



A Bintel Brief: Love and Longing in Old New York

Liana Finck

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An evocative, elegiac love letter to New York City and the immigrant culture that continues to make it the most original and influential city in the world.

As the nineteenth century gave way to the twentieth, a surge of Jewish immigrants to New York City reshaped indelibly not only the culture of the metropolis but of America itself. Struggling to assimilate to a new world while reconciling it to the old one they had left behind, these men and women shared their most private hopes and fears in a series of letters submitted to "A Bintel Brief"—Yiddish for "A Bundle of Letters"—the enormously popular, deeply affecting and often hilarious advice column of the newspaper *The Forward*.

Conceived by Abraham Cahan, editor of *The Forward*, who answered every letter himself, A Bintel Brief transformed the fortunes of the paper, rapidly making it the most widely read Yiddish-language newspaper in the world. The letters that flooded into A Bintel Brief spoke with unparalleled immediacy to the daily heartbreaks and comedies of their bewildered writers' new lives, capturing the hope, isolation and confusion of assimilation, from intergenerational family politics and judgmental neighbors to crises of faith, unrequited love, runaway husbands, soul-crushing poverty and the difficulty of building an entirely new life from scratch.

Drawn from these letters—selected and adapted by Liana Finck and brought to life in her singularly expressive illustrations that combine Art Spiegelman's deft emotionality and the magical spirit of Marc Chagall—*A Bintel Brief* is a wonderful panorama of a world and its people who, though long gone, are startlingly like ourselves. It is also a platonic love story of sorts between Abraham Cahan and Liana, as they engage in a bittersweet dialogue that explores the pleasures and perils of nostalgia, even as it affirms the necessary forward movement of life.

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