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And They in Their Humanity

Answer Me: Part 1

Faculty Research Working Paper Series

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Harvard Kennedy School

June 2014
RWP14-027

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And They in Their Humanity Answer Me: Part 1

Arthur Isak Applbaum

10 December 2013

Abstract

Can political philosophy be made interesting and accessible to teenage readers? The author tries to respect the intelligence of young adults in this first installment of a novel of ideas. Ella Seifenblasen, a spirited fifteen-year old cellist, is given a summer assignment by her bookish father: write letters to the great 16th century essayist, Michel de Montaigne. Then Ella's Palestinian friend disappears en route to a music festival on the Maine coast, and her Iranian roommate is hunted, escaping only through Ella's ingenuity. Suspecting government intrigue, Ella steals an explosive intelligence report from her father (who is more than he appears to be) and hides it in her cello. Montaigne writes back, and Ella thinks she is going mad. She isn't. Montaigne helps Ella navigate her own divided loyalties, while Ella helps Montaigne mediate the end of one of the French Wars of Religion and thwart the Spanish Armada. The story alternates between a tiny Maine island, Montaigne's fabled library, the steam tunnels under Harvard Yard, and a final confrontation at Camp David. We meet along the way Henri of Navarre, heir presumptive to the French crown, Maryam, the flirtatious daughter of a prominent Palestinian peace activist, Niall, a charming young spy of mysterious origins, Neda, a devout and elegant Iranian pianist, Frederick, a brave nonagenarian, Herrick Eaton's Eldest, a laconic young lobsterman, Francis Wallsingham, Queen Elizabeth's spymaster, and the President of the United States.

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When evening has come, I return to my house and enter my study; and at the door I take off the day's clothing, covered with mud and dust, and put on my regal and courtly garments; and reclothed properly, I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them with affection, I feed on that food which is mine alone and for which I was born, where I am not ashamed to speak with them and to ask them the reason for their actions; and they in their humanity answer me; and for four hours of time I do not feel boredom, I forget every trouble, I do not dread poverty, I am not frightened by death; entirely I give myself over to them.

Niccolò Machiavelli to Francesco Vettori
Florence, 10 December 1513

*The hedgehog
Shares its secret with no one.*

Paul Muldoon, "Hedgehog"
2001

{1}

Guyenne
23 October 1587

The route south from the killing field of Coutras fought the terrain. The River Dronne, where the horsemen started, and the Dordogne, below their destination, flowed west, separated by rise after rise of hilly forest, pasture, then vineyard. The road, at times no better than a dirt track, meandered deep into the vinelands, following the boundaries of ancient landholdings when it wasn't seeking a lazy way around the hills. The distance was not great—under ten leagues flying on victory's wings—but the travelers, not wanting to be noticed, proceeded

modestly. They avoided the villages along the way and kept close to woods' edge where they could. They left the road entirely for the final furlongs, leading their grateful horses on foot under the yellowing elms. Through the trees, the chateau came into view. It stood atop a grassy scarp that rose from the surrounding vineyards. The autumn sun, low and gold, lit up the grape leaves in green blaze.

Philippe protested Henri's plan to leave their horses with the guard and approach on foot, just the two. Even the soldiers that accompanied them from Coutras were too few. But Henri waved his hand dismissively.

"Our safety is in obscurity, my dear Philippe. Our men are watching from the forest; Michel, from the house. Finesse, Philippe—not force."

"But your dignity, my Lord."

"*Belly of Saint Gris!*" Had ears been listening, Henri's famously thunderous laugh would have betrayed them. "You worry about my back, Philippe. Walk behind me and loosen your knife. I'll worry about my dignity."

Then in one graceful arc, Henri scooped up a clod of moist forest earth and splattered it in Philippe's face. "There, now you look more like a son of the soil, not a girlish bookman," chuckled Henri as he cleaned his dirt-caked hand on his own beard. "Paris is worth a mess, *non?*"

Henri unbuckled his telling scabbard and tossed it to the captain of the guard, covered his leather doublet with a shawl of burlap, and slipped out onto the rutted shoulder with a confident stride. Philippe whispered urgent instructions to the captain before scrambling to keep up. His simple black coat didn't need camouflage. The road skirted right to take the gentler climb to the top of the plateau, circling round to approach the formal gardens and main gate with proper elegance down a flat chestnut allée. Henri ambled off the road to the left, heading straight across the fields to the bottom of the steep rise, made steeper by the old stone promenade that framed the western edge of the hill. It gave strolling guests on top a thrilling view over the Lidoire valley whence the

travelers came, and visitors approaching from the bottom a compelling argument to return to the road. But the two circled across the face of the hill, picking their way up the vineyards, a pair of farmhands returning for the evening meal.

They reached the top at the corner of Madame's tower, a squat round of ancient buff stone topped by a conical tile hat. They walked in the still shade of the castle wall that ran a hundred paces to Monseigneur's tower, where the master of the chateau had retreated years before from both tiresome public office and wife to write a masterpiece. His chambers were twice the height of hers, a balanced massing of round grand tower joined on one side by the narrower circle of an enclosed stone spiral staircase and the square form of the lesser rooms on the other. The main tower had only one window facing them, high up on the third level. In it winked a candle, signal that the approach was safe. The two travelers rounded the unbroken stone base of the tower to face an iron-gated vault that passed under the square rooms into the courtyard. The gate was ajar, and they silently slipped through, pushing it closed behind them. They emerged in the inner corner of the quadrangle, shadowed from the setting sun by a covered stone skywalk that cut the diagonal from the gallery of kitchens to the gallery of stables without touching the tower. Monseigneur prized his isolation. But the massive oak door on the inside curve of the tower wall was wide open for them. The figure standing deep in the doorway was cast in shadow.

"Come, my friend," said Henri, king of Navarre, to the Huguenot's chief diplomat and thinker, Philippe Duplessis-Mornay. "The great Montaigne awaits."

{2}

Monseigneur Michel Eyquem de Montaigne
Chateau de Montaigne
Guyenne, France

Dear Monseigneur de Montaigne,

I might as well get the awkward part over with right away. No, you don't know me—you couldn't possibly, seeing as I was born four hundred years after your death. You must have gotten lots of fan mail from gushy girls in your day, and if I thought that you would actually read this I'd simply *die* of embarrassment. But there isn't much chance of that, now is there? I hope you don't think that I'm making light of your death or anything. You've had four centuries to get over it, after all, and unless the essay "To philosophize is to learn how to die" simply is something you *wrote*, not something you *lived*, I wouldn't expect you to be thin-skinned about being dead. Oh my, I *am* starting to gush. But I will *not* ape that hyperventilated groupie of yours, Marie de Gournay. *This* young woman will never mutilate herself with a hairpin to prove her admiration, even if she *did* think that you are (were? this is confusing) the greatest writer of all time, which I do *not*.

I am writing to you because Da has come up with another of his *creative* writing assignments for me. He's been homeschooling me this year, which of course is how you were taught—didn't your father speak only Latin to you growing up? Da's making me take Latin. Anyway, in my century, most children are educated together in classrooms by professional teachers. But I'm getting to be a pretty serious cellist—do you know the violoncello? It's basically a bass viola da braccio, held like a viola da gamba, but without frets. Some of the very first ones were made in Cremona for Charles IX, so perhaps you heard one in the French court, or in your Italian travels. Beats the pantaloons off the wussy gamba. Anyway, though my regular school is great and everything, the truth is that so little of the day is spent actually *learning*, when I could be *practicing*. I have a friend whose mom boatschooled him for two years while his family sailed across the Atlantic and around the Mediterranean, and he came back a whole

year ahead of us in math! He also knew stars, Homer, and fish. Da, who is a political philosopher or something, has been on *sabbatical*, a year-long vacation from the university, which strikes every *normal* person as a vacation from a vacation, but Da is *not* a normal person. So I figured maybe I could get him to do something more useful than thinking great thoughts and writing one down every so often before he deletes it and starts again (deleting is sort of like erasing, but without the eraser). Mums, who has a *real* job, thought it would be good for both of us. And I suppose it sort of has been.

Last month, the assignment was to put a Shakespearean villain on trial. Did you know William Shakespeare? He was English, and a bit behind you. We think he read your essays. (And just who, you may ask, are *we*?) Anyway, I did Edmund in *King Lear*. You would have liked each other. Shakespeare, I mean. Not Edmund. You both practically *invented* self-awareness, you know what I mean? Anyway, after the great *success* of the Shakespeare assignment, Da had me read a bunch of your essays too (in English, I'm afraid) and now he wants me to write to you. Sort of like keeping a diary, but addressed to you. Essays on the essays, he says. He gave me a choice between you or *Machiavelli*, for hedgehog's sake, and I find you *much* more interesting. *Machiavelli* was *not* self-aware. Clever, but a hard fellow to befriend, I think. Not the sort of man I'd want reading my diary.

Anyway, I'll be spending most of the summer at a drill-and-kill chamber music camp. But Da wants to make sure I keep thinking and writing as well as sawing, hence *toi*. Sorry—*vous*. And it's not just drill-and-kill: it's about *peace* too. The director is a very *famous* violinist who invites really great kids from really rotten countries that are fighting each other, for hedgehog's sake, and we're all supposed to get along and teach our parents to get along and teach our politicians to get along and teach our *generals* to get along and listen to us play string quartets instead (haven't been invented yet—think viol consort, but not wussy). I made some awesome friends from foreign countries last year who are

coming back, so we can keep playing scales for peace. Moonbow—that's the name of the camp—is on the coast of Maine (very north America, where there used to be lots of natives, but no cannibals, I'm afraid), which is really lucky, because our family has a summer house in Maine not very far from Moonbow, and Da and I are driving up this week (Mums, as I said, has a *real* job). The best part: Maryam is flying a few days early into Boston (slightly less north America, where we live), and Da and I will pick her up at the airport—oh dear, I'll explain later—and drive her to Maine! So my summer assignments are: to make beautiful music, to promote world peace, and to write to you. *Not* a sabbatical.

Moi,

Ella Seifenblasen

After finishing the letter, Ella sat quietly at her desk and looked through smudged tortoiseshell glasses out the window at nothing in particular. A squirrel clinging upside down to a sugar maple branch caught her eye, and she watched until it completed its acrobatics. Then she kicked off her slippers, climbed on her bed, and stretched out her stringbean frame as high as she could on wobbly tip-toe. Her fingertips just barely brushed the high ceiling. Ella went upstairs to her father's side of the library, knelt in front of the dusty Judaica shelves, and gently pulled out one of the thickest volumes of the Babylonian Talmud. Tractate *Sabbath* was the size of an attaché case. Tucking it under her arm, she returned to her room, pushed aside her pillow, and carefully laid the heavy volume in its place. She fished out a calligraphic marker from her desk drawer, wiped her socks with great ceremony on the rug, climbed back on the bed, and stepped up onto the book. Ella craned her neck, raised her arm, and in the neatest hand that the awkward stance allowed, began to write:

A man may always study, but he must not always go to school.

Boston

After boarding in Paris, they talked nonstop about her music and his college, but somewhere over Labrador the dreamy guy at Maryam's side shut his eyes and tilted his head towards her, not quite touching her shoulder. She looked furtively, then frankly, at his profile, moving carefully not to wake him. The light stubble roughened what otherwise would be a too-pretty face—boyishly round, with high cheeks and tousled hair stylishly cut. Despite the long flight, his hair smelled fresh. Niall. Gaelic, no? But the accent was hard to place. Perfect English English, but not native. Dutch, perhaps? Impetuously, she reached for her cell phone, held it out as far as she could reach, and snapped their portrait. At the quiet click, he started sharply and threw his left forearm in front of his face, blocking an imagined assailant. Just as quickly he softened and smiled at her.

"Sorry. You startled me." But the fleeting expression Maryam saw was not so much alarm as intensity. The young man had quick instincts.

"No, I'm sorry. I should have asked. But why not start recording my great American adventure now? Look at you!" She showed him the cock-eyed snapshot on the little screen. She had an impish, almost naughty grin framed by her loose, silky dark hair. The turn of her head revealed her badge of honor, the permanent violin bruise on the left of her neck. He was caught in the instant before alertness, brows arching, eyes open but unfocused, head still towards Maryam but chin already tilting up, face expressionless. The foreshortened angle made him look aristocratic.

"I'm honored," Niall said with that warm smile.

International travelers landing at Boston's Logan Airport walk down a concourse decorated with flags of many countries. In the passport control hall, large video monitors alternate soaring shots of the American coastline with clips of welcoming children. The Clinton administration's promise to make government look like America was made many years ago, before the War on Terror, but the promise still was kept in the hued faces of immigration officials. Maryam usually felt apprehension when crossing borders. When she boarded in Tel Aviv, and again when changing planes in Paris, she saw what she imagined was suspicion and contempt on the faces that went with uniforms. Here she sensed vigilance, but not scorn. Violin case on her back, she walked slowly towards the distant queues with Niall, wistful that their innocent flirting was about to end. She paused in front of the door to the women's room and smiled sheepishly.

"Well, bye now. It was nice meeting you."

"That's okay. I'll wait for you, and we can stand on line together." Again, the warm smile.

Maryam's pulse quickened as she pushed open the bathroom door. She took inventory in the mirror: nice face, but hardly glamorous; slim hips covered by jeans that fit, but not trashy. Already seventeen, and she'd never had a boyfriend. Only seventeen, and he must be twenty—more, even. Don't be fooled by the baby cheeks. If he wants to write, that's fine. But no phone numbers. To counterbalance her flash of rational resolve, she did one more impetuous thing. With a few quick strokes, she texted the cell phone snapshot to Ella. "just landed. see you outside. cute, no? name's niall."

And the two walked together.

The line snaked back and forth across the hall. Maryam and Niall talked freely and laughed easily. Like an older brother, she thought with relief. The one queue fed a broad row of immigration officers lined up like bank tellers. A uniform briskly directed the travelers to the next open window.

“See you on the other side,” Maryam chirped. Her cheeks were a bit flushed. Niall doffed an imaginary cap and waited to be called.

The uniform who took her passport was tense, and did not look her in the eye. How odd, thought Maryam. She’s the one who should be nervous.

“Ms. Ibn Rushid, we’d like to ask you a few questions.”

“Yes?”

“In private.”

Maryam turned to seek out Niall’s reassuring face, but he was already there. He had quickly, silently, moved in behind her. She couldn’t see past him.

“You’re safe, Yami.” Her father’s secret nickname for her. She froze.

“You may have my phone,” she whispered, hopeful and confused.

He smiled sadly, and replied in refined Arabic. “We don’t need your phone, Maryam.”

She gulped for air and turned back towards the uniform. Beyond, she quickly took in two more uniforms and a tall grim woman in plainclothes. They formed a protective arc that led to a door off to the side. Oddly, she had no impulse to scream. Abu Salaam’s daughter would not scream. She stepped forward numbly, but with shoulders straight, and followed the human curve to the door. The young man she knew as Niall was a step behind, hand lightly on her elbow. “All will be well,” he said soothingly, this time in idiomatic Hebrew.

And the two walked together.

Maryam stepped across the threshold and disappeared.

{4}

Louvre Palace, Paris

Saint Bartholomew’s Day

24 August 1572

It was a pure marriage—pure expedience. Still, his cousin was lovely, bright, impassioned. He could come to love her, and if not, his immediate duties hardly were unpleasant. They lay in sweet sleep entwined under the embroidered coverlets. *Chère* Margot dreamt of silk-coated horses thundering with gold-shod hooves, of fountains of pretty plaited girls squealing in glee, of rough boots clattering on stone, of great wounded beasts screaming in pain. Panicked fists pounded on the thick chamber door. Margot leapt to throw the heavy bolt. She heard cries, gasps, moans. Unclothed, blade in hand, he pressed his ear to the door. They cracked it open and together pulled a bleeding courtier to safety. Henri of Navarre had woken to find his kinsmen and wedding guests butchered in their beds.

The wily queen mother, Catherine de Medici, contrived the match between Navarre and her youngest daughter, Marguerite de Valois. Her scheme was to cement reconciliation with the restive Protestants and so outmaneuver the powerful and ambitious House of Guise, militant Catholics who were only a plot away from an outright coup against Catherine's feckless son, King Charles IX. The young duke of Guise, the second Henri of this story, had been eying Margot for himself—not without success, whispered the court gossips. But negotiations with Henri's devout Protestant mother, Queen Jeanne of Navarre, were difficult. The kings in Paris had not yet unified their authority over what was to become the French state; the ruler of Navarre and Béarn in the southwest owed allegiance to the French crown, but retained considerable independence. These provinces were safe havens for Calvinist preachers during the decades of persecution, and their aristocracy commanded the Huguenot party in the religious civil wars that had brought intermittent destruction and misery for a decade.

Though the match had clear strategic advantages for both sides, Queen Jeanne feared a trap. Henri's allegiance to the Reformed church vexed the Valois

monarchy for the same reasons that he was such a prized conquest: from his mother, he was heir to the throne of Navarre; from his Bourbon father, he was “first prince of the blood,” the highest-ranking cousin of the royal family; and under the ancient Salic law that prevented succession through daughters, he currently was third in line to the French throne after Charles’s two younger brothers. If a heretic were to claim the throne, France would be thrown into confusion: the Guises seditious, the Pope implacable, and powerful King Philip of Spain predatory. When he was a boy, after his father was killed fighting on the Catholic side in the first major battle of the civil war, Henri was held hostage in Paris by the queen mother and subjected to Catholic instruction. Why would Catherine de Medici accept a Protestant son-in-law now? And what would his life be worth once Margot bore the son that reunited the Bourbon and Valois lines?

The most formidable mother-in-law in all of France parleyed with the second most formidable mother-in-law in all of France for months, and they were not negotiating the floral arrangements. Terms were reached, but Queen Jeanne was to die unexpectedly two months before the big day. A poisoned pair of gloves from that Machiavellian Medici, some accused. A lung infection, more like it. Henri entered Paris as the newly crowned king of Navarre, accompanied by eight hundred relatives and Huguenot notables dressed in mourning.

In a nimble feat of ecumenical magic, Henri and Margot were wed in the great cathedral of Notre Dame while he stood outside. Would this marriage at last reconcile the Catholic and Reformed churches of France? The Guises, or perhaps the Spanish king, could not take the risk. A couple of days after the wedding, a sniper firing an arquebus from a window wounded Admiral de Coligny, the great Huguenot military hero and Henri’s mentor. The Huguenot guests in Paris were enraged. Tensions mounted. Royals and advisors, trusted and mistrusted, met through the nights. Rumors of plots and plots of rumors swirled. In panic, the Valois struck preemptively, and the slaughter began. The

king's Swiss guard was dispatched to murder the Huguenot leaders and a number of their high-ranking Catholic allies in their chambers. Hit teams stormed the halls of the Louvre Palace. Assassins pulled Coligny from his sickbed to finish the job and threw him from the window to the waiting duke of Guise below.

Then the virulently anti-Protestant Parisian mobs took over, rampaging for three days, mutilating bodies in a frenzy. Philippe Duplessis-Mornay, then a young Calvinist nobleman in the admiral's inner circle, hid on the rooftops to evade his assassins but was captured escaping Paris by vigilantes. They deliberated whether to drown him or hack him, but fortunately were not sure who he was, so he talked his way free and took refuge in England.

When the blood stopped running, municipal workers were paid to fish eleven hundred corpses from the River Seine. Several thousand more were butchered in the streets. Massacre of heretics spread across France. The *Parlement* of Bordeaux, from which Michel de Montaigne had resigned only two years previously, voted to execute three hundred Huguenot prisoners.

Henri himself was not a Valois target that night (though that would have been no proof against a Guise blade). Under threat of death from the king, Henri was forced to abjure his Reformed faith and take Catholic communion. Catherine de Medici again took him hostage.

In one summer, Henri had become an orphan, king of Navarre, brother of the king of all France, chief and protector of all French Protestants, forced Catholic convert, and hostage in the Valois court, all at the age of eighteen. His ravishing Queen Margot was nineteen. The ruthless duke of Guise and the weak-willed King Charles IX were twenty-two. The escaped Philippe Duplessis-Mornay was twenty-three. Scheming Queen Catherine provided what passed for adult supervision.

Henri was to be the involuntary guest of Catherine de Medici for a long time. In a letter, he writes, "The court is the strangest place you have ever seen.

We are nearly always ready to cut each other's throat. We carry daggers and wear mail shirts, even breastplates, under our cloaks." Charles died two years after the massacres, broken by tuberculosis and haunted by the screams of murdered Huguenots. Dead without an heir, he was succeeded by the next Valois brother, the third Henri in this story and the third French king named Henri. Margot and Henri of Navarre were constantly in love, but not, alas, with each other. Although Margot remained politically faithful to her husband, both turned elsewhere for romantic adventure. When Henri, having patiently built up the queen mother's trust, finally escaped from a hunt four years later, he left his wife, still childless, behind.

The events of Saint Bartholomew's Day profoundly marked both Philippe Duplessis-Mornay and Michel de Montaigne. In an age when kings claimed authority from God and demanded absolute obedience from their subjects, Mornay wrote a book, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, arguing that kings are bound by a covenant with their people to rule justly. Tyrannical kings lose the right to rule, and may be violently resisted by lesser officials on behalf of the people. In an early essay, Montaigne wrote, "I cruelly hate cruelty, both by nature and by judgment, as the extreme of all vices." But when told of the Saint Bartholomew's Day Massacres, the dour king of Spain is reported to have laughed for the first time in his life.

{5}

Boston

Ella stood on her toes as high as she could, peering over the heads of the irritating children and irritated parents who struggled out of the customs hall, balancing and tugging overstuffed bags. A business suit was pushing a rolling suitcase designed to be pulled so she could thumb her blackberry. She crashed

efficiently into a brushed steel railing, but Ella was too distracted to be amused, or to recall Montaigne's essay "On Thumbs." Maryam's flight landed over an hour ago, and the stream of French chatter had been dry for some time. She clenched her fists, hard, until the fingertips bit her palms in self-reproach. Hedgehog! Of all the days to have misplaced my phone. Maryam must be calling *frantically*. But I've been trying her on Da's—at least I brought her number. Why doesn't she answer?

"She wasn't on that flight, Ells. Let's check at the desk. She probably missed her connection in Paris," said Sensible Parent gently. Ella ignored him and continued her vigil for a few long breaths, as if the suggestion were indecent. "Okay," she conceded at last, in a small, defeated voice.

Ella marveled at how the ticket agent could type with inch-long fingernails and read the screen through cakes of eye makeup.

"I'm sorry, but I have no record of a Maryam Ibn Rushid on either the Tel Aviv-Paris or Paris-Boston segments. I've checked all the I's and R's. No name comes close. And she doesn't come up on any later flights."

"But she emailed me her flight information last night," Ella said incredulously, jabbing the crumpled itinerary on the high counter between them. "Look, there's the confirmation number. If she missed the flight, you'd know."

Puzzlement flickered momentarily on the ticket agent's painted face, but hers was not a mind to wonder about the world's mysteries. "Hon, on our system, Maryam Ibn Rushid does not exist," she said with sympathetic finality.

{6}

Monseigneur Michel de Montaigne
Chateau de Montaigne
Guyenne, France

Dear Monseigneur de Montaigne,

Something very strange has happened. My dear friend Maryam, who lives in Jerusalem, was supposed to arrive today by airplane—a ship with wings that soars high in the sky like a giant falcon propelled by furnace fires. In our time, travel is much more quick and safe than in yours, and we can write or speak to each other at once from across oceans. Letters, voices, and even pictures can be turned into invisible waves that circle the globe like a ripple crossing a pond, so no more waiting for weeks to get word from faraway places. We carry with us talking and writing machines that fit in the hand, so it is worrisome not to hear from someone for more than a few hours if you are expecting a message. Here's the thing: Maryam wrote to me last night that she was arriving this afternoon, but she didn't, and the company that flies the airplanes has no record of her! When Da and I got home, I telephoned—you know what? I can't keep explaining four hundred years of science and invention to a dead man or I'll never get to what matters. So I'll stop reminding you that you're dead if you make believe that you haven't missed out on the last four centuries. Deal?

As I was saying, I telephoned Maryam's family in Jerusalem when I got home (the little machines you carry around with you only work if you don't *lose* them, which I did *again*). Maryam's dad, Dr. Ibn Rushid, said that her plans have changed, she won't be attending Moonbow this summer, and no, I couldn't speak with her because she isn't at home and will be away for awhile and no he didn't know when she'd be back and she wouldn't be answering her cell phone or email but I'm welcome to write her letters in Jerusalem and he'd try to forward them to her. *Try?* And if that weren't odd enough, he said all this in a stilted, almost mechanical voice. He was polite as usual, and it was definitely him—I've called Maryam at home before and I recognized his voice—but he's usually effusive and full of questions about me, but today it sounded like he couldn't get off the phone soon enough.

There's something about Dr. Ibn Rushid that I need to tell you. Besides being a doctor (the medical kind, not the make-believe kind like Da), he's a *very important* Palestinian figure (we also assume you know four hundred years of world history, 'kay?) You know how Palestinian leaders have *noms de guerre*? (no you don't, but fake it). Well, Dr. Ibn Rushid has a *nom de paix*: he's called Abu Salaam, because he's a peace activist. So naturally he's always in trouble with both sides. The Palestinian hardliners keep trying to make him out to be an Israeli collaborator and the Israeli hardliners keep trying to tie him to terror groups. He's been jailed by both! Maryam is always *so* worried about his getting hurt.

So what's going on? Is he in trouble again and he's afraid to let Maryam travel? But why not let me speak with her? Has his family gone into hiding? But why wouldn't Maryam send me some sort of message so I wouldn't go to the airport? Was it so urgent that she didn't have time? Then why is Dr. Ibn Rushid sitting at home picking up the phone?

I am *so* scared. I was in tears telling Da, and he hugged me and stroked my hair and everything but I didn't get his usual soothing patter. Da *always* has some *rational* explanation for why my world only looks like it's falling apart but really isn't, which is an absolutely *tactless* thing to say to a fifteen year-old girl, even if he is so *disgustingly* correct. But he just held me in silence, and that just made me more scared. Maybe I need soothing patter.

Moi,

Ella Seifenblasen

On her ceiling, she added an inscription:

The thing I fear most is fear.

Chateau de Montaigne

Montaigne rarely entertained in the library, so his ancient valet had to improvise a table. The closest fireplace was in the small adjoining sitting room, but fortunately there was no chill that evening. They dined on rustic Gascon fare—the last Charentais melons of the season, a potage of cèpes de Bordeaux mushrooms thickened with brown bread, and roasted trout from the Dordogne, all washed down with sweet white Montravel mixed with water. A thoughtful and respectful host, Montaigne also offered his guests a cassoulet of duck and sausage, for it was his fish Friday, not theirs. Mornay preferred the more refined butter cuisine of the Loire, but goose fat was queen in Guyenne and Gascony, so he sampled the dishes politely. Navarre at table was promiscuous. The valet stoked the fire, cleared the plate, poured the Armagnac, and hobbled down the stone spiral stairs.

Henri, goblet in hand, stood on the terra cotta floor and surveyed the tower room, a kingdom sixteen paces across. It was as he remembered: the circular wall flat at one end where the simple writing desk fit, the book shelves arranged in five rows all round, first built to house the library inherited from Montaigne's dearest friend, Etienne de la Boétie, now filled out with the writer's own extensive collection; and of course the fabled Latin and Greek aphorisms neatly painted on the exposed timber ceiling beams and joists. This life of contemplation was not Henri's *métier*, but his capacious soul was appreciative.

Breaking Navarre's reverie, Montaigne began. "Against all odds, my Lord has won a great victory at Coutras."

“Providence has been with our cause, my dear Michel. And when I say our cause, I include you too.” Navarre opened his arms to embrace the room, his Armagnac sloshing slightly. He grinned like a naughty school boy and licked the brandy off his fingers.

“But rebellion against the King of France is not my cause, Sir.” Montaigne was a fearless and blunt Gascon. This was why Navarre had come.

“And why not?” The austere Mornay, no mincing courtier, interrupted sharply before Navarre could deny it. This was why Navarre had brought him.

The king chuckled, rubbed his hands with anticipation, and settled into his chair. “Gentlemen, the fate of this so-called War of the Three Henris may turn on which of you has the better argument. *En garde!*”

{8}

Cambridge

“Mums, where in hedgehog’s name is my *cell phone!*” Ella barked, stomping up the stairs to her mother’s side of the library. The hip-roofed third floor was lined with cherry casework and split in two by a ziggurat of books topped by triangles of glass that swept up to the peak. After the carpenters had opened up the old attic space, a five-year old Ella had confidently assumed that the entire floor was to be her playroom. After the first loss, there is no other.

“I’m not responsible for your things, *young lady*. I don’t speak to you in that tone, so please don’t speak that way to me,” sighed a calm but weary voice. It was still Ella’s, perfectly mimicking her mother’s.

Mums swiveled in her desk chair and beamed, then reached up affectionately to brush a strand of hair out of Ella’s eyes. “I see that Montaigne’s self-awareness is rubbing off on you already, my dear. All packed for Maine?”

Having unsuccessfully ransacked the house for her phone, Ella returned to her room, still spinning wordless worries about Maryam in her head. The Talmudic stepstool rested on the window seat. It should be returned to its shelf, thought Ella. She hefted, then opened it. The Hebrew letters on the large folios danced and squirmed. She could pick out some words, but not the sense. The volume, one of a set of twenty, was several decades old, but only the handsome gilt-worked cover was worn. She fanned the thick crisp pages that looked unused—Da had given up Talmudic studies for secular philosophy long before she was born. A loose sheet of folded paper tucked in close to the binding caught her eye. Ella laughed, remembering a prank Da said young scholars would play on their friends whose passion for book-buying exceeded their diligence in study. They would slip notes into the massive tomes with messages sure to embarrass the owner should they be found years later. At one folio a day, it took seven years to complete a cycle of study of the entire Talmud, but it was not uncommon for a class to spend several weeks on one folio, formulating a legal doctrine out of divergent passages in other tractates in light of the medieval commentaries.

This paper, however, was torn from the notebooks Da currently used, and so was no prankish time capsule. Ella unfolded the sheet and frowned. The page contained only two lines in Da's hand:

leiro
011ec

Ella stared without comprehension. Was this code? If so, what for? Then, remembering where the note was found, she read the characters right to left, as Hebrew is written:

oriel
ce110

Cello! The second line substituted numbers for look-alike letters, a common trick for picking hard-to-guess but easy-to-remember passwords. So oriel must be a user or account name, and ce110 the password. But for what? And why would Da hide it inside a volume of the Talmud? Ella had principles—she wasn't an intentional snoop. But how could she resist an accidental scoop? She copied the cryptic letters into her own notebook before closing the volume and lugging it upstairs to its place, wondering who, or what, was oriel.

“A little light reading?” Mums quipped as Ella passed. Thankfully, Da was not in the library when she reshelved the volume containing multitudes.

{9}

Coutras
20 October 1587

Death be not pretty, Navarre thought. Across the meadow, a splendid line of heavy cavalry in gold-leaf armor sporting lances decorated with particolored pennants glimmered in the morning sun. The duke of Joyeuse, King Henri III's brash and ambitious favorite, was as flamboyant in war as he was at court. The armorer had reached the height of his art; Europe would never again see such vast numbers of such fine handiwork committed in battle.

Outnumbered two to one, the king of Navarre's dirt-caked force in greased leather and dull iron breastplate answered with their own beauty.

*La voici l'heureuse journée
Que Dieu a faite à plein désir...*

The plainsong melody began softly, sweetly, on the tongue of Philippe Duplessis-Mornay, knee-to-knee with Navarre in the first rank of Huguenot horsemen. Navarre nodded, almost imperceptibly, and the rest joined.

Here it is, the happy day
What God made from pure desire,
So in us will riot joy
And take in this day pleasure.

Not comprehending, some of Joyeuse's golden courtiers laughed. "The cowards tremble before death, they confess themselves." But a more experienced hand warned the duke, "When the Huguenots make such a face, they mean to fight well."

Navarre had formed his cavalry, armed with sword and pistol, into three tight companies, files eight deep, separated by squadrons of arquebusiers under orders to fire only in unison at close range. His infantry held the flanks. The Huguenot's three bronze artillery pieces on a rise to Navarre's left began to rake Joyeuse's line with precision, leaving the duke no more time for preparations. He sounded the trumpets and led the charge across the meadow at full gallop, long lances pointed. In twenty-five years of civil war, the scrappy Huguenots had never won a major set battle like this one. Navarre's men held still, singing.

In the years since Navarre escaped the coils of Catherine de Medici and renounced his renunciation of Calvinism, France had seen inconclusive wars and shaky truces. The stakes changed radically in 1584 when the Valois king's last surviving brother died of malaria, without child. The luckless Henri III was still childless too, making the Protestant Navarre the new heir presumptive to the Catholic crown. France was plunged into constitutional turmoil. The duke of

Guise, now head of an alliance of militants called the Catholic League, vowed to prevent a Protestant from taking the throne. Guise coerced a reluctant but threatened king to issue an edict revoking the previous tolerant truce and outlawing the Reformed religion within the borders of France entirely. To Navarre's amusement, he also was excommunicated by the pope in Rome for heresy.

For weeks, Henri of Navarre's forces had played cat and mouse with the royal army Joyeuse commanded, luring him deeper and deeper into territory friendly to the Huguenot cause. A direct confrontation with Joyeuse's larger force seemed suicidal, but Navarre's nimble and battlehardened troops were skillful at waging a war of maneuver and skirmish. Meanwhile, a mercenary army of Protestant Germans in the employ of Queen Elizabeth of England had crossed the French border from Alsace in the northeast. The Anglican Elizabeth was eager to keep Catholic France and Spain off balance. Blocking the German advance was left to Henri of Guise, whose estates in Lorraine were most immediately under threat. Henri III no doubt hoped that the two forces would rid him of two problems by destroying each other. In contrast, the king was a fond admirer of his cousin Navarre, and found him to be a useful though covert ally in his serpentine power struggle with the Guises. But the young Joyeuse, having developed League leanings, sought to crush the Huguenot army. He had earned the king's displeasure by massacring several hundred Protestant prisoners of war earlier in the summer. But as was often the case in this War of the Three Henris, the king in Paris was not entirely in command of his own generals.

The village of Coutras, with its one cobblestoned street, sits at the confluence of two rivers, the Dronne and the Isle. Navarre was leading his army south from the Protestant stronghold of La Rochelle, hoping to slip past Joyeuse, gather reinforcements in Gascony, and circle back north to rendezvous with the German mercenaries at the Loire. Thinking that the pursuing Joyeuse was some

twenty miles distant, Navarre forded the Dronne and settled in for the night with his force of some five thousand men, planning to cross the narrow stone bridge over the Isle in the morning. But Joyeuse in fact was only ten miles away, and when word came that the Huguenots were encamped in Coutras, he led his army on a night march to trap Navarre between the two rivers. Navarre was awakened at dawn to gunfire, the sound of the Catholic vanguard driving back his mounted pickets. Though Navarre and the other Bourbon princes commanding cavalry companies could slip over the bridge and escape, to abandon his infantry was unthinkable. Fortunately, Joyeuse's army had marched single file down the narrow tracks to Coutras, and now needed time to reassemble in battle formation—just enough time for Navarre, a renowned tactician, to move to more favorable ground outside the village and arrange his order of battle.

Joyeuse was intrepid but undisciplined. His thin, wide line of galloping lancers, though far outnumbering Navarre's horsemen, was thrown into disarray by the first arquebus volley at twenty yards. Then Navarre's tight phalanxes crashed through and outflanked the Catholic cavalry. The fate of Joyeuse's splendid army was sealed in the first thunderous minutes of *melée*, and the trappers were entrapped between the two rivers.

Four hundred of the king's cavaliers and nearly three thousand royal foot soldiers died that morning. Had Navarre not furiously insisted that his men give good quarter, even more would have died. The order came too late for Joyeuse. Cornered by Huguenot horsemen, the duke declared his ransom to be one hundred thousand écus. He who gave no quarter was shot through the head without ceremony. Navarre's entire army lost only two dozen men. For the desperate and persecuted Huguenots, it was indeed a happy day.

Little Osprey Isle

Ella had never fallen in love, but she imagined it would feel like Maine. She stopped chattering to Da after they drove from the food cooperative with stinky cheeses, warm bread, and lettuce still gasping for breath in the back seat. It was too early for wild blueberries. They had already stocked up on staples for the house and for Frederick at the supermarket. They would buy fish off the pier tomorrow down in Big Osprey harbor and pick mussels off the rocks. As the road rose and fell, she caught glimpses of water, then the breathless view across the bay as they crested the big hill, and finally the unlikely suspension bridge—not quite a bridge to nowhere, but a Depression-era project that halted the decline of the isolated and inbred fishing villages somewhere between quaint and threadbare. The bridge, like everything else on the islands, was caught in a Sisyphean struggle with the salt air. Even without corrosion, the bridge defied the laws of physics. Ella couldn't remember a time when flagmen and painters were not at work preserving its delicate beauty.

The main road touched down and continued across the causeway to Big Osprey, but they turned right onto a road that wound down the length of Little Osprey from the post office to the lighthouse. Every hamlet in this part of Maine defended its zipcode as if the memory of a great civilization depended on it. Little Osprey Isle, Maine, winter population eighty-nine, double in summer, boasted a postmistress who dispensed gossip to the adults and lollipops to the children. Ella drew her fifteen years up to their full height and declined the lollipop with a wave of gracious condescension. Da filled out the form to stop forwarding mail to Cambridge while the postmistress happily filled him in on the season's highlights. That Norwegian salmon farmer finally was run off—imagine, trying to get a permit for a fish pen fifty yards off of Robert

McCloskey's island! Ella had gone to the hearing last summer clutching a copy of *Time of Wonder*, wondering how someone could be so tone deaf. No red tide this summer, thank goodness, so the musselin's good. But the lobstermen can't make a livin', what with the state's new fishery management regulations. Frederick? She chuckled. Still a flirt.

Three miles down, the hardtop ended at a boat landing. In the late nineteenth century, a colony of grand Victorian cottages was built around this cove overlooking the old lighthouse that rose on a rocky reef out at the mouth of the reach. Most cottages had stayed in the families, some working out elaborate sharing rules for the gaggles of cousins, some dominated, in either friendly or hostile takeovers, by one branch. At the far side of the landing, a dirt fireroad guarded by a sign saying "No Exit, No View" entered the woods and curved around the point. The half-true sign always made Ella smile. Their house was the last one off this road a quarter of a mile on. The rough driveway descended through pine and fir to a simply-built but dramatic wood and glass structure that edged onto the granite ledges overlooking the island-dotted bay. From the water, the low, weathered profile almost disappeared amid the surrounding evergreens, but every glass facet looked out on primeval beauty. Ella yearned all year for this moment of eternal return. So who dared defile her sacred pilgrimage by parking a commercial van in front of the house?

Da's frown showed annoyance, but not surprise. "The locksmith. I was hoping he'd be gone by now."

"What's to lock?" If a burglar discovered Little Osprey, which had not happened in recent memory, a lock would simply ensure a broken window. Da didn't answer. He was already at the doorway, greeted by a tradesman in a blue coverall. Ella grabbed a bag of groceries from the back and followed, sulking.

"Sir, as expected, perimeter security in a house like this is hopeless. Regulations require motion detectors, which I've installed, but it's really only the safe that secures access. If we go into the study I'll show you the setup, Sir." The

locksmith was speaking in a soft voice, and Ella, descending the path to the front door, missed most of what he was saying. But she caught the surring. Sounded military. Da looked up at her.

“Ella, this is John—John, my daughter Ella. John’s installing a burglar alarm for us. I’m going to go over the details with him in my study. Could you be a dear and finish unpacking?”

Ella’s eyes flashed from sulk to rage before turning to the locksmith sweetly. “Nice to meet you, sir.” A very civilian sir. “I’ll sleep more soundly knowing that the duke of Guise won’t be able to slit my throat tonight.” She put the groceries down and turned with a flounce up the path for another load, leaving Da laughing and Lieutenant Locksmith bewildered. Ella returned with two more grocery bags and a fully-formed intention to snoop.

{11}

Chateau de Montaigne

23 October 1587

Mornay held Navarre’s gaze and spoke with calm determination. “Henri the Third has broken his covenant with God and has broken his covenant with the people. He is a tyrant, not a legitimate king, and it is my Lord Navarre’s duty as the highest officer of the kingdom to protect the people from his depredations.”

“Philippe, old friend, I envy your powers of discernment.” Montaigne faced Mornay, but his audience was Navarre. “You know both the will of God and the will of the people. I have difficulty knowing my own mind. Hmm. Do I want another glass of Armagnac or Montravel?”

“Jest at my expense, Michel. But don’t laugh about the slaughter of innocents.”

Montaigne reached his hand across the low table and laid it softly on Mornay's arm. "The carnage of this leaden century sickens me. I want to stop the killing, not prolong it."

"Then we must stop the tyrant."

"Our Lord Navarre is heir to the throne in Paris. Do you suppose Frenchmen will let him to sit on it for a day if he launches an open rebellion against his cousin? Coutras will be seen as self-defense. Joining forces with German invaders will be seen as treason."

"Do we not care about the thing itself, Michel, rather than appearances? Neighboring princes are justified in deposing a ruler who oppresses his subjects and violates God's law."

"Protestants say that Catholic rulers violate God's law. Catholics say that Protestant rulers violate God's law. Paris burns Reformers and Zurich drowns Anabaptists. Perhaps we should let God worry about how to enforce His own law, while we worry about how to live in peace."

"You blaspheme, Michel. It is unworthy of you."

"Philippe, I did not intend to offend, but I must speak plainly. Neither of us knows God's will. Though I am filled with awe at martyrs who would die over the finer points of wine and wafers, I am filled with contempt for those who would kill over them. So please, let us leave God's law to the divines. Our work is the work of kings."

"But where is the conflict? The work of kings is to rule justly in accordance with God's law."

"The work of kings is to rule justly. Do you hold out hope that our Lord of Navarre, when Henri the Fourth, will dictate the Reforming religion to all of France like some German princeling to his hog farmers? We would either rip ourselves in pieces or kill each other. Probably both. If a king manages to prevent that, would God disapprove?"

Philippe looked away. "The Reformed Church simply wishes to be left alone to worship in peace."

"A convenient concession for Huguenots to make, now that the chance of Calvinism becoming the dominant religion in France has long since passed. You do not practice such tolerance in the towns you control."

A stately tattoo echoed up the stone stairs, foretelling a tray of sheep's cheese and fresh foie gras.

"The cheeses are from the village, but the goose liver is our own. My mother's family brought the craft of fowl-fattening with them from Spain." Montaigne did not need to add the circumstances that drove his mother to Toulouse. Those ancestors were no strangers to religious persecution. Mornay acknowledged this *touché* with an appreciative nod.

Navarre spread the delicate foie gras like custard on his bread, let its gamey scent waft beneath his Bourbon nose, and tasted with an appreciative nod of his own. "*Belly of Saint Gris!* Some good came of the Spanish Inquisition."

On the joist above his head, an inscription was painted in neat letters:

*God gave to man the desire for knowledge
for the sake of tormenting him.*

{12}

Little Osprey Isle

Frederick's telescope tracked Ella's efforts as she wrestled the grocery-filled Radio Flyer across the sands. The way was easier over the packed surface at the sandbar's wet edge, but Ella liked the feel of warmed powder between her toes. At high tide, Barred Ear was a granite-fringed hill of pine, topped by a windmill and surrounded by seawater, but twice a day the bay ebbed to uncover a

sandbridge to Ella's beach. Frederick reached for the ski pole he used as a cane and propped himself up at the porch railing to greet her. Last summer, he would have toddled out onto the sandbar, but his ninety-something-year-old body had nearly caught up to his sprinting mind. Frederick was ready for his last adventure.

Herr Professor Doktor Frederick Wiener, polymath, alliumphobe, hero, already was old when discovered by Mums, a young collector of fine specimens of humanity of all ages and stations. His Annie still lived then, in the early stages of a sweet-tempered dementia. When Da entered Mums' life, she held him to one covert test, loving Frederick and Annie as she did. He passed with honors. When Ella was within earshot, she began.

"Why call it a causeway?"

"Because, you silly goose."

"That would make a becauseway, and not be acauseway."

"Ach, the way you accuse ..."

"And so three causeways would be ..."

"No, not Bee. Cee."

"Seacauseway? I get the sea, but I'm still causeless."

"It must be a corruption."

"The fate of us all."

"From the Latin *calx*."

"Chalk?"

"Good. Or limestone."

"And sand is ..."

"*Harena*, hence, arena, strewn with sand."

"Arenaway."

"You ran away, poor child? Well, you may always live with me."

And, wet-eyed from mirth and joy, they hugged, delicately, tightly. Although never administered, Ella also passed Mum's test. With honors.

{13}

Monseigneur Michel de Montaigne
Chateau de Montaigne
Guyenne, France

Dear Michel,

May I *tu-toi* you yet? I know it's presumptuous, but after spending the day with Frederick, it seems awfully stuffy to be formal with you. He's eighty years older than I am, which makes four hundred years seem not so far off. Do you realize that Frederick could have known Albert Einstein who could have known Ralph Waldo Emerson who could have known Immanuel Kant who could have known Antonio Stradivari who could have known Thomas Hobbes who, at the age of three, could have known you? We're practically kissing cousins! Now, wouldn't Frederick make a good subject for an *essai*? I'll start it for you:

Of Garlic

Romans in our day eat garlic in great quantities, both fresh and cooked, without any observable ill effects, other than in the nostrils of their bedfellows. Yet,

*Whoever puts hands to his elderly parent's
windpipe and wickedly snaps it,
make him munch garlic, more harmful than hemlock,*

said Horace. In the northern countries, garlic is considered bad for digestion, and used very sparingly. And I have heard from travelers that, among the American savages, garlic is believed to be a potent poison. So great is their aversion to garlic that the Spanish conquerors would hang strands of braided garlic from the barrels of their muskets, and brave local chieftains would fall down dead of fright at the sight. But these same savage warriors ate onions without cease, and strung themselves with garlands of onion to give them courage and luck in battle. So I have been told, but *Nil sine allium*, says a poet—nothing without garlic—and I am of the same opinion. The Brahmins of India shun both garlic and onion, thinking that they grow from the meat and bone of a cow.

I know a physician who has a fearless heart but a fearful stomach, who showed great courage in battle but cowardice at table. He defied a German tyrant and was among the last to abandon conquered Prague. He escaped prison in Paris, climbed the Pyrenees into Spain with his young son on his shoulders, and sailed across the ocean from Lisbon to the Americas. But he would sooner sail the ocean twice than eat an onion. With his family safe in New Amsterdam, he indeed did sail right back to England, joined the Great Armada crossing the English Channel, liberated Paris, and defeated the tyrant, braving danger to care for the wounded and the sick along the way. But this same physician, learned in every other way, imagined harm would come from garlic in his dishes. His cook took great sport in slipping him small doses to test his nose.

So I am of the opinion that courage is not one virtue. Some are courageous in war and cowardly in argument. A man

who is afraid of heights may have no fear of dogs. A man who would serenely choose martyrdom for himself would not lift a finger to protect a countryman from intolerance. Some will defy bigotry abroad but countenance bigotry at home. My physician friend was constant in both. After the war, he risked his professorship in the college of medicine and his freedoms as a gentleman to end the persecution of former African slaves. Garlic, I have been told, was unknown in Africa outside of garlic-worshipping Egypt until the Mohammedans brought it, but I doubt that this was so. Pliny the Elder tells of African garlic. And how can it be that Hannibal did not bring garlic back to Carthage from Italy?

So, could you use me as a ghost-writer? (Sorry—I didn't mean to be flip about your current incorporeal condition.)

About courage. I really do think it's true that courage is not a unitary virtue. I have the courage to perform on stage, but I can be shy about speaking up in class. And you've taught me that valor in combat is not the same thing as courage. Sometimes courage requires avoiding physical danger—walking away from a fight. But I wonder—can it ever be courageous to compromise one's principles? You were a great admirer of Henri of Navarre, who surely was a brave man in a fight, but also a shrewd compromiser. Paris is worth a mass, and all that. Did that make him more or less courageous?

Moi,

Ella Seifenblasen

The exposed rafters in Ella's Little Osprey bedroom sloped down towards the plate glass overlooking the water. Standing on her bed with calligraphic pen in hand, she had to bend her neck like Alice in Wonderland to write:

*We may grasp virtue so that it becomes vicious,
if we embrace it too stringently and with too violent a desire.*

{14}

Little Osprey Isle

Before Ella became a premeditated snoop, she hadn't wondered why Da started using a separate laptop for his research this year. Or why it had an official-looking but cryptic purple sticker on it. Or why he never left it about. After the visit of Lieutenant Locksmith, she was not shocked to find the steel safe with a red combination dial bolted to the floorboards inside the window seat of Da's study. The dial showed only numbers, and no simple transposition of "oriel" or "cello" into digits opened it.

Ella practiced a contemplative prelude from one of the Bach solo suites that morning out on the deck. She could hear herself better indoors, of course, where her bow strokes reverberated off the enclosing wood, but out here her double stops rumbled over the water to Barred Ear. The native hummingbirds, feasting at the feeder, droned a treble accompaniment. High in a fir, or perhaps a spruce, she caught the flash of a rarer treat, a luminous cardinal. Cardinals. Orioles. Cellos. Codes.

In the little library down in Big Osprey village, Ella checked an old Britannica while waiting for her turn at the dial-up internet connection that islanders used to read their email. Oriel was a college in Oxford, but Da never studied at

Oxford. The bay window supported by corbels in her Cambridge bedroom was called an oriel, but why would Da name something after a window? Wait, she found the oriel code inside the Talmud that she stowed on the ledge of that window! But surely that was random—Da’s library has dormers, not oriels. Oriel Chambers is an historic building in Liverpool, and the Beatles were an historic band from Liverpool. So? The Kingdom of Oriel was a medieval Irish federation. Ariel is one of the names for Jerusalem and a character in Shakespeare, Uriel an archangel. But Da can spell, can’t he?

Ella took her seat in front of the creaky computer and set to work googling. The ancient Irish kingdom was named Airgíalla in Gaelic. There were three chieftain brothers, each named Colla—must have been confusing calling them for dinner. When they swore allegiance to the High King, they stipulated that any *giall* taken from their clan would be shackled in *or*, hence Airgíalla, “Hostages of Gold.” And did the High King take hostages? The Uí Néill dynasty did, following the lead of their founder, Niall Noígíallach, or Niall of the Nine Hostages. No evidence that old Niall used golden handcuffs, though.

{15}

Chateau de Montaigne

“Let us all grant, my dear Philippe, that to compel religion at swordpoint is a grave injustice, and so the Valois kings have committed grave injustices.” Navarre circumnavigated the library, brandy glass in one hand, chunk of cheese in the other. Though his appetites were insatiable, vigors of the saddle kept him slim. He waved the cheese as he talked—better than the brandy, Montaigne mused, eyeing his bookshelves protectively.

“It does not follow that an unjust king is an illegitimate king. My cousin holds his throne in accordance with the ancient laws of the Franks. Are we not

all under the rule of law? Were I king of France, should I tolerate rebellion by subjects who held that *my* laws or policies were unjust?"

"That would depend, wouldn't it, my Lord," Philippe answered.

"On?" snapped Henri. Although he invited this Socratic tutorial, the king of Navarre did not like being shown up.

"On whether your laws or policies were unjust," Philippe teased. Navarre got both the joke and the point.

"And what gives every Jacques and Pierre the right to judge whether my law is just?"

"What gives every Jacques and Pierre the right to judge whether you rule in accordance with the ancient law of the Franks? Reasoned judgment is required for both."

"So every Jacques may take up arms against his king?"

"Not at first resort. But you are not any Jacques. As first prince of the blood and king of Navarre, the highest officer of the kingdom, *you* have the authority to take up arms against a tyrannical king. And please don't tell me that you cannot judge whether the king is unjust. You have already made that judgment."

"Indeed," Montaigne interrupted. "But the question is not what to believe, but how to act."

Navarre followed Montaigne's eyes to the joist under which he stood:

Of gods, of men, each maketh still his choice.

Little Osprey Isle

“Too tall for a lollipop? Then you’re tall enough to be a sternman. Herrick Eaton’s eldest is lookin’ for help.”

Bouncing on the balls of her running shoes, Ella politely declined the lobster boat lead as the chattering postmistress handed a padded envelope through the brass-filigreed window. By dinnertime, Herrick Eaton’s eldest would hear that the Seifenblasen girl had a crush on him.

Ells, this almost got washed with your jeans. Hugs to Da and Frederick. Mums. Wrapped inside the scrawled note was her cell phone. It still had a charge, but this end of the island had no signal. Ella’s split time running back to the house was quite a bit faster than the way out.

Through the study window, Da heard his daughter scream inside-out as she gulped vocalized air. By the time he made it to her side, she had slumped to her knees, pointing wordlessly at the venomous phone raising its head from the deck. One arm around her shoulders, he reached awkwardly to grasp the offender, and saw.

“We abandoned her, Da! She was there!”

Ella’s father looked at Maryam’s mischievous smile. The handsome boy’s face at her side meant nothing. But he could no longer tuck his suspicions under the folds of his mind, for the name Niall meant much. His face paled and his fingers chilled as he rocked his only child in his arms.

Da sat alone on a granite ledge. A buoy tolled, but he did not hear it. He barely noticed the apricot sky over the hills across the bay. Instead, his eyes tracked a line of cormorants gliding across the still surface. Three chicks, still—a few more weeks and they would be safe from eagles and falcons. The father cormorant rose halfway out of the water to execute a quiet, sinuous dive, but came up empty-beaked. In Japan, the imperial fishing masters train cormorants with a neck ring and a leash. The ring allows small fish to slip down, the seabird's reward. Larger fish are stuck squirming in the bird's throat, the fisherman's reward. The first catch of the season is delivered to the palace, the Emperor's reward. Da wondered if the fishing masters protect their cormorant's chicks from the eagles and falcons.

Little Osprey Isle

The quick stealth of the tide often surprised Ella. The sea rose on its steady vertical clock, but the horizontal gain depended on the uneven slope of the sandy hypotenuse. Frederick's shape-shifting sandbar mainly was shallow, speeding the irregular eddies on their way to the crest. By the time she reached her shore, the waves were sucking the sand out from under her toes. It tickled now, but she knew that in a few minutes the pull could turn treacherous—the Undertoad of childhood nightmares.

She ate a spare lunch with Da in silence—she accepted no comfort, and he had none to give. No one had answered the phone at the Ibn Rushid house in Jerusalem, nor had Maryam's father replied to her guarded email messages. Da could not know that Niall Noígíallach of Airgíalla turned and turned in a mind

looking for some impossible connection between the young man by Maryam's side and the oriel in Da's Talmud. And she was not ready to ask.

Da smiled tightly, patted her with ineffectual affection, and returned to his study. Ella took her cello out on the deck and began her scales. In a few minutes, she glanced over her shoulder at Da's window and saw him at his desk, laptop open. Turning her gaze back over to Barred Ear, she launched, with alarming viciousness, into the opening bars of the Elgar cello concerto.

The phone rang, and a moment later Da burst out onto the deck.

"Frederick fell and can't get up. I'm going over."

Ella breathed in sharply and jumped up, neck and bow in one heedless hand. "I'll come. He needs me."

"No, stay, in case we have to get help. If he's okay, I'll bring him back to calm down."

"His first aid kit is under the sink. Call me!"

Da was already pulling the canoe out from under the deck and dragging it over the granite ledges. Ella watched his clean stroke as the boat cut through the waters, slaloming between the lobster buoys. She then lifted her determined eyes to Barred Ear and turned calmly to enter Da's study. The laptop was still open on his desk.

{19}

Chateau de Montaigne

"My reason is not obliged to bow and bend—my knees are," Montaigne quipped.

"But Michel, don't you agree that we have no obligation to obey an illegitimate ruler?" Mornay was losing patience with Montaigne's oracular riddles. He liked his arguments straight up.

Montaigne the *parlementaire* answered. "Are you asking if the laws of an unlawful ruler are unlawful?"

"I am asking if the dictates of an illegitimate ruler are illegitimate."

The two men stared across the gap of incomprehension, wondering how deep it ran. Montaigne dropped his air of playful superiority. "An illegitimate child is a child born outside of the laws of marriage. An illegitimate king is a king who has stolen his title from the lawful successor. Whatever do you mean by legitimate, other than lawful?"

"I mean rightful, which can come apart from lawful. Not every lawful ruler has the right to rule, or rules rightfully."

Navarre stopped pacing. He even stopped munching on his cheese. The air was charged with thought.

Montaigne followed Mornay's bait. "I certainly agree that not every lawful ruler rules *rightly*. Lawful rulers can commit injustices, and can do so without violating the law. Nothing is so grossly, nor so ordinarily faulty, as the laws. But Philippe, your claim is more daring. You say that a lawful ruler does not always rule *rightfully*—does not always have the right to make mistakes about justice."

"Precisely. There are two ways to become a tyrant. One way is to be a tyrant in title. The other is to be a tyrant in practice. The tyrant in title steals his crown. The tyrant in practice steals the lives and fortunes of his people. The first never had the right to rule. The second loses the right to rule, and can do so without violating any laws. He has violated something much deeper: the covenant with his people."

Little Osprey Isle

Ella sat before the screen and wondered at what she hadn't wondered before. Da was a MacHead, so why was he working on this purple-stickered piece of junk? She softly cursed the desktop finder, or whatever Bill Gates called its clumsy interface. The hard drive had only one document folder, "untitled," that contained only one file, "oo.doc," and its backup. A compact disc, also untitled, was loaded in the drive. She tilted the machine on its side and saw blank holes in the case where the ports should be. She didn't bother to check for a wireless card. Purple clearly did not play well with others. When she clicked to open the CD, up popped a name and password prompt. Shaking slightly, Ella entered "oriel" and "ce110." Nothing. She tried "leiro" and "011ec." Nothing. Her face flushed. How many tries did she have before being blocked? Think. Perhaps the name was given, and Da chose the password. She entered "oriel" and "011ec." In!

The disc held what appeared to be an archive of thousands of documents, arranged by date, going back several years. She opened one at random:

TS/SCI/ORIEL

21 October 2007

To: Deputy Director Operations
From: Director Counterterrorism
Subject: Storage of Oriel Material

Oriel Project Leader considers GTMO unsuitable for temporary storage of Oriel material. Until Stateside facility is operational, PL proposes transfer to Warsaw Station, despite strain on babysitting. DCT concurs. Please advise.

TS/SCI/ORIEL

Ella ejected the disc, walked quickly to her bedroom, and popped it in her drive. The disc opened with the password, but would not copy. Hedgehog! Back in Da's study, she tried to open "oo.doc." It too was protected, but opened with the same codes. "Evaluation of Operation Oriel" with Da's byline! Fearing for time, Ella pulled out her thumb drive and—hedgehog stew!—Purple didn't have a USB port. She put the CD back and tried copying Da's report onto the disc—again no luck. She fought back panic, then smiled and reached into her pocket for her cell phone. She held the phone sideways and, like a Cold War spy with a Minox, started photographing the document, screen by screen, off the laptop. The resolution was poor, but she could make out the words when zoomed.

A page of text fit precisely on two exposures, and precision was needed not to skip any lines. Once she worked out a rhythm, she could shoot two photos every twenty seconds, but the occasional mistake threw her off. Ella had no time to connect the words before her, but neither could she ignore them: clandestine operation, abduction, hostages, secret sites, Central Intelligence Agency, Agency, Agency, Professor Seifenblasen, Seifenblasen, Seifenblasen until, like the voices in her head, the phone screamed out and broke free, falling with a crack on the keyboard.

"H-Hello? Oh, what a relief! But he must be so sh-shaken up. I'll put some coffee on for *jause*." She used Frederick and Annie's old Viennese term for high tea. But Ella returned to her tradecraft. She tried to pick up the tempo, but fretful glances out the window made her fumble. *Allegro ma non troppo*, she

muttered, breathed deeply, and forced herself into a calming 3/4 count: *scroll, check, aim, click, check, boat, scroll, check, aim, click, check, boat*. The canoe was gliding into their cove when she pocketed the camera and ejected the compact disc. Roadkill! Da would miss the disc at once. Hands trembling, she jammed the oriel disc back in the slot. In a heartbeat she was ankle-deep in the water, tugging the painter, steadying the boat for Frederick as Da clambered out. Together they slid the canoe up to dry sand, Frederick an impassive pharaoh in his royal bark, two ski poles out of time and season braced under his arms. "Oh, you poor dear!" Ella clucked as they helped him out. "Yet another indignity of old age, I'm afraid," sighed Frederick mournfully to Da. But to Ella his eyes sparkled like a child in chocolate.

{21}

Moonbow Music Festival
Penobscot Hill, Maine

Neda sat on her suitcase, puzzled. She wished to leave the place of honor for her bunkmate, but was that top or bottom? Top, she reasoned, because the top bunk had the better view (and, she blushed, the fresher air). Top, she hoped, because heights frightened her. But younger Ella would be more frightened. So Neda stood at the foot, grasped the metal bedposts with both hands, slipped a toe between the bottom mattress and spring, and hoisted herself up the creaking frame. Now what? Her elbows pressed down on the top mattress as her legs flailed, looking for a toehold. If the bed were a dock and her body were in water, she could kick herself up. But then the lower bunk would be underwater, and certainly not the place of honor, unless Ella were a dolphin. But Ella was a cellist, and so could not be a dolphin. Her toes found the bottom bunk again and she eased down, the top bunk now at her chin, hands grasping the swaying but

unconquered bedposts. Unconquered? Neda leaned back, imagining what instrument a dolphin would play if a dolphin could play an instrument, and imagining what a dolphin would think if it could train itself to think in Human, not Dolphin, as Neda was training herself to think in English, not Persian. She closed her eyes and floated, swaying gently in the current, her delicate silk headscarf and long pleated skirt flowing gracefully. Neda imagined accompanying a dolphin singing dolphin *lieder*. Dolphins must sleep afloat when they weren't singing, but if Neda fell asleep she would fall. So, still contemplating her puzzled, suspended condition, she opened her eyes. A stringbean of a girl in smudged tortoiseshell glasses was looking at her patiently.

Ella smiled. "Top's okay for me. I'm a rafter writer."

Neda smiled back in relief, but without comprehension. Raft, rafter, raftest? English was hard to conquest.

{22}

Monseigneur Michel de Montaigne
Chateau de Montaigne
Guyenne, France

Dear Michel,

The Moonbow Music Festival has begun at last! My bunkmate, Neda Azadeh, is from Iran, and totally cool in a traditional Islamic sort of way. She's been living in Canada this year because her Mom's a visiting professor of nuclear physics in a research lab somewhere in Ontario. While Neda's enriching culture, her Mom's enriching uranium.

Finding the time to write to you will be harder now. My father's assignments no longer have much weight with me, for reasons I will explain.

But now *I* want to write to you—*need* to write to you—for me. (Just when I think I've worked my way free of him, Da's long reach ensnares me again. Hedgehog on pumpernickel!)

You, who so detest dishonesty, will not be proud of what I've done. I've stolen a very important, very damaging document from Da. It turns out that he's not exactly the absent-minded philosophy professor he appears to be. Da's been writing a top secret report for the government about a really weird counterterrorism program. The government—my government!—has been taking hostages from the families of people abroad they think are troublemakers—snatching them when they travel to the United States. It started with the relatives of suspected terrorists, but ballooned to include noisy activists, nosy journalists, and inconvenient foreign intellectuals. They began with grownups, but then started kidnapping kids! I suppose if you are trying to extort good behavior from troublemakers, daughters give more effective leverage than second cousins.

The new President inherited a bunch of these secret hostages stashed in secret locations, and someone in the White House commissioned Da to help with an internal investigation. According to Da's report, the President suspended new abductions with a national security directive on Inauguration Day, and the new administration is trying to come up with a clever way to release hostages without causing a major diplomatic meltdown. (You'd think someone would have worried about how to give 'em back before snatching 'em.) But here's the thing: someone is lying, because Maryam, daughter of troublesome peacemaker Abu Salaam, definitely landed in Boston last week, and definitely disappeared before making it through customs! Da doesn't know that I stole his report, so he doesn't know that I know *why* Maryam disappeared, and *who* snatched her. But he has to know what happened to her, and he hasn't told me a thing! Da was keeping his stupid government secrets while I was worrying myself *to death*

about Maryam. I hate him *so* much. But how's this for irony: now I've got myself a hostage—Da's report. And that makes me the troublemaker.

Moi,

Ella Seifenblasen

The rafters were an easy reach from the top of the bunk where Ella sat cross-legged. Finding room was not so easy—the beams and boards were covered with the fading remembrances of campers past. *Avigail & Yuki, Friends 4-Ever, Moonbow '04, '05. The Quahog Quartet (Yasmin, Sasha, Margot, Aaron), 2008. Cadenza Cabin '11: Jaya, Xin, Ella, Ikuko, Maryam.* Ella found a clear run around the window frame, and inscribed a long ribbon of words:

It is painful for me to dissemble, so much so that I avoid taking others' secrets into my keeping, not really having the heart to disavow what I know. In the service of princes it is a small thing to be secret if one is not a liar to boot.

{23}

Bangor, Maine

The aspirationally named Bangor International Airport has no regularly scheduled international flights. Out of season, a couple of airlines fly a couple of commuter turboprops a day. There are two peak seasons. In summer season, a few flights are added, and demand sometimes warrants the use of full-sized jets. In war season, Bangor is the principal port of departure and return for troops deployed to the Silk Road conflicts. The coffee shop in Bangor International has enjoyed peak season for nearly a decade.

Ella and Neda sat in that coffee shop surrounded by young men and women in battle fatigues. Some were anxious and some were exuberant. Some were leaving and some were returning. A few years ago, the Army adopted an unflattering new combat uniform that looked like a camouflaged potato sack. The handful of naval officers in their summer whites stood out like princes among toads. Jane Austen was right about naval officers, Ella thought.

The girls were to perform the Franck sonata at a house concert in New York, a fundraiser for Moonbow. The director liked to send his youngest charges to these events, the better to impress the donors, and he was fortunate to find Ella and Neda ready to perform so early in the festival season. Each had played the Franck before, and the pairing was inspired. They read each other reflexively, matched like the *recto* and *verso* of a page. Though often performed with cello, the sonata was written for violin, an instrument that pierces where the cello purrs. Neda knew when more *pianissimo* was needed to not cover the cello's deep resonances. Some cellists play sonatas like divas sing arias. Not Ella. She sat up near the keyboard, reading the language of Neda's breathing. Together, they made the simple canon of the last movement sound like children chasing fireflies, which, in a way, they were.

"US Airways flight 3710 to New York La Guardia Airport now boarding at Gate 1."

Bangor had only three gates, and that reminded Neda of a mathematics puzzle. If the plane to New York were hidden behind one of three gates, and if, to board, you had to guess correctly which one, and if, after you chose a gate, the game show host Monty Hall opened one of the other gates to reveal no plane, and then offered you the opportunity to switch your choice from your chosen gate to the other unopened gate where the lovely Carol Merrill is now standing, do you increase your odds of getting to New York if you switch gates? Neda had never seen an episode of "Let's Make a Deal," of course, or of any game show,

and neither had the television-free Ella, but the two had argued about the solution to the Monty Hall Problem for an entire evening.

Ella hoisted her electric blue cello case onto her back.

“A flute would have been less expensive,” Neda teased. She had played the Franck in an arrangement for flute as well, which called for different dynamic choices at the keyboard. Ella grimaced. No serious cellist would check her instrument in baggage, and no airline allowed a cello on board without paying for a second seat. Most booking agents were dumbfounded at the request to seat an instrument, and the task was impossible online. So Ella simply purchased a ticket for Cello Seifenblasen and appeared at the gate, where the presentation of a paid-up ticket preempted objections. Cello Seifenblasen accumulated frequent flyer miles and got credit card offers in the mail. As she boarded the plane, Ella wondered how hard it would be to register Cello to vote. Then she wondered whom Cello would vote for in a country where the presidents of both parties take violinists hostage.

{24}

Chateau de Montaigne

“On your view, my dear Michel, what permits our Lord Navarre to take the field at all? Should he not have laid down his arms and stretched out his neck for Joyeuse? Do you counsel all Protestants to walk like sheep to their slaughter, in witness to the true religion?”

Navarre interrupted, reciting some fragment he remembered from his saintly mother. “In the early years of our persecution, Reformed ministers counseled martyrdom in imitation of the crucified Christ.” Henri’s own notions of courage, of course, were quite different, and to stave off thoughts of sacrifice,

he popped a handful of the chateau's tart grapes in his mouth, resuming his restless circumambulation.

"My Lord, martyrdom is not required when organized resistance is possible," the learned Mornay assured him. "An officer of the kingdom who uses his office to resist tyranny serves the kingdom—his proper allegiance is not to the person of the monarch, but to the office of the monarchy, which the tyrant betrays. An officer of the kingdom who resists the tyrant upholds the dual covenants between the people and God and between the king and the people. Of course my Lord was permitted to defend against the ambush of Joyeuse, and I see no moral difference between fighting at Coutras, breaking the siege of La Rochelle, or joining forces with our German comrades now crossing Alsace. Must the defender wait until the aggressor has struck a fatal blow before resistance is justified? What a futile theory of self-defense that would be!"

"But why stop with organized resistance led by an officer of the kingdom?" Montaigne had laid his own ambush. "On your view, Philippe, is not every burgher and peasant a party to these covenants? Why isn't every citizen called upon to be guarantor, whether he himself is the target of tyranny or not? If the king's men come to arrest my Protestant neighbor for supposed heresy, or to tax my poor tenant to starvation, should I not strike the tyrant's henchmen down if I can? The king violates his covenant with the people."

"With *the people*," Mornay parried. "The corporate body of the people, not individuals. Only responsible officers of the kingdom personify the people taken as a whole, and only the people taken as a whole is party to the covenants."

"Your conception of these covenants is a bit too convenient to the interests of the grand, is it not?" Montaigne replied. "The swords and lances of nobles nursing grievances or chasing glory may speak on behalf of the people, but not the pikes and pitchforks of ordinary persons who are genuinely oppressed? And if, as often happens, the tyrant has bought off the resentments of the great houses, then the downtrodden peasantry or persecuted sectarians must suffer

their injuries in silence? Or worse—have they no creditable injuries at all, because, as individuals, they are not parties to any covenant?”

Philippe paused, a caring doctor delivering bad news. “Their injuries are real enough—they count as moral patients. But as individuals, they do not have the authority to act as moral agents.”

“So, unless an officer of the kingdom intervenes, a commoner must choose between submission and martyrdom?” asked Montaigne.

“I’m afraid so,” Philippe replied. “Resistance by a lesser magistrate supports the true legal order. Individual resistance destroys it.”

“No, Philippe,” Montaigne admonished, his head shaking slowly. “You cannot domesticate resistance so easily. Once the dogs of rebellion have slipped their leashes, all civilized order has been cast to the fates. I offer no sorry comfort to our corrupt rulers who suck the lifeblood of our land. But our laws, poor and wretched as they are, are all the order we have. The ship of state is out upon the turbulent waters, and we must patch its leaks and darn its sails as we go. There is no drydock on the high seas, and mutiny will send us straight to the bottom.”

“And so tyranny has no recourse at all?” Philippe was incredulous.

“My view is *exactly* opposite yours,” Montaigne countered. “I may always, at last resort, defend my body, my house, my liberties. In doing so, I make no grand political statement about true covenants. I simply protect myself from cruelty, the greatest evil. When our Lord Navarre protects the lives of Protestants, that is his sole justification, and it is justification enough. As for your fancy talk of speaking for the people and upholding true covenants, I revert to my original skepticism. I very much doubt that officers of the kingdom know the will of God or of the people. I, however, have decided on another glass of this excellent Armagnac.”

New York

Ella and Neda inched up the line to the ticket counter. Exhilarated but worn from last night's music-making, Ella slid her backpack forward with her sneakered foot. Her electric blue cello case was slung over her tee shirt and jeans. Even on the polished terminal floor, she didn't trust the case's wheels to absorb the shocks.

Neda glided behind in her usual elegance, despite the early hour: pressed linen pleats falling to the knee, tailored cotton blouse, silky peach headscarf. "It is good that pianos do not have carrying cases," she quipped, steering her trim rolling carry-on with three fingers, pinky up as if she were taking tea.

"Ella and Cello Seifenblasen, to Bangor," Ella told the ticket lady, pushing her reservations and passport across the counter. "My little sister Cello doesn't have identification, I'm afraid."

The agent chuckled. "And until you're eighteen, you don't need any either. Nothing to check?" The agent quickly printed two boarding passes and pushed the passport back, unopened. "Gate 6, to your left. Cello goes in the window seat. Ask the cabin crew for a seatbelt extender."

Neda, next in line, copied Ella. "Are you fifteen, dear?" the ticket agent asked. Children under fifteen flying alone needed a responsible adult at both ends.

Neda and Ella giggled. "But I am older!" the shorter girl protested.

The agent opened Neda's Iranian passport and quickly checked her birthdate.

"Ah, almost a lady. Someday you'll be grateful to be mistaken for younger, my dear. Let's print that boarding pass." She frowned at the output before sliding it across the counter. "I'm sorry, sweetheart. You see the notation

SSSSS? You've been flagged for an extra security check. Better get to the gate early." She shrugged in sympathy. "Your scarf is stunning. Hermes?"

Neda's eyes held the ticket agent's for a long, grateful moment. "Thank you, yes." she whispered.

"Why now?" Neda sighed to Ella as they left the counter. She had flown within the United States before without being picked out.

As they strolled down the concourse towards security, Ella noticed through a break in the crowd a sight that made her falter: three or four uniformed officers clustered around a young man in civvies pointing his arms, as if giving instructions. Ella tugged Neda into the bookstore alcove they were passing and swung the cello off her shoulders. Neda thought it was one of Ella's playful whims until she saw her urgent face.

"Neds, stay in here with my stuff. Here, look at these shelves. Keep your stunning head down. I'll be back in a second to explain. Please!"

Though her heart raced, Ella disciplined herself to walk slowly up the concourse towards the uniforms. They had already stationed themselves around the screening area. The leader was huddled with a tall grim woman in plainclothes—an earphone wire disappearing under her jacket was the tell. Ella walked ten yards past the checkpoint and, feigning to examine the concourse signs overhead, turned around to walk back. The young man had finished his conversation and lifted his head, gazing full-faced at a point beyond Ella. He was handsome, with an almost too-pretty face—boyishly round, with high cheeks and tousled hair stylishly cut.

Dear Ella,

The brain syrup isn't so bad now. I swallow it, because if I don't, Sitter calls Strapper to hold me down, Nurser injects me, and that makes my head burst. The syrup just makes everything gauzy.

Asker questions me for hours every day. He's gentle about it. It's all very clinical, like he's my therapist or something. Like I have *problems*, apart from the problem of being a drugged prisoner under interrogation. They all talk to me like I'm a toddler, which, to be honest, is how the brain syrup makes me feel. They are insufferably kind. Must be in the field manual under *Interrogation, Teenage Girls*.

Sitter lets me practice violin all I want, though it's hard to play well on syrup—I get twitchy. I wish I had someone to play with. The old piano here is pretty good. Yes, piano—they're holding me at what was once a country house that's been turned into a creepy hotel—you can check out any time you like, but you can never leave. When Niall visits, we play duets, but he's almost never here. Maybe if I'm a good girl and tell Asker what he wants to know, Niall will visit more often. Problem is, I don't know what Asker wants to know. The questions are endless and stupid. Yes, my father knows Abu Tweedledee and Ibn Tweedledum. My father knows everyone. The West Bank's a small place. Niall's questions aren't stupid. But he's almost never here. I know—Stockholm Syndrome, big time.

Sitter gets me whatever books I request—Amazon apparently has second-day shipping to top secret clinics for the politically insane—but it's hard to concentrate on brain syrup. I sleep a lot. *A lot*.

I can write all the letters I want. I know they go straight to Asker, not the mailbox. It's pretty obvious, even though Sitter gives me stamped envelopes.

Asker thinks he's being *really* subtle when he just happens to ask about people I've been writing about. *Hi, Asker.* But I keep writing, because maybe I'll get the letters back at the end. At the end of what?

I'm not so drug-addled that I give them *all* the letters, though. Some I tuck inside my music. Some I eat. I don't want Asker to read *everything*. I told too much in this one, so I'll eat it—if I can remember.

No complaints about the food, though. Feeder's a *really* good cook. I'm gaining weight, I think. I wonder if this is a side effect of the medication. Hard to know for sure, since I'm kept in hospital scrubs—cuckoo blue, not convict orange, at least. *Hey Nurser, is weight gain a side effect of brain syrup?*

Gotta go now. Nurser's coming with my afternoon meds.

Peace,

Maryam bint Abu Salaam Ibn Rushid

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New York

Convincing an incredulous Neda to do it took longer than the doing. The first girl to emerge from the women's room wore Ella's jeans cuffed wide, Ella's smudged tortoise shell glasses pushed a bit down the nose, day-glow red lipstick, and hair up in gelled spikes, the cosmetics found at the kiosk nearby. She strode with forced confidence to join the line at security. When there was little risk of bumping into anyone, she lifted her chin slightly to peer through the lenses, altering the angle of her face. The attentive watchers spread out around the checkpoint looked through her. When her turn came, she handed the TSA officer her boarding pass with a demure smile.

"Name?"

“Cello Seifenblasen.”

“Identification?”

“I am sixteen and do not drive.”

“Traveling alone?”

“Is that a problem?”

“No, but it’s a good idea to carry your passport or birth certificate next time. What kind of name is Cello?”

“Italian. My Mother was a fan of Jacqueline du Pré.”

The TSA officer stared blankly. “Jackie O?”

The girl stared blankly back. “A famous musician.”

The officer scribbled his okay on the boarding pass and waved her through to the x-ray machines.

The second girl stood outside the bathroom door with a blue cello case on her back and a backpack on the floor in front of her. Neda’s skirt, no longer perfectly pressed, slipped down to her skinny hips, but the untucked cotton shirt covered the gap. Without glasses, all she could see at the security checkpoint was blur. She had ten minutes—long enough, she hoped, for memories of Cello Seifenblasen to fade. She walked myopically back to the terminal entrance, stopping in front of a mailbox. She pulled out of her knapsack a Manila envelope she had hoped would never need mailing. Not for the first time, she checked the stamp, the seal, the return address, and the addressee: Maryam Ibn Rushid.

She slipped the envelope into the slot, made sure it did not stick to the chute, and, noticing that she had been holding her breath, exhaled deeply. She then retraced her steps to the security checkpoint and handed the TSA officer her boarding pass and passport. He matched the name on the two documents, compared her face with the passport photo, and said, “You do know that you’ll have to check that guitar at the gate.”

“Yeah, but it’s safer this way.”

He scribbled on the boarding pass and waved her through. The cello case didn't fit on the x-ray belt, and had to be inspected by hand.

"You do know that you'll have to check this at the gate," the officer manning the x-ray machine told her.

"Yeah, but it's safer this way."

The handsome young man was waiting just beyond the screening spot where travelers fumbled to put their shoes back on. He watched the cello inspection with desultory curiosity, looking up regularly to check the security line. Ella took a deep, calming breath. Why should he make the connection? Because if he knows where and when Neda is traveling, he probably knows why she is traveling, and with whom. But perhaps not. They booked separately. Why would he know of her existence? Using cello in his password is Da's little quirk, not Operation Oriel's. He might not even know of Da's existence. But these reassuring thoughts did nothing to tame the pounding in her chest.

When she closed up the case, slipped on her shoes, and walked past him, she managed a rueful smile, as if to say we all must suffer the little indignities of secure travel. He returned the smile, but his attention had already turned back to the passengers coming through the metal detectors. His interest was in the cello, not the cellist.

When Ella got to the gate, Neda was staring out the plate glass window at the planes, keeping her face averted. She was crying softly, silently.

"I am a naked tramp," she whispered.

Ella took her hand gently and looked out the window, side by side. "It's how Henri of Navarre must have felt, taking communion to save his life. But Allah doesn't need another martyr."

Neda squeezed her hand. "And your precious instrument will be ruined."

"Maybe not. It will be hand-loaded, and the plane is a little puddle jumper. Baggage is claimed on the tarmac, like *Casablanca*. You're doing great. Keep looking out the window. I'll get the cello tagged for the hold now—I don't

want to call attention to it later when you're presenting Cello Seifenblasen's boarding pass."

Ella approached the gate attendant. "I know my viola da gamba is too big to take on. Can I get a gate check?"

The expressionless attendant glanced up, returned to her screen, and typed a few keystrokes. Still looking down, she said, "The flight isn't full. You can take it on, if you promise not to tell." Then she looked up and gave Ella a conspiratorial wink.

"Uh, wow, thanks!" Ella replied, not sure whether this was good or bad news for Neda.

The brisk gate attendant had already reached for her microphone. "US Airways flight 3759 to Bangor is now boarding at Gate 6."

When Ella returned to the plate glass window, Neda said, "I had best go wash my face."

A moment later a uniformed TSA officer walked up to the boarding gate followed by the handsome young man looking intently at the travelers lining up to board. After the officer had a word with the brisk gate attendant, the young man was handed a sheet of paper. His gaze alternated from the line to the paper—clearly a passenger manifest. The de Havilland turboprop held about forty, and the flight wasn't full today. When he saw Ella and her cello, he consulted the list, and looked up at her with appreciation. Did he approve of buying the cello a seat, or of naming it Cello Seifenblasen? Ella was nodding in recognition when Neda came into view behind him and froze. Ella stepped up quickly to hold his attention.

"You appear to be an admirer of cellos," Ella said. "Do you play?" Neda unfroze, turned silently, and slipped away.

“Just piano, and just passably.” He spoke English English with a trace of another accent. She understood why Maryam was charmed. “You must be a serious player with a serious instrument, to buy it a seat.”

Ella’s pride struggled momentarily with her sense. Time for her to slip away too. But her daring got the better of both pride and sense. “You must be a serious Federal agent. Hunting terrorists?”

“That would make it too easy. No, it’s a bit more complicated than that. A necessary office.” He sounded reflective, saddened. Hedgehog! Ella didn’t want him to be appealing.

“Let this role be played by the more vigorous and less fearful of citizens, who sacrifice their honor and their conscience,” she recited, and turned to join the line.

He looked puzzlingly at her back for a moment, then finished the quote. *“... as those ancients sacrificed their lives, for the good of their country.”*

Ella turned, startled. Niall of the Nine Hostages shrugged, as if to say you started it, scanned the boarding area one last time, and walked back towards security, trailed by the obliging TSA officer.

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Mademoiselle Ella Seifenblasen

Barred Ear, Maine

Ma chère Ella,

A magnificent stratagem! You were, shall we say, ambushed, like Henri of Navarre at Coutras, and you deftly escaped a trap using your wits. Had you been with him at the Valois court, poor Navarre would not have needed four years to free himself from the golden shackles of Catherine de Medici. He is the

bravest of men, *oui*, but not quite as clever as you have become. And such rare and exquisite friendship you have shown.

I have started a new essay, and perhaps you can help me with it:

Of Hedgehogs

*The fox knows many things,
but the hedgehog knows one big thing,*

So says Archilochus. Princes too know many things. A courageous young woman of my acquaintance knew one big thing, not to betray her friend for a prince. But would she betray a father for a friend, or a prince for a father?

I wonder how it will end. Any suggestions?

Mademoiselle, I kiss your hands respectfully, and pray God to have you in His keeping.

Your humble friend,
Michel de Montaigne

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The nausea of fear rose first, bitter in her mouth. She crouched to ward off faint, then spilled tears. No sobbing—she pressed her knees to her ears and the wet leaked out quietly. She wasn't sure now when his voice in her mind had become a sensible sound. Her fabric unrolled from imaginary to oracular to delusional without seam. The rip came with words on paper palpable in her hand. She

crushed and smoothed, crushed and smoothed, but the ink stubbornly did not vanish. Madness indelible.

Across the small room, on the other snug cot, a blanket rose and fell softly to her roommate's even breath. Unless she too was a character in her delusion. If she was real, she needed her sleep after yesterday. Unless Niall was a delusion. In her chainstitched mind, doubt unraveled to skepticism to solipsism. She was desperately alone.

She pulled herself off the floor and shuffled downstairs in her pajamas to make tea. The kitchen light was on. She hoped that Frederick, an erratic sleeper, was not up. She throttled the kettle before it whistled and sat at the old oak table, warming her hands on her tea, inhaling the rising mist for comfort. The impossible letter from another century lay in wait, battered but defiant, held down by the mug.

"Ach, what troubles your sleep, dear Ella? You have not lived long enough to have unconsolable regrets." Frederick called out kindly from the great room, where he sat in the glow of a lamp by the empty hearth in his stuffed, threadbare wingchair, a cherry music stand seconded as reading desk pulled up to his lap.

Ella rose to join him, concealing the letter in the waistband of her pajamas, carrying the mug openly. She wiped her face on her sleeve, hoping he wouldn't notice her tear-swollen, evasive eyes. "Just yesterday's excitement. I keep thinking of all the near misses."

Frederick twinkled. "Cloaks and robbers! Cops and daggers! And Barred Ear a pirate's lair!"

An unbidden smile broke through Ella's agitation. "The only safehouse in the world that serves *jause*."

"And has a proper library. Your adventure has driven me to Machiavelli." Frederick waved the slim volume in his hand. "Fortune is a woman."

“Excuse me?”

“Sorry—the men of Renaissance Florence were not feminists. Like a man pursuing a woman, goes the metaphor, boldness can improve the odds. Yes, Ella, you were lucky. But without your audacity, Neda would have been taken for sure.”

Listening took effort because Ella was spinning in an endless loop. Niall is real if yesterday was real if Frederick is real if ... there is no way out. So I have no choice but to stay in. Mad or not, this is the only *cogito* I've got. *Ergo*, I will act *as if* I sanely *sum*.

Frederick must have said good night, and she must have replied, because he had hoisted himself out of his wingchair and was slaloming to his ground floor bedroom on the ski poles. Ella remained, sipping tea. She idly picked Frederick's Machiavelli off his chair and thumbed it.

I judge this indeed, that it is better to be impetuous than cautious, because fortune is a woman; and it is necessary, if one wants to hold her down, to beat her and strike her down. And one sees that she lets herself be won more by the impetuous than by those who proceed coldly. And so always, like a woman, she is the friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity.

Violating the laws of chance? Raping fortune? What is this brilliant pig getting at?

Chateau de Montaigne

“Michel, the Bible is clear about the nature of God’s covenant with the people. Of the covenant at Mount Sinai, we read, *And Moses came and recounted to the people all the Lord’s words and all the laws, and the people answered with a single voice.* A single voice, Michel, because they constituted a single entity. The covenant is between God and his people, not between God and individuals.”

“You quote selectively, Philippe,” said Montaigne softly, looking down into his empty glass. Navarre, perched on the arm of a chair, shifted uncomfortably in the long silence that followed, then caught Mornay’s eye. Mornay knit his brow and shook his head almost imperceptibly. *Give him time.* Then Montaigne stood up with resolve. “Follow me,” he said, striding towards the spiral stair.

The Montaigne family chapel filled the round tower’s ground floor. It was the only Catholic shrine for miles that hadn’t been vandalized by Huguenot iconoclasts. Mornay, who was raised in the spare aesthetic of Calvinism, sniffed at the Romish gilt and lace. Navarre’s tastes were more ornate.

“I keep my bibles down here. Religion below philosophy,” Montaigne quipped as he pulled his French Olivétan bible from an ornately carved bookcase and laid it on the wide lectern. He rested one arm comfortably on the bookcase while the other flipped the pages with quick assurance to Exodus. “The verse continues. *And the people answered with a single voice and said, All the words that the Lord has spoken we will do.* A plural response.”

“But that doesn’t signify,” Philippe retorted. “Your point would be better made if each Israelite had said ‘I.’ They use the collective ‘we,’ of course.”

“Or, as we say, the royal we,” the king of Navarre added with amusement. He had little patience for biblical exegesis or grammar, but enjoyed the sparring.

“The crucial word is not ‘we,’ but ‘said,’” Montaigne replied.

Mornay looked at his friend quizzically. In the French text, both “answered” and “said” took the singular forms, *répondit* and *dit*. “You strengthen my reading, Michel. And the people *answered*, in the singular, signifying a unity, with a single voice and *said*, in the singular, again signifying a unity, all the words that the Lord has spoken *we* will do, signifying that they spoke for the group, not for each as an individual. How much more plain can it be?”

Montaigne’s eyes danced in amusement. “But the French is *mistaken*.” His fingers found a carved rosette on the bookcase that rotated with a precise click. The bookcase swung forward on silent hinges, revealing inner shelves hewn into the curved stone wall. The smell of old leather wafted from rows of Hebrew tomes.

“*Belly of Saint Gris!*” howled Navarre in laughter. “Michel, you foxy old Pharisee!” Mornay just nodded in shrewd appraisal. His surprise was not total.

“I am at least as Christian as you two heretics,” Montaigne sniffed. “But I will not abandon my birthright, and dare not openly claim it. The reach of the Inquisitor is long.”

Mornay was not convinced. “But a Hebrew library is not proscribed. What serious scholar in this century has not studied a Hebrew grammar or consulted the polyglot?”

“They haven’t my ancestry.”

“But secrecy would be taken as an admission of guilt.”

“True enough. There is danger down every path, and I chose mine. But I brought you down here to read, not confess. Here is something even you have never seen before, Philippe. A 1491 Lisbon quarto, smuggled out of Iberia under

my grandmother's bottom, like Rachel on her father's idols." Montaigne opened a handsome incunabulum, one of the first printed editions of the Torah, and flipped the pages with more affection than reverence. "Here. *Vaya'an kol ha'am bekol ekhad vayomru.*" His finger traced the Hebrew letters, adorned with vocalization and cantillation markings. "The People *answers*, singular, but *say*, plural. The text is grammatically unstable, switching back and forth. Tell me, Philippe. When and how are the individual Israelites in the desert constituted as the People of Israel that is capable of entering, as a unitary party, into a covenant with God?"

Philippe paused and thought. "There is nothing prior. It is the covenant with God that forms the People of Israel." He flipped through the French bible to the assembly on the Plains of Moab in Deuteronomy. "*You are stationed here today all of you before the Lord your God, your heads, your tribes, your elders, and your overseers, every man of Israel. Your little ones, your wives, and your sojourner who is in the midst of your camps, from the hewer of your wood to the drawer of your water, for you to pass into the Covenant of the Lord your God and into His oath that the Lord your God is to seal with you today, in order to raise you up for Him today as a people, and He will be for you a God. God raises them up as a people.*"

"So if the People of Israel does not exist as a people prior to the covenant with God, how can there be a People of Israel that enters into a covenant with God?" Montaigne stooped to pull a heavy volume of the Bomberg Talmud from the stone shelf and spread it on the lectern. "The rabbinic sages recognized the puzzle. The desert census counted some six hundred thousand Israelite men. Rabbi Simeon bar Yochai holds that six hundred thousand covenants were made for each commandment—each Israelite making oaths to God. Rabbi Judah HaNasi holds that six hundred thousand *times* six hundred thousand covenants were made for each commandment: every Israelite making oaths to each other before God."

Navarre, sensing checkmate, poked Mornay in the ribs. “That’s a lot of swearing.”

“Philippe, you see that I can go a few rounds with you if I choose. But the Bible is not going to settle these matters for us. I have one last text to offer, the proof-text that proves we have no need for proof-texts.” Montaigne flipped back to Exodus in the French bible. “*It is not in the heavens, to say, Who will go up for us to the heavens and take it for us and let us hear it, that we may do it?* The answers are not in the heavens, my dear friends. We must use our own heads.” He returned the endangering books to their stony shelves, closed the secret compartment with a conspiratorial flourish, and headed for the spiral staircase.

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Ella Seifenblasen
Barred Ear, Maine

Ma chère Ella,

Have you ever made an impetuous choice to trust another? I have put my fate in the hands of two men who could, with a word, betray my entire family and estate. My mother’s mother entrusted to me a secret that if revealed could—nay, *would*—be my undoing. Yet I, who inhabit an age of intrigue and perfidy, have an unfounded faith that my confidence will be kept—indeed, kept *because* I have trusted.

I am called a skeptic, and not without reason, I suppose. Is not my motto “*Que sais-je?*”—“What do I know?” But no one has ever accused me of systematic philosophizing! I don’t doubt the existence of my horse under my bottom or of my head under my hat. Nor do I doubt that the greatest evil is cruelty, or that one of the chief causes of cruelty is righteous certainty. But the

remedy for cruel certainty is curiosity, not the skepticism of the philosophers. "I am human," says Terence. "Nothing human is strange to me."

Do not doubt yourself, dear Ella. Do not become strange to yourself, for you too are human.

Mademoiselle, I pray God to grant you long and happy life.

Your affectionate friend,
Michel de Montaigne

Ella pulled her legs up to her chest, wrapped her arms around her knees, and rocked gently back and forward in Frederick's wingchair, her hollow eyes staring down at the inked sheet on the flattened music stand. She reached out a hand, fingers spread, and lowered it to the paper, hovering just above until she felt the heat of her hand radiate off its surface. She moved her hand in a slow circle, the pads of her fingertips and palms lightly brushing the paper's nap. She raised the letter and pressed it to her face like a cloth, inhaling the scents of old rag paper and fresh iron gall ink. Her tears wet the letter but the writing did not run. She read it again and again. He read it to her again and again. She heard his voice in her head again and again. How could she not become strange to herself?

End of Part 1