

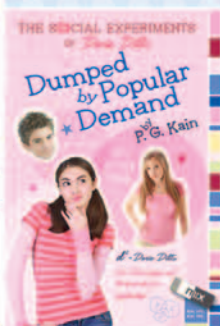
I put my fingers up to my throat and touched the pointy Star of David, my grandmother's necklace, a delicate chain made up of countless tiny links. If I wear this, will people think I am Jewish?

Is that what I want to be?



FLIP OPEN TO THE INSIDE BACK COVER FOR MORE OF THE STORY.

**S**eventh-grader Caroline Weeks has a Jewish mom and a non-Jewish dad. When Caroline's nana dies around the same time that Caroline's best friend, Rachel, is having her bat mitzvah, Caroline starts to become more interested in her Jewish identity.



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## The Funeral

I was doing okay right up until I got to the doorway and saw her coffin. *My grandmother's body is inside there*, I thought, and I couldn't take another step into that room. I stopped short and my dad nearly bumped into me.

"Go on, Caroline," he said to me quietly. "Just walk inside and sit down."

Since we were the immediate family, we had been waiting in a special room. Everyone else, all my grandmother's friends and, I suppose, lesser family members, were already sitting out there, in seats like pews. Sitting, talking quietly. Everyone looked sad or at least serious. While we—my mom and dad and my little brother, Sam, my grandfather, and some old lady who I had never seen before—had been ushered in here. In this fancy room with the heavy furniture, oriental rugs, thick drapes, and pitchers of water with lemon, like we were special somehow. In a weird way it was like a birthday party, when

you get treated differently for really no reason at all except that you were born—an event you personally had nothing to do with.

And now it was time for the service to start.

“I can’t,” I told my dad. My feet wouldn’t move and I didn’t know why.

My mom was still sitting in a big overstuffed chair in the corner of the waiting room, still crying. She had been crying all morning and on and off since we found out three days ago. It was her mother, after all, my nana. Even Sam was unusually quiet. Maybe he was just uncomfortable in his suit and tie.

My dad bent down and whispered into my ear, “Caroline, she’s not really in there.”

“What?” I turned to him and for a second I thought this whole thing had been a big mistake. We were in the wrong funeral home, the wrong place altogether. My grandmother didn’t die. She wasn’t inside that big, long box.

“Not really,” my dad went on. “It’s not her. Not the real Nana, not the Nana you remember. Don’t be afraid. Just take the first step. I am right next to you.”

And suddenly I could.

My feet started moving, one in front of the other. I followed my grandfather, with my dad beside me, my brother and mom holding hands, and then that old lady. We all made our way down to the front row, right in front of the coffin.

I sat down.

Everything after that was a blur. People got up and spoke but I didn’t really listen to what they were saying. Especially not the rabbi who talked forever, even though he clearly had no idea

who my grandmother was. Then he pronounced our names wrong. He mixed up my father and my uncle and he called me Carolyn instead of Caroline.

I looked over at my mom, who despised any kind of organized anything, religion in particular. She didn't even catch my glance as she normally would when she found something was false or insincere—and we would both roll our eyes knowingly. Now she was just crying.

I looked straight ahead and tried to remain calm. But the coffin was only a few feet in front of me. So close, I imagined I could *see* my nana, lying on her back with her hands folded the way they show it in the movies. Only this wasn't a movie and she really was in there, all closed up with a heavy wooden lid on top of her, so near to her face.

*You know I can't go anywhere*, my nana would always say, *until I put my face on*. She meant her makeup. My nana wouldn't leave her house without all her makeup on.

Then I started breathing really fast through my mouth and I felt dizzy. The tip of my nose was tingling. We would have to stand up soon. What if I fainted?

The thought of fainting made my heart beat really fast.

“Dad?” I whispered. My voice was shaking. Maybe I was going to throw up.

My dad took my hand in his and held it tightly.

“Remember, your nana's really not in there,” he said again. “She'll always be with you.” My dad took our two hands together and pressed them against my chest. “She'll always be in *here*,” my dad said.

I put my other hand on top of his so he wouldn't take his hand away, not yet; I wasn't ready. I don't know if I believed him

or not, but in a way it didn't matter. At least, I wasn't going to faint. I let out a slow breath. Then suddenly I started to cry. I would never see my nana again, and there had been so many things I didn't get to tell her.

Like how much I loved her.

I don't think I really ever let her know.