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“words/things”

And so we come to a place in our story when four people, each feeling very alone, are standing on a threshold. There is a great power in the liminal times, and so I'm taking a slight pause in this story in order to acknowledge and honor this time in our lives, and to reflect on where we have been.

Who am I, you might wonder? Up until now, I've decided to tell this story as though it were unfolding by itself and we were all watching it together, able to see all sides, with no voice doing the telling.

I'm Raven, or Mari, as I was once called. I suppose now that I've told you, you'll know I survived, and eventually made my way to a place where I could find out what went on outside the Archives while I was gone, and write it all down. I suppose that may take some of the suspense out of the story, but don't worry, there will be plenty of excitement.

It took a bit of work to find out what happened outside the Archives while I was gone; I thought it might make the story go more smoothly if I just told it all as though I had been there and lived it all as it unfolded. Mind you, events weren't actually all that clean when they happened, but I wouldn't like you, Reader, to have to wade through a description of every wasted moment spent dithering, bathing, relieving ourselves (and anyway, a lady must have some privacy, even in print!); and though I have put a fair amount of weeping in here, there was more

in reality. One could have set up bathing machines and established a new seaside resort, if one had only thought to collect the tears shed over the course of this enormous journey!

Here, now, in this moment of the story when we are all on our various thresholds, I am finding I want to step forward and unveil myself as the teller. I want to make a few things clearer; after this small pause in which I've drawn back to give you the entire wide perspective of the world you're looking at (including allowing you to see me here at my desk, writing this) I'm going to bring us all closer.

Close enough to see the pebble in Jac's boot, which she has just sat down to remove (with language, I might add, not befitting a lady- where did you learn that salty phrase, Jac?); close enough to see the shine of tears in Rabbi Ariel's eyes as he cuts an immense gash in his own life; close enough to see me, Mari, frowning in great impatience as I find myself with a disagreeable new acquaintance, in too close quarters, with too much leisure on my hands (or just the right amount, depending on how you look at it); close enough to see Is' reflection as he bends over the silvery scrying pool, and to see the miniscule flutter of his dressing gown indicating that his heart is pounding in a rather alarming way.

It is an ideal time to pause and view the path we have all taken: we have all known wrenching defeat, and we have all known sorrow and shock, and we have all known small moments of wonder and joy. While we are resting for a moment, (and perhaps making a nice cup of refreshing tea,) I should tell you that I'm writing this letter not just to introduce myself, but also to warn you of a few things.

The first is that I may let some of the others write parts of this story, if I come to a part that I think they had better tell on their own. (If, that is, I can persuade Jac to sit still long enough.)

The second is that the story may skip around a bit in time, from now on. Looking back over where we've been, I have discovered that I left out parts of the past. Usually, it's completely acceptable to leave bits out. In this case, however, there are some pebbles that were cast in the past that are (unknown at the time to us all) still making ripples, and rather than getting smaller and weaker as ripples tend to do, these ripples are turning into waves. Pretty soon in the story, those past things are all going to change the way everything unfolded. (Goodness. I have got my tenses all mixed up. That's what happens when you meddle about with Time, I suppose.)

So, before we can completely leave the burdens of the past behind us, I've got to double back and let you see what happened. The story may jump about a bit now, time-wise. It's rather difficult, as I am not the Maker; I am not able to create the whole tapestry at once and lay it before your eyes.

Telling the things that unfolded elsewhere while I was inside the Archives shouldn't take long; but then, if I've learned one thing from all of this, it is that time is relative. Everything that seems like a detour in life (including this letter, perhaps) is actually a valid and completely integral part of the journey. I invite you to come with me as we go backward a bit, in order to move forward. We will take the "longer and shorter way," as a Chasidic master would say. How torturous our wanderings seem to be! When we come to the end, (or, rather, the beginning, as there really is no end) it will be clear that every boulder in our path was, in fact, a stepping-stone.

You may notice that I say “our path,” although at the moment, we four are in entirely separate places, and each completely unaware of where the others are; unaware that our journeys are connected. This world is woven in such an intricate way, it is really wondrous to be able now to see how connected we all were, even when we felt most alone! Baruch Hashem. And now, I hope you’ve taken some tea and refreshed yourself; let’s get on with our story.