



# QUOTH THE MAVEN

BY BEVERLY KING POLLOCK

## Cousin Naomi

Growing up can be fun. If not made too complicated by the presence of a Cousin Naomi.

Cousin Naomi is the person your mother identifies you with. For example your mother might say, "Why don't you be like your Cousin Naomi? Cousin Naomi practices her piano two hours every day." Or "Cousin Naomi made all A's on her report card."

Occasionally your Bubbeh will chime in, "Cousin Naomi helps me with the strudel." And "Cousin Naomi reads Hebrew like her Zaldeh."

Cousin Naomi also worked in her parents' store, had naturally curly hair and a brother who's a doctor. We spent our childhood in Atlanta.

After Cousin Naomi got married and moved to Detroit, I still heard from her. Mother wrote, "Cousin Naomi's son was accepted at Harvard." "Cousin Naomi catered her daughter's wedding herself." "When Cousin Naomi visits her parents, she doesn't stay for five days. She stays five weeks."

My children know Cousin Naomi well. Though they have never met her. And my husband has seen his wife wither at the mention of that cousin's name. But Cousin Naomi and I will never meet again because I plan my visits to Atlanta not to coincide with hers. And she would never go out of her way to come visit me.

Even a maven can be wrong!  
Thursday started off with my husband coming

home 24 hours early from his New York buying trip. That part was good. But my cupboard was bare. For when my guy's out of town (particularly with my cleaning woman sick the third straight week), the kids and I usually partake of their favorite food at the local hamburger emporium.

But nothing else was the matter with the house that two straight days of cleaning couldn't cure.

My husband had to leave immediately for the store. (After all, what retailer believes his business can exist four days without him?)

And the children and I piled the wrappings from gifts their father had brought us in the middle of the living room carpet and sat on the floor admiring our treasures.

It was then the phone rang.

I didn't recognize the married name but I recognized the voice. Cousin Naomi. She, her husband and son were doing I can't recall what and decided to go only 278 miles out of their way to see us. And how far are we from the interstate exit?

My daughter said I told Cousin Naomi the longer route, but that's not true. I started screaming orders. And the children took command like the Israeli army.

Whatever was loose we dumped into boxes and stuffed into closets. We cleared cobwebs (usually I leave them for educational purposes. I wouldn't want my children to grow up not knowing about spiders!) and rearranged bedspreads so dust puffs wouldn't show. I even cleared the top of my desk.

At a signal my husband dashed home and changed his tie. Then the doorbell rang. Cousin Naomi kissed her way in the door and I showed her through the house. Every room. She has not gained an ounce since her teens. Her hair was a little gray though.

We sat down and my daughter asked automatically, "Would you like something to eat?" I stopped breathing. Except for stale club crackers, dog food and ice water, I was in trouble. But Cousin Naomi and family had just eaten dinner. "Oh, really?" I said.

And those were the last words I spoke. Or anyone else for that matter. For Cousin Naomi took over.

We learned that her husband who always smiled and nodded at her frequent "Isn't that right, Dear?" was building a multimillion dollar (at least) apartment complex.

Also her daughter was married to a very wealthy boy and Cousin Naomi was a young grandmother. And Cousin Naomi's son was a genius at Harvard (or was it Princeton?) and he fiddled with his glasses while his mother talked.

Cousin Naomi told us she thought our house was very nice -- for modern. And she and her crew kissed their way out the front door. She vowed not to let so much time pass before the next visit.

A hush filled the house. Then my son spoke. "Aw, Mom, I thought you said she was something!"

And my husband pulled my ear and left for the store.



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