



A JUNIOR LIBRARY GUILD SELECTION

*Is a lie always a bad thing, even if what comes out
of it is good? Does our faith make us so different
from one another?*

*Miriam ponders these and other Big Questions,
when her family buys a crumbling motel in upstate
New York.*



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turns out to be one. And the miracle in *No
Vacancy* above everything else is kindness.”
— Tim Wynne-Jones, award-winning author

“With effortless mastery, Cohen weaves the
opposing forces of innocence and corruption,
right and wrong, love and hate.”
— *Quill & Quire*, STARRED REVIEW

Jacket illustration by Sam Kalda

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NO VACANCY



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Town of Greenvale

Population 510

The green road sign goes by so fast I'm not even sure I read it right.

"Seriously?" I say. "Did that sign say Population 510?" There are practically more people than that on the block where we live.

Where we used to live.

"What sign?" says Dad.

"I need to pee again," I say. I weaseled a Coke out of Dad at the last rest stop and now I'm paying the price.

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“We’ll be there in two minutes,” Mom says as Dad turns off the highway onto a service road. It’s the first thing she’s said in about a hundred miles.

Dad turns down a tree-lined street and then another and stops suddenly in front of another sign. Sammy is asleep in his car seat. I tickle his feet through his socks, and his eyelids flutter but he doesn’t wake up.

This sign is a faded yellow with The Jewel Motor Inn painted in red letters with a black outline. Some of the paint has worn off and the wood underneath shows through. The weeds under the sign are tall enough to tickle the bottom of the *J*.

On the top someone has taped a smaller sign made of cardboard: Closed. Reopening Monday, July 6.

Today is Monday, June 29.

Dad turns into the entrance and stops halfway into the parking lot next to a little playground that’s really just two busted swings and one of those painted metal horses on a giant spring from the olden days. There’s a sandbox, though even from the car I can see it’s full of weeds and garbage.

The playground around the corner from our old apartment in the middle of the city is bigger than this one. A lot bigger.

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Dad parks in front of a two-story building the color of dried mustard. Mom sighs and he leans over to give her a kiss.

“Here’s to new beginnings,” he says. Mom sighs again. I don’t think she likes new beginnings.

Seeing the Jewel Motor Inn up close, I’m not sure I do either. Though it’s not like I have a choice. After Dad lost his job, we had to give up our apartment and now my two best friends will be five hours away and having a new beginning without me.

Dad gives me a big smile — the kind adults give you when they’re trying to make you feel something they don’t.

“Welcome home,” he says.

Mom and Dad get out of the car and tell me to stay with Sammy, who is still sound asleep, his head tilted to one side and his lips pursed like he’s dreaming about kissing, even though he’s only two and a half years old.

I open my door and stand next to the car so I can get a better look at my new home. The hot, muggy air outside feels like the air in the city but smells different. Greener, I guess.

On the first floor, right in front of our parking spot, is a glass door with Reception painted on it in

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faded letters. There are two big planters on either side of the door filled with dried-out brown plants.

Mom comes out the door. A bell jingles when it opens. She reaches into the car and grabs her phone.

"I have to pee," I tell her.

"Stay with Sammy, please, Miriam," Mom says. She shuts the car door too hard and Sammy wakes up.

"Out," he says, rubbing his eyes and looking at me. "Out."

I reach over and squeeze his chubby little hand three times for "I love you," like Grandma taught me when I was little. When I unbuckle him he climbs into the front seat and pretends to drive. I scramble into the passenger seat to make sure he doesn't honk the horn.

He's lucky. He's too young to have real friends to leave behind. He didn't care about leaving his room or his school or his favorite teacher. His whole world is still with him.

"Come, Sammy." He grabs my hand and we head into Reception just as Mom and Dad come out. I peek behind them. The room is empty.

"Where are the people who are supposed to show us everything?" I ask.

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“No one’s here,” Dad says, frowning. “They left.”

Mom starts taking things out of the trunk: Sammy’s stroller, a cooler of sandwiches and snacks, two small suitcases for me and Sammy and a big one for her and Dad. The rest of our stuff is coming later in a truck.

“They left?” I’m confused. The previous owners were supposed to stay here with us for a week and teach us everything about running a motel.

Mom slams the trunk hard. Sammy lets go of my hand and starts to run out into the parking lot. Dad grabs him and holds him upside down and tickles the part of his belly sticking out over his diaper.

His giggle is the only sound for what seems like a million years.

Dad stays in the parking lot, yelling at someone on his cell phone, while Sammy and I follow Mom back into Reception. I can smell chlorine, and it reminds me of the Y back home where Lekha had her birthday party last month. I still haven’t totally forgiven her for having a pool party when she knew how I felt about water. I ended up helping her mom set up for the cake while everyone was splashing around and having fun.

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I follow Mom around the high counter, taking in the computer behind it. There's a desk against the back wall and next to it a closed door with a sign that says Office. And next to that there's a bathroom, thank God.

Back home, my best friends, Dahlia and Lekha, and I have a public bathroom rating system. Most of the bathrooms in the city are a one or two out of ten, usually tiny and dirty and smelly, with toilet paper on the floor and paper towel dispensers that are empty or jammed. Then there are the ones in fancy restaurants, the ones we go to for special occasions, which get an eight or a nine because they're big, with art on the walls and automatic faucets and blasting hand dryers that actually dry your hands instead of just moving the water around.

This bathroom? I give it a four because it's clean, but it's still tiny, and the toilet seat is chipped. And the soap dispenser is filled with bright pink liquid that looks like diarrhea medicine.

When I come out, Sammy's climbing onto one of the two old couches that face each other in the middle of the room, a scratched-up coffee table between them.

"Mi-wam," he calls to me.

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The couches are greenish brown with frayed edges and there's a rip down the back of one of them. I try not to think about the dirt and sit down, and Sammy snuggles against me until he spies the display stand near the front door. It's filled with colorful pamphlets, the only thing in the room that's not dull and dreary.

Sammy toddles right over and starts pulling them out one by one and dropping them on the floor. I pick them up and try to put them back into their slots but he is way faster than I am so I give up and look at them instead. *Crystal Caverns*, says one, with photos of a huge cave filled with shiny rock icicles that hang from the ceiling. It's magical.

I find a booklet called *Places to Stay in the Finger Lakes Region*. I look inside but the Jewel Motor Inn isn't listed.

At the very top of the display, too high for Sammy to reach, there's an ad for Mabel's Diner, which is right next door to the Jewel. The ad says that kids ten and under eat breakfast free and that there are unlimited coffee refills.

Since I just turned eleven and hate even the smell of coffee, I'm not impressed.

Sammy grabs another pamphlet and hands it to me. There's a map of upstate New York on one side

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and a map of Greenvale on the other. He heads for a door on the far side of the room across from the desk, which says Pool. That explains the chlorine smell. I can see the water through the grimy glass. Just the sight of it makes my heart beat faster.

I scoop Sammy up. He squirms and says, “Dow, dow,” but I hold onto him tight.

“How are we going to know what to do if the last owners aren’t here to show us?” I ask.

“Not a good time for questions, Miriam,” says Mom, rubbing the scar on her palm — something she does when she’s stressed. She searches for something behind the counter as the bell jingles and Dad comes in.

Before they decided to move here, my parents had a big fight right in front of me. Mom said that a week wasn’t nearly enough, that running a motel wasn’t something you picked up overnight. She said it was a whole new *skill set*, and that some people went to college for four years to learn how to do it.

“It’s not the Ritz-Carlton,” Dad said to her then. “It’s just answering the phone and cleaning up after people. How hard could that be?”

That made Mom stomp off talking to herself about marketing and supply inventory and cash

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flow and about how no one could even clean up after themselves in our apartment in New York City. She didn't talk to Dad the whole rest of that day.

But then he did his magic with her, and they made up, and here we are.

Mom gives Dad the eyes of death. The magic has clearly worn off. She comes out from behind the counter holding up a small plastic card.

"Let's get your suitcase and go see your room," she says to me. "Room 109."

Room 109. The room I'll share with Sammy.

Because as of today, I — Miriam Brockman, formerly of New York City — live in a motel in Greenvale, New York.

Population 514.