

VIVA, ROSE!

VIVA, ROSE!

SUSAN KRAWITZ



Holiday House / New York

Copyright © 2017 by Susan Krawitz

All Rights Reserved

HOLIDAY HOUSE is registered in the U.S. Patent
and Trademark Office.

Printed and bound in March 2017 at Maple Press, York, PA, USA.

Photo of Pancho Villa & staff, Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division,
LC-DIG-ggbain-29882

Front page of *The San Antonio Light* with “Around the Plaza” column by Jeff Davis,
March 9, 1932 © San Antonio Express News/Zuma. Image courtesy of Ancestry.com.

www.holidayhouse.com

First Edition

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Krawitz, Susan, author.

Title: Viva, Rose! / by Susan Krawitz.

Description: First edition. | New York : Holiday House, [2017] | Summary: In El Paso,
Texas, in 1915, thirteen-year-old Rose Solomon seeks her missing
brother's return and inadvertently ends up running with Pancho Villa and
his revolutionary army.

Identifiers: LCCN 2016034882 | ISBN 9780823437566 (hardcover)

Subjects: LCSH: Villa, Pancho, 1878-1923—Juvenile fiction. | CYAC: Villa,
Pancho, 1878-1923—Fiction. | Revolutionaries—Fiction. |

Prejudices—Fiction. | Jews—United States—Fiction. | El Paso
(Tex.)—History—20th century—Fiction.

Classification: LCC PZ7.1.K736 V6 2017 | DDC [Fic]—dc23 LC record available at
<https://lccn.loc.gov/2016034882>



*This book is dedicated to my daughter
Hannah Munson and her cousin Rose Ajemian,
my family's current crop of feisty,
fabulous redheads.—S.K.*





Chapter 1

It's a good thing I saw that newspaper before Papa and Momma did.

It lay on the counter of Pickens Mercantile for all of El Paso to see, with a photograph blazed across its front under the words *THE SOUTHWESTERN SCOURGE OF 1915!*

The picture showed a group of men staring squint-eyed at the camera, nearly every one of them decorated with scraggly whiskers and a wide Mexican hat. Below it was written "The notorious gang of Mexican outlaw Pancho Villa, known also as La Cucaracha."

They were a gang of roughnecks, that much was plain, and right in their middle stood the roughest of them all—a round-jawed man with a brushy moustache and a gaze so hard his eyes looked boiled. The fellow to his left didn't seem quite as fierce, though he had a face full of whiskers, some kind of belts crisscrossed on his chest, and he clutched a gun as big as the branch of a tree. His hair covered his forehead, but I didn't need to see a wide

birthmark to know to the bottom of my soul I was looking at the face of my brother Abraham.

I'm not prone to fits like my mother, but I began to shiver as if I'd swallowed ice. My face went burning hot, and when I raised my hands to my forehead I must have banged against the molasses jar Mr. Pickens keeps next to the newspapers.

The lid fell off and it toppled right over, and though the jar was only half full, enough molasses oozed out to cover nearly every *bandido* on the page in sticky goo.

Mr. Pickens was terribly sharp with me.

"Stand away, girl!" he cried, and tried to push the stuff off the paper with a cloth. He threw the rag to the floor, then turned to my father and said, "Do you see what that child of yours has done?"

My mother started to pull at the cuffs of her dress, like she does when she is embarrassed. "If you'd been, for once, acting like a lady..." she hissed, but Papa just raised an eyebrow and smiled at me with the half of his mouth Mr. Pickens couldn't see.

"Rose!" he said, sounding nearly serious. "You've ruined the news!" Then he added in Yiddish (but sternly, so it sounded like real scolding), "Don't worry about it, my *shayna*. It's only paper, not the czar's jeweled eggs."

Momma sighed loudly and positioned a hand on her forehead like an actress in the moving pictures. Papa turned back to Mr. Pickens and said in English, "A simple mistake."

Mr. Pickens gathered the coins Papa pushed across the counter, and shook his head in my direction. The money wasn't enough to take the fire from his tongue.

“It was not an ordinary newspaper she destroyed—it was my last copy with a picture of that thieving La Cucaracha! I was fixing to post it right there,” he said, and he aimed his pointing finger at the posters of rough-faced outlaws on the wall behind him. “But now any one of those Mexican villains can saunter in and ask for hair cream and horehound candy, and I won’t know I’m living my last day until I feel the steel of his knife at my throat!”

Mr. Pickens apparently had a dramatic streak to rival Momma’s.

“I’m very sorry, sir,” I said. I bobbed my head at him in a way he might think was a curtsy, then turned and fled to the back of the store. I stopped by a bolt of calico. *Thump, thump, thump*. The walls echoed with the loud beats of my heart.

My brother with that gun, shoulder to shoulder with a “notorious outlaw” called La Cucaracha? I had heard the youngest children at school singing a song about a *cucaracha*, a word that sounded too pretty to attach to anyone in that photograph, including Abraham.

One of my hair ribbons fluttered to the floor. My hands were shaking so hard I could barely twine my unruly ginger strands back into a braid.

Abe’s secrets. That’s what was making me burn and freeze, and working at rattling me to pieces. Until Abe made me keep them, I’d only in my life withheld one truth from my parents, about the time Mr. Pickens’s mother pressed two sweets into my hand and charged me for just one.

Abe’s secrets were a far bigger freight, and they’d been

weighting my sleep by night and crowding my thoughts by day. He had lied, lied, lied to our parents—told them one thing, and gone to do another. He was off to visit our brother Eli, who was working in the eastern city of Brooklyn, where Papa's relations lived. That's what he'd told us four months before. But then I found a letter Eli had sent him. "*Your secret is safe with me,*" Eli wrote. "*I will support the ruse.*" Of course, I told Abe I'd read it. Who wouldn't? And he confessed to me the real truth. Abe was not heading east at all, but farther west. He was setting off to herd cattle and ride horses across the open range.

But the photograph I saw in the newspaper revealed that the heavy load I'd been carrying for my brother was not the real truth at all.

Abraham hadn't left us to become a cowboy. He'd gone off to be a low-life bandit in a cowboy hat.

Chapter 2

Another secret my brother cursed me with was that he had a sweetheart, the dainty Miss Polly Brunckhorst, who was my teacher and also the so-called love of his life. And that's who I thought of as I stood in the back of Pickens's store. Abe had revealed to her his cowboy plans, and the fact that I knew of them too. Soon after he left, Miss Polly found a way to send him letters, and so I'd written a few and gotten one back—a two-page dispatch about life on the open range. I treasured that letter. How sad it now seemed that it had just been a badly scrawled lie.

Poor Miss Polly. She deserved to know the truth about where Abe had really gone. She would be shocked and horrified at the news. Furious too, most likely.

I could barely wait to tell her.

But leaving the store without asking permission would surely bring Momma's reproach my way. She and Papa didn't seem to be in much of a hurry to go. In fact, they were

still standing by the counter, listening patiently as Mr. Pickens let loose a scour of hot words.

He was working up an agitation as fierce as those politicians who had parked themselves in front of the bank last autumn, and talked election gibberish until the sun set. "They say they're fighting because they're tired of gettin' bossed around by the rich folk—well, I call that plain foolishness," Mr. Pickens was saying. "It's just an excuse for thievin' and killin' and bloody lawlessness."

Mr. Pickens seemed to possess a deep well of critical opinion, but he became especially unkind when he discussed people from Mexico. They numbered many in our town because the country lay just south of us, separated from El Paso only by a river called the Rio Grande. My friends Elsa and Gabriela had been born in that place, and Mr. Pickens's rantings always made me wonder if he would talk ill of me, as well, if he knew they were my companions.

Mr. Pickens aimed his pointing finger toward the ceiling and shook it. "They'll get old Black Jack Pershing's army after them soon enough. He'll clean their Mexican clocks and throw whatever's left of them in jail to rot." I couldn't imagine what the Mexican folks' clocks had to do with this, but he spoke the words with mean-spirited triumph.

My father said something in reply, but not loud enough for me to hear. The more angry Papa gets, the quieter his words come. "Speak up, man!" Mr. Pickens said crossly. "Hard enough to understand your kind of people as it is."

My father tried again, and this time his voice came

clearly. “If you have never known bondage,” he said, “then you cannot know how great a gift is freedom.”

Mr. Pickens’s response was a snort.

“Them uprising Mexicans don’t got the brains or sense to know the difference between freedom and slavery,” he said. “Their landowners been taking care of ’em all these years and helping ’em run things proper. You’d think they’d show a half ounce of grateful.”

I heard the jingle of coins, and my father’s voice came once more, so low now it was almost a growl. “Yes,” he said. “In Russia, that is what the government told our people as well.”

I heard the creak of the door’s hinges. “Come, Rose!” Papa called, and I followed him into the glaring relief of sunshine.

Momma was clutching the tin of tooth powder we had come in to buy. “I tell you again, Sol,” she said, “do not speak of the old country. We were treated badly there, and that is why we left. Here, all is different. We can do as we please, shop where we want, walk about as we wish. But remember when we first came? Pickens wouldn’t take his eyes from us in his store.”

My father looked at her a moment, then smiled and pulled her arm through his. “Bess,” he said. “It’s time to go home.”

My hands still had some tremble as I followed Momma and Papa down the boardwalk. To distract them, I picked up some tiny stones and tossed them one by one into the dust of the road. “Rose!” my mother said, and I had to stop.

We passed Rabbi Zeilonka, whose face looked solemn beneath his dark, wide-brimmed hat. Momma made a curtsy at him, and he put one finger along his nose and bowed to Papa. Rabbi Zeilonka is a dignified person of powerful words, but in size he is far from a giant. So am I, but to my surprise, when I passed him our shoulders were nearly level. Momma would soon be fussing again about needing to lower my hems.

Piano music was floating through the air as we approached the Brunckhorst Hotel. Tinkly and light as a birdcall, it was undoubtedly springing from the hands of Miss Polly. Her aunt Lucille is an enthusiastic player, but the effect she has on the piano is more barnyard poultry than sparrow of song.

I slowed my feet as we approached the hotel doors. Though I am a person of strictest honesty, Abe's dishonesties prevented me from telling Momma and Papa the true reason I had to stop there.

Luckily, I noticed one of my bootlaces had come undone, and I bent to fidget it. My parents walked on a way before noticing I wasn't behind them. Finally Papa turned and raised his hand, beckoning.

"I have a question for Miss Polly about the history assignment she gave on Friday," I told him. Now, this was strictly true. I had been gazing out the schoolhouse window at a man riding by on a horse when she gave the weekend reading pages—never mind that the assignment was always fifteen pages, and the previous night's was pages 53 to 68.

Momma's brow puckered like she was working up a lecture. "I'll be home in time to help with supper," I said. Papa nodded, and grabbed Momma's arm before she could spout a single word about *The Dangers of Young Ladies of My Age Parading About Unescorted*.

Chapter 3

I pushed open the twin oaken doors of the Brunckhorst Hotel and peered into the cool dimness.

“Rose?” a voice called. “You’d better come on in out of the heat.”

Miss Polly wore the kind of starched white shirtwaists that looked prim and stuffy on everyone else, but made her look as bright as the moon in a winter sky. In the dusty piano corner in the lobby of the Brunckhorst Hotel, she fairly glowed.

She looked up from the piano keys and smiled. “I was hoping someone would show up to join in on ‘Close to My Heart,’” she said, and made the piano trill something ripply and light.

As I sat next to her on the bench and watched her fingers fly, I felt a pinch of sadness that I was bringing bad tidings when she was in a mood to make such happy music. I let her play on a whole minute more than I could stand.

“Miss Polly,” I said finally, “I have news.”

“News?” Miss Polly said. Her playing slowed and then got quicker. “Well,” she said, dropping her voice and glancing toward the other side of the lobby where some men in vests were ruining the air with cigars, “it must be important.”

I paused a moment for the biggest effect, and then, in my lowest whisper, said, “I saw him.”

Miss Polly’s hands played stumbling music, like they’d forgotten what they were doing on the keys. “Him?” she said.

“His picture,” I said. “In the newspaper.”

The piano gave an ugly jangle, which caused some of the smoking men to peer at us through their smelly cloud. Miss Polly sat back on the bench, her face gone pale as her blouse.

And then I realized what my words had made her think.

“Oh no, not that!” I said. “Not in the funeral pages!”

I grabbed the sheet music and fanned it at her face, and then I just straight-out did it—gave her the whole terrible truth.

“Yes, Miss Polly,” I said when I’d finished. “I’m sorry to say that I believe my brother lied to us. I’m sorry as well that I must tell you he appears to have become a low-living, lawless thief.”

Miss Polly sat very still for a long, long moment, but then she lifted her hands and set them back on the keys. When she began to move them again, the music she made was a march. She plunked at the keyboard powerfully, shaking the piano with the force of the song. And then she started to hum.

I had to marvel a little at how calmly she was taking the news.

“How did he look?” she said at last, her eyes on a spot on the wallpaper.

“He appeared hairy,” I replied. “Ragged as an old broom. He’s gained a moustache and doesn’t appear to have enjoyed much soap and water.”

What I really wanted to tell her was that Abe’s appearance was downright dreadful. But truth or not, I knew nobody wanted to hear their beloved looked like every last mule on the mule train had run over him, and then the wagon too.

“I’m sure he’s not eating well,” I said. Miss Polly responded with a pair of high, prancing chords.

“Oh, that’s right,” she said. “No cheese with his supper meat, or even milk. No risen bread or cake in early spring-time, and no pig meat ever.” She said it singsong, like she was repeating a rhyme for the first graders. Her voice was as smooth as the pleats on her shirt, and it did strike me again as odd that my great revelation hadn’t stolen much of her peace.

“You’re taking this well,” I told her.

She played on awhile before saying, “Did Tough-as-the-Dickens Pickens recognize him too?”

“No,” I said, without telling her the sticky-sweet reason why.

She smiled and tucked her head down toward the keys. “That brother of yours,” she said. “I told him—” and she stopped abruptly, like people do when their mouth is about to let loose something they’ve decided it shouldn’t.

Her hands had stopped too, but she made them work

again. “Try not to worry about Abraham, Rose,” she said, turning to smile at me. “He’ll be home eventually, safe and sound.”

She sounded so certain. So calm.

So knowing.

And that’s exactly what told me what her mouth would not.

She already knew about La Cucaracha.

She *knew*.

I used to carry around a painted wooden doll that had once been my mother’s. It was hollow and cut in half, and if you twisted its top from its bottom, a smaller doll in its belly was revealed. In the smaller doll’s belly was a doll even smaller, and so on and so on, until the last, which was just a tiny painted nub. It seemed to me now that my brother was also ordered in this way. Inside of Abe was a nested stack of secrets, but at their very center lay a lumpen, steaming lie.

Aunt Lucille came fluttering into the parlor. She was fresh from the kitchen, most likely, because her hands and apron were floury. Dora, her little brown dog, trailed after her. When Dora saw me, she wiped her wet nose on my stocking and made her tail wag fast. I’m not as fond of dogs as most dogs would wish, and this just seems to make them try harder to win me over.

“Rose!” Aunt Lucille said, beaming at me. “Did Polly spill the news?”

“Not yet,” Miss Polly said.

“Well, I will, then,” she replied, her smile spreading even wider. “We have made a plan to have ourselves an

amusement next Saturday afternoon,” she said, drawing her fingers through the curls dangling from the sides of her hair and leaving them streaked with flour. She squeezed her mouth tight like it was about to burst, and then her words pushed out in a breathy rush. “We shall perform for our guests selections from *The Mikado*, which is Mr. Gilbert and Mr. Sullivan’s very latest musical, straight from London, England!”

“Now, Aunt Lucille,” Miss Polly said, “that isn’t strictly true.”

“Well,” Aunt Lucille said as she leaned toward the mirror glass next to the piano, “it may not be new to the world, but it is new to us.” She didn’t seem to notice the flour.

“We have the loveliest role for you, Rose,” she continued, “a character of the name Pitti-Sing.”

Miss Polly nodded. “It’s the perfect part for your range,” she said, “and it will be nice to share your talent with our guests.” She bent over and picked up Dora, who stared at me from her shoulder with damp, pleading eyes.

I saw a newsreel once that featured a woman singing on a fancy stage in front of a roomful of people. She closed her eyes, like her singing came from a place she could only reach without using them. When she finished, the crowd applauded wildly and threw flowers at her feet. At that moment, every bit of me wished I was her. I wished it even though I full well knew it would never, could not ever, ever possibly come to pass.

“I can’t,” I said to Miss Polly. “I’m sorry.”

Aunt Lucille turned away from the glass. “But we’ve

thought it all through,” she said. “We will commence at four o’clock. It will be on Saturday, so there won’t be church, and your mother will have no objections about schoolwork missed. You’ll be home well before dark.”

My father liked to joke about impossible things. “That will happen when pigs fly,” he’d say, or “When a man walks on the moon.” And even though I knew there was a greater likelihood of Rabbi Zeilonka riding a bleating sheep through the streets of El Paso than of my father agreeing to let me sing in front of a crowd of idle hotel guests, my heart made a little skip.

“Saturday,” I said, “is our day for resting. And even if it wasn’t, my father would tell me no.”

“But...really, dear,” Aunt Lucille said, casting an anxious glance at Miss Polly. “Your father didn’t seem to have a problem allowing you to sing—which you did so prettily—at last year’s end-of-school picnic. A lovely voice for singing is not a treasure all can claim, and surely there can be no harm in sharing it.”

There was a reason Papa didn’t mind my singing at the picnic, and it was because Miss Polly had simply turned to me after we’d eaten our sandwiches and asked me to. But how could I possibly explain my father’s strict ways to Aunt Lucille? I looked down at the carpet and used my boot toe to trace its pattern of lush roses and tumbling buds.

“This will be a matter to ponder,” Miss Polly said, and put a hand on her aunt’s sleeve. “Anyway, you can practice with us now, Rose. Just for a minute or two.”

“Well...,” I said, glancing up to the pretty painted hall clock. It was ticking almost supper time. “Just for a minute.”

Chapter 4

The songs from *The Mikado* hummed in my head all the way home. The melodies made us press our voices down like springs, and then release them to sail up and up, higher than the flight of any soaring bird.

My mother's voice sought me as the front door clicked shut. "Rose! You are very late!" She came hastening toward me through the long hall, holding out a white apron like the one she was wearing.

"It is not only yourself you need to think about," she said, setting the apron on my middle and tying it tight. "Especially on such a night when we share our food!"

Papa hadn't mentioned guests, which meant guests had not been expected.

But that was not unusual. Our house was sometimes as busy as the Brunckhorst Hotel. Visitors arrived from lands across the ocean, from places named Vilna, Minsk, and Riga. They dressed oddly, and they smelled of the herbs they carried to keep off illness, of close quarters and worse.

They were gratefully polite to us, but with each other they were often given to shouting in their odd tongues.

My parents didn't seem to notice any of this. When the guests came, Papa brought out bottles of sweet, dark wine and talked with them late into the night. And as they sat together laughing and trading stories, my parents would glance at me and one would be sure to say, *Poor Rosala, only three years of age when we left Russia. She knows nothing but America*, as if this was my greatest loss. Eli had been ten and Abraham was eight, but it was only Abraham who would speak to me of things he remembered from our life there—the way Papa used to set me on the back of the big horse he used for plowing the field, the mean neighbor dog that once nipped hard at my hand, and the jumble of grandparents and cousins who lived all around us. He told me also of the freezing cold night when soldiers came to force Papa to serve once again in the czar's army, and the terrible things that followed when he told them he would not go.

Many of the guests who came to our house in El Paso had stories like that as well. Some stayed with us just long enough to find their own lodgings, but others lingered on and on and on. They remained long after I'd grown weary of sleeping on the stiff parlor sofa, of sharing and stretching every bite of food, of speaking nothing but the throaty, rough tongue of Yiddish, the only language I could use with them because very few knew English yet.

My mother is a woman whose temperament tends toward impatient, but she's entirely different when Papa

brings home strangers. “Your father’s heart is the size of the sun,” she’ll say as we peel buckets of potatoes or chop more cabbage to plump up the soup. I have even seen her wipe tears from her eyes as she said this, and without even a single slice of onion in sight.

The one thing I liked about hosting was when visitors brought daughters near to my age. Unlike most girls I knew in El Paso, they would speak with me of things beyond the styles of hair and clothing. I could take them to the dry creek bed to hunt for pretty stones. I could even show them my doll, a possession my mother scorned as childish the moment I turned the age of twelve.

“Are there children?” I asked as I took up the paring knife and settled in front of the carrots.

Momma flicked a potato eye into a bucket. “It is just one single man of twenty years.” And then she raised her head and gave me her sweetest smile, the kind that made her cheeks rise high so her eyes closed nearly to slits. It was not a sight I’d expected to see, considering I’d made her angry with my lateness.

“We don’t get so many of them, Rosie,” she said. “Men so young and so unmarried. Why, he’s merely seven years older than you are. You’re a bit young to be thinking of these things, but not by much—your father is my age plus eight years. And I was, as you know, just fifteen when we wed.”

She’d started talking this way last summer, which was also the time she’d started to fuss at me about my plaits and my boots. *A lady’s hair is flowing. A lady’s feet wear soft, pretty shoes.* She’d been nagging at me day and night. But

I'd gotten quite skillful at handling her when she was in the way of giving me a good pester. I took her words and made them into soft, pretty summer clouds sailing up over my head and into the endless acres of the sky. Sheep flocks, sky ships, wisps of cotton. They became sunset clouds this night, fluffy white, rippled with streaks of pink.

It was three days before the start of the holiday of Pass-over, and Momma decided this would be the night when we started our extra cooking. There were the jars of honey-sticky *haroses* to make and horseradish to grate, but most important, we had to start on the matzoh, the flat bread we'd eat for all eight days of the holiday. Matzoh baking wasn't a hard task. No time was spent waiting for it to rise—the dough is just patted flat and put into the oven to cook till it has gone crisp and hard.

It was certainly an easier chore than preparing the carrots. I had a deep scrape on one finger where I'd removed a piece of my own peel.

“Are you finished yet, Rosala?” Momma said with her finest honeyed voice. “It is time to serve our guest his tea.”



The young man had a dark red beard so thin it looked like it could have been dirt from his travels, and pale skin as soft as the palm of a baby's hand. The Texas sun would soon fix that—the strip of nose his hat didn't shade had already begun to turn the color of fire. His name was Shmuley, and he'd gotten off a ship three days before at the port of Galveston. He was dressed like all the newcomers were, in the heavily loomed black clothing of the old country. But at his

neck was an odd flash of color: a bright blue-figured kerchief twisted into a low, lumpy knot.

He was from eastern Poland, he told us, where Momma lived as a child, and her voice rose in excitement as they spoke of places she remembered.

Shmuley was a good eater—the skinny ones always were. He was a good talker too, even through all his chewing and crunching. Fortunately, he also had a fair bit of English, though with his accent, it was sometimes hard to tell. “Such a fine town, this El Paso Texas,” he said as he forked up three more blintzes. “I heard on the boat of the glorious synagogues, the pious rabbi. It is true there is even a kosher butcher?” He gulped down his mouthful and took a huge slurp of tea.

Momma looked proud. “So true is this,” she said, “that you’re in his house!”

She refilled his cup and handed me the empty teapot to refill. “My husband, Sol, is also,” she said, “the cantor in the synagogue.”

“Does he sing at his work, then?” Shmuley said as he wiped at his face with a napkin.

“He sings at all he does. The man’s voice is a gift.”

“Ah, *naches* for the meat,” Shmuley said, “to hear the prayers sung as it is sliced!”

“Proud meat!” Momma giggled. “Such a sense of humor!” She covered her smile with one hand and waved me toward the kitchen with the other.

“There is something you may not have heard of our town,” she said just before the kitchen door swung shut

behind me. “We also have some very charming girls near to marrying age.”

It was wise of my mother to wait until I was in the kitchen to speak these words. If she’d said them in front of me, I would have spit out my tea.

Chapter 5

Rabbi Zeilonka has said the reason we eat hard matzoh on Passover is that it was the only food the Hebrew people could take as they ran from that persecuting Egyptian pharaoh thousands of years ago, the one who used them as slaves. They suffered for their freedom, and to remember that suffering, on Passover we eat matzoh instead of bread. No cake, no cookies, no *challah*, no pastry. Just matzoh, only matzoh. Eight days we eat it, which is a whole, entire week and a nibble of the next one. After the third matzoh day, I'm ready to eat anything else. The shavings of pencils, or the bark off trees.

But if eating matzoh had some magical quality that could set me free from the persecutions of my mother, I would gladly chew it every day for rest of my life.

It took a long moment for Shmuley to reply to Momma's remark. "Your daughter seems delightful," he said at last. "But she cannot be more than the age of ten."

Momma made a huffing sound. “Why, she’s thirteen last month. And already, such a wonderful cook! Her *kreplach* are light and fluffy, and the flavor of her brisket is unequaled.”

“Thirteen,” Shmuley said thoughtfully. And then he said the strangest thing. “Does she perhaps know of riding a horse?”

I took as long as I could with the tea, but eventually I had to come out of the kitchen. At the sight of me, Momma quit talking. Shmuley put down his cracker. And then he smiled, displaying a large empty window between his two most prominent teeth.

“Rosala,” Momma said, offering her cup for refilling, “no more fussing in the kitchen. Come and sit. There’s room there on the davenport,” and she pointed to the spot on the sofa next to Shmuley.

I refilled his cup too, and sat down, pressing as close as I could to the arm of the sofa.

“And so, Mr. Schnitzler, why did you choose to emigrate to Texas instead of the Eastern states?” my mother asked. Her voice had suddenly gone low and proper.

“Ahhhh,” he said, and his bony hand went up to his kerchief. “The Vild Vest!” Like most of the newcomers, Shmuley’s W’s were more like V’s.

“I show you,” he said, and dug in his coat pocket and pulled out a little book with worn, shaggy edges. There was a pair of galloping horses on the cover, ridden by two grim-looking young cowboys.

“I purchase in Hamburg,” he said, “when there was delaying for the papers of emigration.” His face flushed an even deeper red, and his eyes glistened. “And reading it poked at me, here”—he thumped a fist to his chest—“like an arrow from an Indian bow. And I thought, what great country is this America, where the women carry guns!”

It was a very odd statement, and what he did next was odder still. He caressed the cover of the book like it was a dog or a pet bird. Small wonder it was near to falling apart.

“And so,” he continued, “I am here!” And with that, he laid the book down, pulled his blue kerchief over his nose, and stuck his hands in his pockets. And then he yanked them out, aiming his forefingers at Momma. “Bang bang!” he said, and he pulled the kerchief down and grinned at me again. I could just about see right down the back of his throat through that toothy little divide.

Momma seated me next to Shmuley at dinner. He was the only person I’d seen besides Abraham to eat nearly an entire roasted chicken. He kept lifting up his fork and waving it toward my mother, like a salute. My mother just waved her fork back, tines pointed at me, though the only part of the food preparation I’d had any hand in was the carrots. My father asked him some questions about the ship voyage, but mostly he just watched Shmuley eat.

After Papa finished his soup, he wiped his mouth on his napkin and turned to me.

“So, Rose,” he said. “How was your visit at the hotel?”

His question took me by surprise, and as I worked up an answer, I could feel it all over again—the sweet, thrilling

music, and the songs, light as bubbles of soap. I should have pinched my lips shut with my fingers, because these feelings seemed like they were about to spill right out of my mouth. And then they did.

“Papa,” I said. My voice had a small tremble. “There’s to be an amusement there next Saturday. It’s a performance of an operetta called *The Mikado*, and Miss Polly and her Aunt Lucille say I’m just the perfect person to sing the part of—”

Papa held up his hand, slicing my sentence as cleanly as his big, gleaming butcher knives cut through a joint.

“Rose,” he said. And then he just shook his head slowly. No, no, no.

“But Papa,” I said. “It’s just for a little while. We eat cold food on Saturdays, and I’ll be home in plenty of time to help set out supper.”

Momma put down her water glass and gave Papa a narrow-eyed glare. It was one of her darkest, most forceful looks.

“A promise to help in the kitchen,” Papa said, “was made also today—a promise that was not, I think, well kept.”

Momma nodded smugly, then gave a little start as though remembering she’d all but told Shmuley I’d cooked dinner single-handed. Luckily for her, the food seemed to be stuffing his ears as well as his mouth. He looked up briefly, but just to gesture at the carrots. Momma nodded at me, and I put a spoonful on his heaped-up plate. He took a bite and smiled.

Momma smiled back.

“My Rose peeled every one of them herself!” she said.



It took a while for Shmuley's eating to finally stop, and when it did, Momma and I left him and Papa in the parlor and returned to the kitchen to resume the cooking of the Pass-over foods. Momma assigned me the making of the *haroses*, and though I generally find chopping nuts and apples tedious, on this night I was glad for the distance it would give me from Bang Bang Blue Kerchief.

But it didn't keep me from hearing about him.

"Of course he's too old for you now," Momma said as she patted dough into a circle. "But in three years he'll be just right. I admit, fifteen was young to marry, but sixteen will be perfect, and if you wait until nineteen, no one will want you. It's a wonderful match, Rose. He's very scholarly, and he has the boot-making trade."

I just kept cutting the apple bits without saying a word. "People always have need for new boots, don't they?" she persisted. Still I didn't answer.

My silence didn't suit her. By the time I was ready to mix the apples with honey, Momma looked fit to explode. She snatched the bowl from my hands, picked up the big spoon, and roiled the apples and nuts like they were laundry in a washtub.

"Rose Solomon," she said, huffing with her efforts, "I was blessed with two sons, not three. You can put boots on your feet, but it will not make you a boy. You can keep your hair in braids, but braids will not keep you a child. You will soon be a woman, and making a good match will be

the most important thing you'll ever do. And the sooner you understand that, the better!"

It was harder this time, but I did it. Her words grew into clouds with high, round tops and flat, swift undersides. Glistening white, they were, with just the least purple hint of storm.

But Momma wasn't finished. "Tomorrow," she said, setting the bowl on the table with a thump, "you will comb out your hair and you will gather it at the back of your neck in a ribbon, like every other young lady your age has been doing for a year. You will wear the calfskin shoes you got for your birthday, and you will come straight home from school and work on stitchery!"

A pinch-footed, ribbon-bound prison. That's what Momma was plotting for my future. I tried, I really tried to conjure the clouds again, and I managed, but they were black and boiling with thunder. And before I could stop it, out came a blast of lightning.

At the very top of my voice I shouted, "WHY CAN'T YOU JUST LEAVE ME ALONE?"