

“Jewish Identity of the ‘Modern-day Crypto Jews’!”

An Autobiographical Sketch in Part

By

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SCENE:

Present timeline at one of most beautiful, picturesque university campuses in the world, Michigan State University in East Lansing, Michigan. It is early autumn – the beginning of October. Indian summer seems more eager than in most years to remain with just a hint of cool breeze today beneath the bright sun that has to compete with billowy cumuli.

Bushy green leaves are still on the trees, but cascading from their canopies are mostly rust's, vivid red's, and especially yellow's, which are clinging to life more than usual for this time of year. It is nearly noonday and classes are about to get out. For now, the sidewalks are relatively vacant on campus, but on the opposite side of Grand River Avenue, things are picking up shop-side.

The university's near century old carillon sounds off at noon and is heard for blocks from its tower. When it ceases, only light traffic will be detectable in the background, but is will not be a distraction to the protagonist Grace Jordan, and Moshe Stein who are walking to their destination a few blocks north, where they will remain through the evening.

“So, you want to be Jewish! Would that be Reform, Conservative, Orthodox, Hasidic? On pumpernickel, rye, or challah? Kabala, anyone?”

A break ensues, followed by, “So, you want to be Jewish!”

Moshe Stein drags out ‘w-a-n-t’ in his slightly nasally way, and likewise holds the ‘-sh’ too long not to be irritating on the end of ‘Jew-ishhhhh.’

With his deep voice now escalating, he speed-answers his own question with a question:

“Why in the world would you want to be Jewish?” His right hand half-circles the air then lands on his thigh with just the right kind of thud emphasizing being dumbfounded.

Grace Jordan shoots him a silent reply with startled deer’s eyes, only softer... More vulnerable.

They continue walking a few paces in silence when a mouthy, gangly freshman scopes heads in front of them, whizzing on his skateboard, scissoring between passers-by. “Hey Dudes, move it or lose it!”

They comply.

“Oh, now that’s original. Watch me grab that little bast--- He’s had it coming all semester, already, and classes have only just begun.”

Designer suit on, or no designer suit on, Moshe steps out right in front of him, clasps his collarbone and the kid skids off his contraption. He fails to flip it high enough to grab onto it, so it crashes into a brick boutique, leaving him relieved it had not broken a window.

Being a rare man’s man, Moshe gives a *real education* to the boy-man. With his face in the kid’s, the understanding is certain: Moshe wins firmly but discretely. That’s how they handled things in his Israel and at times in New York where he had first settled about a decade ago; therefore, he is not opposed to giving such menaces a bit of ‘free education’ since the system has failed here.

Grace likes that about him, a man who knows how to get things done. Always dignified, a little risqué. A definite turn-on his having been a Colonel in the IDF with Intelligence until he had retired after 20 years of service, and is now a US citizen with dual citizenship, of course.

She steals a glance toward campus to make certain the Dean of her Department where she is teaching various English courses is not lurking.

Nervy but still shaken, the kid screws his shoulder backwards twice, the last of which was less jagged and violent. Conversely, his pride refuses to give in entirely, and their eyes remain locked as he gropes the sidewalk with spread-eagle hands for his dashed accomplice.

Moshe mumbles gruffly into Grace’s neck where it tickles, “He won’t be ‘cruising’ these sidewalks for a long time!” His accent definitely gets more interesting when he gets riled – and, more attractive to her.

All she can come up with is “Smooth, really smooth...” Her laughter is distinct. Her giggles always turn upward at the end of them as she draws in the last breath, and he adores her for it. This time, she offers no more, caught up in the fabric of his expensive suit whose lines are silhouetting his muscular tall build as he flexes to straighten it.

The skateboard lays flipped on its side forgiven, yet abandoned. Its wheels had rotated to a dead pause just as the kid’s arrogance was winding down a peg. Had the board an ego, it would no longer wish to placate him. Instead, it would be bracing itself for the toughest workout of its life.

He mounts his muse, and they return to the life of petty crime. Brave again in motion, he yells some obscenities at Moshe, ending with, “...who the heck do you think you are, anyway?” as he rolls off.

“Stein! Of “Stein, Goldman and Shapiro!” The same Stein who will be representing any person or business you harm on this street!”

The young tough bobs, then stands erect while combing his fingers through his red disheveled nest of curls, “Yeah, well my ol’ man works for Abram of “Abram and Associates!”

“Then, you should KNOW the routine!” Moshe’s quip wins out, and the pupils in his blazing blue eyes attenuate as if to say with confidence, “That’s that!”

The standoff is finished with the coward rolling off into obscurity. The older buck, clearly the victor, appears instantly board as though nothing has happened, and trots on.

“That’s it? All finished, just like that?” She cracks up not able to contain herself any longer.... “That’s it...?” Men puzzle her.

“A testosterone surge... Eyes locked, cursing in their sockets... Then as suddenly as you had grabbed him, it’s ‘resolved’!”

She doubles over very slightly laughing, contained more than she would like by the tight cut of her beige and navy linen, coatdress. “Just like that!” She giggles again and repeats it, then flips her long raven hair from her shoulder where it cascades to her hip. It’s a lot of hair, but not too much for her five- and- a- half-foot frame.

Her natural timing always impeccable, she picks up the oddest little detail and runs with it, and that is why he also likes her. That combined with her teasing him to no end.

She seems to have gotten that from her grandmother, who not only had her entire ship in stitches on the way over from Sicily in 1909, but also managed to get all the passengers dancing on deck, somehow. This was her *maternal* grandmother, Giovanna who had bequeathed her antique Star of David necklace to her, but Grace was not able to possess it or completely fathom its ramification until she was a much older adult. Such possibilities of having Jewish roots was either unknown or kept hidden because things had never been discussed among her nominally Catholic family, to Grace’s knowledge, as her beloved grandparents had passed away when she was an adolescent and young teenager, respectively.

Besides, the thought of being Jewish was far too noble a quest for her to contemplate until a few decades had passed. Despite this, to her immediate family with their limited historical logistics post arrival of her grandparents, the Jews were assumed, naturally, as some other people, not Italians, and were perceived by them as beloved, unfortunate people who had tragically undergone the Holocaust.

Why Grace had been singled out to become the recipient of this heirloom, she would ponder in years to come because she had never discussed her sensing she must have Semitic blood with anyone during her early childhood. As a tiny tot, she was always drawn to the encyclopedias with the large colorful plates of peoples and exotic lands of the Near and Middle East, and yes, the Holy Land, and would feel an affinity toward them.

Sensing some kinship with those people, being pulled towards them as well as being attracted to the textures of their material cultures-- the sights, sounds, tastes, exotic instruments, ornate handmade jewelry and dress, and fabulous fauna, namely camels, in addition to the Bedouin lifestyle, would come to feel second nature to her. Her lifelong studies of Western Civilization - her own Mediterranean world, a love of languages, history, genealogical research, anthropology and archeology, comparative religious studies and the arts had impacted her so.

As baffling as it was to inquirers in the mid- 1970's about her choice of formal university studies, including Jewish studies, they would blossom more so academically, personally and religiously as part of the process she would better fathom in her 50's, even though it might never really feel completed. At 56, she feels there is even more to learn.

This antique piece of jewelry with its Old World essence would serve the miraculous when it was time for her spiritual mikvah to occur in 1993, when she cried out to God to verify whether she had even one drop of Jewish blood.

He would answer her plea the following morning when she was cooking breakfast while watching a random television interview through which an Orthodox rabbi stated, "If you have an unexplainable, overpowering love of Jews and Israel, and feel as though you could give up everything and move to Israel, making aliyah, then you too, are Jewish. Part of the Jewish Remnant in the Diaspora. This is because the Ruach HaKodesh has been going around the world, knocking upon your hearts calling you home." (Ruach HaKodesh being the Holy Spirit)

With that still penetrating her being, He then instructed her to retrieve the small pouch in her bedroom closet in which the bequeathed necklace laid, as it would hold the answer. It was all dawning on her as she obeyed and reached for it in its special place.

Discovering the family heirloom, indeed, was the Star of David caused her knees to weaken and her eyes to weep. From that moment on, she had obeyed all His leadings on how to keep Sabbath and biblically Kosher, how to observe all the High Holy Days, and so much more... Since then for the next 18 years to the present, she had not missed any such Sabbaths, which she has mostly kept intimately at home in His presence as best she could manage on her own, while continuing her Jewish studies.

Having conducted genealogical research since her youth, it became even more critical of late. Thus far, eight family branches with Jewish names back through several centuries on both sides of her family have surfaced: *Augusto, Catalano, Candela, Russo, Pace, Cosenza, Ferro, and DeAmico for Amico.*

Grace believes that she will also discover more. Unfortunately, due to the forced baptisms through the Spanish Inquisition of 1492, whereby most Jews who had taken on Sicilian Christian names, some links had been lost, while others had become traceable through ecclesiastical and clerical records, such as diverse notarized documents.

Specifically, Sicilian Jewry is classified as having been a distinct form of Judaism liturgically, linguistically and through other customs, though there were serious

overlaps historically and culturally with that of the Sephardim and Mizrahim. Therefore, Sicilian culture, language and its DNA are richly polyglot from the myriad of foreign invaders and conquerors that numbered over twenty-four.

Like Sardinia and Valencia during the time of the Inquisition, it was a Spanish colony though ethnically, there was not much admixture in Sicily because Spain ruled there largely through key viceroys, although there was some admixture historically because many Sicilian names are of Spanish and Jewish Sephardic origins, so there had been earlier and later admixture.

Specifically, the Inquisition meant that thousands of Jews from Sicily had to face forced conversions, torture and death, or undergo expulsion at a great loss in every way. With the Sephardim who traveled across but mostly around Sicily to Calabria fleeing from Spain and Portugal with thousands of distinctly Sicilian Jews, they had remained in either the 'Boot' area, or fled later north or into other countries as the growing arm of the Inquisition had also reached them there. Many had sought refuge in Ottoman and Arab nations, Israel and beyond. Tragically, millions of their progeny would meet their extinction much later through pogroms and the Holocaust.

That earlier researchers and writers had stated that there were no more Jews in Sicily as though all had either converted, fled or been killed, that was NOT true. Nor is it completely true that among Jews who had remained, their progeny became completely assimilated to the total eradication of any Jewish identity. Rather, no one had previously conducted such research as they have been doing lately, nor had Sicilians reason to make a lot of noise about it on their own under their dire circumstances. For the neofiti (the Sicilian crypto Jews) who had chosen to remain or had to because of no ability to flee, they had tried as best they could to retain Jewish practices and customs over the centuries through the present, although many such efforts had lost their full Jewish religious and cultural significance through 'forced' assimilation. Shame of being Jewish imposed on them by the greater culture, thanks to Catholicism that had supported the Inquisition, and fear of being caught observing Sabbaths and ritual customs forced them to do so in their 'closets,' so to speak, and at times it was literal. Probably more so than will ever be known.

As a result, as earlier neofiti died, following decade upon decade, and century upon century since Sicilian Jews had been openly practicing Judaism, in most cases brief, contrite deathbed admissions of Jewish ancestry were finally passed onto the next generation, because it had been too dangerous to entrust it earlier to them. This was all that had survived in many cases, along with any partially correct ritual practices and beliefs such families had tried to maintain, if at that, which were not already lost. Yet, as we are finding now, many customs, sentiments and practices were shared in some families as distinct from those of observant Catholics: The separation of milk and meat, not eating pork and shellfish, and observing forms of shiva, to name some.

In some families today, they hardly know why they are conducting such oddities, but in others, they have always known of their Jewish history but had to keep it clandestine while also partaking in the Christian lifestyle for whatever purposes, sincerely or insincerely. Some are only now connecting the proverbial dots in trying to make sense of why certain practices are kept without explanation or knowledge of the origins in their families.

For example, in Grace's family, her other grandmother, Antonina buried meat with salt for half an hour, then scrubbed it tasteless prior to cooking it! No explanation was given, other than it was to cleanse it thoroughly. Additionally, while growing

up, Grace had to partake in her mother's frantically cleaning the house every Friday, which was an unexplained burden with no rhyme or reason! Most remarkable, however, was Grace's never feeling right about embalming the dead or funeral practices here, and had always thought it right to bury the deceased the same day in a cloth, as well as being adamantly opposed to cremation. These are a few among other things that she would come to realize were part of her Jewish soul, including the distaste for tattooing the body, for people are created in God's image. No one else in her extended family had sensed Jewish identity, nor would they have altered their Catholic traditions to at least accommodate some, let alone embrace it fully.

As a result of this global, Jewish spiritual phenomenon, more and more Sicilians, who are polyglot to begin with, are only now beginning to reclaim their Jewish heritage partly or fully. Had it not been for World War II and the added Jewish stigma, there, perhaps this might have flowered earlier. This is hard to say.

Researchers indicate that at the time of the Inquisition, as much as 50% or more of Sicily and Southern Italy was Jewish, and such numbers cannot have been eradicated completely if sincere adherents had clung to the heritage clandestinely, as we are seeing elsewhere globally among such anuism or morannos, i.e., the modern-day crypto Jews. Consequently, it seems obvious to Grace that if such people are thusly recognized in say, parts of the United States, Mexico, Central and South America, then certainly, there have remained crypto Jews of Sicily and elsewhere throughout the centuries. Such has been the fate of the Sephardim and Mizrahim, the 'Arab Jews' of the Near and Middle East, and others such as India by extension.

Such Sicilian Jews are part of the Jewish Remnant, and with dwindling Jewish population at approximately 13.3 million, they need to be embraced by other Jews who must realize that their processes will vary, as will their beliefs systems. Some will retain forms of Christianity and paganism while taking on only some aspects of Judaism, while others will utterly convert, but whatever the process is by which these modern-day crypto Jews emerge, no one should deny them the validity and complexity of their processes because they identify themselves as Jews. Typically, anyone would agree that the masses have never desired to do so, given the horrific plight and derision Jews have had to face, despite their tremendous personal attributes and spiritual contributions. Hence this Jewish awakening within the souls of people striving to ascertain any Jewish identity has to be supernatural.

Some Orthodox and other rabbis have been issuing various Certificates of Return to those who have been going through this phenomenon in recognition that they are Jews; therefore, they will not have to go through identical formal procedures like those that converts would if they care to partake in formal religious rites or make aliyah. They would surely conduct Jewish studies and religious rites of passage in order to participate fully in religious communities, although many Jewish clergy have widely varying stances.

Regardless of trying to untangle all such historical and religious aspects since 1993, Grace felt ROYAL in the sense that it had been revealed in prayer that she was from the lines of Judah (and Benjamin), from whom the likes of King David and his descendants had come. She had always had felt royal from having been a mix of European aristocracy with commoners' blood, but this was different.

Therefore, her Jewish identity as a modern-day crypto Jew, with having rarely acknowledged it within some circle from time to time, has been the most rewarding and beautifully humbling walk of her life, and for that alone, life is worth living.

From the onset of her newfound Jewish identity, she had met hundreds of others whose touching revelations were as miraculous as hers, and all were going through similar processes.

As the years go by, Grace reflects upon why her maternal grandmother had stressed that only she was to possess that necklace for some reason. What secrets to their ancestry had she known but not revealed fully before she had passed? Grace's love of this set of grandparents would never cease, and in actuality, she was similar to both of them, not just the comedic air she had inherited from this grandmother, Giovanna.

Still being in a playful mood, Grace could not let Moshe's antics with the skateboarding freshman go.

"You're hilarious! Such détente. If you are this way in the courtroom, I've got to come sometime. Alright?"

He pivots facing her, tugging at his cuff links. His cologne heightens for a few moments and leaves a trail she cannot resist. It is slightly sweet and airy, not overpowering or spicy. She unconsciously sniffs as it wafts by. When it disappeared, she drew nearer.

She asks, "When is your..."

Just then, he cuts her off with, "Where were we? Oh, yes, about Jews."

His interruption does not deter her. She leans into his chest, caressing him with her head, then monkeys with his tie, which did not need mauling, but he did not know that.

The sidewalks have been unusually bare for this time of day, and with the coast all clear, she sensuously declares, "I like a man with a little fire amidst the namby-pambies!" She wiggles on 'namby-pambies,' delighting him.

He raises his sunglasses unexpectedly, buries them in his thick layered, silvery hair and grabs her by the waist in silence, losing himself in her chocolaty eyes while she finishes monkeying with it, signaling completion with a double pat.

His battering continues. "With all the suffering, persecution and derision Jews go through, what are you, NUTS!"

He could not get his voice to be as harsh as he would normally have liked to feign after having melted via the 'namby-pamby' wiggle.

He is still agitated, however. His gate quickens, taking a few steps ahead of hers, then, he rebounds toward her. She looks away momentarily toward the traffic, bracing herself and exhales an irregular breathe that is not overly audible.

A few seconds pass in silence. Then he goes at it again while talking with his hands, though not identically animated like the Italians' but close, while his footsteps become more intricate in keeping with his anxious speech, stepping this way and that, towards her, then ahead a few more steps, and then alongside her again. Sort of a half-shuffle she had fondly termed, "The Ashkenazi Shuffle" that she had come up with having witnessed him and a handful of his Central and Eastern European-American Jewish associates getting pretty worked up about issues. All kinds of them.

Her terminology encompasses both their cruel verbal attacks and such physical mannerisms. However, she extends it more often to the verbal clobbering some give her that catches her off guard and makes her wither and shut down. She had

not encountered that like this with other kinds of Jews since she had discovered she was Jewish, so she remained on alert, bewildered and edgy with some now.

While she enjoyed friends letting off steam behind closed doors or when the time was right, with these fellows at random lunches, it seemed over and beyond just letting off some corporate steam by strangulating cautiously waving Rubin sandwiches until their entrails heaved through the wrappers. How not so much as a single spot would even land on them was beyond her.

Funny thing is that they were probably not even aware of how impacting it feels to be on the receiving end of it, meaning her, not the sandwiches. Just the same, she knows better than to extend this pejorative terminology to all Ashkenazim, having had so many such friends that were kind and mild.

Since the couple had plans elsewhere today, they would not be joining him for lunch, so things would remain stable. Not to mention that students had not yet sifted out of classes, so their walk through town is uninterrupted.

He catches his manners and slows down again to accommodate her without colliding. "How does he do that so gracefully being a very tall man?" she ponders.

Lovingly, he takes her arm in his, being the one this time to pat a couple times reassuringly with his other hand as he cooled down.

He knew that look on her face. Thus he smirked with a tongue-click and rolled his eyes to prevent her from joking about his shuffle. He was not in the mood for much joking around. Indeed, she had a knack of setting this guy off. And, he adored that even more, but not today!

Or, was he easily ticked off with everyone? About every topic? Or, just about things Jewish... Or, potentially Jewish topics, for that matter? Potentially Jewish? Yes.

Her eyes could not escape his, not with his rapid succession of remarks. Apparently, he WAS irked, but she could not quite ascertain whether it was about her, this topic or what.

She had never seen him so rattled 'about nothing,' thinking that something must be on his mind today. She did love, however, how he would rant and rave – even YELL around his house about testy events in the news, and oddly enough, she was just like him, losing sleep over some heated topics now and then, especially about Israel and the Jews.

After a brief pause glancing into a store window, they resume walking again, and then she drifts off a bit, reflecting on him yelling in his living room with his bellowing masculine voice. There, behind closed doors, they would take solace comforting each other over the anti-Semitic flare-ups in the news with their own variety of madcap jeers at the prejudicial opponents on the national and world scene to ease their tension.

She loved it how he would often repeat renditions of the following when she would act up: "Grace," Moshe would begin, "...even if you had not found those eight Jewish names in your genealogy, and even if you had resisted keeping all the Sabbaths, one cultural fact identifies you as a Jew, your humor!"

Her cheeks redden as they clash into one another dashing a puddle, miscalculating, offering opportunity for him to try to read her thoughts. Then they redden even darker at the thought he had. She is shy like that at times.

As they continued strolling northward, it was dawning on her that part of his adorableness was because he is a man she could relate to, confide in, and the one

with whom she could weep and laugh. Yes, weep with. Unlike Western American men, this one did not feel less a man for weeping, but became more of one. Moshe is not a weeping-willowy man at every bump in the road, or a routinely hysterical one like some manipulators before they pop, but is one of substance who could discern what is tear-worthy, thus heart wrenching to him. She particularly needs a man who could weep, an emotional one, not a pop sickle who was artificially sweet, stiff and frozen.

He being the progeny of Central and Eastern European Jews, by War's end in 1945 at barely 18, he was a seasoned Partisan who together with others managed to help his father escape from Auschwitz, after which the two made their way to Palestine. His mother and sisters had not fared as well and were executed upon arrival at the same camp. Moshe, together with his father and his eventual new sabra stepmother helped forge the fledgling State of Israel and continued fighting for it and for Jewish causes. Largely because of his past, he radiates that sense of protection that other men lack to provide.

None in Grace's background had possessed enough sense to lock the doors and windows before going to bed, or to get up and check them! But that was long ago, and life for her is not something to place in the hands of someone haphazardly, having managed quite well on her own in the most bazaar places and circumstances all over the US, Europe, parts of Africa and the Orient, to name only some. She, slowing down for a while now, did not want a man who would be working her to death or dragging her all over the place. Rather, her natural homebody and reclusive bents welcomed the type of man who would have some kind of agendas for a little adventure and outings, not to mention spontaneous surprises. Moshe, being much older seemed a nice fit, and his sense of priorities, caution and conservatism brought a sigh of relief to her feminine ways, at last.

Would it have to take a former soldier of the IDF to accomplish that in a man, or just one with good common sense? This late in life, good common sense was obviously a major need to both of them, yet it had always been. He was worth the gamble, she knew it, and so did he, and if he were going to settle down at last, having been a confirmed bachelor, she would have to appreciate such things.

Apparently, she needed a man who was a bit *m-o-o-d-y*, as she found that with Jewish men she could then dote on them even more, and vice versa. She must have gotten that from her Sicilian-Italian brooding sub-culture, having been raised around older people of former generations to which she owes her 'old soul.' That is why Moshe and she hit it off because he is not careless like younger men around her own age, yet he has a youngish heart, stout good looks, and possesses a wildly attractive intellect always desiring to learn more and more, and a desire to try new things. Thus, their 27-plus year age difference seemed like nothing between them. Besides, he has the guts to desire younger women (not radically younger ones because he has too much sense for that), and she found that very appealing about him.

As fate would have it, she looks younger than her years, so younger men still approach her, not to mention, behaves like a youthful woman. With men her own age or younger, while they might be kind and bright, they lack any historical perspectives on life from which to draw, and their reminiscences, if any, bore her, but with older men, she could relate and learn from them with much pleasure chatting endlessly about life and times past, while examining ramifications of historical lessons unlearned.

Furthermore, neither he nor she had ever been into drugs or carryings-on, while both have an aversion to sin and scandal, and if she had to have waited this long for someone like him, then it had to be.

For her, Jewish men seem to possess that inescapable melancholia coupled with hilarity that mimics her humor. This conscious realization about moody, humorous, yet dreamy-practical, successful men, surprises her, and a silly grin etches across her face and mirrors itself in his as he wonders what she is thinking about as they continue pacing along, and affirms her with a squeeze.

Some educated foreign men and those first- or second-generation American born men might also be ideal who could manifest similar emotional qualities as hers, but they are hard to come by. Most available men she had met lately are dull, boring, cold, and were not forged from broad life experiences, nor are they well read.

Additionally, they are too hedonistic, immoral and selfish. Few if any are hands-on types of men who are not afraid of getting their hands relatively dirty, barring dentists and surgeons, while also relishing donning a tuxedo for some gala affair or fundraiser. Least to say, they must be Jewish, passionate about books and leaning in general, and into charities and such. Moreover, they must know how to let their hair down at home and be intimate, yet exude the correct type of public protocol with discretion, and be well dressed and rather private. Plus, they must suit her romantic notions. Moshe did these naturally.

A few moments pass as they plod toward their afternoon destination, then he interrupts with: "What? No chattering, no laughter?" In Hebrew singsong, he mocks, "What are you daydreaming about, Honey?"

"Al ma at cholemet behakits, Motek?"

[מותק, בהקיץ חולמת את מה על]

People often said how when they greeted others, they had the same kind of smiley-face, and, therefore, looked alike. Catching a glimpse in a store window, she now agreed. However, it was the sterner side of his appearance that she also liked.

With him, his own brand of occasional Oriental-Occidental orneriness was something she thought she could cope with, and actually enjoyed from time to time, as long as she could bring him out of it quickly, and he would not become weird or abusive like some men. She reflects upon that as it darts through her mind, today, knowing that the first time abuse would happen, she would be long gone. Life is too short to live like that, period. Was she up to gambling on him? It scared her a little.

She was good for him because she possessed that magical knack Italian and some Middle Eastern women have of playfully setting a guy off by teasing and jerking his worries around with poignant comments through bursts of laughter, then quickly soothing him, babying and teasing him, which allowed for a sudden simmer to make up quickly... And oh, yeah, he liked that too! Especially, her half-hearted fondling and pinches that went along with all of it.

No, her playful taunts are not the deriding insulting kinds that bitter women spew that are meant to hurt a man. Rather, her ways were simply a natural spontaneous response to life's vicissitudes that keep the ebbs and tides in motion.

Some women have it, most do not. She has it. She attributes it to her love of people and having been exposed to all sorts of them through her interests, studies and travels. That curiosity about life and the drive to learn everything, and how unlike other people who would get bored, she was content in her own world, as much a solitary homemaker as a fulfilled professional. Love of learning makes for

that, and at her age, she is winding down now, and contemplating what might be next on the horizon because she is to retire after this semester.

Moshe had not found that in Western women here or the reserved values he cares about and lives by, so with Grace, unexpected sparks are always igniting, and both are coming back to life after a long period of emotional doubt and routine. What he appreciates about her compared to those women who would throw themselves at such well-to-do men, she is not the type to degrade herself, and neither would he. Something of a glue is definitely between them, and both privately hope it wouldn't become a toxic epoxy if they were to grow closer!

Relationships can be rather suffocating, and marrying the wrong type of person invariably becomes a type of mummification soon enough; consequently, if people would only realize that when one or both wants out of it, the other should be gracious enough to let the other go. Force and manipulative threats are suicidal, sinful, and ridiculous. Why be miserable? Divorce occurs long before it is documented on paper, and if a couple had given their all, who should force them to stay like that? That can't be Adonai's best. Besides, few consult Him or obey when He tries to deter a relationship that should not begin in the first place, so naturally, if they marry, it is supposed to disintegrate! Otherwise, it may ruin one of them or both. Nevertheless, by remaining and suffocating, some yet-to-be-met third party would be still waiting in limbo for that special person with whom they are meant to be.

What is more important to Him, anyhow, the vows taken under duress, youthful lusts, or error, or the people involved and their entire earthly existence, purposes, destinies, and eternities?

This revelation, consequently, served Grace well, once she had shaken her former papist indoctrination and brainwashing. Getting it directly from Adonai made more sense than being strapped to an organized religion whose leaders make decisions for those they would never even meet whose circumstances might be unbearable. Let alone for the unfortunate offspring.

Actually, she has respect for sincere attendance at truly holy sanctuaries when He calls people to them. As for her respect towards Moshe's outwardly professing to be a 'type of secular Jew,' is because he is strong enough, and sensitive enough toward spiritual things not to want to be pushed around, coerced or insulted by some denomination, though he really does believe in HaShem and enjoys discussing such things with her. Unlike in Israel where he had enjoyed partaking in Orthodox services, he is uncomfortable and disappointed with synagogue life here in general because it is more a social club requiring paid seating, rather than being worship-focused, and such things turn him off, as he has stressed to her.

He being an academically minded man is what she also craves, always studying something like she, yet making time for culture: the opera, symphony, ballet, theater, and particularly that he is a musician in his own rite. She especially likes it how when she visits him, he allows her to cook for him and how he enjoys gabbing with her while they clean up the mess together. The kitchen drudgery really passes quickly like that. He is a real talker, and it suits her just fine. Then again, he says that about her.

She recognizes him as a caring man who helps others and fights for causes worth fighting for, and is not a braggart about them. He is the total package, and his form of Jewish rationalism with that slightly maudlin air, coupled nicely with her *optimistic-pessimism* whose worldview translates there is far more evil than good. They are two peas in a pod. Thus it seems like a perfect fit of emotionalism,

sentiments, old fashioned values, and off the wall wit to sooth the occasional verbal tiffs that are inevitable in life. Best of all, he is not a chauvinist.

After having retired from the IDF in Intelligence, he had gone into business for himself in Haifa and had made several fortunes through real estate and by owning a chain of small supermarkets, much of which he had contributed toward assisting Jews in immigrating to Israel. Many of whom, like Grace, had felt that undeniable pull of the Ruach HaKodesh to make aliyah. Such were the Ethiopian Jews who had literally walked hundreds of miles to await some miraculous means whereby Adonai saw to it they would be air lifted to the Holy Land. Thus Moshe had helped them and many of the Sephardim and others who desired to do the same.

To this day, he still feels compelled to rush assistance to any Jew anywhere in the world before evil people might commit genocide, Jew by Jew, or community by community, in addition to reaching out to poor hungry Jews of the former USSR because wherever Jews are, they are Mishpacha. This has been her way, too. It is not enough in a romantic relationship to be strongly physically and intellectually attracted to someone. Rather, to automatically share or be apt to share some of the same passions in life is crucial.

One of the first things that had drawn her to him was that he was a great conversationalist, which she attributed to his Semitic roots, so they were never lacking when they were together unlike some people are who are literally dying in the grips of boredom. In addition, he is a good listener.

Just then, from deeply within the 1928 vintage Beaumont Tower, its carillon ceased its sweet refrain as young scholars spewed from her favorite old building Berkey Hall, where she had taken many classes years ago in which she now teaches. Whenever he could get away from his firm, he would stop by her office and accompany her directly across the street for their short breaks at the Bagel Shoppe. Today was different in that they were to walk over to "Etoile Cove" ("Starlit Cove") a few blocks north, so that Moshe could get the final signatures from the proprietor Rosco and for the couple to wish him "Moseltov" towards its Grand Opening later this evening at which they would remain to be honored, and to assist at the reception. It would prove to be a big event for them, the most special social one yet.

It was concerning this establishment that Moshe had negotiated and tended to all the legal ramifications of the City concerning this small, rustic but elegant French subterranean restaurant that posed some thorny questions for the extremes of Michigan weather for public safety and insurance purposes. Through battle after battle, he would not give up until he had won State approval with a core of his firm's architectural engineers at his disposal, being that the design was underground with an innovative twist that he had encouraged, i.e., the canopy of stars with alfresco ambiance as preferred in Israel, whose intent was to draw high-end clientele.

Thus it was proving to be a potential major statewide attraction, since East Lansing was a conjoined sister city with the capital, Lansing, whose legislators, business and corporate moguls and associates had long awaited something of this caliber and ambiance, with legal 'exclusivity.' Meaning, its late evening dining of extremely pricy French country fare, black tie requirements, and reservations-only seating for such a tiny place naturally barred hordes of rowdy, barely-surviving-on-a-shoestring-budget students or the typical local co-workers out for a late night sip.

Rosko, therefore, had his own architect calculate and draft a highly protruding glass dome from ground level, whose apex, a somewhat expansive cap, would electronically open that would allow fresh air in, along with a full view of

celestial delights. This innovation would be far more gorgeous than a series of cluttered skylights on a traditionally closed structure, plus it would certainly please patrons who wished to dine romantically by moonlight under the stars year 'round. Hence the name, Etoile Cove.

Indisputably, the entire glass dome enclosure with partial stained glass effect was Grace's idea, as was its French themed décor, while it was Moshe's responsibility to translate it precisely to Rosco's architect concerning legalities, then to follow through with him and the contractors to completion. Her designs with special niches, and both slightly sunken and also elevated platform areas – all within this open underground floor plan, was irresistible to Rosco whose origins were French and Sephardic. Among the three of them, their common Mediterranean bond felt warm and inviting, and they have been very close ever since they met. It was not hard for a perceptive man like Rosco to sense some sparks flying off Moshe toward Grace from their first meeting, and he was eager to see where it might lead.

It was on that fateful night six months previously that Grace had first met Moshe when she attended one of his lectures on campus, which pertained to the new threats Israel and world Jewry were facing. When she had approached him after it was finished to discuss some concerns she had about Israel's neighbors, Moshe asked her to accompany him for a cup of coffee at Rosco's other restaurant because he would be waiting to go over some rough outlines about his future dining establishment. They had discovered on the walk over that they both verbally fantasized pretty much the same warm, idyllic alfresco ambiance as a possible architectural theme due to their symbiotic grumblings over the miserable slushy sidewalks and constantly cold, damp weather for months on end, and so, this was how Etoile Cove was birthed.

When she had initially heard how Rosco had purchased the three-acre lot on which one four-story building remained unscathed from a recent fire, but the other smaller one had to be completely gutted in that all that remained was the underground antiquated brick basement, the creative wheels in her mind began cranking. By the time she and Moshe had arrived at Rosco's, immediately after introducing her, Moshe could not allow a moment's delay in sharing her brilliant ideas, to which her joy could hardly contain itself through Rosco's inviting urging.

She pleaded, "If you would indulge me for a bit... *Please do not demolish the basement. Use it as is, fire scorched to provide a particularly aged quality, just refurbish it slightly... Make it work for you, Rosco!*" For the next couple of hours, they sat and discussed her superb ideas.

Rosco was completely enthralled with her concepts pertaining to the dome and French Medieval country interiors, and Moshe, with her. After some coffee and cheesecake there, the three of them agreed to meet the next day to see some rough sketches she would make for him about the exterior and interior, and the rest is history how this restaurant would come about.

Love can ignite any place, any time, and fate can bring ancestral identities into perspective through a chance meeting with someone that could change life forever. From attending that first lecture until now, she and Moshe have had no room for others. Indeed, the thrill of working together on Rosco's project these past few months had revealed more about her to him, and his own personal set of values to her, as well as their particular idiosyncrasies, than would have manifested through a typical dating scenario. Over the course of four scheduled meetings after these initial ones at which all three were supposed attend last winter, Rosco was absent, not able to forge through snowstorms with zero visibility, that the couple had gotten to know each other and started to fall in love.



They silently admired in each other that unspoken respect through which they had a covenant with their eyes, and their intentionally guarded stance against peering at the opposite sex, made all the difference in the world to them. One of the strongest virtues they share is that of fidelity, which they had not found in others, thus neither had ever found that one true love of their life with which to spend eternity. This brand of emptiness, through no fault of their own, left within them an inconsolable gnawing, one that would be inextinguishable had they settled for the wrong person.

Therefore, this entire unexpected endeavor with Etoile Cove has been a blessing from its onset in a myriad of ways. Rosco confirmed each step in the process, including commissioning local artists to design and install the band of delightfully fanciful French Art Nuevo etched, stain glass motifs that stand only knee-high, commencing at the base and running the circumference of the dome to add warmth and charm to the otherwise glass bubble. Moreover, with the art kept this low, it would still allow approaching onlookers to view both the breathtakingly lavish interiors and the heavens directly through the dome from all angles from quite a ways from the site. Grace worked closely with the artists on recommending the right themes of these images and had the final say over the selections, to later present to Rosco for final approval.

Likewise, she had also envisioned a complementary thin circular band around the dome at about 10 feet from ground level at which potted indoor ivies would be positioned, but would still be well below where the glass capitol would begin to converge as the dome. Specifically, continuous, slightly curved decorative planters in which the ivies would flourish had to be manufactured that would be both lightweight yet durable. Now, this task is completed. Beneath this ledge of ivies runs a band of matching stained glass trim in simple mosaic form that is hardly seven inches wide so not to detract from visibility of the arboreal and celestial marvels through the glass. This yields an attractive visual transition so that the entirety of the dome over this rather small enclosure would feel more a wonder, than a stark transparent one.



Her patent-pending invention of clear, thin embedded hoses run up the glass against its lead adhesions to irrigate them on a time-based system which are hardly visible unless one were seeking them. Her hope is to shepherd the vines to sprawl downward against the glass, rather than upward across the dome to complement the vines in the floral upholstery and occasional drapery festooned on the brick and stone walls near some darling functional niches that had to be intentionally built within the burned brick subterranean main areas. The key is to not allow them to grow too thickly, but randomly, about. Such were Grace's ideas that just tumbled from her genius for structural décor.

Journalists from leading architectural digests were privy to every aspect the previous night when Rosco had instructed what they should glean prior to returning this evening for the formal reception to better gauge the functional aspects, and responses from the patrons.

Thus far, the media had been enthusiastic, commenting about how onlookers outdoors would be privileged to viewing every facet, from seeing couples engaging in dinner, to loungers snuggling in their own clandestine worlds, to the large golden harp that is placed perfectly in the formal dining area whose backdrop is the sunken lounge area. Such inviting displays, replete with a fireplace near the baby grand and prospective bass would be irresistible. Hence, it is essential to have reservation-only seating to eliminate lines of gawkers.

Concerning the capitol whose apex Grace has termed ‘the cap,’ she designed it with four expansive semi-spheres that open independently or simultaneously, so that in the warmer months, when any or all of them were open a removable screen mesh just beneath would protect patrons from flying intruders. Then in autumn, intermittent slightly warm, silent sprays would free the occasional lazy leaves that might settle upon the closed cap. During winter, however, when the cap is sealed, its built-in defroster would suffice to melt the snow and ice, so that starlight and moonbeams would always enter. Where the trail of the melted water might collect over much of the dome, it is hoped that gorgeous sparkling, peculiar ice formations would flourish, complimented by frosty swirling diamond layers to add more of an ice palace effect.

With the spray option operable in any weather condition, Rosco is eager like a child to play with it to create his winter wonderland, and for once, he was eager for winter.

Nevertheless, for ample visibility up to the 10-foot rim where the ivies sit, forced heat would always keep the enclosure free of frost, day and night, and because heat rises, it would be exciting to note the variances of frost and icy patterns that were sure to grace the dome throughout the frigid months on their own. That is, except on the cap and, perhaps, directly near it. Gratefully, with modern technology, such glass now comes layered with special film to insulate from cold and to assist with heat and air conditioning that also prevents a great degree of fog from forming, as do chemical washes.



Originally, Rosco preferred tens of flickering candles, though they knew this was not feasible. What had been worked out, thanks to Grace’s romanticism, involved substituting champagne colored, pin-point lights here and there against the earthen and stony interior and in small lamps in the lounge area, rather than installing garish modern lighting that would subtract from natural celestial lighting. Again, all of these marvels were attributed to Grace’s ability to envision and describe them, let alone having two excellent, equally hopeless romantics on her side.

Upon Moshe’s and Grace’s arrival this afternoon, having secured proper signatures on the final documents, Moshe heads over to the baby grand piano to practice as promised, for he would be performing all evening, including singing some songs in French, and of course, English. Undoubtedly, this posh establishment favors Moshe’s rendition of a French classical piece he had memorized in his youth in Europe, by yielding perfect acoustics, which is a good omen for tonight. This would be Moshe’s only time to practice before the cocktail reception this evening, which would carry over through much of the dinner period, thus he hurriedly goes into a French aria.

Soon after, however, he realizes he has plenty of time to cover his entire selection of romantic music and offers Rosco’s favorite, Debussy’s impressionistic composition, “Clair de Lune,” which was written in 1890 under its original name as part of a suite but was later published in 1905.

With this beautiful composition completed, Rosco is able to relax significantly, and wanders to his office to decide whether he would like to include the lovely and timeless, “Un Homme et Une Femme,” by Francis Lai, 1966 (“A Man and a Woman”) or, Michel Legrand’s “I Will Wait for You” from film *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, 1964, or both.

These include the bulk of the French portion of Moshe’s repertoire, after which he continues with American love songs from earlier decades that he and Grace favor so.

A little while later, Rosco returns and interrupts, stating he is still undecided but advises relying upon playing the former ones until he makes up his mind.

Moshe regretfully informs him that he had misfiled another for consideration, "Les Feuille Mortes," by Joseph Kosma and Jacques Prevert, 1946. ("Autumn Leaves." It was Johnny Mercer wrote this English title and its lyrics in 1949).

The news does not fluster him, surprisingly. With so many other important things on his mind today, he flees to the kitchen to check on the menu, allowing some private time for Grace to cling onto Moshe's neck from behind, interrupting his playing until he gives in with some cute gestures and mumbles something in Hebrew as he squirms to her last tickles. She finalizes her session by kissing him his ear loudly, giggling, "You are playing exceptionally well today. How come?" Her giggles trail characteristically upward, though sound more shill here than expected given their bouncing off the glass interior.

He fakes slight disinterest and refuses to remove his hands from the keys even when she tugs twice, then thrice on his long ear lobe. He usually hates that particular little taunt, but it did not faze him today. He smirks with a crooked smile, and she acknowledges devotion with uplifted eyebrows, contented she had that moment to touch him again. He needed that too.

She yawns and stretches contentedly and heads toward the longer of two comfortable, tufted leather sofas on which she stretches out. She slips off her heels knowing they would prefer the thick Persian carpet, whose colors pick up the pinkish-beige and faint turquoise in the stone fireplace and marble flooring. Her selection of these, along with everything else, down to the fluffy romantic pink rose and white peony draperies over fussy Austrian lace curtains above niches, whose fabrics are repeated in the table linens, are exquisite. She adored every aspect of researching designs, and especially, the exhilarating pursuit of French period pieces.

From her utterly relaxed position the sofa, she was clearly a gratified woman who could now take pride in a *fait accompli*, and being a hopeless romantic, she loses herself in Moshe's playing and he could sense it...

He then glances over to her lying there adorably, and cannot resist sneaking in a stanza of "Turna a Sorriento," by Ernesto De Curtis, 1902 ("Come Back to Sorrento"). She knows she 'has been had' by this Italian aria in her honor and blows him a kiss, to which he responds in kind. She adds, "You play and sing superbly."

"Only for you, my love," is his response. A few moments pass, then he whispers, "I love you, Grace."

Rosco renters now and shoots them a proud nod of approval from the blazing fireplace that is to the right of the baby grand, that he had just ignited on its stony semi-circular wall. Across from it is where lovers could recline on the leather sofas with ottomans, gazing at the stars in this sunken area that is purposely visible from the formal dining area and front entrance, and indeed, throughout the entire open floor plan of this establishment. Being a small facility, no area is far from the dome's cap for maximum planetary enjoyment, which is directly overhead of the lounging area that feels more open that it actually is due to the arrangement of the furniture, as well.

Because the dome rises from ground level and sets upon its own secure circular base, more or less snugly enveloping though independent of the squared angles of the original basement, which is the restaurant proper, there remains submerged the

definite angular original walls, in addition to newly added curved walls for esthetic purposes.

Off to the far left of the baby grand is an ample hallway where the kitchen and Rosco's office and other rooms trail that are not visible from the main area. On that same route but not too far from the piano is a large grill at which patrons might desire to barbecue their own steaks or select accompaniments, whose skirt continues the matching stone theme. Afterwards, they could seat themselves by the fire near the piano where there are a few, small rustic French Medieval tables with stubby legs, replete with either benches or period chairs.

If thirsty, patrons could wander from there by following the contiguous northwestern wall at which a matching chunky dark bureau with an enormous Russian silver samovar is encircled by Parisian china, upon whose cups and saucers bright rose buds with twisted foliage and delicate yellow-green canaries beg for attention.

From there peering diagonally across the lounge in the vicinity of the main hallway that leads to the kitchen and Rosco's office, one could comprehend how appropriately placed the bulky loft appears and why it had to be constructed on the east side of the restaurant. Up a slight platform, though the loft appears to set on sturdy rustic stilts in keeping with the French Medieval theme, patrons might wander through a temperature controlled, floor-to-ceiling display area of wine racks holding specialty liquors and imports. There, they would sense light bursts of cool forced air flowing through its lattice as they select bundles of dried figs and other delights, dwarf rounds of French cheeses and ponder which breads to request: *baguettes*, *ficelle* -thinner baguettes, or *pain de campagne* (country bread). The last of which is, of course, the House Specialty.

Diners would then carry back lovely open, thickly woven dark wicker baskets full of such delicacies nuzzled within the same matching romantic floral and lace linens, though not before they gaze upon the romantic forested campus and dazzling cityscapes from this elevated view, steeling glances at dancing stars that have been quietly observing them, all along.

At the opposite end of the loft, the southern end, an elegantly carpeted, narrow burgundy walkway descends toward the formal dining area where only 20 petite tables with white lace tablecloths flow over the same floral skirted fabric, whose chairs are carved with French inlay motifs. Therefore, the loft lines the entire eastern side of the open formal dining area.

Naturally, French-speaking waiters were hired to add more charm. On the western side of this formal dining area is a brick wall with an antique spiral, rod iron staircase leading toward a mirrored violinist's niche housing room for only his chair and music stand, which allows him to descend to play amidst the diners, only to ascend there again. Above the niche are festooned draperies with the fancy Austrian curtains that create a faux indoor window effect showcasing the musician.

This entire formal dining room appears raised some 9 feet above the sunken lounge in front of it, and is accessible from the main entrance to its left up a richly carpeted inclined matching walkway bordering this western wall where two such staggered niches occur. It was Rosco's good fortune, indeed, that the original basement consisted of two stories underground, so that once patrons descend 22 slim fashionable steps outdoors to the entrance, they behold a breathtaking open view and are escorted to their reserved table by way of this western walkway.

Moreover, the focal point of the formal dining area is the beautifully positioned large, golden grand harp at which diners gaze where a gold railing is protecting it

from the sunken lounge area with the fireplace. From any point in the dining area, the lounge or elsewhere, this golden harp remains visible and audible.

It is in this spot that Grace will be playing the harp occasionally, but for the most part, Rosco would be hiring a regular harpist, along with a violinist and pianist. Moshe had also promised to return to play the piano when the mood would strike him.

By Christmas, the European crafted cello and bass would arrive, thus accommodations have already been made. The larger, bottom niche, which is about 15 feet kitty-corner from the violinist's niche, will house the cello, over which the same drapery and a full Austrian curtain now grace, so that when the latter is completely drawn, the cello will be obscured.

The cello would be placed near the harp when chamber musicians are in residence, or when Grace would agree to play either one for an evening, though she might alternate between the harp and flute, or cello and flute per occasion. The bass, of course, would reside beside the baby grand piano, permanently.

Relaxing on the sofa, Grace takes solace in the original Impressionist paintings reminiscent of Monet, Renoir, Pissarro, and Sisley that she had commissioned by local artists for their first competition in a series of paintings that are going to be presented on easels at Etoile Cove, and she is delighted that Rosco wants to continue this tradition. She had been an Art Director for a local art guild, and favored promoting prominent Michigan artists. Furthermore, both visual artists and performing artists would benefit from being scheduled here, and that was the plan, to provide upscale exposure for them.

With Rosco's end of the preparations for this evening now complete, he darts past the piano to the front entrance where his car is parked to run one final errand, compliments Moshe on his exceptional selection of love songs and singing, and absentmindedly tosses him the keys to the place as he whizzes by. Fortunately, Moshe catches them before they could scratch the piano, then shakes his head in disbelief. Shouting at just the right level over the music as he dashes by, "Ok, then, you two take care of the rest till I return. The caterers and florist will be here about 6:15 or so, and the receptions should begin around 6:30-ish, give or take."

With Rosco gone now, Grace prances over to Moshe who is playing a rhythm faster than it should go to match their playful mood. When she places her arms around his neck and kisses his ear, when he whispers "I love you, Grace," again, he can at least turn far enough so his lips meet hers without missing a beat.

She suddenly withdraws a little, and he becomes aware of it as she confides, "Sometimes, I wonder what we are doing... Is what we have, enough?"

"It's enough... And more." His emotions rise, evident in the crescendo he plays, then the music lulls after several measures.

She tightens her locked arms around his broad shoulders and presses into him sighing, "Our differences and all... You're Israeli, and I am... Well..."

He leaves his piano bench concerned and squats by where she is standing and motions for her to sit on it. "Grace, would I have gone this far with you had I not thought we were compatible?"

She sighs hoping, but mutters like a little girl, "I dunno."

"I know, and I tell you, after all these years of bachelorhood, I know that you are meant for me." His demeanor remains confident as usual.

She fights the tears, but some escape, but she catches them with the back of her hand on her velvety cheek.

He chokes up a little but continues, “Neither one of us had found that one true love of our life to spend eternity with until now.”

She snuffles and a little moan comes out as she flings her arms around his neck and they kiss tenderly, comforting each other. He leans forward and presses his forehead against hers reassuringly, and performs some baby kisses on the tip of her nose until she can smile again, despite some more tears. Then he has to pull out his handkerchief and wipe her eyes, gently propping her chin up so he can peer deeply into her two dark stormy seas.

He discerns what is troubling her. “Don’t you know that I realize who your messiah is, the one who is called Yeshua in Hebrew? And that it doesn’t matter to me that you are not an Israeli girl, or an Orthodox one?”

Her smudged eyes widen with interest, and her heart responds loudly, but she can only answer softly, “I guess so...”

He continues with, “Besides, at our ages there’s not the concern over children and families interfering.”

She still being worried adds, “But the Jewish religious issues, are they a problem to you? I mean, I don’t know everything yet, and you may mock me!”

“Listen Grace, I would never mock you. So, what if you set the Passover table wrongly or get a Hebrew prayer or two out of sync? I can help you.”

She sighs in relief, but tears up again acknowledging, “But I still feel insecure after all these years as a closet Jew, fearing being ostracized by some Ashkenazi’s, that I am only now, once again, trying to emerge.”

His voice deepens with conviction in that deeply masculine way she adores when he becomes protective: “I will take care of them and anyone else who makes it hard on you. I promise!”

Grace’s face lights up and she begins to smile again.

He *kosher-ham’s it up a bit*, “After all, only today, I ‘gave it to’ that freshman, didn’t I?” He times it just so, then jumps in with, “...And, his ‘*ol’ man works for Abraham and Associates!*”’

He tosses back his head and laughs it off, careful not to lose his footing from his squatting position.

“You sure did!” Her giggles have arrived, and she boldly swipes his handkerchief from him, and dabs her face and neck, right after which he leans in to kiss those areas lightly, tickling them to cheer her up.

He sees, however, that he must establish more for her benefit, and becomes serious again.

“You never have to concern yourself with me, Grace, about proving how close you are to G-d. I have witnessed that many times in you, from all the Sabbaths you keep, to my standing in awe in some parking lot when someone traipses after you having sensed the anointing on your life in the store, to ask for prayer right there.”

Her heart quickens as she blurts out, cutting him off: “Yes, then you really do see that on my life.” Her smile widens, revealing her relief.

He replies dumbstruck, "Are you kidding, Grace? I have come to see that every time you... How do you call it? What Spirit-filled, Charismatic types call it?" He pauses, snapping his fingers six times in a row to jar his memory.

"Giving 'A Word'," she says, "...Prophesying. But, remember, I am also in the Office of the Prophet. A prophetess."

He nods in thanks. "Yes, prophesying on someone... I have not only witnessed this in you but have relied upon it many times, and had I not heeded what you had prophesied, I would have lost a lot. So, thanks for that, and thanks to G-d, because it saved me a lot of mayhem, too!"

"Oh," she gasps, having felt so defeated previously. "Why didn't you tell me this before? It would have made it so much easier on me?"

"Because I knew you had to still go through some of the process of identifying yourself as a Jew." His voice still held undeniable confidence, as did his appearance.

She pipes almost cheerfully, "So, you are OK with all of this?"

"Definitely. Because not since I was in Israel have I ever sensed that warm presence of Adonai on my skin, those little electrical impulses, and that other sensation like being immersed in warm oil... Not until I was with you. It floods over me just like when I was in my synagogue in Haifa, or when I was visiting the holy sites. You know, Israel is a very mysterious place."

Grace's eyes gush once more, as she softly pounds his shoulder with her free hand, and twists the handkerchief around for a dry spot with the other. He can no longer resist, feeling the Divine presence right then, and holds her and rocks her back and forth in the subdued silence. If he is feeling it, she had to be feeling it too, and since they both were sensing it, G-d was condoning their union all the more.

He tears up badly but hopes he can contain himself, as he gulps down the lump in his throat. Upon their release, his deportment grows more serious. He cups her chin again in the crux where his index finger meets his thumb, hoping her tears would subside as he stresses, "Look, Grace, I can't say I know this messiah of yours, nor can I say I ever will accept him. But one thing is certain, in every generation someone confesses he is *The Messiah*, but that falls through. But sooner than later, with the way things are going on in the world today, he will be coming on the scene soon."

Moshe makes a lot of sense to her, and her posture reveals relaxation at last.

She adds, "It is critical to me that you respect who and what I am as I take this Jewish journey, and that I cannot and will not..." Her voice softens, as do her eyes, "...forfeit such beliefs or the spiritual Giftings."

He stops her right there. "And, you mustn't. What's more Jewish anyway than a Jewish prophetess?" He smiles broadly, though sincerely.

This catches her off guard, and she utters not a peep.

"For me, I look at it this way, Motek, in that you prophesy about current and future events in the world, and personal details about people, it can't be from evil. And, if G-d is not threatened or insulted to come to you to give those Words to you, who am I to refuse you?"

She presses her hand against her fluttering heart and draws in a deep breath. "Thank you, My Love. Moshe, just so you know... You sound pretty spiritual, yourself, but I am not sure I can ever go back into regular attendance at any kind

of sanctuary, after all that denominational indoctrination over the years... Just so you know, in case you were to ever find a nice synagogue to attend here..."

His response uplifts her. "Not to worry. I KNOW you are keeping the Laws required by G-d, not the ones that man has made, and I tell you the truth, you have for some 17 years kept them better than most Jews I know here. In fact, you are more Jewish than they are, and you don't even know it!"

She corrects him with a smirky smile and a bubbly, fake Hebrew accent: "For some 18 years!"

"Ok, for some 18 years, and I am so proud of you. We wouldn't be together if you hadn't, Motek," he admits gravely.

Unconsciously, he pulls his fingers heavily through his white layered hair, jerking his neck to the side to relieve the tension of the moment, which speaks louder than words.

She is overwhelmed by that disclosure and cannot focus on the rest of what he might have said, but thinks that for such a time as this, her Jewish side, which had been rather private all these years, except for the encounters with other crypto Jews, had culminated in securing their relationship. She is utterly dumbstruck coming to terms with this and remains silent.

He, also, has time to reflect and knows he has to reveal more to her, at least for the sake of demonstrating he has some additional understanding about her past religious associations that had been Catholic, Orthodox, and Spirit-filled Inter- and Non-Denominational.

Moshe starts off with, "You will get a kick out of this, Grace. I couldn't divulge it a few months ago concerning a former client who has since dropped his case against a local pastor, but I actually had to attend one of those Full-Gospel, Charismatic services to get the facts straight for litigation, because up till then, I had never been to such a place nor wanted to. After all, I was raised NOT to."

She sat there amazed, laughing very hard. "You are determined to wipe me out today, aren't you?" Somehow, the thought of him there is hilarious.

He blushes, which he normally does not do, and chuckles, and this time, when he jerks it is in partial disbelief that he had gone there at all.

"I just thought you should know that I am now somewhat more familiar with your ends of those spectrums." He clears his throat feigning arrogance for a job well done to make her giggle more.

He continues: "Back in Israel when I was a young soldier I had to constantly keep my eye on various kinds of Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant leaders who were constantly fighting over Passion Week rights at their holy sites. This really turned me off, because if theirs is 'a religion of peace and love,' why were they always fighting?" He regrets telling her that last part, then says, "And, besides, on more than one occasion, I had to tend to other things inside their churches."

She chuckles and adds, "Tell me more. Did you feel compromised, or guilty about going in them, or what?"

"Motek, I don't know what to think half the time about all the other religions, but I have got to tell you that the joy in this local Full Gospel place, with all the jumping around and dancing and spiritual overtures, they were quite like the jubilation of the Hassidics, and I like that."

She is most amazed at his response and is delighted because she likes that about the Hassidics too, and other things.

“What else do you think about that visit?” she inquires.

He cautions, “I might not agree with their philosophies, doctrines and concept of G-d, but with the joy of the Lord and those electrifying tingles, He truly inhabits the praises of people. So, for me, I come as I am, and you, Grace, you come as you are, and I guess, we’re just stuck with each other...”

He gets up, a bit stiff-legged, and kisses her reassuringly on the cheek, and she responds in kind.

“Oh, Moshe, I love you so much. May there never be any kind of barriers between us.”

He strokes her hair, agreeing.

All of a sudden, she becomes startled from looking at the clock. It was nearing 5:00 PM, and the Reception is to begin at 6:30, promptly.

“It is getting late and we had better change now. I even need to shower yet and fuss with my hair. Then, all we’ll have to do is wait for the florists and caterers to see things are laid out how Rosco wants them.”

Moshe agrees, “Yes, good idea. That will give me a little break, so I can practice a few more pieces later.”

“Where did you put your tux?” She looks around on her way to the rear but sees nothing.

He responds, “I put it in the dressing room with a large mirror this morning before going to the firm. You can use that room if you need to after you dress. You haven’t seen it since they have finished decorating, but it turned out very nicely. Future clients will appreciate that for their own receptions.”

Making it as far as the kitchen, sniffing the aromas of French cuisine, she shouts to Moshe, “I’m hungry, and you must be starving after all that playing, so would you like a quick sandwich or something?”

“Definitely, but please hurry.” Moshe’s nerves flood back momentarily, and then subside as he decides that his previous plans to surprise her might be out of his hands now.

She returns almost instantly with a stuffed boiled egg that the chef had worked on this morning, a wedge of cheese, a tattered croissant, and a glass of milk for him.

“Ummm... I like it, thanks.” He yells that to her as she scurries toward Rosco’s office with her croissant ready to devour it there.

Moshe, on the other hand, does not rush, but stands at the piano and fingers miscellaneous rolls on the ivories, then ends up rubbing his knuckles that exude a touch of arthritis. He flexes them and cracks them, then looks anxiously outdoors for the last time to see if Finkle and Sons Jewelers have finally arrived. He gulps a mouthful of milk, and then pops the stuffed egg in his mouth. To his surprise, although he had not spotted their van pulling up, there was a faint knock on the door, as he had demanded of them, which he had been nervously awaiting all afternoon, desiring Grace would be out of the way, so he could pull off this feat gracefully.

On the couple’s entire stroll over to the restaurant, he had been rehearsing various scenarios in his mind to make it a surprise, while trying to disguise his anger at

the jewelers under the auspicious of anti-Semitic rebuttals. He was not sure how she had taken all that fuss, but was certain she would understand later.

Of all the days, he was correct to be fuming how the jeweler would need more time to re-work the clasp to her new diamond and ruby necklace, which, together with another piece was supposed to be ready for him to pick up this morning.

Since he had made time to go way over to the other side of Lansing to pick them up as scheduled, he was very rattled because had they delivered it in her presence, he would have to give her some cock and bull about them delivering a battery for his expensive watch to best time his performance. Conversely, if they had come too late or not at all, then his plans would be thwarted for tonight. Now that they had arrived, he could get on with his plans in this idyllic setting in their elegant garb, the perfect place and time.

Gratefully, Grace does not hear the driver knocking as she scurries into Rosco's office where it houses a full bathroom in which her cream colored and pearl encrusted dress hangs under its heavy plastic lining. She was relieved to find her small piece of luggage right where she had stored it, in which she had packed her accessories that she had manage to take over a few evenings ago in light of this soiree.

This particular semi-formal dress was one of two Moshe had bought her some weeks ago when there were strolling through a mall and he spotted them and insisted she try them on. He was fond of shopping, but she abhorred it, usually. However, with him on her arm, she tended to enjoy such outings and forget how much she usually loathed it. He thinks it strangely wonderful, finally, a women with good taste whom actually hates to shop. "The perfect woman!" he would say repeatedly every time she moaned about going shopping, except for the fun of it with him.

The other gown is a dark luminous teal blue, a very elegant cocktail dress with matching shoes. The bodice has a low cut "V" neckline whose one side pulls toward left where it is fastened with a large faux pas sapphire with 'diamonds' around it just above the hip. It is a mid-calf affair with a long slit to mid-thigh on the same side.

Moshe's favorite, however, is the creamy one, that is an above-the-knee straight gown that is fully encrusted with swirling, tiny hand-sewn pearls over its entirety, interlaced with shimmering transparent baguettes and regular 'diamonds' throughout. This shoulderless gown's bodice is the epitome of an inverted heart that would leave just the right amount of cleavage to warrant the necklace he could hardly wait to place around her neck. He believes this new diamond and ruby pendent set in detailed platinum would be stunning with her dark eyes and black hair. Her complexion is an ivory olive, though she hardly tans in summer, but has a warm sallow glow during the other seasons, and with a hint of her slight tan remaining, this ensemble should prove spectacular.

She, being far enough into Rosco's office by now, Moshe obtains the package from the currier and politely but quickly shoves him a tip without caring about its dimension. He opens the package and rids its wrapping, determining to place the necklace in one pocket of his tux, and the other piece in the other, and flees to his dressing room to do so.

Twenty minutes later, he manages to return fully coiffed and adorned in his tux long before she finishes and escorts the caterers and florists out, who had a set of Rosco's keys, and were already late for their next appointment elsewhere. He clips off a small rose and lays it on the baby grand for Grace and begins playing the song he has composed for her entitled "Betrothal."

He is able to unwind now, and plays it as she enters, and when she sits quietly on the ample padded piano bench near him facing opposite the piano with her long legs crossed and outstretched, he reaches for the rose and hands it to her, and she melts and yearns for him to continue playing that song. He is so distracted by her loveliness that he is not certain whether he had mixed up some bars but made as though he had not. She closes her eyes, trying to forget her upset concerning how she did not find her own necklace in her luggage but chose not to say anything that might upset him.

She loses herself in the music, and when he begins singing, she leans against his shoulder sweetly, and soon, the power of his deep voice allows her to forget her missing jewelry. All that matters is that she is with him, and desires to be so forever.

When his voice crescendos, it takes her breath away as the lyrics resound in her soul:

“Since the day we met, I’ve not been able to forget you. What hold you have had upon me, my life, my cause, my aim. That I shall not die but soar forever if you say you’ll be mine...”

Since the day we met, I have thought of nothing else, no one. What a hold you have had upon me, my life, my cause, my aim. That I shall not linger one moment if you say you won’t be mine...”

His fingers leave the piano keys, though he continues singing the lyrics softly, and places the diamond ruby necklace around her neck with an acknowledgment why he had removed hers previously from her luggage on purpose.

Her eyes fight the tears that can no longer be constrained and some flow over her warm glowing cheeks, which she pads off with the back of her hand as he returns to playing and singing it again, awaiting the precise moment after which she contains herself.

But, now, he, too, is breaking up and struggles to repeat the entire song because at his age, he never thought he would marry, let alone someone as young as Grace.

She reposes once more against his shoulder, careful not to close her eyes too tightly not to smear her eyeliner or to dislodge the ‘diamond’ hairpin that holds the sides and top of her hair up, though the rest has nicely fallen over her partially bare back, nearly reaching the piano bench.

Passionately, with sheer determination it appears he be able to complete his resplendent composition “Betrothal,” after all:

“Since the day we met, I’ve not been able to forget you. What hold you have had upon me, my life, my cause, my aim. That I shall not die but soar forever if you say you’ll be mine...”

Since the day we met, I have thought of nothing else, no one. What a hold you have had upon me, my life, my cause, my aim. That I shall not linger one moment if you say you won’t be mine...”

Since the day we met, I knew this moment would define us. What a hold you have had upon my, my life, my cause, my aim. That I should ask you to be my wife forever, so tell me now..."

Her stillness does not reveal that she has been listening. Moments frozen in utter silence, neither wishing to intrude upon the other's blissful inner sanctum, the cliché is beholding, '*time really does stands still*'. Thus the lovers have reached and inhabit that place in which the moments transform into precious surrealistic ions of cherished tranquility...

Gently, he gently takes the lead: Her being startles not, sensing him slipping the engagement ring on her finger, and as she opens her eyes she finds him leaning closer to kiss her tenderly, and afterwards, he beckons softly,

"Grace, I want you to be my Ruth."

To his words, she replies lovingly,

"And you, Boaz, my Kinsman Redeemer."

No other agreement need be uttered, as their embrace signifies the affirmation he desired, nor can his love be mistaken by the enormous pear-shaped diamond around which there are hosts of baguettes and seven other diamonds. The dainty arabesque gracing the band shimmers in the stream that the tiny champagne lights leave that have only recently flashed on for the dinner hour.

Moshe glances up at the dome and finds a few smiling stars studding the sky, and draws her eyes to them with assurance, whispering, "If the weather is rainy on our wedding day and we cannot have our ceremony outside, how fortunate for us to erect the chuppah under this dome... But, unlike what Ruth said to Naomi, my vow will proclaim, 'Your people, **are** my people, and your G-d, **our** G-d.'"

They kiss again in complete agreement promising the other that their vows shall also include, "I will make a covenant with my eyes."

No words can reveal what is in their hearts at this moment.

Then, he carefully reaches inside his jacket and hands her a large folded document. "I have prepared a ketubah for you, and I hope you will find the terms appealing."

Her eyes fall upon the highly ornate, colorful borders, and she is pleased by its beauty, then she discovers a sum and replies nearly breathlessly, "I only hope that I would be worthy of it." She is stunned and cannot utter more.

"You are!" is his reply. "I only hope that we will never part, Grace."

"We won't. I promise that. I can't bear the thought of losing you..."

That old familiar melancholia drapes itself over him, and this time, she feels it too at the thought that one day something or someone might separate them. Heaviness ensues, and despite the romantically charming surroundings and their declared love, neither can break its grasp.

"I can't bear it either, truly," he whispers, swallowing mercilessly, fighting emotions.

She embraces him, running her arm across his back, stroking him as he collects himself. He despairs, silently recalling all the losses in his life through the Holocaust: his mother and sisters, being uprooted repeatedly, though taking life by the horns, overworking to compensate, if anything, and yes, remaining a bachelor with good reason until now. Suddenly, an even darker thought envelopes him,

betrays and attempts to force him to question whether he would be good enough for her after having lived such a life.

He confronts that thought boldly by peering deeply into her eyes, stating, "There is still time if you want to change your mind, Grace..."

"Never!" That is her final answer, and the conviction written on her face edifies him.

Within a few seconds, they hear Rosco fiddling with the lock at the back entrance, and being startled, she skirts back to his office to stuff the ketubah into her luggage, while Moshe, still sickened at the thought of ever possibly losing her improvises a hauntingly beautiful melody on the keys, "I'm a Solitary Man," which he dolefully sings:

"I am a solitary man

What could I offer a wife?

I am a solitary man

It's no wonder she refused

Being a solitary man, what will I do in life, never knowing the joys like other men?

I exist in solitude

I am a solitary man, and as I grow older, I ponder my ways and remind myself...

How she had refused

Now I will live it out, mourning what we used to have

I am a solitary man

That is what I ought to be

But, for one small moment with her, I would do anything, but I am a solitary man and would have lost her love, again"

Rosco's contenance droops in bewilderment spotting Grace dashing into his office looking terrible, and a dark feeling overtakes him. It is compounded upon hearing Moshe singing this somber song. Thinking the worst, he sympathetically approaches his dear friend at the piano and stands there idly with his hand on Moshe's shoulder as he finishes the tune.

Rosco almost whimpers, "How come Grace looks so sad? What happened?"

"Oh," Moshe says, "we were discussing breaking up."

Rosco cries out, "Oh-h-h... I am so sorry... Why did she refuse your proposal?"

Moshe responds happily, as the facts begin to set in again, "She didn't!" His legendary smile lightens the room and competes with the tiny lights that are fighting dusk.

"Mozeltov!" Rosco delights in the good news.

Soon after, Grace walks into the room, refreshed and glowing, and Rosco compliments her on her beauty, kisses her ring hand, as French gentlemen do, and then they embrace as he wishes her the same. Offering Etoile Cove for their wedding reception, how can she refuse?

She takes some moments to thank him for everything, for encouraging her and Moshe's relationship to blossom at Etoile Cove, and of course, for the fabulous opportunity it has produced, when just then, the sun set, leaving coral streaks blazoned across the sapphire sky. Instantly, the final series of tiny champagne lights come on, which will cause the restaurant to remain very subdued and mellow against the darkness of night.

A few distant early evening stars wink from their celestial balcony and draw nearer for a closer peek through the open cap, although the young moon is far too bashful, yet.

Grace makes her way to Moshe's side, but hasn't the opportunity to sit beside him this time, because Rosco gestures for him to get up and dance with her, as he takes over the keys. His having been a Parisian nightclub owner, he is no stranger to performing.

The couple eagerly takes the floor in a clear space beside the piano amidst the Mediaeval tables and chairs, as Rosco delights them with a bouncy version of playing and singing one of Moshe's earlier published compositions, "A Canopy of Stars":

"What shall be our fate? Only heaven knows

Lovers who embrace at star gate, enter through a canopy of stars...

We took a chance on romance looking at the stars

We danced the path of moonbeams but did not make it very far

Lovers who embrace at star gate, enter through a canopy of stars...

Stars twinkle at romance and sing sweetly when two lovers kiss

They wager among themselves, "Will this be hit or miss?"

(During the instrumental refrain here, Moshe dips Grace and spins her several times! Then the entire song is repeated till the end.)*

Lovers who embrace at star gate, enter through a canopy of stars...

We took a chance on romance looking at the stars

We danced the path of moonbeams but did not make it very far

Because we embraced at star gate and entered through a canopy of stars..."

He dips her again as the song ends, and they embrace, and then, he twirls her more and more, to which a crowd applauds wildly who had been watching adoringly from outdoors since they had taken the floor; however, they could not resist the 'heavenly' atmosphere for long and entered quietly to enjoy the performance!

Rosco is delighted with how things are evolving and announces them as a newly engaged couple, ushering in another chorus of "Mosletov!" With that established, he pays honor to them as his attorney Moshe Stein and, of course, the creator-designer of Etoile Cove, Grace Jordan.

He continues, “ Well, as you can see, this is proving to be a very romantic place, and if anyone has come here tonight single, they might leave engaged! The canopy of stars can do that to you!”

Moshe edges discretely toward the baby grand as they revel. Staying within the celestial theme to commemorate Etoile Cove’s Grand Opening as promised, he is about to perform the English version of the dreamy 1962 bossa nova “Corcovado” by Antonio Carlos Jobim, who also wrote its Portuguese lyrics. However, for this night its English title and lyrics by Gene Lees are apropos: “Quiet Nights of Quiet Stars.”

The guests embrace the lovely music and romantic ambiance, and Rosco, their comments during refreshments before escorting them on a little tour of the restaurant.

Although the lovers cannot bear being apart for long, not even cross the room, Grace stations herself at the entrance to welcome newcomers and to lead them to where Rosco has begun the tour. A quarter of an hour passes, and then a few more wander in, but no one else. At last, the lounge becomes completely theirs once again...

Moshe ceases playing, silently pondering his betrothed, taking in every movement of hers, the way she sways slightly when she walks, how her silky hair cascades from her shoulder when she tosses her head to one side, and the little gestures that he had never focused on before at such a distance. Although she does not know it, he watches her admiring her engagement ring and necklace that she traces with her fingertips in her reflection in a glass panel and is awestruck how enraptured she seems by their symbolism.

He cherishes what he is witnessing and briefly considers playing a mesmerizing tune: “Green Dolphin Street” by Bronislaw Kaper and Ned Washington (1947), but prefers to not break the silence. She suddenly catches him staring at her, and the lovers’ thoughts lead them into their own Starlit Cove as the heavens shift to utter darkness on this windless night.

Grace finds herself approaching him, but nearly there she feels compelled to pause beneath the cap to marvel at the wonders that have been bestowed upon them this day.

Afterwards, she wanders towards Her Beloved at the piano, and for a few moments in utter isolation, they feel the heavens bless them through the opening above.

For her, she has come full circle, and is profoundly grateful for being able to make aliyah through Moshe.

The End / La Fin

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EPILOGUE:

I hope you have enjoyed the preceding innovative, unorthodox partial autobiographical sketch, whose intent is to reveal my inner workings through the

process of identifying myself emerging as a modern-day crypto Jew, rather than presenting a dry chronology with a litany of facts. Visitors can click on “Other Services” to piece together those.

This romantic short story is fictional, as are Moshe, Rosco, the names of firms, stores and Etoile Cove / Starlit Cove. Any similarities of names or creations are purely coincidental. A man like Moshe would be a rarity, indeed, but it would be nice to have someone like him. I am just romantic enough in spirit to believe he really is ‘out there.’

What are factual in this story include my values, sentiments, attitudes, personal interests, inventions, designs of Etoile Cove, and yes, of course, all the little characteristics which *that* Grace shares with me, for I am she, not to mention what I like about the persona of Moshe, my religiosity, backgrounds and travels... Moreover, all the genealogical data, familial tidbits, my beloved alma mater and much of career information are true as well, though set to romantic fiction and have been adapted very little. Yet, there is so much more to my background and nature...

Actually, I am amazed as well, because I had originally intended to write this as a purely academic article with the same title, “Jewish Identity of the Modern-day Crypto Jews!” replete with numerous facts and figures, because I am also a technical writer. Honestly, I am pretty rusty at both creative and technical forms, so this has been very pleasant, exhilarating, yet demanding over the past few months, because like the Grace in the story, I have slowed down considerably.

Despite having intended this to be an academic piece, this particular short story kept rolling around in my head in response to a gentleman telephone caller this past May, 2011, with whom I wish to make amends for having inadvertently misrepresented myself pertaining to my Gentile-Jewish identities and religious background. This is my attempt to ‘come clean.’ Specifically, at that time, I was attempting to emerge from my Jewish closet and was still sorting out a lot of the past religious linguistic terminologies and their conflicting principles, needing to re-define myself within a Jewish context.

Consequently, I had inadequately described and refuted issues not being able to express myself correctly, fearing being clobbered by him, which was another error on my part, as he is not the clobbering type, but is very kind. Thus, deeper into my mouth, my foot sank each time I tried!!!

I simply assumed that there would be time later during this telephone call for this topic to resurface so I could better articulate my beliefs more thoroughly once I had settled down. However, the plethora of other more interesting topics we discussed never allowed this opportunity.

Although I had made amends with G-d shortly thereafter, I still feel I must do so with this gentleman.

Consequently, this short story, along with the revision of my entire web site with art images of both religious identities, discussions of Sicilian-Italian crypto Jews and links demonstrate my sincere response to him through which I am attempting to explain my errors and fears through the nuances of emerging as a closet Jew.

Although I may never get the opportunity to make such amends with him directly, should he ever find my web site on his own, I actually owe him not only my apologies, but also my gratitude.

Like that melody by Joe Raposo in 1970, “It’s Not Easy Being Green,” it was not easy emerging as a poorly informed crypto Jew on my own, but thanks to him and

this situation on that call, I did emerge on my web site and in this most sincere epilogue.

Furthermore, if I could imagine he is actually reading this, I would like to reiterate that I really meant what I said on that call in May, "Keep in touch, keep in touch." I am still hoping and waiting...

Shalom,

A grateful, (albeit still skittish) former closet Jew

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AUTHOR'S CONTRACTUAL ASSIGNMENTS:

Should you like to hire me as a creative writer of such short stories of varying length, novelettes or plays pertaining to your own genealogical histories, giving me creative license to weave fiction about your ancestors, so that you may sense the nuances of their times and cultures, please do contact me. A legally binding contract will be drawn up to protect both interests.

Commissions are based upon the agreed project, rather than by word count because of the breadth of historical research that would be involved, time and effort, etc. Partial non-refundable payment must be paid up front prior to my commencing, i.e., 50% - 75%, then the other portion in increments paid at each interval concerning its progression through completion. The entire sum must be paid in full upon completion, or the work will not be released to the client, of course.