

PREFACE

FIFTY-FIVE YEARS AGO, I was one of many, many readers who fell in love with Chaim Potok's brilliant and powerful duet of novels, *The Chosen* and *The Promise*. Which is why, when I read the author's later work, *Davita's Harp*, I couldn't help but notice that *The Chosen*'s protagonist appears in the final chapter as Davita's handsome classmate. Could this have been a Chekov's Gun? (*If, in the first act, there is a rifle hanging on the wall, in a following act it must be fired.*) It seemed to me that Potok had intended the two would eventually get together.

Fast-forward to 2013. I was finishing my sixth historical novel, *Enchantress*. Potok (of blessed memory) had been gone for ten years, but his characters still rattled around in my head and were refusing to leave. So, with the idea of continuing their story, I reread the first two books. As a feminist, I was astounded at what short shrift the female characters received. The hero's mother, who dies before he can remember her, is nameless. Nor does he seem to know anything about her or want to. His Hasidic friend's mother is also nameless, and despite the prominence of Hasidic women running their households in real life, she has a minimal presence.

So I decided to write yet another novel I wanted to read that had not been written, again focusing on overlooked Jewish women. My novel, set in mid-1950s Brooklyn, would wholly transformative, giving names and backstories to girls and women who are inspired by but do not appear in Potok's work, and in the process, commenting on and criticizing Jewish women's unequal and inferior legal status.

There would be love, history, a little baseball, and of course, Talmud.

Because for me, an additional frustration with Potok's first two novels, in which Talmud study is so entwined with the plot, is that no actual Talmud appears—not one line of Gemara. It was this frustration that drove me to

include genuine Talmud in my Rashi's Daughters trilogy, so that when Rashi teaches his daughters, the reader learns along with them. Thus I created a plot for my novel in which the hero and heroine's relationship blossoms as they study Talmud together.

I have not written a sequel to Potok's works; rather, and not unlike the Talmud, I have written a commentary—my Gemara to his Mishna. I was being respectful to his writing and true to life in New York's Jewish world in the early- and mid-1900s.. I found it personally motivating because this was exactly the Jewish world my father's family inhabited. Research was both easier and more challenging than it had been for my earlier novels. A great many twentieth-century sources are available online—so many, in fact, that it was overwhelming.

Like my other historical novels, the basic plot is a romance where the protagonists experience many trials and triumphs during which their relationships with one another and with Judaism are tested. Ultimately, they, along with the readers, are rewarded with a happy ending.