

NANCY LUDMERER

BAR MITZVAH

WHEN BENJY STARTED TO CHOKE on a piece of celery stuffed with scallion cream cheese, I turned from the buffet table and asked, *are you okay*, and when he shook his head, I said *raise your arms* but he kept choking, so I slapped him on the back of his fancy new suit, and then two words clicked in my head *Heimlich maneuver* so I punched my fist into his stomach even though this was the wrong way to do it, but I couldn't think, couldn't think of the right way, his gray eyes huge and terrified, I had never seen him that scared, so I cried *we need help over here Benjamin is choking* and then she was there, Dinah, wicked stepmother in her fuchsia gown, airline stewardess (*flight attendant*, Benjy had corrected me once, *don't be sexist, Ma*), and she clasped her arms around him from behind and jerked back hard and the celery flew across the room on angel's wings and I said thank you God while this woman who had wrecked our lives ten years earlier hugged my son and I knew then, on his Bar Mitzvah day, that for everything there is a purpose under heaven.