



LEAP OF FAITH

SHE WAS SWEEPED OFF HER FEET BY AN ADORABLE JEWISH GUY—BUT HE COULDN'T PROPOSE UNLESS SHE CONVERTED. SO **PETRA GUGLIEMMETTI** MADE A CHANGE OF BIBLICAL PROPORTIONS.

THE MOMENT I FIRST SAW MARC is a focused snapshot in the blur of my mid-twenties: I walked into Friendsgiving at my friend Leslie's apartment, and there was her older brother, Marc, laughing in the kitchen. I'd known Leslie had a brother who lived nearby. I hadn't known he was cute. I felt instant guilt—I was there with my boyfriend of two years—but I couldn't stop glancing at Marc.

Of course, he was very off-limits. Not just because of my boyfriend. And not just because Leslie was one of my closest friends. It was mostly because I knew she came from an observant Jewish family, and she and her brothers were expected to date within their religion. I was a confirmed Catholic—a onetime altar girl who could recite the Hail Mary in English, French, *and* Latin. When I was growing up in Maine, my only knowledge of Judaism came from Catholic school, of all places (we celebrated Passover one year, and Sister Janet broke a matzoh that reminded me of a giant saltine), and via my dark teenage obsession with *The Diary of Anne Frank*. I went to the University of New Hampshire, where I had exactly one Jewish friend. By the time I met Marc in New York City, I knew just enough to realize we were not *bashert* (Yiddish for "meant to be").

Initially, that wasn't a problem. I had every intention of keeping my secret little crush both secret and little. And I managed to for months, until he kissed me. We

were with a pack of friends at a dive bar, chatting for hours, then it happened suddenly. After that, there was no ignoring our connection. Still, we kept it in stealth mode. As I worked through a drawn-out breakup with my boyfriend, there were texts and more kisses in dark drinking establishments. Then we started meeting up after work. We tacitly understood the need to keep things casual and covert; dating a friend's brother is dangerous even without religious obstacles. Yet the more I tried to talk myself out of liking him, the more I noticed things we had in common: We both came from close-knit families, were low-key in a high-strung city, grew up in tiny religious schools (Holy Cross for me, Hebrew Academy for him).

He was also different from anyone I'd ever dated—funny and chill, yet secure and grown-up, with almost unsettling reserves of focus and patience. A tech nerd, he could easily spend five hours tinkering with a friend's broken MacBook without threatening to throw it out the window. That was riveting to me, as I get overwhelmed adjusting my bike helmet. He had a similar knack for untangling my cluttered thoughts and defusing my career angst. I loved the way he spoke to his mom on the phone and how he always addressed the waitress or cabdriver by name. I loved that he'd saved up to buy his studio apartment, which contained no futon and felt like a real home. "He's a *man*," as one friend put it, even though he was only 29 to my 27.

Eventually, he asked if he could be my man—you know, out in broad daylight. When we made the situation known to our crew, Leslie heroically didn't have a meltdown (although my brunch invites were on ice for a while). Things felt serious fast, and within a few weeks he came out and said what I already feared deep down: He was starting to care too much about me, considering he couldn't marry someone who wasn't Jewish. He respected his parents (and their parents) too much, and raising Jewish kids was too important to him. He couldn't see himself as the Jewish dad with a Christmas tree in the living room. I cried and asked why he'd let me fall in love with him. He apologized repeatedly and offered to leave my apartment, but I couldn't let him go.

I know: It's intense to throw the word *marry* around after dating only a couple months (much of that in secret). Yet there we were, using the M-word, and I wondered whether this gem of a guy was worth going

Jewish for. I was still Catholic enough for the very thought to feel blasphemous. But could choosing such a good person really be bad? Not to make Marc sound completely unsexy (our chemistry was—and remains!—very real), but he was a walking checklist of the values emphasized in my parochial school: kindness, integrity, loyalty. I knew he was a catch. So one day I put it out there: What if I were to convert? "You'd do that for me?" he asked. I was willing to investigate. Crazy, possibly, but breaking up seemed crazier. The Torah is just the Old Testament, I told myself.

Step one was setting foot in a synagogue, which felt oddly familiar to someone who'd spent countless hours of her formative years sitting in a pew gazing at stained glass. Bizarre ancient rituals? Bring 'em on. As I quickly picked up the catchier Hebrew songs, I felt them fill a space I hadn't realized was empty. It

had been years since my voice had blended into a congregation's or since I'd let a religious service tie up the loose ends of a crazy week. I realized I'd actually missed having religion around. Maybe it didn't matter that the big stained-glass window depicted Moses' tablets instead of a haloed infant.

Except, of course, it did. Beyond the theology, I worried about prioritizing someone else's family and culture over my own. I worried that I was entrenching myself as the weaker half in our relationship—before we'd had a single real argument. I worried

that our religion gap was making us too serious too soon. I spoiled many a nice dinner with such topics. Marc, in his usual way, reassured me each time that we'd sort it all out together. I remember feeling relief when I learned, during the Judaism 101 course that he and I had enrolled in, that being Jewish involves admitting you don't have all the answers. Judaism actually celebrates doubt and questioning (my specialties in life!).

By the time I began my official yearlong conversion process, Marc and I had already been practicing some of the rituals: We lit Shabbat candles on Friday nights. I showed off my brand-new Hebrew at his parents' Passover table. We wandered Central Park without our phones or money on Shabbat (our "lite" version of the Orthodox practice of unplugging completely). I should mention I still had no ring on my finger. But I actually preferred it that way: Ring before rabbi would have meant I'd already made the decision, when for me, changing religions was a true process.

**BEYOND THE
THEOLOGY,
I WORRIED
ABOUT PRIOR-
ITIZING HIS
CULTURE
OVER MY OWN.**

(continued from page 81)

I'm sure some friends, and definitely our parents, thought we were crazy: Wouldn't it have been easier to stay in our lanes? Yet when I finally had the chutzpah to address the topic with my mom, she only said, "We just want you to be happy." Would I have been happier if Marc had been open to a Chrismukkah-style relationship? Weirdly, I don't think so. The fact that he was so ride-or-die for his tribe wasn't just kind of hot, it spoke to the rock of a husband he'd someday be. The one thing I asked for in return was that we would always go to my parents' house in New England for Christmas. I know this stirred up some anxiety for him—was this the top of the slippery slope that led to the appearance of a "Hanukkah bush" in our apartment?—but he didn't hesitate to say yes, knowing all the compromises I was making for him (not to mention the culture shock we were putting my parents through).

I officially became Jewish on a bright, cold February morning, about seven months after we got engaged. It is another crystal-clear memory: Three rabbis questioned me about my Jewish knowledge and reasons for converting, then I went to immerse myself in the mikvah, a ritual bath symbolizing a new start. (You can't wear a thing, not even nail polish.) On my way out, the woman who served as my mikvah witness gave me a kiss on the forehead and whispered, "Be a nice Jewish girl."

WHEN OUR TOWN LIGHTS UP FOR CHRISTMAS, I MOURN THE BEST HOLIDAY EVER, ONE I VOLUNTARILY GAVE UP.

Of course, I occasionally miss being a nice Catholic girl. When our idyllic New Jersey town lights up for Christmas, our house sits dark, and, inevitably, the twinkle lights trigger tears. I ugly-cry and mourn the best holiday ever, one I voluntarily gave up. Then I realize I'm not missing tinsel so much as my childhood, my grandparents. I refocus and picture our wedding's chuppah, which my dad made from Maine birch. I think of our rabbi pronouncing us husband and wife in a Catskill mountain town, knowing the winding road we had taken to arrive at that place. I remember Marc's parents and their friends hoisting my parents up on chairs during our hora, my fun-loving Italian and Midwestern relatives hopping right in. ("They sure know how to party!" my Aunt Marja observed.) I think of the new story we are weaving: my Grammy's china on our seder table, Marc's latkes that trash the whole kitchen but are worth it, family dinners in the sukkah, with its own twinkle lights. Traditions that once felt foreign, and then adopted, now just feel like us. The morning I converted, the rabbi read a verse from the Torah that comes back to me all the time. It's from the Book of Ruth, and it never fails to make me cry: "Your people shall be my people." And that is what marriage is all about. **B**

Statement Required by 39 U.S.C. 3685 showing the Ownership, Management, and Circulation of Brides, published every other month (6 issues) for October 1, 2017. Publication No. 489-390. Annual subscription price \$20.00.		
1. Location of known office of Publication is One World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007.		
2. Location of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publisher is One World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007.		
3. The names and addresses of the Publisher and Editor are: Publisher, Kim Kelleher, One World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007; Editor, Lisa Gooder, One World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007; Executive Editor, Rory Evans, One World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007.		
4. The owner is: Advance Magazine Publishers Inc., published through its Condé Nast division, One World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007; Stockholder: Directly or indirectly through intermediate corporations to the ultimate corporate parent, Advance Publications, Inc., 950 Fingerboard Road, Staten Island, NY 10305.		
5. Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are: None.		
6. Extent and nature of circulation		
	Average No. Copies each issue during preceding 12 months	Single Issue nearest to filing date
a. Total No. Copies	489,047	469,432
b. Paid Circulation		
(1) Mailed Outside-County Paid Subscriptions stated on PS Form 3541	196,885	200,931
(2) Mailed In-County Paid Subscriptions Stated on PS Form 3541	0	0
(3) Paid Distribution Outside the Mails Including Sales Through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, Counter Sales, and Other Paid Distribution Outside USPS®	41,630	45,664
(4) Paid Distribution by Other Classes of Mail Through the USPS	0	0
c. Total Paid Distribution	238,515	246,596
d. Free or Nominal Rate Distribution		
(1) Free or Nominal Rate Outside-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	66,824	68,336
(2) Free or Nominal Rate In-County Copies included on PS Form 3541	0	0
(3) Free or Nominal Rate Copies Mailed at Other Classes Through the USPS	0	0
(4) Free or Nominal Rate Distribution Outside the Mail	3,274	3,200
e. Total Free or Nominal Rate Distribution	70,098	71,536
f. Total Distribution	308,613	318,132
g. Copies Not Distributed	180,435	151,300
h. Total	489,047	469,432
i. Percent Paid	77.29%	77.51%
j. Paid Electronic Copies	7,223	6,987
k. Total Paid Print Copies (line 15c) + Paid Electronic Copies	245,738	253,583
l. Total Print Distribution (line 15f) + Paid Electronic Copies	315,836	325,119
m. Percent Paid (Both Print & Electronic Copies)	77.81%	78.00%
7. I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. (Signed) David Geithner, Vice President and Treasurer		

BRIDES IS A REGISTERED TRADEMARK OF ADVANCE MAGAZINE PUBLISHERS INC. COPYRIGHT ©2017 CONDÉ NAST. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. PRINTED IN THE U.S.A. VOLUME 84, NO. 6. Brides (ISSN 1084-1628) is published bimonthly (February/March, April/May, June/July, August/September, October/November, December/January) by Condé Nast Bridal Media, which is a unit of Condé Nast. PRINCIPAL OFFICE: Condé Nast, One World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. S.I. Newhouse, Jr., Chairman Emeritus; Robert A. Sauerberg, Jr., President and Chief Executive Officer; David E. Geithner, Chief Financial Officer; James M. Norton, Chief Business Officer, President of Revenue. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40644503. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. 848457321-RT0001. POSTMASTER: Send all UAA to CFS (see DMM 5071.5.2); Non-Postal and Military Facilities: Send address corrections to Brides, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037-0617. FOR SUBSCRIPTIONS, ADDRESS CHANGES, ADJUSTMENTS, OR BACK-ISSUE INQUIRIES: Please write to Brides, P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037-0617, call 800-456-6162, or e-mail subscriptions@brides.com. Please give both new and old addresses as printed on most recent label. Subscribers: If the Post Office alerts us that your magazine is undeliverable, we have no further obligation unless we receive a corrected address within one year. If during your subscription term or up to one year after the magazine becomes undeliverable you are ever dissatisfied with your subscription, let us know. You will receive a full refund on all unmailed issues. First copy of new subscription will be mailed within six weeks after receipt of order. Address all editorial, business, and production correspondence to Brides magazine, One World Trade Center, New York, NY 10007. For reprints, please e-mail reprints@condenast.com or call Wright's Media 877-652-5292. For reuse permissions, please e-mail contentlicensing@condenast.com or call 800-897-8666. Visit us online at brides.com. To subscribe to other Condé Nast magazines on the World Wide Web, visit condenastdigital.com. Occasionally, we make our subscriber list available to carefully screened companies that offer products and services that we believe would interest our readers. If you do not want to receive these offers and/or information, please advise us at P.O. Box 37617, Boone, IA 50037-0617 or call 800-456-6162. BRIDES IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR THE RETURN OR LOSS OF, OR FOR DAMAGE OR ANY OTHER INJURY TO, UNSOLICITED MANUSCRIPTS, UNSOLICITED ARTWORK (INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO, DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND TRANSPARENCIES), OR ANY OTHER UNSOLICITED MATERIALS. THOSE SUBMITTING MANUSCRIPTS, PHOTOGRAPHS, ARTWORK, OR OTHER MATERIALS FOR CONSIDERATION SHOULD NOT SEND ORIGINALS, UNLESS SPECIFICALLY REQUESTED TO DO SO BY BRIDES IN WRITING. MANUSCRIPTS, PHOTOGRAPHS, AND OTHER MATERIALS SUBMITTED MUST BE ACCOMPANIED BY A SELF-ADDRESSED STAMPED ENVELOPE.