

Holly-Jane Rahlens



Extract:

Prince William, Maximilian Minsky and Me

“Papa, I found the absolute perfect telescope,” I said after taking a bite of my lamb chop.

I admit that it may not have been the right moment to divulge the news, but how was I to know my parents were at the brink of a major crisis? And besides, I actually thought I was doing something constructive by filling the lull in the conversation. My mother had just mentioned that she had spotted her ex-best friend Beate at the supermarket that evening, near the frozen foods, and that they both had pretended not to see each other. And then there was a lull.

“I know the telescope’s not cheap,” I went on. “But it comes with a T-2 ring camera adapter.”

“Wow!” said my dad.

That was sweet of him, because he really had no idea what I was talking about.

“What does it cost?” said my mother.

And wasn’t that just like her? Wham! Bang! How much? She always goes straight to the heart of the matter.

“Only seven hundred. A special price. Just for me, Fritz said.”

“Seven hundred!” My mother dropped her fork. “Seven hundred? Nelly! You can’t be serious. I’m sorry, sweetie, but your hobbies are really getting too expensive.”

“But it also comes with a filter for sunspots!”

“Nelly, for god’s sake!”

“Okay. Then I’ll use my bat mitzvah money.”

“We said you were going to save that money.” She threw my father a look.

What did they know that I didn’t?

“I got some bad news today at my meeting. CinemaScoop may be folding,” my mother said. “And just when I wanted to write my book.”

Uh-oh. There was Her Book again. Her New York Novel.

“Now I can’t take time off,” she went on. “It was my gravy train. Now I’ll have to work my tochis off at piecemeal jobs. It’ll take me forever to find another cushy job like that.” She turned to my father. “I’m worried, Benny.”

“You’re a worrywart, Lucy. You’ll find something. You always do.”

“But why is it always me who has to find something? I’m sick of being the wage earner in this family.”

Oh, no. Not that broken record.

“That’s not fair!” I said. “Papa works!”

My mother pounced on me—figuratively, of course. “Nelly, do you have nothing better to do than referee our arguments?”

“Well, I think CinemaScoop is a stupid magazine anyway,” I said.

“Nelly.” My father’s tone was gently admonishing.

“Nelly,” my mother said, imitating him. “Jesus, Benny, can’t you for once say more than just ‘Nelly’? Can’t you say, ‘Nelly that was fresh. Nelly respect your mother. Nelly, watch that mouth’? You and your German antiauthoritarianism! You’re all wimps!”

My father turned to my mother. He kept his voice steady. “So it’s the Germans again. I was wondering how long it would take for you to smuggle that into the conversation. I suppose it’s the Germans’ fault too that the magazine’s folding.”

“You’re damn right it is. The Germans know nothing about movie

stars. They don't know how to make them. They don't know how to nurture them. And they don't know how to write about them."

I pushed my plate away and got up. My lamb chop was about to make its way back up my esophagus. "Can I be excused?"

"Sit down, young lady," my mother roared.

I sat down.

I think the sound of her own voice frightened her, because when my mother spoke again she was a thousand decibels softer. "All I'm saying is that until I find another job, or make some sort of decision, we're going to have to be careful with money. All of us. Even me. Now we can't go to New York." She gave my father a sidelong glance. "Or would you like to find some work and help us out here?"

"Lucy," my father said. "Please."

My mother looked at me for a couple of seconds and then, almost gently, she said, "Look, Nelly, I know you want a good telescope. And I want you to have one. But I think if you want one so much, you should work for it. You're old enough. Why don't you consider baby-sitting? If you start saving your money for a telescope, we'll match your earnings. How's that? Fifty-fifty."

"Baby-sit? You want me to baby-sit?" I said, horrified.

"Why not?"

"Why not?" I shouted.

"Yes, why not? Why do you have to be so contrary?"

"Me contrary? Are you aware of how long I'd have to baby-sit in order to save enough for a decent telescope?"

I saw my mother's cheeks turn a bright red. (Remember how my father is always blanching when he gets angry? Well, my mother's always flushing.) "What am I?" she screamed. "A bank? The mint? Some jerk who dishes out money at the drop of a hat?"

"It would take me forever to get a telescope baby-sitting!"

“You’ve got all the time in the world. The stars aren’t going anywhere.”

That was the last straw. I jumped up from my seat and made a bee-line for the door.

“I hate her! I hate her! I hate her!” I yelled at the walls as I stomped through the living room to my room. I slammed my door and fell on my bed in tears.

Really, it was absolutely the most rotten day of my life.