

It would be wonderful if you and Stephanie visited on your trip.”

I clutched the thick white envelope in my fingers. My golden ticket, it provided access to my father’s family. Would they welcome me? Maybe my aunt was trying to make up for not coming to our rescue all those years ago, for not dragging my father to my door. For not insisting he invite us back to his house. This house.

“Thank you, Aunt Bluma. Thank you. I will. We will.” I wanted to hold her hand, keep her close. Hear more stories; ask more questions.

Her husband, Sam, an aged Clark Gable look-alike, approached. “Bluma, it’s been a long day. We should go.” He turned and smiled at me. My Uncle Sam. I reached out and hugged him, not wanting to let go. But it was time for me to leave too. Maybe no one else there would talk to me.

“Thank you so very much.” I leaned over and kissed Bluma’s cheek. The words seemed inadequate for the gift she’d given me. “I’m going to go now, too. And I definitely will contact him,” waving the white envelope. “Take care. Bye.” Would I see her again?

I walked through the living room toward the open front door, careful not to jostle the lingering guests. No one said a word. Pearl was nowhere in sight. Reaching the hallway, I placed the wedding invitation in my purse and closed the door behind me.

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A month later Stephanie and I played on a beach in Tel Aviv, tossing balls, dashing into waves, building castles. At twilight we sat on the sand and enjoyed Pavarotti live in concert. We did all of this with family. My family. The Winders.

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Bluma, I later learned, is Yiddish for “flower.”

Renee C. Winter’s essays have been published in *Exposition Review*, *Qu*, *phren-Z*, and *Coachella Magazine*, as well as in *Tales of our Lives: Reflection Pond*.

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