THE TIME OF
JACOB’S
TROUBLE

DONNA VANLIERE
CHAPTER 1

Queens, NY

We have to get out of the city!” twenty-five-year-old Emma Grady shouts, watching images of destruction on the TV.

Her boyfriend Matt grabs her arm, yelling as he pulls her to the door. “No time! Get to the basement!”

They scream and yell through the hallway, warning people in the other six apartments. Emma stops at the apartment at the end of the hall, banging on the door. A young Indian woman opens it when she sees Emma through the peephole. “Piya! Get your family to the basement.”

The young mother is frightened and shaking. She has been up all night. “We have to evacuate,” Piya says, her words quivering from terror.

Emma grabs her hands. “Please! You won’t make it out of the city!”

Matt runs ahead, banging on doors and shouting a warning as they speed down the stairs. The sound of glass shatters above them and the building quakes, shattering their nerves. The air is pierced with indescribable fear as the apartment building basement fills with eighteen residents, each clinging to loved ones and the stranger next to them. The explosion is deafening, crumbling the ceiling above and shaking the walls. The lights flicker for several seconds before thrusting the room into darkness, shrieks and screams slicing through the black.
CHAPTER 2

Queens, NY—one week earlier

Emma tiptoes out of the bathroom, passing Matt, still sleeping, before pulling the bedroom door closed. She’s careful not to make noise in the hall as she steps to the kitchen for a cup of coffee. Matt has been working the late shift at Demarco’s, a restaurant in Midtown, while he finishes his law degree during the day. Their schedules rarely afford them the time to see much of each other. Emma leaves the apartment each day at 7:00 a.m., arriving at work thirty minutes early to help prep the physical therapy room. She’s worked as a physical therapist at Thrive Rehabilitation in Brooklyn for two years, and while Matt and several friends groan at the prospect of going to their jobs, she loves her work and looks forward to seeing her patients.

She puts a K-Cup into the single-cup coffeemaker, closes the lid, and presses brew on the machine. The coffee begins to stream into her travel mug as her phone buzzes. She reaches for it and reads a text from her sister, Sarah. Call me later. Mom and I are sampling reception food after work today!!!

Emma texts, K. Will call on my break. Have fun!

Sarah is three years younger and getting married. Emma is happy for her; Jason seems great, but there’s some part of her, somewhere deep and hidden away, that wonders why she isn’t the one planning a wedding. She tosses the nagging thought aside, ashamed again to be jealous of her sister for getting married. Growing up in Indiana, Emma was a track and field star at her local high school. She would pull her
light brown hair into a high ponytail and race around the track, dreaming of running in college, but too many injuries on the university team cut all those dreams short. Between that and a failed relationship with her college sweetheart, Emma couldn’t get out of Indiana fast enough. She met Matt at a bar with some friends her second week in New York, and they seemed destined for one another.

“Are you headed out already?”

She jumps at Matt’s voice and turns to see him at the end of the hall, squinting into the light of the kitchen. He’s standing in his boxer shorts and his dark brown hair is standing straight up on his head and flat on one side, as if it’s been ironed. They dated for six months before deciding to move in together two years ago. Her dad liked Matt but didn’t approve of them living together. Her parents were old-fashioned, but she loved them anyway. She had hoped that Matt would get to know her dad better, but he died four months after they moved in together, after a short battle with cancer. She sees his mom often; she lives just over the New York state line in New Jersey, where Matt grew up with an older sister. Matt’s mom and dad divorced when he was fourteen, and his relationship with his dad is fragile at best. She’s never met him, and Matt rarely speaks of him.

“You scared me!” She reaches for cream out of the refrigerator. “Did I wake you up?”

He walks behind her and reaches his arms around her, kissing her cheek. “Couldn’t sleep. Need to study for the exam.”

She turns and kisses him. “You’ll do great!” She slides an elastic hair tie off her wrist and pulls her hair into a ponytail, then reaches for a banana out of a bowl on the counter. “Don’t forget that Rick and Brandon are coming over for drinks tonight.”

Matt throws away her used K-Cup, groaning. “After a day of exams and a night at the restaurant, I doubt I’m going to be up for Rick and Brandon.”

“You’re the one who invited them!” she says, laughing. “I found a new appetizer recipe.” He looks at her, bored. “It has bacon in it,” she says, her voice tingling with excitement.

“All right,” he says, brewing a cup of coffee. “I’m in.”
She laughs and waves. “See you later. Love you!”

“Later!” he yells toward her. He didn’t say, “I love you.” Sometimes he did. Sometimes he didn’t. Although she knew he loved her, his love just didn’t seem to be “all-in” all the time. Maybe Jason’s love for Sarah was all-in all the time. Maybe that’s why they were getting married and she and Matt weren’t.

Emma is thankful their apartment is so close to the subway, and in just a few minutes, she’s headed that way. On many days she walks there with Brandon, who lives upstairs, but he had to be at work earlier than usual today. She uses the time on the subway to read some news on her phone and eat the banana. Neither of her parents would like her hurried routine of grab and go. Her dad had especially liked sitting around the breakfast and dinner table just talking. Her eyes mist over thinking about him, and she scrolls through the news: some red-carpet event has brought out several stars, two new online shows debut tonight, a construction accident will have traffic in knots on the East Side today, people are opposing the mayor’s new regulations on small businesses, and President Thomas Banes will meet with the president of China at the Oval Office.

Linda and Carrie are both at the front desk when Emma arrives at Thrive. Linda must be in her fifties; both of her children have recently graduated from college. Carrie is in her thirties with three children in elementary school. She has beautiful dark almond skin, long cornrows, and typically wears a bright scarf tied around her head.

“Hi, Emma,” Carrie says, looking over her computer. “It’s gonna be a great day!”

Carrie grew up in the foster care system but has somehow managed to turn the pain and hardship of her early life into eternal optimism. She’s famous for saying, “God’s got this” to employees at the office when their car has broken down, or they are struggling financially, or they need another job. She and Roderick have been married twelve years, and Emma can always tell when she’s talking to him on the phone because her laugh, a high-pitched cackle, can be heard throughout the therapy room.

Aliyah, Reggie, and Mateo are busy looking over their patient lists
for today. Aliyah has short black hair and skin the color of smooth milk chocolate. She’s somewhere in her late twenties and expecting her first child with her boyfriend, Keenan. Reggie is in his forties, from Honduras, and the divorced father of two. He sees his girls every other weekend. He’s been a physical therapist for more than twenty years and the one Emma turns to when she needs help with a patient. Mateo is from a large Hispanic family, looks like he’s in his late twenties or early thirties, and has a smile as big as his personality.

Emma’s first patient will be Art Gleason, a cranky man in his late sixties who makes an hour feel like a day. She is thankful when she sees that Mariana Ramos is coming later in the morning; she always looks forward to seeing her.

Midtown, NY

Elliott Hirsch bounds up the stairs from the subway platform and heads toward the brokerage firm where he’s been employed the last two years. Two blocks before the building, he enters a market with the daily specials written on a sidewalk chalkboard. His cell phone begins to ring as he walks through the entrance.

“Hi, Mom!”

“Elliott! You didn’t get back with me yesterday about Saba’s birthday party.”

He pushes his glasses up to the bridge of his nose and makes his way to the back of the market. “Super busy day at work.”

“I assumed that’s why you didn’t call, but Saba’s party is coming up, and we need to give a head count of who’s coming.”

Elliott chuckles, shaking his head. In the twenty-four years he’s been on this earth, his mother has never been known for flexibility, and as she’s getting older, she’s becoming even less so. “His birthday is nine days away. Even if I got back with you three days from now, that would give them six days’ notice that I’m coming.”

“Well, it would be nice if they knew ahead of time.”
“And they will. I promise you. I will look at my calendar and let you know. I need to go. I forgot to grab something for a party at work today. I’m at the market just blocks from the firm, so I’m trying to rush through here.” He reaches for a prepackaged cheese platter.

“How about now?”

“What?”

“You’re in a market. You’re not working at the moment. How about looking at your calendar now?”

He laughs out loud. “Of course! Right here next to the Gorgonzola is perfect.” Elliott checks the calendar on his phone, types the information into it, then puts the phone back to his ear. “I’m wide open. So please, on my behalf, would you RSVP Hirsch party of one for Saba’s birthday?”

“Oh! I’m just thrilled that you can come! Thanks so much for getting back to me.”

“You called me, Mom,” he says, rushing to the cashier to pay.

“I know! But it was in your heart to call me yesterday.” He can hear her on the other end, shuffling papers around, probably figuring out who she needs to call next. “Your father and Ben and I will be heading back to Ohio two days after the party, but hopefully we can all get together with you while we’re there.”

“You’re flying to New York. Of course we’ll get together.”

“Only if you’re not too busy. I mean, it was hard for you to make a phone call yesterday.”

He slaps his palm on his forehead. “Mom, you’re killing me.”

She gasps. “That is not my intention. I just wanted you to know our schedule. Do you need to write it down?”

“I got it.” He pushes up his glasses again and places the cheese platter in front of the cashier.

“Wonderful! How’s your day, my love?”

“At the moment? A bit hectic. How about yours?” He reaches for his wallet in his back pocket.

“Your father’s complaining about some sort of foot condition. What do you think it could be?”

Elliott laughs. “I have no idea!”
“I just wonder if it might be something like you had in high school. Remember?”

He pauses for a moment, remembering. “When I broke my toe playing hockey?”

“Remember how painful that was?”

“Yeah! I broke my toe! Playing hockey! Has dad broken his toe?”

“No.”

“Has he been playing hockey?”

She laughs on the other end. “Of course not!”

“Then how is this anything like what happened to me in high school?”

“Because it’s a foot problem. And it’s painful.”

He pays the cashier and reaches for the bag. “I don’t think I’d make that your lead-in when you visit a doctor with Dad. Love you, Mom.”

“I love you, Elliott.”

He prepares to hang up when he hears her voice rising. “Oh! Oh! Do you need to write down the date for Saba’s party?”

“I already put it on my calendar. Remember?”

“You’re sure?”

“I’m sure.”

“I’m just asking because Saba’s rabbi is going to be there.”

“He’s my rabbi, too, Mom.”

“Oh, that’s right. He is! I wondered if you had forgotten.”

Elliott sighs, smiling. “I remember the rabbi.” Most mothers would be asking about his interest in girls, with the goal of grandchildren in mind, but his mother has always been more concerned about the condition of his soul rather than his love life.

“You know what? I’ll call you the day before, in case your computer or phone crashes or there’s some sort of cyberattack.”

“Love you, Mom.” He hangs up before she can take another breath.

Elliott and his brother, Ben, were born in Cleveland and lived there until his dad was transferred to New York, where they settled in Long Island, and Elliott and Ben played hockey in the winter and baseball in the spring. They lived there until their dad was transferred back to Cleveland during Elliott’s sophomore year in college, but he stayed in
New York, claiming it as his permanent home. He sees his parents several times a year and talks to them on the phone at least once a week, more if his mother is calling. For the last year he’s worked as a purchase and sales clerk at a brokerage firm, hoping that one day he’ll become a financial advisor. At twenty-four he’s single and lives alone, while Ben, who’s two years younger, has traveled Europe and has yet to take a career seriously. The fact is that Ben has always been the outgoing and charismatic one, while Elliott has always been shy, content to bury himself with work. This isn’t the life he envisioned in college, but then again, it’s not terrible. At least that’s what he tells himself.

Mr. Gleason must have been having a better-than-average day because he grumbled only once to Emma about the cost of the therapy and the hassle of dealing with his insurance company and Medicare. When Mariana Ramos arrives for rehab at eleven, Emma is ready for the woman’s sweet conversation. Mrs. Ramos and her husband, Miguel, are both in their mid-sixties and own 316 Deli in Brooklyn, known for their Cuban sandwiches, soups, sweet-potato cake, and coconut flan. Emma will often leave the apartment early so she can stop by the deli and pick up one of Mariana’s Puerto Rican sweet rolls for breakfast. “No sugar. The secret is honey,” Mrs. Ramos said when she brought a sweet roll for her first therapy session.

Mrs. Ramos is reading when Emma opens the door to the waiting room. “Mrs. Ramos?” Emma smiles, noticing a bag in her hand. “I’m pretty sure I smell something delicious in that bag,” she says, holding open the door to the therapy room.

“Just a Cuban sweet roll,” Mrs. Ramos says, handing the bag to her. “You haven’t been by in a while.”

Mrs. Ramos’s once pepper-black hair is now heavy with salt and resting on the back of her head in a soft bun. Wrinkles edge her mouth and eyes, but Emma thinks she’s beautiful and looks much younger than her age. She gives her a quick hug. “It seems I’m running late every morning,” Emma says. “Thank you so much!” She leads Mrs. Ramos
into the therapy room and sets the bag on the window ledge behind them. Mrs. Ramos sits at the end of the therapy table; Emma puts her hands on her shoulders. “I can say this with all honesty…you are my favorite patient ever!”

Mrs. Ramos throws her head back, chuckling. “I love to feed people, and I love it when they love my food!”

Emma puts a hand on her hip and looks at her. “How’s the knee?”

“It’s good,” Mrs. Ramos says in the soft Puerto Rican accent that Emma so enjoys. A torn meniscus put Mrs. Ramos into surgery and brought her here nearly two months ago for therapy.

“Are you being careful at work?”

“Yes!”

“Honest?”

The petite woman laughs. “Yes, honest! I sit on a stool when I’m rolling out the dough, and I sit on a chair when I work the cash register.”

“And you’re doing your exercises?”

She nods. “Yes, yes. I’m doing so many exercises I could go to the Olympics.” Mrs. Ramos extends her leg as Emma keeps her hands on the knee, feeling the motion.

“What’s the latest in the wedding plans?” Mrs. Ramos asks.

Emma tries to smile and makes her voice sound happy. “Sarah and Mom will be trying out caterers today. Can you do ten extensions for me?”

Mrs. Ramos does as she’s instructed and smiles. “And how is that cute boyfriend of yours?”

Emma shrugs. “The same. Working hard and going to law school.”

“Wedding bells in the future?”

“None that I’m aware of.” Emma leans in, whispering, “I’m not sure he’s the marrying type. Or maybe I’m not the type he wants to marry.”

Mrs. Ramos pats her arm. “That is impossible to believe. God has wonderful plans for you. Sometimes we’re just hard-of-hearing.”

Emma smiles. Mrs. Ramos reminds her so much of her own mom that she never gets angry or irritated when she brings up God. Somehow, God is a friend to both her mom and Mrs. Ramos, and somewhere deep inside she wishes she could be more like them.
 Twenty-seven-year-old Dr. Zerah Adler gets into his car in the physicians’ parking lot at Hadassah Medical Center in Jerusalem and begins the drive to Modiin, eighteen miles west of Jerusalem. He grew up there and thought he would eventually leave, but the parks, countryside, wineries, easy access to the airport, and his family have kept him rooted in the suburbs while other young professionals choose Tel Aviv, Petah Tikva, or some other city boasting high-tech industries. He lives in a small apartment just five miles from his parents.

He drives straight to their home, a small single-story house with a basement, in the neighborhood where Zerah rode his bike on the streets and played basketball and soccer at the park around the corner. When Zerah opens the door, the smell of chicken schnitzel makes him smile. “My favorite!” he says, closing the door.

“Zerah!” His mother Ada walks into the living room, drying her hands on the kitchen towel, the one with the apples printed on it. She grabs his face, kissing his cheek. “So glad you could join us! How was your work today? Come, come,” she says, leading him into the kitchen.

He pops a couple of spiced cracked olives into his mouth, nodding. “Good.”

His mother opens the oven door, looking inside at her noodle kugel. “Making progress in your research?”

Zerah has been part of a team researching what they hope will be a breakthrough in Parkinson’s disease. “I hope.” He reaches for some pita...
bread, tearing off a piece before dipping it into another of his favorites, his mother’s famous baba ganoush, careful to get a few slices of Kalamata olives sitting on top of the dip. “Mm! The best,” he says. “My whole meal could be this.” He scoops another piece of pita into the dip.

“Why do they keep you there so late each evening?”

“They don’t keep me there. I choose to be there and finish what I’ve started. Besides, seven-thirty isn’t that late,” he says, sliding another bite into his mouth.

She taps the face of her watch. “It’s eight-o’clock and it’s too late if you want to have a family. Little ones go to bed at this time.”

Zerah smiles, reaching for a few more spiced olives. “Well, the good thing is I don’t have a family right now.”

His mother puts the platter of chicken schnitzel on the table. “And you’ll never find a woman working these crazy hours.”

He sighs in exasperation and changes the subject. “Where’s Dad?”

“Downstairs watching the news. He turns it up so loud that I can’t hear myself think, so I make him go down there.”

Zerah removes the noodle kugel from the oven for his mom and places it on top of hot pads on the kitchen table. Whereas some cooks would take a shortcut and use applesauce in their kugel, his mom always takes the time to grate fresh apples into hers. “Mm,” he says, breathing in the aroma. “I’ll go get him.” He shoves another large bite of the baba ganoush into his mouth before opening the door to the basement. The voice of the newscaster pronouncing doom and gloom over the entire world fills the kitchen and Ada rolls her eyes, shaking her head. Zerah closes the door behind him.

His parents bought this home over twenty years ago because one room in the basement was a bomb shelter, a place that Zerah and his sister Rada ran to many times while they were growing up. One of his earliest memories of a bomb shelter was when he was around seven or so, huddled in a neighbor’s shelter playing cards with a girl two or three years older than him. His parents never let him or Rada live in fear; this was simply something that had to be done from time to time. The stark room features nothing more than a small television set, a two-decades-old couch, and a few folding chairs around a small folding table. The
walls are still plain and gray, and his dad looks like he’s staring at a TV in a sterile waiting room.

Zerah watches as his dad’s hand shakes while pointing the remote at the TV. In a cruel twist of irony, his father Chaim was diagnosed with essential tremor, a cousin to Parkinson’s disease, just six months after Zerah landed the research position at the university. He has felt helpless, as his medical degrees have done little to help alleviate his father’s tremors. “Dad,” he says, touching his dad’s shoulder. “Dinner’s ready.”

“Zerah!” his father says, clicking off the TV. “I forgot you were coming! Of course you were. The only time we eat this late is when you’re coming.”

Zerah hugs his dad. “Not you too! I just took my first round from Mom.”

His father laughs. “She’s your mom. She worries. Your life is work, work, work.” He shrugs. “To your mother that’s unnatural. There’s an order to things for her.” He pats Zerah’s cheek. “I’ve got your back. In the meantime, you keep doing what you’re doing. Only wonderful things are ahead!”

Queens, NY

Emma uses earphones to talk with her mother on the phone as she makes the bacon appetizers. “So finger foods are cheaper than an actual meal for the wedding?” she asks, spreading ricotta cheese onto several toasted baguette slices.

“It ends up being about three dollars less a plate,” her mom says.

“Uh-huh,” Emma says, wanting to be interested. “Has Sarah asked Uncle Robert to walk her down the aisle?” Her heart hurts at the thought of having an uncle walk her sister down the aisle, and she misses her dad all over again.

“She did. He said yes. Your dad would want him to.” Emma is quiet, thinking. Her mom has always known when something isn’t right, and says, “Is everything all right, Em? Is it the wedding?”
Emma reaches for the slices of cooked bacon, breaking them in half to put on each baguette. “I hope it’s not. I mean, I hope I’m not that shallow.” “You’ve never been shallow. You are my deep well.” Emma smiles. “I’m happy for Sarah. I really am.” “I know you are. And it’s okay to be in a funk. That happens a lot as we go through different stages in life and we watch other people go through their stages.”

Emma keeps her voice low so Matt can’t hear from the bedroom. “I kind of thought that I would be the first one to go through that stage. If you know what I mean,” she says, chuckling. “I know, but this isn’t your lane, remember?”

Emma nods as she mixes some honey with a teaspoon of hot sauce, sprinkling some over each slice of bacon on top of the baguette. “I know, I know. I can’t run someone else’s race. I have to stay in my own lane and run my own race.” Ever since she and Sarah were children, her mom has told them that.

Her mom laughs. “You remember!” “You still say it all the time!” Emma says, biting into the appetizer. “Oh…yum! I think I just made another finger food that would be perfect for the wedding!”

“I wondered what you have been doing. What did you make?” “A bacon appetizer for Matt, Rick, and Brandon.” “The next time we chat, I’ll have to get the recipe from you. I’ll let you go. Hug each one of them for me. Love you!” “Love you, Mom!” She ends the call on her cell phone and puts the other half of the bacon baguette into her mouth. “How’s your mom?” Matt says, putting on a shirt as he walks out of the bedroom. “She’s great. She and Sarah were trying to find a caterer today,” she says, holding one of the bacon appetizers in front of Matt.

He takes a bite and quickly reaches for the rest of it from her hand, shoving it into his mouth. “This is amazing! These will totally be worth having Brandon and Rick over.”

She smiles, cleaning up the mess she made in the kitchen. “You love Rick and Brandon.”
He wraps his arms around her, kissing her. “No. I love you. I find them amusing. I’d rather be here alone with you tonight.”

She’s surprised that he said he loved her without her saying it first. “Then why didn’t you tell me?” she says, swatting him with a kitchen towel. “I invited them only because it was your idea.”

“Why do you listen to me?”

“Maybe because I think you’re brilliant and I love you,” she says, sticking the unused bacon inside the refrigerator.

He reaches for her arm as she closes the door and pulls her to him. “And I love you.” His tone is different; and Emma looks at him, wondering if something is wrong. “Why aren’t we the ones getting married?”

“Wha…?” She is stumped, looking into his eyes. “What do you…?”

He laughs. “Seriously! Why aren’t we the ones planning a wedding?”

She is confused and tries to put together another sentence. “I don’t… You’ve never said anything about…”

He pulls her tighter. “Marry me, Emma.” Her eyes are full of surprise. “Tonight even. Let’s just go do it!”

He kisses her, and she begins to laugh. She leans back, looking at him. “Are you serious?”

He holds out his index finger and taps it with the index finger of his other hand. “I love you.” He holds out a second finger and taps it. “I want to marry you.” A third finger is extended. “I want to marry you tonight.”

“Oh my gosh! Matt!” she says with nervous laughter. “Was this because of the bacon?”

“No!” He thinks for a moment. “Well, maybe. Okay, no! It wasn’t because of the bacon. It was because I keep hearing you talk about your sister’s wedding and I think it’s nuts that she’s getting married before we are. I mean, we’ve lived together. We know we’re compatible. So come on, let’s go do it!” He grabs her hand and begins to pull her out of the kitchen.

“No! No! No!” she says, laughing. “I want my mom and my sister to be there. And I would like to wear a wedding dress and not a pair of jeans with a ratty shirt.”

“But I love those jeans and that ratty shirt,” he says, kissing her neck.
“Plus, we invited Rick and Brandon over. It would be rude to run out and get married and not even invite some of our best friends.” He smiles, and she hugs him tight. She doesn’t want to let go of him. Not now. Not ever.

“*“So when will you set the date?” Brandon says, refreshing his and Rick’s drink.
“Soon,” Emma says, snuggled next to Matt on the sofa. “I think we need to let Sarah get married, and then we can,” she says, craning her head to look up at Matt. “Her wedding is only two months away.”
“Whatever you say,” Matt says. “I just hope I don’t change my mind between now and then,” he says, winking at Brandon and Rick.
She knows he’s teasing, but for whatever reason, Emma is hurt. She thought by now that she was used to Matt’s offhand remarks.
“Where will you get married?” Rick says, reaching for his drink.
“Probably in Indiana,” Emma says, hoping it’s okay with Matt.
“Really?” Matt asks. “Not here?”
She shrugs. “Most of the people I know are there. My family’s there. My only friends in New York are in this room.”
“And I will walk to Indiana if I have to!” Brandon says.
“I’ve never seen hay bales or chickens running through a front yard, so I’m in,” Rick says, making Matt laugh.
Emma has always liked Brandon and thought he deserved someone better and kinder than Rick. Rick is white, in his thirties, and works for an IT firm. Brandon is a twenty-four-year-old black man with striking brown eyes and a wide smile. He’s worked in the publicity department for a small publishing house for the last three years. He moved to New York from Louisville, where he was raised by a single mom and squeaked through high school, passing by a hair. He never met his dad, and while he has said that it doesn’t bother him, he has confided in Emma that he hates the man, whoever he is, for abandoning him and his mother. Whereas Brandon is caring and thoughtful, Rick often comes across as mean-spirited and insincere, even mocking Brandon’s
mother’s Southern accent. His boorish personality drives Emma crazy but she still cares for him as a friend, and for the sake of Brandon, she has always remained quiet.

“You guys always talk about it, so…” Emma says. “When will you tie the knot?”

“We'll wait and see how long you guys last before we take the plunge.”

The three men laugh, but Emma notices that Brandon’s laugh is halted and sad, as if he was wondering whether Rick would abandon him as quickly as his father had.

More drinks are poured, and they all laugh until they cry as they share stories of their college years and early days of working in the city. In spite of their individual flaws Emma loves this little group, where she feels safe and cared for, and rests her head on Matt’s shoulder, grateful for their life together.