



ROCK CANDY PRISM

Barbara Krasner

Images used with permission from Barbara Krasner.

ON SUNDAY, MAY 19, 1918, AT age twenty-six, you, Eva Zuckerkandel, became the bride of forty-one-year-old Max Krasner in a rabbi's home in the heart of Jewish Newark. Max arrived in America from the Minsk district of Russia in 1899 at age nineteen and settled in with his older brother in Newark.

I search for you within each of your five wedding portraits taken at the Henry Slawek photography studio after the marriage ceremony. I don't recall how I came into possession of these photos. My aunt may have given them

to me. Descendants of your first cousins may have given me one or two. One thing is for sure: None of them came from my father. Perhaps they were in the box my father delivered from his father's house in 1969 and perished in the boiler room explosion later on. I look at these photos and assess the setting, the stance, placement of the hands, the direction of the eyes. I am asking you in all of these portraits: *What are you thinking? What are you hoping?* You don't answer with your voice. You just give me a look. And I scrutinize it. All the looks.

- POSE I -
DETERMINED AND DIRECT

You and Max look directly into the camera. You both stand against a tree-filled mural and behind a small highboy table topped with a tasseled, blue velvet pillow. The wedding bouquet of green leaves, red roses, and white flowers—maybe lilies of the valley or carnations—rests on the table as do the fingers of your right hand. Your veil, gauzy and in the fashion of the late 1910s, fits like a shower cap. It and your tulle train flow behind you, floral embellishments traipsing to meet the hem of your dress. The dress itself features an empire waist, and the sleeves settle in a gather just above your elbows. Lace covers the bodice past the gathering and onto the torso. You are ready for the work of marriage, your left hand pressing flat on Max's shoulder, but you can't wait to get out of those pinching satin heels. You expose a wedding band on your left hand's ring finger in the American style. Although you're not yet an American citizen, you show adaptability and compromise.

Max stands stiff as the wood he once worked with as a joiner's apprentice, looking terrified in his boutonniere, tuxedo and satin top hat. His hands hang at his sides as if he doesn't really know what to do with them. By this point, he might have figured out he's married a force to be reckoned with. He will figure out what your cousin Murray told me: He may be the man

of the family, but you will be the boss. You are, after all, rock candy—rock candy being the translation of your maiden name, Zuckerkandel. You will be a disciplined, yet soft mother and a shrewd negotiator. It's hard not to think about my father, who will arrive the following year. I wonder what plans you had for your own children.



- POSE II -
ADORING AND WIDE-EYED

In this photo, showing the right side of your face in profile, you regard Max, your brown hair rolled at the nape of your neck, your lips close to a smile. With both hands you hold your bouquet, larger than your torso. In contrast, Max stands in three-quarter profile, his head cast down, his eyes averting your direct gaze, as if to say,

he doesn't know if he can meet his bride's expectations. You curl your left hand on his right shoulder, a soft assurance that you have made the right choice for yourself and for your groom. The curl suggests you might give in to his whims. Max wears white gloves; you do not. You have become vulnerable, at least in this moment.



- POSE III - RELAXED

There is no table. There is nothing to lean on but each other.

I see my twin sister so clearly in this pose, especially in your nose, mouth, and chin. Although she and I are identical and she shows up in my Ancestry DNA results as “Self,” we no longer look alike. At least we don’t think we do. Even so, I’m stumped as to how and why I can see her but not myself in you. My frustration leads to disappointment. I want to resemble you, but I think I resemble Max more—and my mother.

For most of my life I’ve believed that our ancestors look out for us. Because I was named for Bryna, Max’s mother, and Max’s sister Doba, who died in the 1918 flu pandemic, my father’s side watches over me. Because my twin was named for my mother’s paternal grandmother and her father’s sister, my mother’s side watches over her. Although, as many families do, we established closer relationships with our mother’s side, I do feel a visceral something to my father’s side, to both Bryna and you. I’m sure that irks you a bit, since from what I’ve heard, the two of you did not get along.

Maybe the photographer figured he should give Max a prop, and so Max grips the rim of his hat with his left hand. The table has been removed, and you hold your bouquet in your left hand. I wonder if this is your stronger hand, and you are left-handed like my middle sister, who was named for you in the Jewish tradition. Max has placed his right hand, most likely at the photographer’s prompting, on your left shoulder. You are easing into the idea of marriage, easing into American culture, ready to claim a blossoming American Dream. You look so young, so hopeful, so short. My height at 5’9” must have come from my mother’s side of the family.

In this moment, Max and Eva are a framed composition that will be mounted on your bedroom wall, positioned for your new life as a married couple. Not in any way foreseeing the Great Depression, the aperture of the Holocaust, or the watermark of your early death from cancer and diabetes.

I wonder why you chose this particular portrait to enlarge and frame, and hang it in a place of intimacy. Other families hang wedding portraits in living or dining rooms, in public spaces. I cannot come up with a rationale.



POSE III



POSE IV



Just as I begin to have a sense of your identity and character based on these three portraits, I come across two more poses from your wedding day. I've been looking for a photo of my aunt for my cousin and rifled through all my stashes of photos upstairs in archival-safe boxes and plastic bags placed within

a large wicker trunk at the base of my bed. This first new find must have been among my father's things after his death, packed away in his basement office, the depths of which I ransacked. Because it's in the original cardboard frame, it has the name of the photography studio: Henry Slawek, 102 Ferry Street, Newark, NJ. I think at first this is a smaller version of the hanging portrait, but it's not.

- POSE IV - STEADY

Here you wrap your arm around Max's arm as if you need to hold him steady. He's leaning forward like he's going to tip over. I find the backdrop interesting and one I've not seen in the previous photos. A carousel—a metaphor perhaps for your married life. I colorize the photo on the Ancestry website. I want to see the original colors as if I'd been standing there in the Slawek studio. I want to see you more clearly.

I am asking you
in all of these
portraits: What are
you thinking? What
are you hoping?
You don't answer
with your voice. You
just give me a look.
And I scrutinize it.
All the looks.

- POSE V - READY TO FACE THE WORLD

In the same trunk, I also find a single wedding portrait of the bride. I don't know its source. The version I have is photocopied and the size of a postcard. In this photo, you're alone, side-lit by the photographer's studio window. Your wedding band is clearly visible. You stand sturdy and look off to the distance, ready to face the future. Perhaps your Uncle Benzion



POSE V

Zuckerkandel paid for the assortment of wedding photos since he paid for the wedding. This one is my favorite because in this one you stand alone. You have determination. You have agency.

But again, in profile, I see my twin—not myself. Sometimes in your wedding photos I also see my middle sister, especially in the eyelids.



You undoubtedly addressed and mailed the postcard versions of these wedding photos back to your home village of Kozlow, now returned from Austria-Hungary to Poland. Max might have done the same to his relatives in Russia. In the remaining large portrait stand two immigrants who found each other, assisted by a hired matchmaker. You came from different regions of Jewish Europe and you spoke different Yiddish dialects. You no doubt want to prove your worth by getting pregnant right away, and when that doesn't happen, according to my mother, Max almost

divorces you. Yet, you married in May 1918 and my father is born seventeen months later. Is that not soon enough? Maybe it isn't since Max is so much older. Maybe he fears he won't live long enough to see his children grow up. He cannot know that despite appearances, he will outlive you by eighteen years and outlive his second wife by two years.

But here you are in 1918, joined in matrimony, your new life as a married couple ahead of you. Max might be thinking about how to provide for a family, and you, how you might support him and your family in that pursuit. You can be a big help to him since you know retail and wholesale business from your butcher father. You know how to slice meat, how to keep the books and the Sabbath. You know how to take care of young children as the eldest of seven and raise them with Jewish traditions.

The fact that the framed portrait, and that frame must have cost a pretty penny, will hang in your bedroom instead of the living room suggests a view that your marriage belonged to you. ♦



Pascal Dagnan-Bouveret, *A Wedding Party in the Photographer's Studio*, 1879