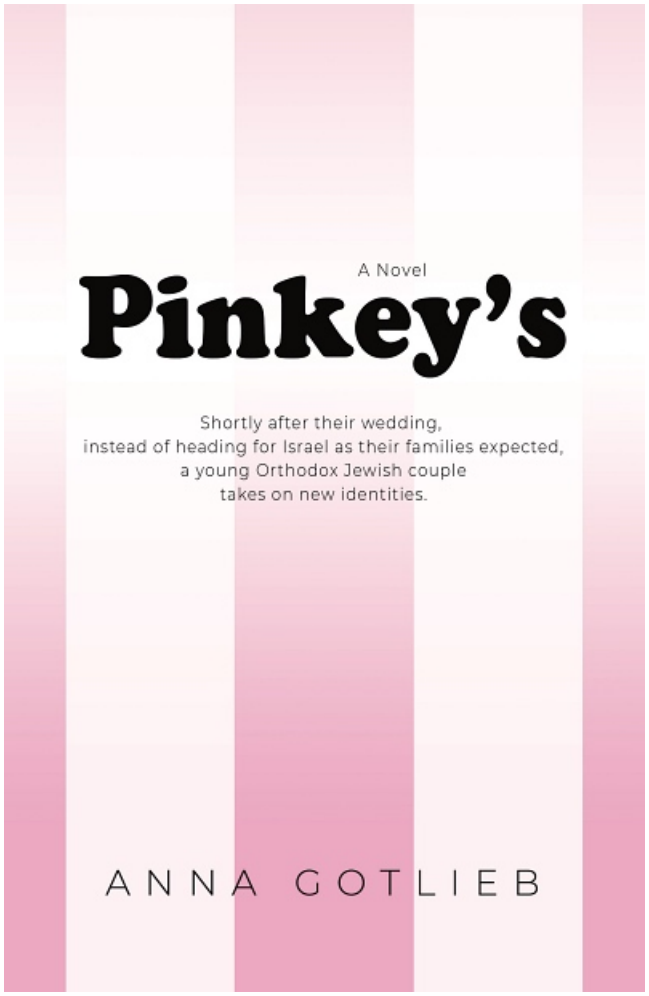


*A young Orthodox couple abandon their way of life in search of new identity in a small Midwestern town. Simultaneously, an Israeli widow and her son make their way to the same town. Change comes as paths cross.*

**Pinkey's**
By Anna Gotlieb

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A Novel

# Pinkey's

Shortly after their wedding,
instead of heading for Israel as their families expected,
a young Orthodox Jewish couple
takes on new identities.

ANNA GOTLIEB

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First Edition

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# The Interval

***Afterward***

The muffler was loud as they entered the driveway. Both sets of parents were on the front steps before he turned off the engine. The mothers were in tears. His father was stoic—still angry, still pained. Her father looked broken. The young couple had called earlier when they were better able to estimate when they would arrive. This had been their second call in a matter of days—the first was after more than a year of silence. They would come, the young couple said—on their terms.

“We’ll stay a week, maybe two if you’re okay with that,” they said.

And then? The parents wanted to know, but they did not ask.

***Before***

No one could have guessed what they were burning in the little leap of flames that darted toward the black summer sky. No one could have imagined the items that sizzled into dust that night at the far end of the grassy lawn on the edge of the river.

One white cotton shirt, men’s neck size sixteen, sleeve length thirty-two/thirty-three, one pair of men’s black trousers with frayed cuffs, one ankle-length skirt with double pockets, a brown, shoulder-length, authentic Asian hair wig, and a new black fedora with a wide brim.

A halo of light hovered just above the fire, obscuring the view of the river and the opposite shore. In daylight, a craggy cliff could be seen rising from the sandy bank across the way. On this starless midnight, though, there was neither rock nor river. There was simply a small, sad blaze, quickly born and quickly expired, signifying an end and a beginning.

### *Her Parents*

Not far away, less than fifty miles, two people sat opposite one another in the small kitchen of their apartment. It was on the night following the little fire, but of course, they were unaware of that. They knew only that their girl was gone. “She’ll be all right?” the woman asked. And the man answered, “Yes,” as though she’d asked and he had answered many times before. “She’ll be all right. Yes.”

The white overhead light was hot on the hot night. She hated air conditioning. He didn’t want to argue. Not now. Not in the night, with the hollow sound of understanding battering his ears. At least she had told them.

“It’s better that she let us know, isn’t it?” he’d said earlier when she’d said, “She’ll be all right.” A statement. Not yet a question. That had been this morning.

“It’s better that she told us. It was the honest thing to do.” And then the tears had bubbled to his eyes, and he’d had to look away from her—from the woman standing at the kitchen sink—the woman in the striped housecoat standing barefoot on the kitchen floor, not facing him, facing away from him. Asking him without words, *Why?*

And *How could it have happened?* Accusing him with her back as though he could have known. Should have.

Now, fifteen hours later, they sat opposite one another at the small kitchen table in their small apartment. The ragged page of lined paper lay on the counter where she had found it. It was she, in the striped housecoat, who before she'd brushed her teeth had thumped her way to the stove where she'd removed the old porcelain coffee pot. She would brew the coffee from scratch the same as she had been doing through all of the years of their marriage. Even then, on the morning of the lined paper, she had brewed the coffee in the porcelain pot.

Now she asked, "Where will they go?" A question.

He moved his head upward two inches from where it had been balanced on the palms of his hands, braced by elbows pressed heavily on the smooth white tabletop.

"North. Canada, I think. He asked me once about Canada. That's where they'll go, I think."

"When did he ask about Canada?" The word *Canada* came through her hands covering her face.

"A month ago. Maybe two weeks ago. He asked about Montreal. 'How far is Montreal?' I think he said."

"And you answered? What did you answer him?" The words were loose and thick—disheveled—an extension of the way she looked. Unkempt.

“I answered,” he said, resignation in his voice. “I answered.”

### *His Parents*

“Cicada choir out there,” he chuckled, wiping the perspiration from his forehead and neck with a damp dish towel. He leaned back, tipping the lawn chair.

“Don’t do that, you’ll break the screen,” she said.

“You’ll break the screen,” he echoed, teasing her.

She smiled at him from her seat on the matching lawn chair, planted firmly on the floor of the summer porch of their modest suburban home.

Between the chairs stood a low white plastic table. On the table, two glasses were filled with bottled iced tea and slices of fresh lemon. Also on the table was a round white bowl holding a mound of vanilla cookies.

He broke one of the cookies and placed half in his mouth. “We did all right.” He dropped the second piece of cookie onto his tongue. “We did all right for ourselves. I’m so proud of him.”

“Them,” his wife corrected. “We’re proud of them.”

They sat that way, he leaning back, his head making an impression on the screen, his mouth partially opened to accept the cookie halves interspersed with long swallows of tea. She, leaning forward, hands wrapped around the glass on her knees.

"Everything was beautiful—" she corrected herself "—is beautiful." The *chassana,* the *sheva brochos—Baruch Hashem*. She turned her head upward and to the side, her tired brown eyes framed by tiny creases.

She sipped the tea, nodding happily to her husband, to herself, and to God in heaven for the joy of it. For the two daughters sleeping quietly in the room at the top of the stairs and for the grown and married son—on the plane now with his new wife—headed across the sky for Jerusalem. He would learn in the yeshiva, and she would find a job.

"Do you want to look for work before you go? Make some inquiries? We know people who could help," she'd offered the young woman some weeks before the wedding.

"No, thank you," she answered. "Don't worry, we'll be fine."

### *The Chossan and Kallah*

She wore jeans and a man's shirt. Her hair was short and dyed blond. They'd done it earlier in the day. His and hers bottled blonds. His looked more natural. He was thin, fair-skinned, and faintly freckled. She was dark with black eyebrows—bleached now to an unnatural yellow-white. His jeans were too long, too new. "Skin and bones," they'd always said of him for as long as he could remember. "Skin and bones. Doesn't your mother feed you?" It was a joke, of course. Everyone knew the way she coddled him with food and attention. With love. And it wasn't just her. It was all of them. His sisters and his father. His father nearly idolized him. "I may not be bright, but I managed to produce an *illui*, a genius." And he'd smile his exuberant smile and place his lanky arm around the

bony shoulder of his brilliant son. “Meet my son,” he would announce with such pride that sometimes even the son was impressed.

Her driver’s license read Felice Anne Marie Margolis. She had taken it out of her wallet for the fourth time in less than three hours. “It’s an awful-sounding name.” Her words were spoken just above a whisper.

“It’s just fancy, that’s all. You’re not used to such a fancy name. I don’t like mine, either.” He removed the laminated card from his back pocket. “Derrick Blake,” he read. “Now that is an ugly name. Not even a middle initial. Just plain checkered-shirt, toothpick-in-the-mouth Derrick Blake, that’s me.”

They were seated on the Greyhound, three-quarters of the way back. “Don’t go all the way back—too close to the lavatory,” she’d warned. “And up front there’ll be too many kids.” She’d told him this nearly six hours earlier as they’d waited to board. “How would you know?” he’d asked her. “About the kids. How would you know?”

“I’ve been on a bus before,” she’d answered, surprisingly sullen. He didn’t blame her. It hadn’t been much fun yet. No fun, in fact. Her parents had been asleep when they left the apartment. She insisted on the note. Then there was the Uber from the corner to the river forty minutes north. And the little ceremonial fire that made them both feel more sad than free. They spent the night in a small hotel a short walk from the river. The cutting and dying of their hair was less exhilarating than they’d expected, and it rained in the morning, a chill, damp rain as they boarded the train that would take them to the city. The city—where they collected their identities

from a shockingly Nordic-looking woman with pale blue eyes and impossibly white teeth, seated behind a chipped gray desk.

"These are yours." She'd handed the manila envelopes to the couple, who would now be Derrick Blake and Felice Anne Marie Margolis.

In return for their identities, Derrick and Felice Anne Marie paid three thousand dollars in cash, two thousand dollars being the total of their combined savings, plus one thousand dollars in wedding gifts. Another two thousand dollars remained in the bank, a present from his parents. But he had not touched that. "Won't," he'd told Fancy before she was Fancy.

They threw the manila envelopes away in the tall wire wastepaper basket just outside the office door. They transferred the licenses to wallets and the wallets to the back pockets of their jeans. The other papers—birth certificates, school and medical records—they zipped into the side panel of the small duffel bag. He carried the large army-green backpack with the sparse makings of their future.

### *His Parents*

The ice clinked against the bottom of the glass as he set it down to answer the call. "It's *Abe*." He mouthed the word, looking at his watch. "Abe? It's late for you to be awake." He said it with a smile.

The *machatunem* were the early to bed, early to rise brand of people.

"The kids are gone." Abe's voice was flat. "They left a note. Said we shouldn't try to find them."

The color drained from Shimon's face. "What? What?"

"They didn't go to Israel. They left a note. Miri found it this morning. They must have gone in the middle of the night. We didn't hear them. The note says we shouldn't try to find them. I'm sorry." The last with a sob.

"This morning, and you're telling us now? Now you're telling us that they didn't go to Israel? Are you out of your mind?"

Edie, the glass of iced tea in her hand, was on her feet.

"We could have started looking!" Shimon shouted into the cell phone. "Called the police. Hired a detective." Edie, frantic now, grabbed her husband's arm, tried to wrench the phone from his hand. Shimon wanted to hang up on Abe. Wanted to slam the cell against a wall, hear it crash to the floor. But he knew that the momentary satisfaction of cutting Abe short would not squelch the rising panic. And he knew, even through his fury, that the four of them, he and Edie, Miri and Abe, would have to work together and quickly if they were to find their children, regardless of their children's not wanting to be found.

"Don't leave the apartment. Do you hear me, Abe? Don't move. I am coming right now."
Edie would not be left behind, nor would the girls once they'd been told. Shimon had hesitated only briefly. "Maybe they know something. Maybe they can help." He woke them gently, despite the blood pumping hard through his veins. "No talking until we get there," he insisted. "Not a word. We will sort this out and everything will be fine." They drove through the silent streets to the highway,

from the highway to the bridge, which took them through several towns until they reached the mid-size apartment building where the machatunem lived.

### *The Chosson and Kallah*

Mosquitoes batted at her ankles above her sandaled feet. The sticky breeze barely moved the thin crop of hair visible at the open collar of his shirt. "Get me some licorice. No, not licorice, something chocolate, Fancy." He had taken to calling her that, a reference to her recently acquired elaborate name. She took the twenty-dollar bill from him. He was squatting on the sidewalk in the blistering heat. "And something to drink." He didn't look up from the local paper, which he'd folded lengthwise after turning to the section marked Real Estate. He'd taken it from a rack outside the store. Through a clear glass door, Fancy entered the free-standing white stucco building called Pinkey's. They had seen the sign from the window of the bus. The word was spelled out in fuchsia script beside an oversize cutout image of a man with a barrel chest wearing a pink-and-white striped jacket, a top hat, a bow tie, and black trousers that tapered to tiny, pointed feet. The sign was perched on stilts above the flat roof.

From their seats on the bus, they had seen Pinkey's parking lot glaring white in the early sun. They didn't have to say a word to one another; they simply knew. This was the destination toward which they had been heading. The driver shut off the engine. "Pit stop," he announced, pointing to the fuchsia sign.

The lurch of the bus as it came to a stop had roused Derrick. Before that, he had slept soundly for several hours while Fancy dozed fitfully, watching high-rise apartments turn to houses, houses

become trees, trees give way to farmland. Through the smoked glass of the window, she had seen shadowy silos against the blue-back sky when the moon was high and full. Derrick yawned and checked his watch. The words to the morning prayer were already on his tongue. Old habits die hard, he thought, forcing the familiar ritual from his head.

All but a couple of passengers made their way to the front of the bus, with its metallic-smelling air. Time to stretch legs, wash faces and hands in the sinks of Pinkey's ladies' and men's rooms, which would smell of flowered deodorizer and medicinal bug spray. Time to buy a bottle of orange juice and a paper cup of coffee poured from the round glass pot on the base of the machine behind the counter. Time for gum or mouthwash or candy—anything to take away the taste of fourteen hours and seven hundred and twenty-two miles.

The heat, even at six a.m., was oppressive. The driver stepped down and stretched, pulling his gray-visored cap back on his head, running his fingers through tightly curled hair, "Sure is a scorcher," he said to nobody in particular.

"Could you open the bottom?" Derrick pointed to the side of the bus where, before leaving the terminal, the driver had stored the passengers' larger bags. "We're gonna get off here."
"Sure thing." The driver turned the latch of the stowaway compartment. "Which is yours?"

Derrick reached in to grab the backpack lodged behind a black, faux-leather suitcase.

In the searing heat, the backpack seemed heavier—more substantial than it had the day before when he'd maneuvered it through the turnstile. He was apprehensive then. They both were. Afraid that one or the other would give in or give up.

And now they had arrived.

Derrick shaded his eyes with one hand and read "Circulation 7,000" printed in small type under the masthead. The lead story carried a bold headline: *"*Barn Blaze Kills Livestock*."* The accompanying photographs showed two dead cows. A box on the lower right led readers to page three for National News, page eight for Arts and Entertainment, page nine for Editorial, page twelve for Real Estate**.**

***The Machatunem***

"We pulled the house apart looking for clues," Miri told the police. It was well past two a.m. when the two sets of parents and Derrick's sisters arrived at the police station.

"The note?" The officer held out his hand. 'It wouldn't have mattered if you'd called immediately. It doesn't really matter now. They're not missing persons. They're a married couple, and they left a note. You wanna know where they are? You'll have to hire a private agency. Sorry, folks."

*Where?* was certainly a pressing question. But *why?* Why was more disturbing. The machatunem looked at each other, at the young girls who were the *chossan's* sisters—frightened now, when just a week ago they had danced with the *kallah,* when she'd

pulled them into the circle. Their slender shoulders slumped forward as they followed their parents out of the police station.

“What’s the point?” It was Edie who finally spoke up. The six of them were standing between the two cars parked diagonally on the street. “They don’t want to be found. If we find them, we could lose them forever.”

### *The Chossan and Kallah*

Derrick found Fancy at the checkout counter as she was paying. She laughed aloud as he approached her. The sight of him with light blond hair was still a delightful surprise.

“Scorcher, ain’t it?” The cashier with weather-beaten cheeks echoed the words of the bus driver.

“How do we find Round Park Road?” Derrick had circled the address under Real Estate: Rentals.

The casher squinted, studying the newspaper. “Gotta know which number. Says here one hunerd and eleven, see.” He pointed to the figures, nodding with importance. One eleven’s north. Anything down ta one hunerd s’north, from ninety-nine down’s south. Park’s in the middle.”

“How do we get there?” Derrick repeated the question.

“Outta here make a left—two block” (he omitted the *s*). “Three block on yer right an that’ll be Round Park. Can’t go but one way. Just keep on. Two mile or so. One eleven’s on the left. Name a’

Green." He poked at the circled address with his long gnarled index finger.

Derrick said, "Thanks." The cashier was already offering the next customer his "Scorcher, ain't it?" greeting.

"How much more till we hit two mile?" Derrick imitated the cashier. He was grinning broadly, his face flushed from the moist heat and the weight of the knapsack. He stopped to readjust the straps.

"I think one mile," Fancy drawled. "One mile, but not two mile." She was giddily happy. Round Park Road was exactly as she'd hoped it would be. Barely wide enough for two cars, long, flat, and flanked by enormous trees with wide pale trunks and spreading branches flush with large, broad leaves. To the right, the small, two-story houses were separated by well-manicured lawns. To the left, a field of grain. "Oh, beautiful for spacious skies," Fancy sang. Despite the heat, a warm breeze set the grain dancing. "Amber waves"—she was in awe. This place, the tidy little homes, the fragrance of summer, and now the farmland with its produce rippling in the distance. She adjusted the red bandanna wrapped around her head. All her life, she had waited for this moment—this place, this time, this scene. Her childhood drawings, her youthful fantasies, had contained always some version of this setting, this space.

### *The Landlords*

The house, when Derrick and Fancy reached it, was set back a short distance from the street. As was the case with Round Park Road, if Fancy could have dreamed a house, this is the house that would have come to mind: small and white with two stories, green shuttered windows, and a wraparound porch with white spindles

and green railings. Six identical wooden chairs, painted green, were spread out on either side of the front door. Across the way, and stretching beyond, was farmland. Derrick knocked twice. Fancy could see straight into the front room through the screen door, a sure sign that the house was not air-conditioned, an asset as far as Fancy was concerned. She liked summer to feel like summer, inside as well as out, even in an apartment. But this...this would be so much better. “Hello,” Derrick called, not too loudly but loud enough to be heard. “Hello.”

“Somebody there?” A woman’s voice.

“We’re here about the ad in the paper,” Derrick answered. He was going to say, “The one about the place for rent,” but before he’d finished the thought, the screen door opened to reveal two old people with faces like prunes. The prunes smiled. “Com’on in, come,” said the woman. “Ain’t it hot out there?” She ushered Fancy and Derrick into an immaculate living room with polished wood floors and white stucco walls. “Kin I get you a drink? Probly yur thirsty.” She didn’t wait for an answer, but headed through the living room into a narrow dining room and then off to the left where, Fancy supposed, was the kitchen.

“You folks from up north?” the man asked. “I kin tell by how ya talk.” He motioned to them to sit down on a low couch. He took the large chair opposite and slightly to the right. “Here now, have soma Mrs. Green’s lemonade, why don’t ya? You’ll feel a whole lot cooler after.” He removed two striped plastic glasses from the tray that Mrs. Green had set on the low rectangular table in front of the couch and handed them to the couple. “Drink up,” he said. “There’s more where that come from.”

Fancy and Derrick sipped politely, both realizing that Mrs. Green's encouraging nods were more than a mere acknowledgement of their thirst. She wanted them, really wanted them, to drain their glasses.

### *The Machatunem*

Stunned, they remained standing near their cars in the early morning light, speaking in curt sentences. Abe pressed for a private detective. Edie was adamant about holding back. "Go home," she told the machatunem. "We'll all go home. We'll talk later."

The machatunem listened, feeling chastened.

"She knows something," Miri told Abe in the car on the way to their apartment. "She knows something, but isn't saying what."

### *His Parents*

"What I know is, he was miserable." Edie, lips bunched, faced Shimon. "How many times did he tell you that he didn't want to spend another minute in yeshiva? That he wanted to go to college now, not after two years or five years, or whatever you had in mind for him. That was your plan, not his. How many times did he argue? Didn't I tell you to stop pushing him? You thought you won. But now look." She said this last quietly, resignedly.

"And what about her? Maybe this was her idea?" Shimon was sorry now that he hadn't known the girl better. "Maybe she convinced him. So, now what? We just wait?"

“We wait.” Edie picked up her phone to call Miri. “We wait,” she said. “They will get in touch with us. Otherwise, they wouldn’t have left that note. They want time. We will give them time. As much time as they need. No private detective. Agreed?”

### *The Chossan and Kallah*

Only after they had complied and allowed her to refill their glasses from the plastic pitcher did Mrs. Green sit down in a fan-backed chair parallel to her husband’s. She got to the point. “We got two places fer rent. Upstairs is a room, furnished a’course. Sleeps two, plus a bathroom all yer own. You kin have it for ahunderd and fifty dollars a month. More if you want meals. Meals is six a.m., breakfast; one is lunch and six, supper.” She cocked her head to the side, sizing them up. “Cost you fifty dollars a week fer the two of ye fer meals. Now if you wanta negotiate some on the meals, maybe you just wanta eat here weekdays is all, well, we could negotiate.”

Fancy did not have to look at Derrick, nor he at her, to know that meals with the Greens, no matter how few, were out of the question.

“Is there a place for us to cook if we want to make our own meals?” Fancy sat forward.
“Kin use a hot plate, if ya like. There’s a table in the room and chairs and you kin have a small fridg in there. But there ain’t no oven or like that. And there ain’t no sink in the room so you got ta use the bathroom sink.”

Fancy moved as though to stand. But Mrs. Green was not finished. “If yer looking for a bigger place, we got such a one—call it back

house. Got four of 'em on the propertee. One's empty now. Comes furnished too. Got a bedroom, living room with a kitchen at the end and a'course a bathroom with a new stall shower. Kitchen got the works: new oven, big fridg, pots, dishes and all such, and a washer dryer one top o th'other. Last tenants put it in. They was nice people. Anyhow that place, if you wanta see it 'll be three hunderd a month plus gas and 'lectric. We got well water here. No charge."

Fancy and Derrick exchanged glances. "We'd like to take a look." Derrick responded more to Fancy's face than he did to the description of the back house or the rental fee. With all their planning, all the machinations necessary to leave, somehow they had never discussed the specifics of rent. Both knew the amount of money Derrick was carrying in his backpack. Neither knew how long it would last.

"This way then, ya follow me." The feisty Mrs. Green led them through the dining room, turned left into the kitchen, large and fussily decorated, then out the mud room door. "Got ta go out the mud room door, ya know," she said, leading them through a small enclosure with rubber boots lined up neatly to one side and hooks with yellow slickers along the inner wall.

"That way." Mrs. Green pointed to a large grassy yard bordered by four "back houses—that one there ta the end, it's fer rent."

It was perfect. Fancy wanted to jump, to twirl in circles, to sing. Like a summer camp cabin, an old-fashioned bungalow. But she let Derrick take the lead. 'We'll need a little time to talk it over." Mrs. Green nodded her head. "You can set right here and think about

it," she told him, pointing to the Formica-topped table for two at the kitchen end of the living room. "I'll get back upta the house. You knock when ya know fer sure." And she left them there to decide.

Derrick knew without asking that Fancy had made up her mind.

"Just let's see if they'll lower the rent. We don't have jobs. We don't know how long the money'll last. And, we have to account for food and utilities, and a phone—a landline." Cell phones were out of the question. They could be traced through cell phones. They had disposed of theirs months earlier, along with its data linked to their previous selves.

"And if they won't come down on rent?"

"We'll take it." Derrick smiled back at his wife. "It's what you were hoping for, isn't it?"

"We," Fancy said. "What *we* were hoping for."

They waited another twenty minutes, surveying the bedroom with its frilly, starched, white curtains, the window overlooking the field of waving wheat—a piece of green farm machinery at its center. The living room/kitchen faced the front of the little house, with a view of the lawn, a few trees the same variety as those lining Round Park Road—one with a swing hanging by ropes from a large branch—and the back of the Greens' house.

Derrick removed three hundred dollars in fifties from his backpack. He put two hundred dollars in the front pocket of his jeans and gave Fancy two fifties.

The landlords agreed to "three hunderd a month including utilities. We can see as yer a nice young couple and married. That's as it should be. Glad to have ya. Now ya jes settle in and stop by any time if ya need something. The folks in them other backhouses—they work the farm. Two men in one house. Three in the other. Older couple in the third. Farm's not our propertee any more anyhow. We sold it a while back. Owner lives in town."

Fancy and Derrick showered, changed into clean clothes, and walked back to Pinkey's, where they bought eggs, bread, two tomatoes, four peaches, and a red-and-white-checked plastic tablecloth.

Later, with stomachs full, they settled into bed. The job hunt, they told one another, would begin in the morning...early.

...

Derrick waited outside while Fancy went in. There was no sign in the window, but she figured it couldn't hurt to ask. And maybe the guy at the counter would have a suggestion. Which he did.

"Without even an interview," Fancy told Derrick. "Six a.m. to six p.m. Seven dollars an hour. Saturdays off. He's got Sundays off." Saturday's off. They shared the thought, though neither said a word about it. "I start tomorrow. He said you could try the paper. 'down the road some,' is how he put it. Seems there is only one paper in town, and they're always looking for help."

"Obits, weddings, engagements, anniversaries, those things." The editor with graying hair wore baggy shorts and a T-shirt. "Follow the template, simple as that. Can ya do it? Last guy took off a week

ago. Goin' to college somewhere out east. You graduate high school? Good. Job's yours. Eight bucks an hour four days a week. Monday through Thursday. Friday mornings we print. Ya wanna help on print days I'll pay ya nine bucks an hour Fridays. Got ta be here early 'bout six. Good. You're on. Start on Wednesday. What ya say your name is?"

Derrick answered.

"Don't look much like a Derrick." The editor squinted. "See ya Wednesday, eight. Be on time."

*Banking*, Derrick thought, *might be a problem.* He worried about the identification. But the teller didn't seem to notice. She opened the account without a question. He deposited half of the cash right away and kept the rest in case.

"In case we need it," he told Fancy later, once he was back at home. "In case they come looking for us."

"Who?"

"Parents," Derrick answered. "Police."

In the second month of marriage, when Fancy had become proficient at cooking decent meals in the kitchen area of the living room, she told him a secret.

"Pregnant," she said.

He wasn't surprised. Neither was he disappointed or overjoyed. He had been expecting this. They hadn't used birth control. Told themselves they would rather live naturally. The same way they told themselves it was better to eat grains, fruits, and nuts than it was to eat meat—unable, as they were, to swallow the fried chicken from the take-out place. Unwilling to test the limits of their commitment to a new way of life.

So they celebrated with ice cream and congratulated themselves on an evolving future. They fell asleep facing in opposite directions.

Fancy asked for advice from one of Pinkey's regular customers—a pregnant women with two small children, a boy and a girl, both friendly and slightly overweight.

"You carrying one?" The woman smiled. "Don't need a doctor—we here all use a midwife. There's two." She'd gave Fancy their names. "Both just as good," the woman said. Fancy called the first on the list. Simple as that.

The midwife was not quite what Fancy expected. She was more official. Said she had a degree in practical nursing. Wore a single braid, rimless glasses, a plain blue shirt, dark blue pants, and sneakers. Maybe in her late forties or early fifties. "Stop bleaching your hair," she told Fancy. "Seeps into the scalp. Unhealthy. Don't eat junk. No raw fish. You'll be fine." She handed Fancy a bottle of vitamins. Weighed her on a scale she'd brought and said she'd be back next month unless they needed her before. "Call me any time. Don't be shy." She left on the bicycle she'd parked in front of the cabin.

“Seems competent.” Derrick was satisfied.

The fall came with bushels of apples delivered to their door by the Greens. Fancy bought a new frying pan, a soup pot, and some flatware. They made soups with beans and vegetables and meatless stews. They ate omelets, French toast, and almond butter sandwiches on whole-wheat bread. Fancy found recipes in cheap magazines at Pinkey’s. By late November, Fancy’s jeans no longer fit.

*Should I call them? How overjoyed they would be. Should we tell them?* She had been thinking the question for days. But now, with the late autumn weather, the sun casting weaker rays through the empty tree branches, she asked it aloud. They were walking together hand-in-hand down Round Park Road.

“I understand.” Derrick stopped and faced her. “If you call them, Fancy, we’ll go back to who we were, what we were. I can’t do that. Can you?”

She answered, “No, but I miss them, and I am sorry that we’re hurting then. And that they don’t know that we’re okay, and that...” She didn’t continue because she thought she might cry.

Winter was cold. Snow fell twice in horizontal waves. They bought a space heater for the bedroom. The windows did not shut properly. Sometimes wind whistled through.

Fancy knew the regulars at Pinkey’s. They nodded kindly at her growing belly and offered her their infants’ hand-me-downs for

"when the time comes." They cautioned her to be careful on the ice.

Derrick proved to be a decent writer. The editor expanded his responsibilities and gave him a small increase in pay. "Smart kid," the editor said. "Where'd ya go to school?" Derrick said, "Up north." The editor didn't press for a more specific answer.

Sometimes the Greyhound stopped at Pinkey's to let off newcomers to town. Once Fancy thought she saw a religious girl. Long dark hair, long skirt—the skirt longer than her short winter jacket with its fur-lined hood. Sad face. The girl bought a bag of potato chips and a soda and waited outside. Fancy watched a car pull up. The girl got into the back seat. A woman was at the wheel, a man in the passenger seat. The man wore a black fedora. Family, maybe, picking up the sad girl.

When Derrick saw a ripple move on the skin of Fancy's stomach, when he felt an elbow or a knee belonging to a person yet to be born, there was regret. Not for having left so much as for knowing he would not go back.

They passed the days walking, working, reading, sometimes listening to music on the old radio they had found in the back of the closet where they hung their few clothes and stored their gloves and boots.

The midwife said, "May." And asked, Did they want to see the fetus? Next time she would bring the monitor and a printer if they'd like. She could tell them the sex if they wished. They said they would rather a surprise.

With the coming of daffodils, Fancy stopped working. Soon, the day would come. They bought a small cradle at a thrift shop, five small stretch suits in yellow and green, some tiny diapers, and a few bottles. “In case the baby has some trouble latching on. But you’ll be fine,” the midwife said.

Fancy wasn’t frightened. She sat in a lawn chair near the entrance to the cabin, breathing in the fragrance of fresh grass. She watched the clouds float across the field where workers in overalls drove green tractors. Sometimes three or four men would gather at the backhouse cabin next door. At night the men played guitar and cards, and drank beer. Fancy saw the bottles in the garbage can the next day. The men were not rowdy. She imagined them with beards, with tzitzit hanging out, but the picture wouldn’t stick.

On a June night when she was a week or so past the due date, the pains came, the midwife came, and a baby girl with pink skin and a mass of dark hair came into the world. She was fat and hungry. Her lungs were strong. And with her first cry, tears ran down the faces of both parents. Fancy saw Derrick mouth the ancient words of thanks. He held the child while Fancy slept. A marvel. A miracle.

They named the baby Bella. Derrick used his passport to give the child her true last name. The summer air was warm and sweet. The infant grew. Fancy bought a stroller. She and Bella spent hours walking, sometimes even in the rain. The stroller had a plastic awning, which delighted the baby, who watched the raindrops slide and drip. Fancy stopped in at Pinkey’s to show off her daughter. They met Derrick for lunch in the park, where she and Derrick sat on benches eating sandwiches while Bella slept in the stroller.

Most evenings, they ate dinner outdoors on a blanket spread under the tree in the yard.

Life was peaceful, idyllic, quiet, serene.

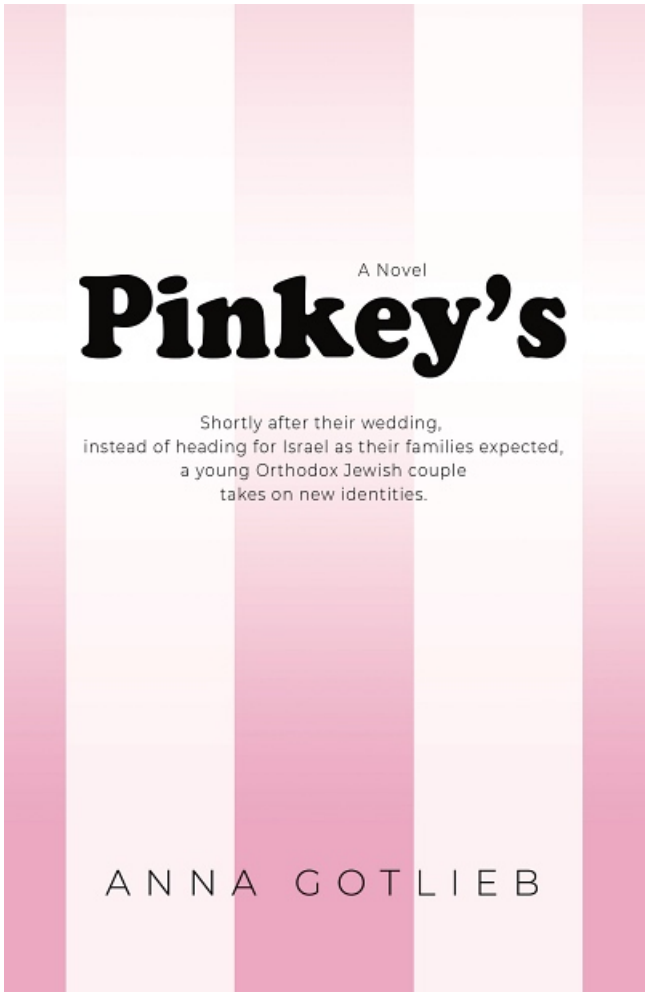
It was Fancy who spoke. Her now dark hair was shoulder-length, she was barefoot, and she wore a simple sundress. The setting sun caused the sky to be shot through with shades of mauve and gold and peach.

"I want to go home," she said.

Derrick bought a used car.

# About the Author

Anna Gotlieb, known as Annie to her friends is Granny Annie to her children's children. She is the author of Between the Lines, C.I.S. Publishers, 1992; In Other Words, Targum Press, 1996 and Full Circle. Author House, 2008.




*A young Orthodox couple abandon their way of life in search of new identity in a small Midwestern town. Simultaneously, an Israeli widow and her son make their way to the same town. Change comes as paths cross.*

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