

Robbie Pfeufer Kahn

Family Album/ 1943

The blades in the mixing bowl whirred. My mother was baking a two layered cake with green icing. It would look just like the picture on the Betty Crocker box, the frosting fluted by strokes of a knife. She baked to make the time pass. A slant of light sliced the room. The floor and walls met in the corner but offered no shelter. A propeller plane droned overhead. My father's fixing pilot's teeth. Our country was at war.

"Daddy home?" I asked my mother's turned back. The flared hem of her flowered dress with white buttons down the front swayed as she rubbed wax paper smeared with butter around the cake pan. Her back still to me she brushed a strand of auburn hair up over the barrette that held it in place.

Annoyance in her voice she said "Daddy will be home soon."

I went out on the screened-in porch looking out on a suburban neighborhood of Fort Worth, Texas. The warm breeze felt friendly. I climbed on my painted wood rocker. It's a brown and white heifer with a merry sideways glance that seemed to say "Not only did I jump over the moon, I ran away with the dish and the spoon."

I was clean. I had been quiet. Maybe she wouldn't fill the slant of light with angry words today dividing me from my father. The front door slammed. He's home. I clambered off the rocker and ran to him my face open and eager. "Daddy." He crouched down on his coltish legs, gathered me in his arms. Lifted me high. His pained prominent eyes shone as if wet. His full lips planted a kiss on mine. He pressed me against his scratchy army shirt. I didn't mind. I burrowed into a fold of cloth wanting to stay there forever. Then I looked back at my mother. Turned now in my direction her smooth face was impassive, her sensuous lips set one against the other as she regarded us with an absent stare. What I didn't see was the Yiddish-speaking girl in a homemade dress who

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stood watching. The girl saw a short father, home from peddling dry goods. He crouched down on sturdy bowed legs and lifted her in his muscular arms up to his broad Slavic face. Laughing with delight she ran her hands over his shining bald crown.

I scanned my mother's face but could not read it. It seemed though there would be no angry words today. Later cake with green icing. My heart unclenched. For the moment I was safe.