of their early attempts at a relationship; they hurt each other in profound ways, sometimes deliberately, especially when Maggie was on Sydney's service. They forgave each other long ago, but they consciously avoid talking about the patterns that remain in place.

This progress is significant, but it does not occur in one direction, this work is opening and exposing old wounds. People suppress and ignore emotion for valid reasons; they may not be constructive or health reasons, but they exist and sustain people for a reason. The removal of emotional defences leaves the heart and soul vulnerable to a whole gambit of pain.

***

Sydney is an interventionist by temperament and training.

'Obstetrics isn't for babies' may be one of her favourite refrains but Maggie knows her wife takes mental toughness to a whole new level. Sydney consciously takes on the hardest cases on record, flies all over the world to set up emergency clinics in remote regions hoping this will be the second opinion that finds the answer. Her wife has an unshakable faith that she can intervene and be the witness to miracles for desperate families and sick babies.

"Hardcore" was Maggie's favourite term for her former teacher but it is a mild term for what Syd puts herself and her students through to stay at the top of her game.

The odds are often in her favour, Sydney has boxes of thank you cards and letters from grateful families, it is likely a method will be named after her shortly, though she shuns such individual praise. The romantic in her does enjoy the notion of them having a joint technique. One of the foundations of their relationship is a passionate for the latest treatments, interventions and science.

There are days when miracles are in short supply, and it hurts all the more.

Maggie knows something is wrong when she sees Syd's car in the driveway. Her wife is not due back from the hospital for several hours yet, the hopeful message from this morning indicated she
would stay at the hospital. A long-term patient was moving back to Canada from Israel and needed
Syd's advice, wanting to show off her new baby, or at least that was the plan. Maggie didn't know
specifics but cancelling such an appointment is just not in Syd's nature.

Maggie hurries up the stairs, thankful that Eli is dosing on her shoulder, clutching the baby octopus
that was still her treasure, even if it was on its third iteration.

The scene that greets them is as heart-breaking as it is hard to comprehend. Sydney is standing in the
middle of their living room, surrounded by broken plates and artefacts; it horrifies Maggie to realise
that they are Katz family pieces and some of Sydney's most revered possessions.

"Was my Emunah not strong enough? Did my service displease you so much you had to fire a
warning shot? Was Becca just a test to see how I would respond? What was almost losing Maggie
that time? I served you with everything I am even when in my darkest days and most profound pain
and this what you inflict on an innocent a couple?"

Sydney raises a hand shakily, a bottle of spirits in her other hand, a sure sign of acute distress; she
does not like hard liquor at all. They keep it for guests.

"Sweetheart, what's wrong?" Maggie asks as she places Eli into her day sleeper and settles blankets
around her, it is lucky in a sense that they missed the worst of the distraction.

She gingerly moves over the mess, deftly removing the alcohol, before pulling the other doctor into a
firm embrace, more therapeutic than tender. Dr Katz needs to get out of her head. She needs to get
out of her head, to feel grounded in the here and now. Syd doesn't put up much of a fight; it is
doubtful she would have the energy regardless of inclination.

The look Sydney gives her is unfocused, both by chaotic thoughts and drink; it is also very possible
that she forgot to eat and the combination hit her small frame extra hard.

"Noah and Sarah brought their baby into to see me today, their longing for, a treasured son who is
their miracle after seven miscarriages. Do you know what news their paediatrician just delivered?"
The words are a broken whisper.

Maggie could make an educated guess about the narrow list of diseases and disorders that could
provoke her wife and make her this upset. It isn't a question anyway.
"He is showing all the markers for ALL and falls into every problematic subtype there is, his initial marker counts, bad subtype."

Maggie winces, understanding why this news is such a blow to Sydney. The Leukaemia odds are not disastrous in and of themselves, and there are aggressive treatment protocols, this does not take away from how much pain the new family must be experiencing.

"Do you want to know the worst part?"

"Of course but I want you to come and sit down before you fall. We can talk about this all night if you need to but this isn't the place for it. Why didn't you call me?" Maggie asks as they shuffled to the couch.

Sydney shrugs helplessly.

*****

"Seven - a holy number for the Jewish woman, what kind of sick irony is that?"

It is not ironic in either the grammatical sense or any cosmic conspiracy but it still hurts Syd’s sense of justice.

Maggie feels helpless as she watches Syd's pain. She is torn, between talking Syd down from emotional extremes and letting her argue with herself and God. She settles for an in-between move forcing her wife away from the remaining Jewish objects in the house and holding her tight as the string of words come, a nonsensical mixture of Hebrew and English.

"They are both scientists and are taking this on as a Numbers Game; they are working on the assumption that if they cover enough bases, there must be a solution." Sydney begins with a weary sigh.
"Makes sense."

"They want to discuss options for giving Nicholas a matched sibling in the event of needing a stem cell transplant. The thing is, it is a realistic possibility."

"Oh, Syd..."

"They want me to be the miracle worker twice and it’s impossible."

Sydney may be a rational scientist, but she is also a person of profound faith, she will work tirelessly to be that hope for them, no matter what the cost. If there were a way to call for the second chance, her wife would find a way no matter how distraught she felt.

This drive is the precise reason Maggie fell in love with her in the third week of the rotation.

****

"I keep having my worst fears placed before me in technicolour and surround sound. Why do you think that is?"

Maggie is focusing on making the omelette, hoping to get Sydney to eat something before they head to bed. Her steady stream of commentary is settling down now and she seems less likely to throw things.
"I betray a good friend for no other reason than jealousy, and I get loaded for it" Sydney becomes a painful narrative.

"I also lose you before getting to tell you that I loved you." Sydney is preoccupied with this notion and continually traces the faint scar at her hairline.

"Then my sister almost loses her baby to a brutal cancer that destroys her immune system."

Maggie puts down a plate of food and is now prompting Sydney to eat, stabbing a fork and offering a cherry tomato with an encouraging smile. She will feed Syd if it comes down to such drastic action.

"Becca and I are here Syd we are both with you. Remember what Roberta said? Your burdens were heavy, but your strength is even higher." Maggie wishes she knew the Hebrew phrasing, it was a more eloquent description.

****

Sydney does not want to see their daughter if anything demonstrates how wrong she feels it is this simple fact. Elianna is the light of Syd’s life and the balm to any situation.

"I will only frighten her again; she doesn't need that."

It is a morose exaggeration, Eli is familiar with her mother’s gentle and soft voices. For a variety of reasons, both of them have strong aversions to raising voices, especially in front of children. Yelling has too many bad childhood memories for them both; it is not something they wish to repeat in motherhood. Therefore, Elianna is surprised from slumber when Syd raises her voice, but the reaction is nothing more worrying.
"You never frighten our daughter, Sydney," Maggie says firmly.

"Not tonight" Sydney replies firmly.

Maggie sighs and starts the evening routine, helping Syd to get into nightwear and the brushing out of her hair.

Sydney is profoundly tired not only from the long day. This response is another price of engaging with feelings; it takes energy that may not be available to spare. However, this is why Maggie took her vows and said before the Rabbi and witnesses that she would be steadfast support for Sydney Katz no matter the season.

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"Nicholas doesn't even fit the criteria for any clinical trials? I rang every major hospital on each continent, even woke up my old supervisor in Australia."

It isn't entirely a surprise that Sydney's isn't able to get to sleep, her mind won't stop running through possible scenarios and things she may have missed. They end up in the kitchen talking over hot chocolate and the last of Becca's birthday baking.

Sydney takes in the carnage of her rage and immediate starts to clean, feeling teary all over again at the loss of such possessions. It only takes her wife a second to come up with a plan and action, and she deposits Syd in her reading chair with a smile.

Maggie hums as she works on putting together a Sedar plate, her love of stationary comes in handy at times. She has the right glues and tools to do necessary repairs; she will get Samuel to do the more detailed maintenance over the weekend.

"Not even you can cover all bases in two hours, love. We don't have all the facts yet."
The Hope Zion family springs into action at a moment’s notice.

Sydney is still settling into her new position as Head of Obstetrics and transferring her patient lists over from previous hospitals, and there is the added disruption of maternity leave. She is in quite a literal sense irreplaceable with three high-risk pregnancies on the ward and budgets to review. The week Maggie wants her to take off isn't practical, even if the CEO is in a generous mood, the babies will not cooperate.

Alex is carving out an interest in cancer and takes over Sydney's hunt for options, in particular looking into paediatrics stem protocols in non-siblings matches. Syd's desperate search was extensive but narrow as there may be a few options she did not consider.

Jackson takes responsibly for feeding Syd at regular intervals and ensuring that she does not forget to eat in the chaos of a long shift or complicated labour. They end up sharing a meal at odd times throughout the 24-hour cycle, sharing conversations about family and faith.

Billy becomes an eager shadow, offering just the right blend of genuine medical curiosity and humour to keep Syd from feeling too down. He also wins favours by being utterly besotted with their daughter.
Sydney Katz isn't a perfect wife and mother in every given situation.

Of course, there is no perfection to measure against, Maggie knows this better than most and places few expectations on her wife, especially now that they are in therapy and working towards healthier communication styles. In truth Maggie has no framework to judge what a wife should look like, her parents separated when she was young, and her friends don't place much priority on the institution. Indeed, not as much importance as the Jewish faith does. It still feels miraculous that Sydney isn't planning her next trip away and wakes up next to her every day.

There are certain clichés when it comes to doctors generally and paediatric doctors in particular. Mainly that individuals in that profession always know the answers to any problem relating to children or family, that they (and their loved ones) don't suffer from the foils of mere mortals outside the profession. This assumption is an annoying misconception but not so different from chefs or personal trainers expected to have perfect nutrition and body image.

The more distractive reality is that many doctors hold themselves to exceedingly high standards, stemming from a lifetime of accelerated learning and scientific exploration. Doctors are no less susceptible to failing than anybody else in the world, they are just as tentative to find innovative ways to self-destruct and judge themselves. They have better access to stimulants and pharmacology too, not that Sydney would ever indulge like that, not since waking up with the worst hangover the week before and begging Maggie to remove all but the mildest wind from the apartment.

Instead, Syd retreats into the familiarity routine, family, faith, work and therapy. Thankfully the OBGYN still sees great value in seeing Rabbi Roberta, and they have a standing appointment every week. There is an option for a couple's session every fortnight. This practicability is at the cost of any expansion or spontaneity in her life. Declan and Alex joke that they were an old married couple long before official papers but Maggie knows how much progress Syd has made in the last few years, the joy she takes in travel, theatre and simple secular pursuits.

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It's too simplistic to call what Sydney is going through a crisis of faith.

Rabbi Roberta is adamant about this point when Maggie asks for a walk-in appointment. Fortunately, the assistant Rabbi has space that afternoon and welcomes her with a smile. Listening carefully as the
newest member of her congregation lays out her concerns in specific detail and a few tears. Sydney specifically asked her to wave confidentiality for her wife, so the older woman is happy to talk freely about the dynamics at play.

"Sydney doesn't doubt her faith; her faith is as strong as ever. She is mourning the loss of certainty that comes from being part of her former lifelong community and the milestones, she and to an extent Rebbecca are missing. Motherhood and career advancement were supposed to look a particular way to your wife and it never will now. When stressors occur, the mourning for her past comes into play again."

"If she had her way at the moment Sydney would build a castle for the three of us and never leave except to do the occasional surgery, it's worrying and reminiscent of agoraphobia.” Maggie replies with a frown.

"Be careful when applying your medical knowledge, Maggie. Sydney is deviating from her norm, but this behaviour isn't far down the anxiety continuum yet."

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Sydney is struggling to sleep much anymore.

Of course, it isn't as much of a problem as it would be in a more regular household. Eli still requires settling in at night, and Maggie is often doing Skype meetings all over the world. It isn't that difficult to accommodate Syd's insomnia; it's just like being back in medical school when they have strange foods at midnight and debate stupid topics. However, that doesn't make the lack of sleep a desirable development.

“Would you like some tea, Sweetheart?” Maggie asks as she watches Sydney edit a journal article.

“Thank you- you didn’t have to get up with me”

Maggie feels a familiar wave of sadness. People haven’t taken care of Sydney in the past. A self-contained child never broke the habit. Sydney probably expects to shuffle round the house, alone with her thoughts while everyone sleeps.

Not if Maggie can help it, ever again.
“I wasn’t sleeping anyway” she lies with a sad smile.

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She is seeing mistakes where she is accustomed to seeing certainty.

Dr Sydney Katz has taken to presenting her wife and successive medical students with far-reaching hypotheticals which have little to do with a desire to teach or making idle conversation as they do the dishes. Sydney's massive intellect is trying to reconcile harsh realities in the only way it knows how, by working through the problem.

"It is like she is trying to reconstruct her universe star by star” is the unexpectedly poetic comment from Billy, who may be a little in love.

"Your wife is trying to save the world in her spare time again” is Alex's less charitable view after debating with Syd for an hour about the comparative merits of general surgery in pregnancy.

"What if we missed something in Eli's background or the genetic testing. Maybe I didn't search our family tree in enough detail?”

"Yes, Sydney it is your fault for not isolating each of the thousands of disorders our daughter may have" Maggie replies drily "I don't need to be your wife to tell you our daughter will not get sick for lack of effort on your part."

Sydney doesn’t look entirely convinced but she resists the urge to argue, possibly because she knows that unlike most people, her wife Maggie will challenge her point for point. There are many other worries to compete with that one.

Instead she leans into Maggie and watching their daughter watch the latest episode of a puppet show she adores that was put on by Samual’s workplace.

“What if she doesn’t understand her family and all its many variations”
“We will teach her”

“Will these worries ever go away?”

“Am I ever going to feel grounded again?”

It’s not the right time to point out that the senior doctor wasn’t especially grounded in the first place. They were just better denial mechanisms for how their life was in the past. Maggie doesn’t have an answer for either the specific or general question. Medication could be an option or a religious retreat that Roberta runs.

For now, Maggie’s role is to listen, learn and love

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"I'm going to transfer the Sextuplet case to Shiloh."

"Why? The Lars Family practically harassed Joan and the other secretaries to have you as their primary doctor, you know Shiloh can do no wrong in my eyes, but they specifically want you for a reason, my love."

Sydney is one of few experts in the field of fetal surgery sickness, and this group was about as ill as they come. The family is also Jewish and spend considerable time chatting to Sydney in Hebrew and sharing Sabat recipes. Her wife is developing something of a following amongst Jewish families, especially now that her faith isn't so restrictive. Maggie sometimes thinks her wife will eventually retire and run a few clinics for a Jewish woman.

"You were complaining that I spent too much time away. This handover is an easy solution" Sydney snaps defensively.

Maggie sighs and stops chopping the vegetables for dinner. This was going to be a longer conversation.

“Those were entirely different issues. I know you, Sydney. Letting down that family isn’t going to
make you happy or content. It’s only going to make the anxiety recede for a while. There aren’t enough fetal surgeons to offload your cases. Our family can be your home base but we can’t be your fortes from life. I love you because you are a hard-core surgeon not in spite of it”

“Is Charlie giving you some life and relationship lessons now?” Sydney asks with a tender smile.

The orthopaedic surgeon and new father has a reputation around the hospital for profound empathy and compassion. His time in a coma and the aftermath isn’t well understood but Shakir jokes he wants to write his friend up in Canadian Neurology.

“I learnt a lot from you Syd but I’ve been learning about you for just as long. You were my private enigma. Even if we never reconnected I wanted to know how to make you happy. Besides which most upset surgeons play from the same perfectionism playbook”

“Can I run through the case theory and surgical steps with you. There are some sticking points for the identical girls”

“Of course I would be a little disappointed if you didn’t want to share your plans”

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"She can’t inhabit a Reformist identity as perfectly as she does anything else, it’s a shock to the system. Just give her as much time, and patience as you always do and her monkey brain will return to normal."

Maggie is sharing her weekly 'Mum and Me' date with her sister in law - watching as their children explore the blocks in the playpen. Dark hair and red bent close together, Maggie has already snapped photos, photos of Eli always make Sydney smile.

Rebecca Friedman adores her sister and even at the height of their estrangement that was obvious to see when she was lying in the hospital glaring at Maggie. However, they are different people in many ways, Becca takes to their new circumstances with relative ease, now that her family is complete and she is in remission with positive signs from her oncologist. She leaves the rest to God, rather than struggling to change her path.
Sydney wants to shape her path and faith actively.

"What made you decide to change synagogues to support Sydney? I know it wasn't an easy decision for you and Samuel. There were was to reach out without leaving entirely."

"Yes of course but selfishly I was sick of the whispers about the 'Cursed Katz Family" it was going on long before Sydney came out. She has all the science genes, but I know enough to follow a conversation, our collective fertility isn't a result of who Syd falls in love with or how devout my mother is. Besides none of them washed me when I became incontinent during that last round of chemo or reassured my husband that it was ok to touch me again."

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"Teach me some Jewish lullabies?"

They are sitting in the nursery which needs to be redecorated to reflect that their daughter will soon be a toddler. This change feels like a momentous occasion especially given Eli's uncertain start in life. Maggie is becoming a right modern parent and exchanging Pinterest boards with her mother and sister in law. Jerry, Samuel and Amara want to contribute to the redesign, but her mothers need to decide on what they want outlaws all that. There are endless options and colour pallets to consider. Sydney delights in the challenge though as it is well within her safe spaces and activities.

Elianna is sitting laying between them on her play mat between them sleepily, thoroughly worn out by a playdate with her cousin Aaron.

"Of course, it will be good for your Hebrew education. The patterns are simple and melodic, but Elianna loves the English and Mandarin ones you and Rosemary sign her. Our daughter doesn't lack for options in the evening" Sydney reassures with a smile.

"No she doesn't, but I wasn't planning on serenading Eli."

Sydney gives her a strange look and fragile smile, not understanding the comment.

"When we first met Neshma, you said that your mother used to sing to you when you were sad and scared. I’m nowhere near as talented as your relatives but I’ll like to try and help you sleep, if you could forgive a few off key notes"
“You could sound like a screeching cat mid fight and I would still find the sound comforting”

“Wow a low bar to meet but I will do my best to sound human at least. So come on teach me your favourite songs from childhood. I can hum them to start off and maybe teach you some Mandarin at the same time”
Declan Delima I

Chapter Summary

24/03/19: Lin Family Drama - Maggie and Sydney try to communicate through trouble.
(Part 1/5)

Having always imagined myself in a reasonably slim minority, I suddenly saw that I was in a vast company. Difference unites us. While each of these experiences can isolate those who are affected, together they compose an aggregate of millions whose struggles connect them profoundly. The exceptional is ubiquitous; to be entirely typical is the rare and lonely state Andrew Soloman - Far From The Tree.

Their first post-therapy fight of any significance is over Declan.

There are many things that Sydney and Maggie disagree on; they are both stubborn and temperamental people. There are points their life philosophies merely clash. They agree on the most fundamental aspects of their lives and can compromise reasonably well on the things that are sticking points, like how devout Maggie needs to be in maintaining Kosher outside of the home.

Their respective therapists say that fights are healthy and they can't live in a bubble because they are afraid to lose each other. To an extent this is true, little things are ok. Maggie is still fearful that things will escalate from small to catastrophic without warning, but the strategies help, both jointly and separate behaviour patterns.

Declan is an unlikely subject for the first major roadblock in their marriage.

The youngest Lin twin is close to his sister and developing a firm bond with Sydney. He takes pride in his new titles of Uncle and Brother in Law. The expanding Lin family gives him a sense of purpose and direction. Barely a week goes by without him stopping by for dinner and spoils Eliana with another toy to add to her impressive collection.

Maggie is not by nature a superstitious person, but occasionally she finds herself believing in the adages about calamity rarely coming alone, the children in trouble usually comes in threes.

Alex, the baby, Gavin, Joel and the accident all happened in batches of three at Hope Zion.

Trouble One: Sydney is taking on a superhuman workload and attempting to publish at the same time. Dr Katz is learning to moderate her workaholic tendencies but denying cases is difficult. Her wife seems convinced that she can bend time to suit her will, which in practice results in loss of sleep, family time and harmony.

Trouble Two: Declan has become the family historian, spending all his time liaising with their distant
relatives in China. This effort disturbs the delicate balance between the Lin and O'Neal sides of their heritage. Maggie senses that something is underlying this need, but he refuses to talk about it beyond the vaguest terms.

If Maggie's mental timetable proves accurate, it was time to meet the third child trouble.

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The third child of trouble arrives on a Thursday morning in the guise of an innocent comment from Rebecca.

"Rabbi Goldberg saw your sis and his girlfriend at lunch today; they were holding hands, looks like there could be another Lin wedding in the future. Declan seems to be enjoying learning your father's language again."

Maggie often forgets that by marrying into Sydney's family, she is marrying into a whole community, who think nothing of making personal observations. Rabbi Goldberg is renowned for his encyclopedic knowledge of his congregation, having studied in the oral tradition, which requires terrific feats of memory.

Maggie froze, mid-bite of stew, there were two problems with that statement. Declan's girlfriend was in the United States visiting family. Secondly, Lisa is a musician native of California with Sweedish ancestry. There is no logical reason for her to converse with Maggie's brother in anything but English, not when she needs help to use chopsticks.

Sydney is busy feeding Elianna so does not immediately draw the pieces together. Maggie is not so trusting not when it comes to her foolish brother. Therefore takes depressingly little time to find the truth. Her brother is not even hiding the trail that well, given his litany of not entirely innocent social media posts.

Declan is cheating on his girlfriend with a genealogist from China.

Said genealogist from China is confirming the existence of several half-siblings who their father supported since birth and sent through university in Guangzhou.

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The Apple Does Not Fall Far From The Tree.

That would be the name of the soap opera episode if they turned their family exploits into a TV drama, with Declan playing the role of the lovable yet misunderstood rogue, predisposed to making poor life decisions.

Of course, their father is too diligent to let this revelation genuinely resemble a soap opera. For one his second family wasn't even that much of secret. The senior Dr Lin keeps methodical records and routinely made trips to see his children, especially once they started high school and university.

Some of these records may still exist in various storage facilities - after the divorce there was little desire on anyone's part to go through his files beyond the minimum when he died- helpfully he keeps a record 'My Estate' with all documents, so further exploration wasn't necessary. Their mother possesses too much self-control to burn the papers but nor does she open them.
They are spending Saturday afternoon opening when of the storage unit, wearing old clothes and Sydney cradling Eli in a cloth sling. It is a hot day, but Maggie feels like this is making progress.

Sydney is adamant that they must tell Lisa and Rosemary, the whole truth, consequences are what they may.

Of course, she doesn't phrase her opinion in precisely that way - Syd reviews consequences as easy as she breathes. However, the inference is there in the way the other doctor talks about family loyalty and relationships. Maggie knows that Syd takes their wedding vows to mean more than her as an individual, in Jewish custom they have become a network of new families, a significantly important gesture when the Katz still struggle with accepting their eldest daughter.

The dilemma is moving through their house like an unwanted guest, invading every activity from breakfast two bathtime. Maggie curses her twin for starting this firestorm just as the household was falling into a comfortable rhythm - not that their is ever a 'good' time to hear about your father's other family.

"I love your brother, but he avoids conflict as much as you seek it out. He'll avoid this till his death bed if given a chance - especially with your mother. Declan relishes the title of a lovable rogue, emphasis on lovable."

Maggie is busy looking through boxes neatly labelled from her childhood home to respond

"There is nothing to say yet - besides my brother is being an idiot - there is nothing definite to say."

Sydney sighs and heads to the next pile - whispering a soft prayer before touching the family objects. Maggie doesn't feel the same reverence, but the Hebrew words are comforting, especially when Eli starts to giggle and babble away.

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"You do not have the right to interfere, Syd. Not all problems solve themselves by the shining light of truth; some truths are ugly, messy. You may be still high on living your 'Oprah' truth or whatever but it doesn't always work like that."

Maggie is more than a little mortified that they are yelling in Rabbi Roberta's office, complete with wild gestures and tones - the scene looks like a parody of a couple in therapy - seemingly erasing all their progress on communication and constructive debates. Sydney looks simultaneously pale and flush - Maggie knows from experience she is waging a losing battle

"What alternative do you suggest letting your brother live out his Roots fantasy in technicolour - move the children next door?"

"Stop it both of you-you are deliberately putting up the weakest and most extreme versions of each other's positions - just so there is an excuse to snipe at each other like newlyweds over the Sabbath rituals. We have made too much progress for that" Reorta barks authoritatively.

Maggie sinks back into the chair suitable chastened and feeling vaguely sick from the exertion and deliberately flinging words to hurt the woman she loves.

Sydney looks ready to protest before the counsellor whispers a few words in Hebrew - complete with a sharp gesture at the scriptures on the wall. Maggie's Hebrew isn't good enough to follow the
exact words, but the effect on Syd is remarkable to behold.

The formidable Doctor Sydney Katz-Lin shrinks back and offers a hasty apology - reaching to straighten a hat she hasn't worn in years.

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"How dare you put me in that position, lying to that poor girl as she makes plans to join the family."

"Do you think it was any easier on me? for heck sake, my brother is acting like nothing is wrong."

The family dinner is dreadful - Declan and Lisa are chatting about a getaway plan. Rosemary makes the blond woman's favourite dinner - chipping in with recommendations for holiday stops that are affordable and worthwhile. Maggie has little recollections of the specifics but hopes the tension between the other couple isn't too notable.

Poor Sydney barely touches her meal with some weak excuse about saving room for a picnic at the Synagogue - as always Elianna provides a happy distraction when they don't have another conversation point. Rosemary adores her granddaughter and is still willing to chat about the latest milestone or photo opportunity.

Maggie still hates the distance between them as they walk towards the car - Sydney angrily striding out ahead. Even though they are making progress in some areas, the secrets remain.

"Sydney, please wait!"

Maggie jogs to catch up before gently putting her wife to a stop, trying not to wince at the iron rigidity in the smaller frame and all she wants is to take the pain away.

"However, this goes it's going to hard and messy - Jerry Springer will have a field day. Specifically, you are right about Declan avoiding conflict, and my mother is likely to blow a gasket on so many levels. I can bear the idea of facing the conflict if we are fighting too - please can we talk about it, maybe reach a compromise?"

Sydney hugs her so tightly that Maggie's ribs ache in more than the metaphorical sense, never underestimate the power of a surgeon's grip. The embrace feels like such a simple thing to provoke such relief. Maggie never wants to argue you like this again but knows that is an unrealistic expectation given the current scenario.

"I'm taking my anger out on you, but I am more disappointed in the situation than anything. Declan is such an amazing soul and his mistreating other people - let alone treading on the family ground."

"and I was a more accessible Lin twin to take your frustrations out on?"

"Something like that" Sydney whispers against her neck.

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The inadvertently step on an emotional landmine, complete with shrapnel and collateral damage.

To be more accurate another landmine is triggered for them - just as they are working their way back to each other - with sincere apologies and extra therapy sessions. Maggie is glad she invest in medical insurance and the health plan at work. Solving family dilemmas can get expensive - even
though both mental health professionals have reasonable rates. Their little family of three is coming back together one piece at a time - most of their friends don't notice or choose not to comment.

Rosemary O'Neal-Lin doesn't have such courtesy when she brings over a new recipe book for Rebecca's birthday. Birthdays in the Freemans household are a massive celebration since the cancer remission and the new faith community.

"Stop torturing yourselves Maggie - I know about the other Lin children, trying to protect me is noble but not necessary," Rosemary says calmly as she mixes the cake batter.

Maggie drops one of the eggs she is cracking, and Sydney looks up from the notes she is auditing. The silence in the room feels defeating and heavy, but Rosemary continues whisking with hand beater - not bothering to look over her shoulder.

"Your father is many things, but he wasn't deliberately cruel he told me not long before he died - even though I yelled at the nursing students and scared off his latest girlfriend."

"Why didn't you tell anybody?" Sydney asks softly

"There are considerable concerns for her family - the shame in her family has an unwed family - they support the children now but saving face was important."

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"You made me have a screaming match with my wife, Dec. I do not like fighting with Syd at the best of times; let alone over you and Dad."

Declan doesn't look up from the papers that cover his long dining room table. Maggie will say one thing for the historian; this woman is an expert at the business of finding families and compiling detailed notes. There are documents from their father's side of the family going back decades as well as the more recent dossiers on his other children.

"Forgive me if your marital hardship isn't high on my list of priorities right now, sis. You are too late Mum has already given me a blistering lecture on my moral failings. Lisa is on a flight back home after filling in any adjectives that I hadn't heard. Ling is mortified and wants to return any of my calls" Declan offers bitterly.

"What were you thinking reacting on own personal Who Do You Think You Are without talking to me? You know how close me and dad were. This journey isn't your decision to make alone, look at the consequences" Maggie struggles to keep her voice level.

"That's why I did daddy's little shadow". Not all of us were trying to learn Maths at three and set on a career path at 7!"

"What?" the doctor is genuinely confused by the use of the affectionate nickname."

"I wasn't as close to Dad as you were Gigi and I didn't have the advantage of being the favourite prodigy grandchild with the family. This step felt like a way to make connections." Declan sounds genuinely hurt.

"There is a massive step between the haunting family tree and frolicking with our geologist and keeping massive secrets." Maggie offers to try to sound calmer and more reasonable.

"I know, but we just become closer as we learnt more about Dad's history and immigration story - Ling is so great to talk to and passionate about her profession" Declan offers weekly.
Maggie winces and feels grateful that Lisa isn't around to hear this; the poor girl deserves to be home with her family. She will reach out once the dust settles. The family can only handle one impossible situation at a time; luckily there is one less problem to confront. Rosemary gives them full permission to explore further.

"Have you met them yet, our siblings?" she asks curiously the sentence still sounds weird to say out loud.

"No of course not - that is something we need to do together or not at all" Declan says firmly.

"Explain this all to me slowly - I promise not to yell too much. Eli deserves to know all her family if possible, one step at a time."

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