

# VIVA, ROSE!

## WINNER OF THE ASSOCIATION OF JEWISH LIBRARIES SYDNEY TAYLOR MANUSCRIPT AWARD

Dear Abraham,

I did not want to do this but you have left me no choice. Things have gone too far. Far farther than they should have. It has grown clear to me that you need to be saved from your own regretful impulses, and so I must insist you return home by Passover first night, which, if you have no calendar, is this Thursday. That is three days from this one. If you do not, I will tell Momma and Papa the Real Truth about where you've gone and I do mean every scrap of it. Every Scrap. And I may just add on about you and Miss Polly as well.

I know far more than you think I do.

Your loving sister,  
Rose

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# Chapter 1

**I**t's a good thing I saw that newspaper before Papa and Momma did.

It lay on the counter of Pickens Mercantile for all of El Paso to see, with a photograph blazed across its front under the words *THE SOUTHWESTERN SCOURGE OF 1915!*

The picture showed a group of men staring squint-eyed at the camera, nearly every one of them decorated with scraggly whiskers and a wide Mexican hat. Below it was written "The notorious gang of Mexican outlaw Pancho Villa, known also as La Cucaracha."

They were a gang of roughnecks, that much was plain, and right in their middle stood the roughest of them all—a round-jawed man with a brushy moustache and a gaze so hard his eyes looked boiled. The fellow to his left didn't seem quite as fierce, though he had a face full of whiskers, some kind of belts crisscrossed on his chest, and he clutched a gun as big as the branch of a tree. His hair covered his forehead, but I didn't need to see a wide

birthmark to know to the bottom of my soul I was looking at the face of my brother Abraham.

I'm not prone to fits like my mother, but I began to shiver as if I'd swallowed ice. My face went burning hot, and when I raised my hands to my forehead I must have banged against the molasses jar Mr. Pickens keeps next to the newspapers.

The lid fell off and it toppled right over, and though the jar was only half full, enough molasses oozed out to cover nearly every *bandido* on the page in sticky goo.

Mr. Pickens was terribly sharp with me.

"Stand away, girl!" he cried, and tried to push the stuff off the paper with a cloth. He threw the rag to the floor, then turned to my father and said, "Do you see what that child of yours has done?"

My mother started to pull at the cuffs of her dress, like she does when she is embarrassed. "If you'd been, for once, acting like a lady..." she hissed, but Papa just raised an eyebrow and smiled at me with the half of his mouth Mr. Pickens couldn't see.

"Rose!" he said, sounding nearly serious. "You've ruined the news!" Then he added in Yiddish (but sternly, so it sounded like real scolding), "Don't worry about it, my *shayna*. It's only paper, not the czar's jeweled eggs."

Momma sighed loudly and positioned a hand on her forehead like an actress in the moving pictures. Papa turned back to Mr. Pickens and said in English, "A simple mistake."

Mr. Pickens gathered the coins Papa pushed across the counter, and shook his head in my direction. The money wasn't enough to take the fire from his tongue.

“It was not an ordinary newspaper she destroyed—it was my last copy with a picture of that thieving La Cucaracha! I was fixing to post it right there,” he said, and he aimed his pointing finger at the posters of rough-faced outlaws on the wall behind him. “But now any one of those Mexican villains can saunter in and ask for hair cream and horehound candy, and I won’t know I’m living my last day until I feel the steel of his knife at my throat!”

Mr. Pickens apparently had a dramatic streak to rival Momma’s.

“I’m very sorry, sir,” I said. I bobbed my head at him in a way he might think was a curtsy, then turned and fled to the back of the store. I stopped by a bolt of calico. *Thump, thump, thump*. The walls echoed with the loud beats of my heart.

My brother with that gun, shoulder to shoulder with a “notorious outlaw” called La Cucaracha? I had heard the youngest children at school singing a song about a *cucaracha*, a word that sounded too pretty to attach to anyone in that photograph, including Abraham.

One of my hair ribbons fluttered to the floor. My hands were shaking so hard I could barely twine my unruly ginger strands back into a braid.

Abe’s secrets. That’s what was making me burn and freeze, and working at rattling me to pieces. Until Abe made me keep them, I’d only in my life withheld one truth from my parents, about the time Mr. Pickens’s mother pressed two sweets into my hand and charged me for just one.

Abe’s secrets were a far bigger freight, and they’d been

weighting my sleep by night and crowding my thoughts by day. He had lied, lied, lied to our parents—told them one thing, and gone to do another. He was off to visit our brother Eli, who was working in the eastern city of Brooklyn, where Papa's relations lived. That's what he'd told us four months before. But then I found a letter Eli had sent him. "*Your secret is safe with me,*" Eli wrote. "*I will support the ruse.*" Of course, I told Abe I'd read it. Who wouldn't? And he confessed to me the real truth. Abe was not heading east at all, but farther west. He was setting off to herd cattle and ride horses across the open range.

But the photograph I saw in the newspaper revealed that the heavy load I'd been carrying for my brother was not the real truth at all.

Abraham hadn't left us to become a cowboy. He'd gone off to be a low-life bandit in a cowboy hat.