



*The Lucky Kind*

alyssa b. sheinmel

CHAPTER SAMPLER

Sometimes in love  
it helps to have  
*a little luck.*

High school junior Nick Brandt is intent on getting a girlfriend, and Eden Reiss is the one that he wants. He has exactly four semesters to get the girl, but when the phone rings on an otherwise ordinary Tuesday night, life for Nick and his parents will never be the same. What had been a seemingly idyllic home life has become something else entirely. But with this shake-up comes a newfound confidence for Nick; he's become a bolder version of himself, no longer afraid to question his parents, and no longer afraid to talk to Eden.



Alyssa B. Sheinmel has written a powerfully gripping story about family secrets, falling in love, and finding luck in unexpected—and sometimes unwelcome—circumstances.

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## *Phone Calls and Other Life-Altering Events*



**I**t's 7:42 on a Tuesday when the phone rings. I only notice the time because I'm watching *Wheel of Fortune*, which is so boring that I think I might be better entertained if I turned off the TV and stared at the blank screen. I wonder when Vanna White began looking like somebody's mom. I distinctly remember thinking she was hot when I was younger. My parents are out and I'm sunk into the living room sofa, but the phone is within my arm's reach. I grab the remote and hit the mute button.

“Hello?”

“Eh-hem.”

“Hello?”

“Is Sheffman Brandt in?”

It takes me a second to realize he’s talking about my dad. Sheffman is his real first name, but no one calls him that. He usually goes by Robert or Rob or Bobby, for his middle name. Sheffman is his mother’s maiden name. It must be a telemarketer or someone who got his name off a list.

“No, I’m sorry, he’s not home. Can I take a message?”

There’s silence on the other end. I think I hear the man say “Umm,” like he’s really thinking about whether or not to leave a message.

“Hello?” I say, mildly irritated.

“No. I’m sorry. No. Sorry. No, thank you.” His voice sounds more certain that “No” is the right answer each time he says it. Then he hangs up, so I do, too. I’m asleep before my parents get home.

In the morning, the sound of my mother and Pilot coming back from their walk wakes me up. Pilot is our dog, but my parents act like he’s my little brother.

My father is sitting in the living room at his computer. His desk is in the back of the room, behind the sofa, so that he can watch TV while he works.

“Morning, Nicky,” he says, looking up from his cereal. Even though he’s fifty years old, my dad has a big sweet tooth; he puts three or four spoonfuls of sugar into his Grape-Nuts every morning. Mom says he’s going to get adult-onset diabetes. Dad works from home half the time, and he’s sitting in his pajama

bottoms with his cereal, so it doesn't look like he's going in today. Before I was born, he started a company called Fetch Capital, and my mother quit her job to help him run it.

"Hey, Dad." My hair is still wet from the shower, and my shirt is clinging to my chest because I was still wet when I put it on. But it's only September, school's only just started, and it's still hot out. It'll feel good once I get outside.

My mother and Pilot are on the couch, watching the five-day forecast, which is pretty much my mother's favorite show.

"Stevie coming over this morning?" she asks as I walk toward the kitchen.

I shake my head. "I'll meet him downstairs." Stevie and I have been walking to school together since we were ten.

"His parents were at the fund-raiser last night. They won the big prize in the silent auction."

"What they win?" I ask as I pour myself cereal.

"Some trip. They always bid on the trips, those two.

Stevie's parents love to travel. When we were little, Stevie slept over every time his parents left town.

"Bring a sweater to school with you, Nick," Mom says, kissing my head before she leaves the room. "I know you think it's still summer, but it's getting cold already and your hair is still wet." I roll my eyes at Dad but he says, "Sweater, Nicky," like he agrees with Mom that I'm not old enough to know whether I'm hot or cold.

## *Girls in School Uniforms*



“**W**hy the fuck is everyone in such a hurry to get into that building?” Stevie asks. We’re standing on the corner across the street from school, leaning against the windows of the pizza place. Stevie hates school this year. His parents are making him see a tutor after school because colleges pay such close attention to junior year on your transcripts. It wouldn’t be so bad if Stevie didn’t already get straight As. They seem to think, since he never studies, that something must be wrong. But Stevie’s just that smart. You’d hate him if he weren’t so cool about it. Sometimes when we have two choices for an essay, he’ll write both of them,

choose the one he likes better, and give me the other one to hand in.

I'm pretty sure that Francis is the only coed high school in New York with school uniforms. Boys have to wear shirts and ties, and right now Stevie and I are sweating under our long sleeves. Whoever came up with this outfit was not thinking about the weather in Manhattan, which stays hot through September and gets hot again in May, so that the boys have to sweat out two months every year.

But not the girls. The girls wear gray kilts and button-downs, although they call them blouses, and they always roll their kilts at the waist to make them shorter. Sometimes they wear boxers underneath their kilts, and the skirts are rolled so short that you can see the boxers peeking out at the hems.

Eden Reiss is walking toward Stevie and me, and her kilt is just above her knees; she never rolls her skirt to make it shorter. Her button-down is loose enough that the buttons don't pull at her chest, but you can see the polka dots on her bra underneath her white shirt.

"Check out Eden's bra," Stevie whispers.

"Yeah, I see it." I don't exactly need it pointed out to me, and Stevie knows it. But I'm trying not to look because she'll see me staring. Eden Reiss has been at Francis since kindergarten, too, just like Stevie and me. Just her name is enough to make her cool, like her parents wanted something biblical, but rather than settle on Eve they went straight to the heart of the matter by naming her Eden.

“Praise Jesus for girls in school uniforms,” Stevie says.

“You’re Jewish.”

“So are you. But I gotta thank someone.”

“Well, thank Theodore Francis for being so uptight that when he started this school, he made the kids wear them.”

“‘Praise Theodore’ don’t have the same ring to it.”

“Let’s go in already.”

“Yeah, all right.”



## *Tribeca*



**M**ost of the kids at Francis live uptown, mostly on the Upper West Side, but the Upper East, too. Eden Reiss lives in Tribeca, which is all the way downtown. She's the only person in our class who lives there. And Tribeca is my excuse to talk to Eden Reiss today. Her walk to the subway is kind of in the direction of my building, so all I have to do is fall into step with her and ask her for Tribeca restaurant recommendations for my parents' anniversary, which is next month. It's flimsy, but it's the best I can do. I barely spoke to her once last year and it's a new year and so it's going to be different. We're juniors now, which means there's only four more semesters left to get this

girl. Someone's going to get her attention, and damned if I'm not going to at least try for it to be me.

I'm standing outside the building after school is over, feeling like a total jackass because I'm waiting for Eden. Stevie flashed me a thumbs-up before he left for tutoring, even though I hadn't even told him what I was planning. Crap, this is pathetic. She might have plans after school. What if she's with her girlfriends, or with Rob Mosely, who lives in the West Village and sometimes takes the subway with her? This is never going to work.

But then there she is, on her own, chewing gum, pulling her hair back with one hand and getting her MetroCard out with the other. Girls can do so much at once.

I wait until she gets started on her walk, and then fall in behind her, trying to be casual.

"Hey, Eden."

She turns back, blinking. "Hey, Nick."

"You walking to the subway?"

"Yeah."

"Me too—I mean, I'm walking home, but it's this way." Christ, I sound rehearsed.

"Oh." Eden keeps right on walking.

"How long does it take you to get home? Once you're on the train?"

She shrugs. "About twenty minutes, I guess."

"You must get a head start on reading." I don't think I could sound more like a dork at this point.

She wrinkles her nose. "Nah. I like to people watch. Have you ever noticed how we always try to fill our time with

reading, or listening to music, or whatever? What's wrong with just staring into space, or at the other people? You see interesting things."

"I'll bet."

Eden nods, but she doesn't say anything else, and for, like, five steps we walk in silence. She hasn't once smiled at me.

"So, you live in Tribeca, right?"

"Yeah." She knows I know that.

"How come your parents chose Francis? It's so far away."

"My mother went to Francis."

"Really?"

"Why would I lie about that?" she says, not meanly, and not rhetorically either. I think she may want me to answer. But I move on.

"Anyway, it's my parents' anniversary in a few weeks, and they like to go someplace new every year. There are so many good restaurants down there—any suggestions?" I'm doing everything wrong, but I don't know how to do it any better.

Eden shrugs. "Do they eat down there a lot? 'Cause I can't think of anyplace new—but there are some great places that have been there forever. Do they want something romantic?"

"I guess. My dad always makes the plan, but I said I'd help him think of something."

"Try Scalini Fedeli."

"Scalini Fedeli, got it." I know the name, because we've eaten there. But I'm not going to tell Eden that.

"Thanks," I say.

"Sure," she says, and turns onto the block where the subway

entrance is. It's out of my way, but I turn with her. She'll disappear soon, and I haven't made any kind of progress at all.

But then something happens, right at the subway entrance; Eden stops walking, and turns to face me. "I have to run." She sounds apologetic.

"Yeah, me too," I say, even though I don't have anywhere I need to be.

"One of these days I'll have to drag you downtown," she says, and she, just barely, smiles. I can see her teeth peeking out from under her plump upper lip. She looks so fresh that I think her mouth would taste like apples.

"How come?" I ask, feeling stupid.

"Show you around the neighborhood, I guess."

"Right." I don't think I've smiled this entire exchange, so I start to, to let her know that I'm friendly and that I'm enjoying talking to her, and then I stop, because I should be so cool that I don't need to smile. But then that's worse, because now this half smile of mine is hanging in the air between us.

Mercifully, Eden says, "Right."

"See you tomorrow."

"Tomorrow," she says, and hops down the stairs to the subway. When she bounces, I can just barely see the bottom of her underwear: plain gray cotton. Not polka-dotted to match her bra.



"Dude, she practically invited you to her bed," Stevie says later. Stevie is very optimistic about Eden Reiss. I'm sitting in my bed, a highlighter in hand. Stevie's phone call interrupted my attempt at our history homework.

“I wouldn’t say that. She said ‘the neighborhood.’”

“Well, that’s world-class innuendo.”

“Jesus, Stevie, not everything is innuendo.”

“It is if you look for it.” I can hear Stevie grinning.

“Hang on a sec, someone’s on the other line.”

“Okay, but come on back, ’cause we gotta get you into the Garden of Eden.”

“How long you been waiting to say that?”

“Not as long as you’ve been waiting to do it, man.”

I click over. “Hello?”

“Hello? Excuse me, is Mr. Brandt at home?”

I recognize the hesitant voice immediately. “Is this the same guy who called last night?”

“What?”

“Are you trying to sell us something? ’Cause we’re on the do-not-call list.”

“No, I’d just like to talk to Mr. Brandt.”

I roll my eyes. “Hang on a sec.” I click back to Stevie. “I’ll call you from my cell phone. It’s for my dad.” Stevie and I may be the last two guys in New York who still call each other on their landlines; we’ve been friends since long before either of us had a cell phone. Other than my own, his home phone number was the first one I ever memorized—and I’m pretty sure that his house was the first place I ever called all by myself.

I click back to the other line. “One second,” I say, and then walk into the living room and hand the phone to my dad, who’s watching baseball from his desk. “Bring it back to my room when you’re done.”

“Who is it?”

“I don’t know.”

“Thanks, kid.”

“I’m not your secretary,” I say, but I’m smiling.

“Hello, this is Rob Brandt,” he says, and for some reason, I don’t walk away immediately, back to my room, to my cell phone, to call Stevie and discuss Eden, or at least to work on our homework together. I’m kind of curious who this guy is.

But my father surprises me. “Oh, hello,” he says. “Yes, I usually go by my middle name,” he explains, and then he’s silent. “Can you hang on one second?” Poor guy’s been on hold three times already tonight. Guess he’s not a telemarketer.

“Nicky, do me a favor.” My father hands me the phone, carefully, like it’s made of glass. “I’m going to go into the bedroom. Will you hang up when I pick up, please?”

“Sure.” He’s acting like he’s asking me to do the impossible, and this is not a big deal. The phone from my room gets fuzzy in my parents’ bedroom. We do this all the time.

“Okay. Thank you,” he says, breathless. I can’t tell if he’s nervous or excited. “Just hang up, that’s all.”

“I think I can handle it, Dad.” He seems to cringe when I call him “Dad.” Or maybe I just imagined that.

Before I hang up, I hear my father ask the guy to repeat his name. It’s Sam Roth.

## *Stolen Bicycles*



I can't imagine that my father would be in any kind of trouble with that Sam Roth guy. My father is a remarkably nice man. People always like him. He's part of why Stevie practically lives here. He always wants to watch the ball game, but he'll totally turn it off and play video games with us. And he's good, too.

My dad grew up in Ohio, in this very small town called Troy, so small that I always think it must have been a shock to his system the first time he saw New York. We go there a couple of times a year to visit his parents; we land in Columbus, where his brother now lives, and then we rent a car and drive to Troy. The only hotel in Troy is a Days Inn where the sheets always

feel dirty. But we stay there, two or three long weekends a year. On the drive from the airport, as the scenery goes from city to suburb to country, I count how many billboards there are advertising Jesus. Maybe that's why I'm the only Jewish kid I know who says "Jesus Christ" when I'm surprised, or pissed off, or have screwed myself royally. Other than Stevie, that is, but he probably got it from me.

When we're in Troy, we go to church. It's a small community church, and the four families who've been going there more than one hundred years have honorary ownership over each of the four stained-glass windows. Every year we take a picture in front of the Brandt window. Once, standing in the white church, under the window, gritting my teeth for the picture, I leaned in and asked my dad—trying not to break my smile—whether his parents knew I'd been raised Jewish. Mom's Jewish, their wedding was even Jewish, with a rabbi and the seven blessings and the stomping of the glass at the end. They must know. But Dad just smiled and shushed me.

Apparently, Troy isn't as nice as it was when my dad was growing up. My grandparents like to take us to the mall, where we eat at a diner that my father says used to be his favorite restaurant. My grandparents don't seem to notice that things aren't as new as they used to be. My dad tells me that he worries about his parents wandering around that mall without him, oblivious to the fact that it's maybe not a place for elderly people to wander around.

It was at this mall that I found out my father was brave—but a quiet kind of brave, so that until then I hadn't even been aware



of it. I was nine years old, and we were at the mall alone together, running errands for my grandparents. It's an outdoor mall, rows and rows of stores with sidewalks in between, kids racing by on Rollerblades and bikes and skateboards. I've always been jealous of kids who are good on skateboards because I have terrible balance. When we were little, Stevie had a skateboard and spent hours in Central Park watching me fall off it.

My father and I were coming out of the video store, having rented a couple of movies, and my father told me to wait, go back inside, just wait a second until he came and got me. I knew what he'd seen, because I'd seen it, too, but I guessed he just wanted me to stay inside until it was over. There were two boys, maybe fourteen or so, cutting the chain locks on some mountain bikes resting against a parking meter. My father walked toward them—and these were not skinny kids; they looked scary, at least in my nine-year-old opinion. But my dad walked straight to them, with his glasses and the corduroy patches on the elbows of his jacket, and he talked them out of stealing the bikes.

I know that because I recognized the look on his face when he talked to those boys. It was the same look he got when he was explaining something to me. He actually reasoned with them. I still wonder if those boys waited until we walked away and then came back to take the bikes, but I don't think they did. I think they were actually convinced by whatever my father said. My dad: so reasonably insistent, so calm.

So when he got off the phone that Wednesday night, my dad didn't shout for me or for my mother. After I hung up the phone, I went back to my room and called Stevie, then finished

my history reading, and I only knew my dad's phone conversation was over because I saw him, out of the corner of my eye through my open bedroom door, walking down the hallway toward the living room. I heard Pilot trotting toward him, but my father must have not wanted to play with him, because the dog came into my room, rubber ball in his mouth, begging to play fetch. A few minutes later I saw both my parents on their way down the hall, and when they got to their bedroom, they closed the door behind them.

So now I have no idea what's going on, but I know it has to do with that guy on the other line.

## *History*



**M**r. Barsky is staring at me, like he's expecting something, some words, to come out of my mouth. Stevie's sitting next to me, and he nudges me with his elbow. I must be pretty far in outer space, because my arm hurts where his elbow hit, like maybe it's not the first time he's done that in the last few seconds.

"Nick Brandt," Mr. Barsky says, "would you care to join us?"

"Umm, yeah."

"And where are we?" Mr. Barsky's making fun of me now. He's a nice teacher, but he thinks it's incredibly rude when kids daydream in class. I can hear the other kids shifting in their seats.

“Umm . . .” I try to remember what I read in last night’s history assignment, something clever, something to make Mr. Barsky laugh so he won’t be pissed at me for being rude, but my mind is a blank.

“Henry the Eighth’s court, sir.”

“Well, then you should know it’s a treacherous place in which to piss off the king.” Mr. Barsky’s lips begin to curl. He’s gonna laugh soon.

“Yes, sir.”

“All right, then. Anyone else know why we should care so much about Henry the Eighth’s marriage to Anne Boleyn?”

“Because of its contributions to the Reformation” comes a voice from behind my head, a voice that’s kind of scratchy like maybe the talker smoked too many cigarettes last night, or didn’t get enough sleep. It’s Eden’s voice.

“Excellent, Miss Reiss.”

Today Eden’s bra is blue. I saw it when she walked into the classroom, just the strap, peeking up by her neck. I wonder if she’s hot, wearing that long-sleeved button-down. This classroom isn’t air-conditioned, but she doesn’t have her sleeves rolled up like the rest of us. She always seems somehow more crisp than anyone else. There’s a softness around her breasts, and at her hips and her belly, but somehow, she’s . . . sharp.



Later, when we’ve finished dinner and my mom is reading in the living room, my dad comes into my room looking exhausted.

“Hey there, Buddy,” he says, rubbing his eyes. I’m sitting on my bed, over the covers, doing my Algebra II homework.

“Hey, Buddy,” I say back. Buddy is a nickname from when I was little. I decided a while back that I would stop saying it or answering to it, but tonight I’ve forgotten. I lean back against my pillows.

“This has been a long friggin’ week, you know.” He sits down at the foot of my bed. My mom says my dad used to curse a lot. Not like the angry kind of cursing—like I said, he rarely gets loud and angry. But just kind of peppering his sentences with “fuck” and “balls” and “sonuvabitch.” When they had me, he tried to tone it down, apparently. The result is that he uses words like “friggin’,” which, frankly, I think sounds worse than “fucking.”

“It has?”

He looks up at me, like he’s just realized that he knows something that I don’t; like he forgot that I don’t know whatever it is that’s making his week long.

Maybe Sam Roth is trying to extort money from him. Like, Sam just looked him up, made up some dirt about him, some invented secret from his Ohio past that no one in New York knows about, and he’s threatening to tell my dad’s fund’s investors if my dad doesn’t fork over some money.

I’ll cut to the chase. We can figure it out. I can help him.

“Who’s Sam Roth?” I say quickly, before I can change my mind.

My dad blinks; he starts for a second, like maybe he’s going to get up off the bed, maybe he’s going to get my mom, maybe he can’t stay sitting down. The bed actually bounces a little as he lifts his weight off of it.

“How do you know who that is?”

“I don’t, Dad, that’s why I just asked you. In fact, it’s exactly what I just asked you.”

“Right, but—where did you hear that name?”

“He’s the guy who called last night. I heard him say his name. I think he called Tuesday, too. Someone called asking for you.”

My dad nods. “Yes, that must have been Sam. He told me he’d tried the house before.”

“He didn’t even know your name. He asked for Sheffman Brandt.”

“That is my name,” my dad says, leaning back on the bed. I’d had him momentarily flustered, but he’s composed himself now. Now that he knows how I know Sam Roth’s name.

“Yeah, but no one who knows you calls you that.”

“True.”

He doesn’t volunteer any more information, and it’s not like him not to answer a question directly. I’m sure Sam Roth is trying to screw with my dad, and I want to tell him he can tell me; whatever this Sam Roth is doing to him, I’ll help him figure it out.

“So, who is he?” I say, trying to make it sound casual. I try to turn it into a joke. “What’s he got on you?”

My dad smiles slowly, like I’ve just said something right, something a little closer to the truth than he thought I could.

“Oh, that,” he says. “Just some . . .”—he exhales, puffing out his lips—“just a little bit of history there, I guess.”

“He from Ohio?”

He shakes his head. “Only kind of.”

“How can someone be kind of from a place? That doesn’t make any sense.”

“It makes sense here.” He smiles. “Kind of.”

He sounds tired, but I won’t let up.

“Kind of?”

“Yup,” he says, like case closed. But he doesn’t get up. He sits there, looking at me. More like watching me. I feel bad for him; he looks pretty wiped. Whatever this guy is doing to him, it must be pretty bad. Just for now, I’ll change the subject.

“Speaking of history, I thought Mr. Barsky was going to eat me alive today.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. I totally spaced in class.” Because of Sam Roth, I want to add. And maybe because of Eden Reiss, too.

“Well, careful with that, Buddy. Don’t want to get a reputation with the teachers. Maybe you should do some extra credit or something to make up for it.”

“Jesus Christ, Dad, one space-out in the decade I’ve been at Francis,” I say, irritated. “I don’t think my reputation is destroyed just yet.”

“Yeah,” he says, getting up, patting me on the shoulder, “not yet.”

And as he leaves the room, I think, Yeah, not yet.

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