

NINA 1968

written by
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inspired by a true story

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FADE IN:

INT. TSHKIN HOME - NINA'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

The room is small and tidy. Filled with memories.

A wedding photo of her dad in his Navy uniform and her mom in a simple white dress.

An old newspaper clipping: "PICKFORD TEEN WINS SCIENCE COMPETITION" with a picture of her standing next to a table of glass beakers, test tubes, and piping.

A tattered photo of her brother Alex in sweaty Army fatigues standing with a buddy holding up a sign: "NEXT STOP, VIETNAM!" Scrawled across it in marker pen: "HELLO FROM CAMP PARADISE! MISS YOU, SIS. LOVE, ALEX."

A bookshelf filled with lab notebooks.

NINA TSHKIN, 22, takes a lab notebook off the shelf. "PROFESSOR HERRON, CHEMISTRY 201" written on the cover. She thumbs through it. Inside are notes, drawings, and chemical formulas.

ELLIE TSHKIN (O.S.)
(muffled from downstairs)
All right, thirty seconds!
Everybody got champagne? Who needs
a horn?

Nina glances over at her clock.

The second hand is sweeping past the 6 -- almost midnight.

She slips the notebook back on to the shelf and pulls down a new one.

She puts it on her desk, opens to the inside, picks up a pen.

ELLIE (O.S.)
Ten-nine-eight-seven-six-

Nina writes on the cover page: "NINA 1968"

ELLIE (O.S.) (CONT'D)
-five-four-three-two-one -- Happy
New Year!

HORNS BLOW, PEOPLE CHEER. Nina writes.

NINA (V.O.)
 And so it begins. The first second
 of the first year of the rest of my
 life.

ELLIE (O.S.)
 Nina! Nina, where are you?!

NINA (V.O.)
 (continuing to write)
 I am a scientist. I make
 observations. I build hypotheses
 and test them through experiments.
 This experiment will last 366 days.
 This is a Leap Year. I hope that's
 not a bad sign.

ELLIE (O.S.)
 Nina! You're missing your New
 Year!

Nina gets up to walk downstairs, we FOLLOW her.

NINA (V.O.)
 My name is Nina Tshkin. Nine-a,
 not Nee-na. My mother said she
 named me after watching the
 Lawrence Welk Show one night.

TV CLIP - "The Lawrence Welk Show."

LAWRENCE
 (on TV)
 And a one-a and a two-a --

His orchestra starts PLAYING MUSIC - "Auld Lang Syne."

BACK TO SCENE

Nina continues walking downstairs.

GUESTS (O.S.)
 (singing)
 Should old acquaintance be forgot
 and never brought to mind...

NINA (V.O.)
 She says I'm lucky I was named Nina
 and not three-a or four-a. I'm not
 sure I believe that story.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

GUESTS mingle, hug, and dance in the New Year.

GUESTS
 (continuing to sing)
 ... Should old acquaintance be
 forgot and days of Auld Lang Syne.

Nina enters quietly down the stairs. Her mother, ELLIE TSHKIN, 49, compact and efficient, spots her.

ELLIE
 Nina! There you are! That's no
 way to begin 1968, all holed up in
 your room alone.

NINA
 I'm never alone, Mom.

Nina continues to mingle with her mother and various guests.

NINA (V.O.)
 My mom had this indefatigable sense
 of optimism. I think she got that
 from my grandparents.

PHOTOS - MONTAGE

Nina's grandparents in their small village in Ireland.

NINA (V.O.)
 They came here from Ireland with
 nothing in their pockets...

Her grandparents boarding a ship for America.

NINA (V.O.)
 ... but bits of lint and a
 determination...

Her grandparents posing among the hordes at Ellis Island.

NINA (V.O.)
 ... that if you worked hard enough
 at something, you could be rich.

Her grandfather proudly washing dishes in a greasy-spoon restaurant.

Her grandmother with a bucket and mop showing off the floor she's just washed at the local hospital.

NINA (V.O.)
They never were.

Her grandparents with suitcases boarding a train for California.

NINA (V.O.)
But they never stopped trying.

BACK TO SCENE

Nina continues to mingle.

NINA (V.O.)
And Mom just picked up right where they left off.

ELLIE
(to guests)
We are so proud of her! She got accepted into this program to teach high school and earn her credential while doing it! She's going to be wonderful!

ALEX TSHKIN, Nina's brother, an immature 18, spins into her, almost spilling his drink. He's wearing an Army uniform.

ALEX
Whoa! Hey, hey, Doctor Tshkin, I presume! How's my favorite sister?

NINA
Your only sister.

ALEX
Then it's a good thing you're my favorite!

NINA
I see Boot Camp worked.

ELLIE
Doesn't he look wonderful?! So trim and handsome.

Alex, Nina, and Ellie continue to mingle.

NINA (V.O.)
My brother was born fighting.

INSERT - PHOTO

Alex as a premature baby in an incubator, Ellie in her hospital gown looking down on him while Oleg, the proud father, stands behind her.

NINA (V.O.)

He was eight weeks premature, but Mom said he was just eager to get started with life. And once he got going, he never looked back.

PHOTOS - MONTAGE

Alex playing basketball.

Posing in his football uniform.

Pinning his wrestling opponent to the mat.

NINA (V.O.)

Wrestling, basketball, football, anything that required great physical effort and close personal combat.

Standing in front of the Army Recruiting Office in his civilian clothes, but saluting proudly.

NINA (V.O.)

No one was surprised when he joined the Army as soon as he graduated. He made them promise to send him to Vietnam. They didn't seem to have a problem with that.

BACK TO SCENE

OLEG TSHKIN, 51, a stern Russian, walks up.

ALEX

Hi-ya, Dad --
(snaps a salute)
-- I mean, sir!

ELLIE

Oh, Oleg, isn't this grand, our son a proud soldier and our daughter a brilliant chemist!

OLEG

Could have done worse.

They now mingle.

NINA (V.O.)

My dad was Russian. His parents smuggled him out of Moscow in a suitcase when he was an infant during the Revolution. Sometimes I think they forgot to pack his heart.

SHEILA MACELROY, 40, plain but enthusiastic, joins them holding a camera.

SHEILA

Now here's a picture! The whole Tshkin clan in one place.

OLEG

No clans in Russia, Sheila.

SHEILA

No Russia in the United States, Oleg.

OLEG

No Scotland either.

SHEILA

Well, we're all residents of Pickford now, aren't we?!

NINA (V.O.)

Sheila MacElroy was one of those neighbors who always seemed to be at everyone's home but her own.

BRUCE MACELROY, 22, hard from working the land, steps up, putting his arm around Sheila's waist.

BRUCE

Happy New Year, everybody! I hope my sister isn't starting 1968 off on the wrong foot!

NINA (V.O.)

Bruce MacElroy was her brother. They were eighteen years apart. Neither one of them ever had the nerve to ask their parents why.

PHOTOS - MONTAGE

Nina's Yearbook picture.

Bruce's Yearbook picture.

NINA (V.O.)
Bruce was my high-school
sweetheart.

The two of them holding up a banner: "BEST COUPLE 1963."

NINA (V.O.)
Around here, that was one step
before the engagement.

The two of them at a football game.

NINA (V.O.)
Somewhere in our Junior year,
everyone seemed to pair off, like
mourning doves in heat.

The two of them in the hall, mugging for the camera.

NINA (V.O.)
That is the kind of chemistry I
simply do not understand.

BACK TO SCENE

Bruce is greeted by the group.

ELLIE
Bruce, dear, how are you? Happy
New Year! Nina, look, it's Bruce.

OLEG
She's a chemist, she sees.

NINA
Hi, Bruce.

BRUCE
Hey, Nina. Happy New Year.

NINA
Yeah, Happy New Year.

BRUCE
Are you excited?

NINA
Not that I can tell.

BRUCE
I mean about your move and all.
You know, to teach.

OLEG
High school!

NINA
Chemistry, dad.

OLEG
High-school chemistry.

ELLIE
Let's not start, Oleg.

ALEX
She's driving two hundred miles up
the Coast to teach a bunch of brats
in Marin County while I'm flying
eight thousand miles across the
Pacific to fight gooks in Vietnam.
I ask you, who should you be more
worried about?!

SHEILA
You know what, I don't care where
you're from or where you're going,
I want a picture. So, here, you
Tshkins, you stand right there.
(nudges them together,
holds up camera)
Ready? Smile!
(takes picture)
I can hardly wait to see how this
one turns out!

EXT. BACK PORCH - NIGHT

Nina walks out of the house, leaving the party buzz behind.

She stares at the stars, listens to the wind, breathes in the
air.

Bruce comes out.

BRUCE
Want to be alone?

NINA
I'm never alone.

BRUCE
You always say that.

NINA
It's always true.

BRUCE
Am I the only one who never
understands what that means?

NINA
You're the only one who ever asks.

BRUCE
You don't have to do this, Nina.

NINA
This?

BRUCE
Leave.

NINA
I'm not leaving. I'm just going
someplace.

BRUCE
Right here is someplace.

NINA
For some people.

BRUCE
Your family made a go of it here.
My family's done it for three
generations.

NINA
Practice does not make perfect.

BRUCE
No shame in working the land, Nina.

NINA
Fertilizer, Bruce.

BRUCE
What about it?

NINA
I was hoping to make a better
world, not grow bigger almonds.

BRUCE
Well now I happen to think those
are one and the same, but maybe
that's just me.

NINA
It's a good job, I know that. But
it's not my job. I know I can do
more.

BRUCE
Personally, I find it easier to go
through life if I keep my ambition
more in touch with my reality.

She stares at him.

BRUCE (CONT'D)
What about us then, Nina?

NINA
Us?

BRUCE
Aren't I worth sticking around for?

NINA
I'm not your sister, Bruce.

SHEILA (O.S.)
What's that supposed to mean?

Sheila joins them.

NINA
Nothing.

BRUCE
We were just talking.

SHEILA
About me.

NINA
About life.

BRUCE
She thinks there's more of it out
there than right here.

NINA
Maybe, maybe not. But it's worth
finding out, isn't it?

SHEILA
Well, I don't get it.

NINA
I'm not you, Sheila.

SHEILA
Everything I need is right here.

NINA
I know that.

SHEILA
Why would I go traipsing off to
someplace I don't know where
looking for something I don't know
what.

NINA
You wouldn't, I would.

SHEILA
You just be careful, Nina Tshkin.
If you go looking for it, you just
might find it. And then what are
you going to do?

NINA
That's the whole point. I'll find
out when I get there.

SHEILA
Me, I'd rather live in my small
world and know my way around than
venture out there into the great
unknown and be lost all the time.

NINA
(to Bruce)
I'm sorry. I'm not ready to
settle. I can't settle.

BRUCE
You've said that since high school.

NINA
It's been true since high school.

BRUCE
Will you ever be?

NINA
I don't know. That's why we
experiment.

INT. NINA'S BEDROOM - LATER

Nina writes in her lab notebook.

NINA (V.O.)
 If the first hour is any indication, this will be an interesting year. But people have been pushing and pulling at me ever since I received the letter.

FLASHBACK - INT. BENSON FERTILIZER COMPANY - LAB - DAY

Nina, dressed in white lab coat, wearing protective glasses, mixes some chemicals.

EVANGELINE DELRIO, 22 and gaunt, in same outfit, stands across from Nina fiddling with some glass tubing.

EVANGELINE
 Hey, Nina, want to go down to The Bit tonight and see if we can cook up some real chemistry?

NINA
 Have you ever known me to think that was fun?

EVANGELINE
 In Marin County I hear they have hot tubs and peacock feathers and nude encounters!

NINA (V.O.)
 Evangeline DelRio started working at the plant right after she graduated from Pickford High. She got me my job there. Ever since I can remember, she's been my best friend. And by that I mean someone I could always count on to tell me the truth, no matter how much it hurt.

EVANGELINE
 And San Francisco! The Summer of Love, hippies, drugs, sex, and rock and roll!

NINA
 I'm going there to teach, Vangie.

EVANGELINE
 Berkeley is right across the Bay. The Free Speech Movement, radical politics, the anti-war movement.

NINA
 Besides I haven't even been
 accepted yet.

EVANGELINE
 I don't know, Nina Tshkin, if you
 can't handle The Bit for one night,
 I don't know how you're going to
 handle the Bay Area for a whole
 year.

FLASHBACK - BENSON FERTILIZER COMPANY - OFFICE - DAY

STU BENSON, late 50s, sturdy and compact, hands a letter back
 to Nina.

STU
 Congratulations, Nina. That's
 quite a program.

NINA
 It seems like too good an
 opportunity to pass up, Mr. Benson.

STU
 You'll be fine. You're a good
 chemist. You could've had a long
 career here. But this is right for
 you.

NINA (V.O.)
 If you've got to have a boss,
 Stuart Benson was the kind to have.
 His great-grandfather started the
 fertilizer company almost as soon
 as people started planting crops
 around here.

STU
 I love chemistry as much as you do.

NINA
 I know, Mr. Benson.

STU
 But you have this other thing, Nina
 -- this ability to touch other
 people with your passion.

NINA
 Well, thank you, Mr. Benson. I
 hope so.

STU
They recognize that talent.

NINA
They need teachers.

STU
You'll always have a place here.

NINA
That's very kind of you, Mr.
Benson.

STU
I know this isn't the most exciting
job in the world, and Pickford
isn't the most exciting town, but
we're making a difference in
people's lives, Nina --

NINA
Yes, sir.

STU
-- and there are some deep family
roots in the soil around here --

NINA
No question, sir.

STU
-- you could do worse.

NINA
Yes, sir. I know that.

STU
But you, Nina, you could also do
better. The world is changing.
Sometimes all you can do is grab on
with both hands and hang on for the
ride.

NINA
(standing, shaking hands)
Thank you so much, Mr. Benson.
This was my first job out of
college --

STU
Five months, Nina. Hardly a
career.

NINA
-- and I truly appreciate
everything you and this company
have done for me.

He hangs on to her hand.

STU
Nina, you'll always have a job
here. But you know you'll never
come back.

NINA
Oh, I don't know.

STU
Every experience changes us. You
can come back, but you won't be the
same. And this place won't be the
same.

NINA
I can come back.

STU
(looks at her, smiles)
Well, I guess if anybody can do it,
it'll be you, Nina. Call me next
summer and tell me how it's going.
Tell me then who you are.

FLASHBACK - INT. TSHKIN HOME - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT

Oleg pokes at the fireplace. A flaming log rolls forward, he
puts it back with his bare hands.

Ellie sees him.

ELLIE
Oleg! That's hot! What's the
matter with you?!

OLEG
That, I can't answer. The hot log,
you don't work forty years in a
machine shop and not get used to a
little pain.

Nina is seated nearby, reading a chemistry book.

NINA
She's just trying to protect you,
Dad.