

THE BOOK OF HIRSH

a novel by
Tzvi Fishman

Am K'Lavi - Jerusalem

For my Nation

Copyright © 2021 by Tzvi Fishman

Computer typesetting and layout by M. Kaplan

For more information: tzvifishmanbooks.com

Am K'Lavi, Suite 8, 19 Shoshana Street, Jerusalem, Israel

“Literature will be sanctified, and writers will also sanctify themselves, and the world will rise up and recognize the great and gentle power of literature that will raise up the spiritual foundation of the world in all of its exaltation.”

Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak HaKohen Kook

Note to the Reader

This novel tells the story of Steven Hirsh, a successful, Jewish, celebrity lawyer from New York. When he was a youth, his Orthodox grandfather told him many things. One thing was that everything which happened in life was for the good. “When you understand that,” his grandfather explained, “You will always be happy, without needing to worry at all.” Another thing Hirsh’s grandfather told him was that a person has free will. Even though God brings everything in life about, a person is given free choice to decide things for himself and to do what he pleases. His grandfather told him that the seeming contradiction between the absolute will of the Almighty and the free will of man was a puzzle beyond human logic and comprehension. Similarly, there are two endings to the story, one happy, one sad. Like Hirsh, the Reader is free to choose whichever ending he prefers.

THE BOOK OF HIRSH

Chapter One

Open any celebrity magazine and you were bound to find a photo or story about one of Steven Hirsh's clients. His very successful law office abounded with famous personalities. At the moment, he was meeting with one of the top actors he represented, a big action-adventure superstar from a decade back, who was, like so many others, involved in an ugly divorce - not that divorces were ever pretty. More and more these days, the still virile-looking Craig Lane had to settle for supporting actor and character roles, but during his long career, he had racked in millions. Unfortunately, his bitter wife was greedy, and she was going for it all. Out of the blue, Lane's head twitched in a nervous spasm, and a hand tapped nervously on his lawyer's desk, hardly the picture of the cool, emotionless heroes he used to play.

Hirsh grumbled when the old-fashion, desk phone rang. He didn't like to be interrupted when he met with a client. That was one of the trademarks that made him so popular with the stars. He gave people his upmost attention when he met with him, almost embracing them with his warm, caring eyes. His success in getting people to like him was the key to his career. Except for his two estranged children, he thought with a sigh. Somehow, his charm didn't work with them. But he didn't let his own shattered family life and the endless divorce

negotiations with his third wife get him down. Live and let live was his motto. As his religious grandfather had always claimed, "Everything is for the best." Not that Hirsh thought about his grandfather very often, but when he did, that was the teaching the devout old man had bequeathed him.

Once again, the telephone rang.

"I apologize," he told the distraught actor on the other side of the mahogany desk.

"Sorry, Mr. Hirsh," Roger, his secretary, said. "It's an emergency."

"An emergency?" the busy lawyer echoed. "What kind of emergency? Who's calling?"

"It's Jason," he answered.

"Jason?" Hirsh wondered. His mind went blank for a moment, not placing the name.

"He says he's a friend of your wife."

Cindy was his third wife. He vaguely recalled that Jason was her latest boyfriend. Jason, John, Juan, Jeremy, Jacki, Jose. It was almost as hard to keep up with her lovers as with his own. What the hell did this Jason character want, the lawyer wondered, disturbing him in the middle of the day?

Opposite him, the familiar face from the movie nodded at him. "Go ahead," the actor said. "It's perfectly all right. Take the call. An emergency is an emergency."

Hirsh let out a small, out-of-place chuckle. He chuckled often. Usually out of good humor, but often he chuckled to ward off uneasy feelings. His chuckles were like ancient shields smeared with oil to thwart the impact of an arrow, protecting him from shadowy caverns he preferred not to explore.

“Put him on the line, Rog,” he said to the secretary, who sat just outside Hirsh’s office, in the lobby of the prestigious, six-associate, Madison Avenue law firm. Roger was gay, something which didn’t bother Hirsh in the least. Live and let live. In fact, Hirsh hired him because he was gay – not because he wanted to have a token homosexual in the office to show how enlightened and liberal he was, but because he had gotten himself into trouble too many times with the cute secretaries he used to hire and invariably seduce. Now that the “Me Too” movement had grown so vocal, he didn’t want to take chances with female employees under his charge. Already, he had quietly settled one bothersome blackmail out of court with a former secretary who threatened to sue him for wielding his authority over her for immoral purposes, even though she had been a more than willing partner in all of their outside-the-office meetings. Almost every man he knew had to alter his extra-curriculum activities because of the “Me Too” craze. Even the Commander-and-Chief of the country. Years ago, when the President had been a flamboyant Governor of New York, he had allowed himself an escapade with a Playboy centerfold. When her modeling days were over, she threatened to make the romance known, claiming that the governor-turned-

President had raped her. The country's compromised leader contacted one of Hirsh's associates, a crackerjack criminal lawyer, to quietly threaten her with a counter suit for libel if she didn't agree to a more-than-generous gift for dropping the matter and handing over an embarrassing tape she had made.

The voice at the other end of the telephone line was quaking.

"Is this Steve?" he asked.

"Yes it is."

"I'm Jason. A friend of Cindy's. I'm sorry to tell you. She's dead."

Again, Steven Hirsh let out a tiny chuckle. Cindy? Dead? Still in the prime of her life? The Wimbledon champ? Winner at Forest Hills and the 2002 ITF Grand Slam? It couldn't be. At the age of 40? Cindy was too beautiful, too smiling, too athletic, too immortal to die so young.

"She was hit by lightning this morning while we were playing golf," Jason reported.

"On a golf course?" Hirsh muttered in bewilderment.

"That's right. We were on the fairway of the eighteenth hole."

"By a lightning bolt?"

"Yes, sir."

"My wife Cindy? Cynthia Hirsh?"

"Yes, sir."

“In Boca?”

“At the Boca Ponds Golf Course.”

“Oh my God,” Hirsh exclaimed, not really believing in God, but because it was a popular expression.

The actor Craig Lane stood up from his chair. “Are you serious?” he said. “Your wife was killed by a bolt of lightning?”

Hirsh chuckled softly once again for no apparent reason. Could it be an act of Divine Retribution for her merciless greed throughout the course of their divorce? Not that the celebrity lawyer believed in Divine Retribution. He didn't believe in the Divine at all. His grandfather, his father's father, believed in the God of Moses, but Hirsh's father, like Karl Max, insisted that religion was the opium of the masses. His father, Noah, a chemistry professor, had believed in science. He had believed in Nature. If there was such a Being as God, He certainly didn't hurl down lightning bolts on people. Once, in a less heretical mood, his father had said that if there had been a Creator, after He ignited the Big Bang, He let Nature take over and do the rest. Hirsh's mother, a woman of quiet intelligence, accepted whatever explanation her husband provided. So, to the lawyer's way of thinking, if Cindy had been hit with a bolt of lightning from out of the Heavens, it was an unfortunate accident, that's all. Live and let live. Die and let die. Your business is your business, and as your attorney, 15% of your business is mine.

To tell the truth, the sixty-year-old celebrity lawyer was more surprised than sorrowed. Whatever fond feelings he still had for his flamboyant third wife had faded over the course of their drawn-out divorce. He was happy to give her ten million dollars and call it game, set, and match, but she wanted more and more. He had lived with her and made passionate love to her for eight wild and wanton years, but whatever real love and attachment he had felt for her had vanished.

“When did it happen?” the lawyer in him asked his wife’s boyfriend on the other end of the line.

The jittery actor made a sign with his hand. “I’m going downstairs for a cigarette,” he said. “I’ll take a rain check.”

Hirsh stood up. The actor reached out and shook his lawyer’s hand with a reassuring grip and the Hollywood grin that had once made him the most popular leading man in the world.

“I’ll phone you tonight,” Hirsh promised. Clutching the telephone, he stared blankly at the office’s wall-length window and panoramic view of downtown Manhattan.

“About ten o’clock this morning,” Jason answered from Florida. “We teed off at eight. She was having a wonderful round, as pleased with herself as could be. Until the lightning struck. On the last few holes, it started to drizzle. Nothing serious. We didn’t bother to open an umbrella. Far away, like the sound of ocean surf roaring in the distance, we could hear the rumbling of thunder. Then, all of a sudden, a flash of lightning lit up the

sky. There was nothing we could do. Her seven iron was raised straight up in the air like an antenna. She glowed like a trophy when the lightning bolt hit her. More than that, I can't describe it. It was awful. Dear God. It was awful. The look on her face...." Jason couldn't continue.

Hirsh trembled, imagining how his wife's once magnificent body must have shuddered all over when the lightning enveloped her and burnt her soft skin to a crisp.

"Where is she now?" Hirsh inquired.

"An ambulance took her to the hospital. The medics tried to save her, but...."

Again the voice failed.

"Right now, she's in the hospital morgue. They are waiting for your instructions regarding the funeral."

Instructions, Hirsh thought. Funeral? What business was it of his? Yes, they were still married, but they hadn't had any human connection for years. Mr. and Mrs. Hirsch no longer spoke to each other. Except for the demanding phone calls from her lawyer - a two-bit, arrogant, conman, who probably had a brief, intimate relationship with her as well - they lived in separate worlds. Why was this gigolo phoning him now? Let him bury her. Or her sister who lived in Boca. Let the sister call up their parents - if they were still living.

“I advise you to call her sister,” he said. “Cindy and I have been living apart for four years. We never had children. Ask her sister to call her parents.”

The truth is, Hirsh had been glad when his much younger wife didn't want children. He already had two kids from his first wife, and he hadn't proven to be an award-winning father with them. His first wife, Gloria, accused him of being too busy with his work and his backstage harem of women, as she jealously called them. Hirsh chuckled. Live and let live. He never planned to cheat on her, but after their first few years of marriage, she had become as a short-circuited Aspen Jacuzzi. He loved his son and daughter, and would do anything he could to help them, but they didn't seem overly upset that their father was no longer a viable part of their lives. So when sexy Cindy said she didn't want children, lest it ruin her world-class figure and interfere with her sports, he hadn't protested.

“How can I contact her sister or parents?” Jason asked.

Good question, Hirsh thought. He hadn't spoken to them for years. “Maybe her lawyer knows,” he suggested.

“I don't know her damn lawyer,” the irritated lover snapped back. “Listen, pal. She's your wife, not mine.”

Hirsh paused before answering. He held the phone away from his ear. It was a technique he had learned from the founder of the firm, the late and renowned Walter Cohen, who had been like a surrogate father, bequeathing the very successful

entertainment firm to Hirsh in an iron-clad will before dying. That way, the gift of the business couldn't be contested by Cohen's children, whom, for all sorts of reasons, the old badger loved but didn't like. Instead, he left them money. "A good lawyer is a calm lawyer," the octogenarian had told Hirsh. "Don't ever look worried or angry. Confidence is an attorney's winning card. The client needs to know that his lawyer is confident of success. Even if you know that you don't have a chance in the world to win the case, and that in every possible settlement your client is going to be the loser, keep a winning smile on your face. You may lose the case, but you'll end up keeping your clients."

Hirsh knew he wasn't the sharpest attorney in town. If the old man hadn't taken him under his wing, he'd still be an associate partner and not the boss of the company. He was dedicated, concerned, punctual, and proficient, but certainly no Perry Mason. The experience he had, and his long list of clients, were gifts from his mentor. The new glamorous stars that he signed up on his own were due to the firm's reputation. It wasn't only out of gratitude and respect that he kept the name, Walter Cohen and Associates, on the carved-oak doors of the office. The name of the firm drew the clients, not his own personal expertise or charm.

Retaining his composure, he once again addressed the man at the other end of the phone. "I may have the telephone number

of her parents written down in my address book in my apartment, but I won't be home for several hours."

"What kind of creep are you?" Jason replied. "Do you intend to let her lie naked in the morgue until you get home this evening?"

"It isn't my business," Hirsh snapped and uncharacteristically hung up the phone.

The celebrity lawyer collapsed into his chair, drained, as if he had just summed-up a passionate appeal to a jury. Of course, the funeral, he realized, was his business. Legally, he was still her husband, whether she was dead or alive. Attending to the burial was his responsibility. But what kind of burial? The easiest thing was to have her cremated. They could seal her ashes in an urn and send it registered mail to her parents, once he discovered their address. Rhode Island, he seemed to remember. When they were married, her parents lived in Greenwich, Connecticut, but then they moved. They hadn't approved of their young and famous daughter marrying a man two decades older than she was, and to make matters worse, a Jew, so Hirsh and his fun-loving, *shiksa* third wife hardly ever visited them.

Hirsh had absolutely no idea what Cindy would have wanted for herself. Whoever thought that she would die? He didn't. Certainly neither had she. A last will and testament was the last thing in the world she would have written. He chuckled. As an attorney, he drew up wills every week for rich and famous

clients, insisting they follow his advice with a, “I won’t take no for an answer.” But he never dreamed that the two-time “Women’s Athlete of the Year” would ever become food for worms. How ironic life was, he reflected. Worms would have the last satisfaction, feasting upon the woman that he had so wildly desired, now toasted beyond recognition.

As far as a Jewish funeral was concerned, that wasn’t even a question, since the New England tennis champ was as Waspy as could be. So it was either some “Boca Everlasting Lawns Cemetery,” or a golden-plated urn filled with her ashes, with a miniature tennis racket for a cork.

The only funerals he had attended in his life were the Jewish funerals of his grandparents on his father’s side, with their somber *Kaddishes*, Hebrew prayers, and eulogies, and the celebrity-filled funeral of Walter Cohen. His mother’s father died before he was born, and he couldn’t remember why he hadn’t attended the funeral of his grandmother, who had been run over by a car. He had been invited to a few funerals of former clients and friends, but he only attended if he knew that he that his presence was needed for emotional support. Not wanting any kind of Jewish ceremony, his father insisted on being cremated, a titanic transgression according to Orthodox Jewish Law, and his mother was still alive and kicking at the ripe old age of ninety. In the joint will of his parents which Steven himself had written, his father had insisted that his wife be cremated also, but they would confront that obstacle, he

reasoned, when Mother Nature brought the moment to pass. He knew that his younger brother, Robert, a “born again” Orthodox Jew, would object on the grounds of the Torah, and that was OK with Hirsh, especially since his brother had taken care of their mother in Israel ever since her dementia began. Live and let live. Die and let die. To be truthful, even though Hirsh was open-minded, he thought his younger brother was crazy to handcuff himself in the shackles and chains of Jewish Law and commandments which had, in Hirsh’s progressive *Weltanschauung*, no meaning in today’s modern world. In addition, he couldn’t understand why his summa-cum-laude brother would give up a lucrative career in medicine to chase after some wild Zionist dream. “If you want to take care of Jews, you can take care of Jews in America,” Hirsh had argued, but there was no reasoning with his headstrong sibling.

The very little that Hirsh knew about *Yiddishkeit*, he had gleaned from Walter Cohen’s treasury of Yiddish expressions, which the law firm’s founder would bander back and forth with some of the great entertainers of old, like Sid Caesar and Jack Benny, rabbi-types who had transformed themselves into popular comedians, and with cantorial candidates like Eddie Fisher and Neil Diamond, who abandoned the pulpit and *Kol Nidre* for jazzy routines in Las Vegas. When all was said and done, if his brother, a practicing physician, wanted to be an Orthodox Jew - that was his affair. If he chose to live in Israel, that was his decision. Hirsh strived not be judgmental. Because he wasn’t politically inclined, the question of whether Israel

belonged to the Jews or the Arabs, that wasn't his problem. As Walter Cohen was fond of exclaiming, the Israelis had built themselves a fantastic country in just a handful of years, and they deserved credit for that.

Walter Cohen had cherished Israel. Proudly displayed on the wall of his office were plaques of appreciation from Hebrew University, Hadassah Hospital, the City of Jerusalem, and Israel Bonds, for his generous donations. The plumpish, suspender-wearing lawyer also appeared in framed photographs with Jerusalem Mayor, Teddy Kollek, and with Prime Minister Menachem Begin, the former Irgun leader who had blown up a wing of the King David Hotel when it was used as British Military Headquarters before Israel's War of Independence. Another two photographs pictured the eye-patched military commander, Moshe Dayan, and a photograph of Walter Cohen shaking hands with the heavy-bearded, Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren, famous for having blown a shofar at the Kotel during the miraculous Six-Day War. Other photos in the boss's office showed him arm-in-arm with the likes of Danny Kaye, Zero Mostel, Jack Benny, Tony Curtis, and Sandy Koufax, to cite but a few. A mystical Chagall painting of a Jewish fiddler was spotlighted on another wall beside a Hirshfield portrait caricature of the chubby celebrity lawyer himself. Walter Cohen hadn't been afraid to let people know he was Jewish. Today, Hirsh reflected, there weren't many Jews from the old-school like Cohen, who didn't give a damn what the *goyim* would say about his love affair with the Jewish State and the Jews. In

contrast to firm's founder, the walls of Hirsh's office were decorated non-denominationally with original George Kalinsky lithographs and photographs of some of his clients, sports celebrities, singers, and rock musicians whom Hirsh had seen perform live at the Garden. The only thing Jewish in his office was an artistic, black-and-white photograph of Sammy Davis Jr., who was as kosher as the once-upon-a-time Stage Delicatessen where the lawyer often lunched with his clients.

Live and let live, Hirsh reflected. He didn't interfere in the life of his brother, and his brother didn't try to interfere in his. That his rebellious son had followed his uncle's example and adopted the religious lifestyle of his great grandparents, Hirsh wasn't particularly happy about that turn of events, but the boy seemed far happier now with his Bible, and with the cash allowance that his father sent him every three months via a contact in the Tel Aviv Diamond Exchange. All in all, the lad was alive and reasonably sane, which was more than one could say about a sizeable share of his famous clients' children - suicides, dope addicts, and all kinds of new genders. That's life. That's the way it goes. Hirsh wasn't about to condemn his son's rebellious and often unexplainable behavior. Hirsh was a lawyer, not a judge. He had his own foibles and pleasures that he allowed himself, so who was he to preach? Not having been a very involved father while the boy was growing up on the other side of the continent with his mother, if Hirsh demanded that the youth give up his religious play-acting, return to America, and get a college degree, what chance was there that

the boy would listen to him? He wanted to be closer to his son, Kevin, not to drive him further away. Hirsh sighed. At the moment, his prodigal son wasn't the issue. Cindy. Poor Cindy. What the hell was he going to do about Cindy and her once so vibrant body, now lying lifeless on a cold steel slab in a South Florida morgue?

Chapter Two

A reporter from the Miami Herald made up his mind for him. Soon after he terminated his conversation with Jason, Hirsh's secretary, Roger, told him that a journalist wanted his reaction to the sensational lightning bolt death of his wife, the beautiful and famous tennis star, Cindy Olson Hirsh.

Other reporters were bound to call as well. This was top celebrity news, with the type of bizarre twist that every cheap writer and magazine was searching for. No doubt, his wife's photo would make the front page of every major newspaper in the country, and be a lead story on primetime TV. How could he not attend her funeral?

"Tell the reporter that I'm on my way to Florida," Hirsch told his sad-eyed secretary, as he walked out from his office. "Tell him that I am very distraught. Tell him that I said she was a pioneering woman, a champion who inspired other women to

be independent and to reach for the stars. Tell him that I loved her very much, and that, although we grew apart, we remained the best of friends.”

“I’m very sorry,” Roger said, lowering his shaven head.

“So am I. Please book me a flight to Fort Lauderdale or Miami in about two hours, and book me a hotel room in Boca. I’m going to pack a small bag at my home and take a cab to Kennedy. You can whatsapp me the details.”

“Yes, sir, right away, sir,” Roger replied, sitting down at his desk.

“Also, when Jason calls back, tell him that I will speak with him when I arrive in Florida.”

Years ago, not long after they separated, paparazzi photographers discovered they were splitting. Celebrity rag sheets were filled with the gossip. For over a month, their pictures could be seen everywhere. Cindy was trailed by photographers and hounded. While she always enjoyed attention, the round-the-clock intrusion got to be too much. She flew off to some faraway island to escape the limelight, until their marriage separation became old news. As for Hirsh, he detested the aggressive invasion into his private affairs. After all, he had chosen to be a lawyer to the celebs, not a celebrity himself. He was far more comfortable remaining behind the curtains than appearing on stage. There were lawyers who tried to turn themselves into stars, but he favored discretion. His

father had been a humble man, like his grandfather, and like Walter Cohen, the founder of the firm who had represented the likes of Katherine Hepburn, Humphrey Bogart, Jack Benny, Groucho Marx, Marlon Brando, Lauren Bacall, Mel Brooks, Judy Garland, Ed Sullivan, Jimmy Durante, Ella Fitzgerald, Zsa Zsa Gabor, Zero Mostel, Arthur Miller, Norman Mailer, Herman Wouk, Salvador Dali, Otto Preminger, Columbia Pictures, The Beatles, Henry Kissinger, Muhammad Ali, Joe Namath, Madison Square Garden, and Frank Sinatra, to name just a few. Nevertheless, Walter Cohen, the sought-after “Lawyer to the Stars” never agreed to be interviewed.

On the other hand, Hirsh mused, now that the news of Cindy’s death was all over town, a surge of past and budding Lady Gagas were sure to show up in his office, looking for a rich and eligible lawyer. He couldn’t help but chuckle. As his grandfather used to say, “Everything is for the best.” Voltaire’s *Candide* had said the same thing. “Everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds.” Rabbi Akiva had beaten them both to the punch. “Everything that God does is for the good,” he taught.

To make a long story short, Hirsh found the telephone number of Cindy’s parents in the worn, brown leather address book which had belonged to his father, and which he kept in the drawer of his bedside cabinet. The book contained, in his father’s precise handwriting, an almanac of their family, on both sides, including addresses, phone numbers, birthdays and anniversaries. After his father’s death, Hirsh had chosen the

book from a pile of belongings which he gave away to the Salvation Army. Now and then, he added new names and phone numbers to keep the address book up to date.

Cindy's parents told him that they couldn't travel to Florida for a funeral. Cindy's mother had fallen and broken a leg, and the cast wouldn't be removed for another two weeks. Her father explained that he had to stay with his wife. They agreed that their daughter's body would be cremated in Boca, for what they called "environmental reasons," and that Hirsh would bring her remains to Rhode Island in "a jar," where they would arrange for a quiet burial.

Hirsh picked up his ticket at the airport. He flew first-class Delta Airlines to Miami. Once the plane was in the air, he ordered a scotch and watched Manhattan recede into the distance as the aircraft circled south. To distract his thoughts, he browsed through a *New York Times* which a stewardess held out with a smile. Fortunately, she wasn't his type. One thing was certain, now that Cindy was gone, their marriage was legally annulled, and, without a last will and testimony, any inheritance settlement had to be concluded in the most civil way possible, with a much lower pay-off, and an under-the-table cash payment to her lawyer.

With only a carry-on bag, he didn't have to wait for luggage. An hour's taxi ride brought him to the Boca Plaza Hotel at ten o'clock in the evening. It had a floodlit garden with Spanish-looking architecture. A column of water rose up and fell, rose

up and fell, like life itself, in the obligatory driveway fountain. Colored spotlights shone on the palm trees. While he was checking-in at the front desk, an attractive blond, perhaps five years younger than Cindy, stood up from a sofa in the lobby and approached with a noticeable sway.

“Mr. Hirsh?” she asked.

“That’s right,” he answered with the reassuring smile that his clients cherished.

“I’m Sharon. Cindy’s sister. Remember?”

Suddenly, the woman burst into tears. Instinctively, Hirsh reached out and hugged her. Her body was warm. And curvy. She held on to him and sobbed.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I don’t mean to cry.”

“It’s all right,” Hirsh told her.

The distraught sister controlled her sobbing. With a movement reminiscent of Cindy, she tossed her hair back from her forehead, and smiled behind her teary blue eyes. “I loved my sister so much,” she confided. “She was everything to me.”

Hirsh remembered that Sharon had once joined them on a long weekend at the beach house in Martha’s Vineyard. He had been tempted back then to start something with her when Cindy went shopping, but he had restrained. Why take the chance? But now, there was no danger that Cindy would barge in the hotel room and catch them in bed, so what the hell? If he

could comfort the girl and she could comfort him, it was a match made in Heaven! Live and let live. Drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.

But after two drinks in the lounge, even though her long legs were as tanned and shapely as Cindy's, Hirsh had second thoughts.

"If you like I can spend the night with you in the hotel," she suggested. "I mean so you won't feel so alone."

Hirsh passed on the offer, not because he didn't find her attractive. And it wasn't because of the "Me Too" movement. She was a grown woman and could decide things for herself. But something told him that it wasn't the right thing to do, at least until Cindy was at rest in the ground. When he returned to Manhattan, there were several women he could turn to for companionship, so he decided to overcome the temptation, politely decline her gesture of southern comfort, and retire to his hotel room alone.

"My sister used to look after me," the young woman added when they said goodnight.

"I'll look after you too," Hirsh promised. "I'll give you a check tomorrow at the ceremony to help with your expenses for the next few months."

True to his word, he did exactly that, out of kindness of heart. He also handed a check to Cindy's lawyer who was also on hand at the elegant crematory which looked more like a lush

botanical garden than a place where people get transformed into dust. Jason was present as well. Hirsh exchanged a few terse sentences with him, not wanting to become pals with his wife's last lover, a decent-looking guy, far below Cindy's class, who said he worked in real estate. Some official lady from her condominium was there, along with the tennis pro of her country club, who had probably been intimate with her as well, and a representative of the ITF Tennis Federation. Journalists made up the *minyan*, not that a formal *minyan* of Jews was needed. No rabbi, no minister nor priest. The fellow from the tennis organization eulogized the deceased, describing her illustrious career. When he finished, the tennis pro stepped forward and said he was going to miss her smile and sizzling backhand. Sharon sobbed on Hirsh's shoulder, the photographers snapped pictures, and that was that. After a short wait and some uncomfortable small talk, a man in a clean white outfit appeared with the shining gold urn in his white-gloved hands. Handing Cindy to Hirsh, he said, "May she rest in peace." Everyone answered "Amen."

"Amen," Hirsh said with a small nervous chuckle. It was hard to believe that his warm, passionate, energetic, unpredictable wife was compressed in the cold metal urn. If he opened the seal, would she pop out like a genie, as energetic and beautiful as ever, before a weariness and lethargy set in, along with the realization that they shared little in common except for his money.

“What does your wife’s tragic death mean to you?” a reporter asked him.

There was no avoiding the question. He chuckled nervously. “It’s a terrible loss for everyone who loved her and for the world of sports,” Hirsh answered and left it at that.

Chapter Three

As he boarded the plane for New York, a pretty flight attendant held out a newspaper – the *New York Post*, which featured a large photo of Wimbledon champ Cindy smiling at him from the front page. For whatever reason, Roger had booked him a seat in the less comfortable Business Class, with two seats on each side of the aisle. His rotten luck, a garrulous, overweight fellow plumped down beside him and immediately starting talking about politics while the flight attendants prepared for take-off.

“I hate the President,” he informed Hirsh without introducing himself. “He’s ruining the country. Employment has skyrocketed, he’s murdered the economy, crime is totally out of hand, every day another nut with a rifle kills ten or twenty people, and he treats the Russians like their nukes are merely firecrackers. What do you say?”

Hirsh didn't say anything. He didn't feel like talking. Not wanting to take a chance that the funeral urn would fall from the overhead compartment, he had kept it in a bag on the floor between his legs. The fat man snapped his fingers at a busy steward.

"How about a Jack Daniels on ice?" he called. Then, turning to his neighbor, he asked, "Want to join me?"

Hirsh enjoyed a stiff drink now and again, but he didn't feel like company. The man's heavy cologne filled the cabin, as if hiding an unpleasant body order.

Ignoring Hirsh's cold wall, he continued with his monologue. "He might be a clever businessman, but as President, he acts like a *shmuck*. The United States isn't a start-up company he can play with. But to tell you the truth, the other animal wasn't much better. Can you believe it? The greatest country in the world and the best we can produce is a crass, whore-loving businessman for a President. The governor of New York isn't any better - a stepin fetchit who graduated from Princeton and speaks four languages, but who's never had an original idea of his own."

Physically and emotionally exhausted, Hirsh reclined in his lounge seat, backing as far away from the intrusive human being as he could. A twinge of pain in his knee reminded him that he wasn't getting any younger. That's was the main reason he preferred First Class over Business. The seating was much more spacious and kinder on his arthritic knee. He began to

doze off when his precious carry-on rolled forward between his feet. Reaching down, he lifted the golden urn out of the bag and set it gently on his lap.

“What’s in the urn?” the busybody asked.

“My wife,” Hirsh replied with a chuckle.

That ended the conversation. Hirsh closed his eyes. The next time he opened them, the jet was in the air. Apparently, the fat man had found some other seat. Hirsh sighed thankfully, blessedly alone on his side of the aisle. He had dozed for more than two hours. He gazed at the urn in his lap. “Is that you old Yorick?” he quipped, recalling the famous gravedigger scene in *Hamlet*, when the young Danish prince held up the skull of the royal jester. Hirsh knew the lines by heart, along with many of Shakespeare’s soliloquys. In fact, he had played the role of the tortured Hamlet in high school, at Phillips Academy, the prestigious boarding school he had attended in his youth. He loved literature. Maybe because his mother had been an English teacher. Reading was one of his great pleasures, along with movies, sports, vacations, and sex.

“Alas, poor Yorick! I knew him, Horatio; a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy; he hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred in my imagination it is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now? Your gambols? Your songs? Your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar?”

Yes, how he had loved her lips, until their amour had become cold with boredom.

Then another famous scene flashed in his mind. Hirsh, in fact, had dined with the great classic actor, Sir Laurence Olivier, though the firm had not represented him.

“To be, or not to be: that is the question.
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune;
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them?”

Not that Hirsh was contemplating suicide. Losing Cindy was not as tragic as that. Except for the money squabbles still to be settled, they had been long separated. Nevertheless, the encounter with death was never a breezy experience. If someone so filled with life like Cindy could die, then for certain, he would die too.

Yes, Cindy had been a nymph like the fair Ophelia. In her prime, for a few years running, Cindy was one of the most famous nymphs in the world. Young, long-legged, graceful, carefree. Every man's dream. And he had attained her. Not because he was her match, or because of his goods looks, or his money. Many other men who pursued her had more to offer than he. She said he had kind eyes. She said that she liked that he wasn't a show-off, impressed with himself. She said that he reminded her of her father – the good things in the “Old Bird,” as she fondly called him.

Hirsh stared at the urn. The beam of the overhead lamp shone down on its golden surface, making it glow. “Ashes to ashes; dust to dust.” The law firm had represented the fine English actor, Michael Caine, for a short time. “What’s it all about, Alfie? Is it just for the moment we live?”

Once again, the celebrity lawyer flashed back to his youthful days in prep school and another Shakespeare play....

“All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.

Once upon a time, Hirsh had dreamed of being an actor. But he didn’t have the ambition and screen magic of a Bogart, Brando, or Paul Newman. He read his lines well, and he had no trouble memorizing long speeches, but he lacked the inner fire to electrify a theater filled with spectators. And when you put a camera in front of him, nothing happened. No chemistry, no charisma. But he could represent successful actors and negotiate their contracts, law suits, and divorces, and that vicarious, backstage involvement was quite enough for him.

What was his cue line as Macbeth? Ah, yes. “The queen, my lord, is dead.”

Now, Steven, now! Give them all you've got! The stage is yours! His parents were in the audience, glowing with pride and hidden apprehension. What if he flubbed his lines?

“Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow
Creeps in the petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all of our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death.
Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow. A poor player
Who struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more.
It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.”

Nothing... nothing... nothing....

“This is the captain speaking. We are preparing for our descent into the metropolitan New York area. Please return to your seats and fasten your seat belts.”

Hirsh bent over and returned Old Yorick to the bag between his feet. Why was it, he wondered, that so many popular writers were obsessed with sex and death? Hirsh chuckled. Especially Jewish writers like Philip Roth, an unhappy, existentially tortured, literary genius whom the Walter Cohen law firm had represented for a portion of his illustrious career. Hirsh's brother in Israel dubbed the acclaimed author, “a Jewish Mother hater.”

In his down-to-earth, physician's manner, he summarized Roth's novels: "My parents lied to me. There is no God. I'm going to die. Might as well have sex." It was strange, Hirsh reflected. Many Jewish bards he had met made a name for themselves, and millions of dollars, by rejecting their heritage and God. In contrast, who ever heard of a Japanese writer denying Japanese history, or a French writer trashing French culture, or a Greek writer bashing the great Greek philosophers of the past? For some reason, America Jewish novelists had a need to ridicule their parents and grow back their foreskins in public. Philip Roth had spent an entire career insisting that God didn't exist. "Methinks the lady doth protest too much," Shakespeare had written. To Hirsh's way of thinking, if someone wanted to believe in God, that was his business. Live and let live. Religion wasn't his cup of tea, but if his brother and son believed in it, that was their constitutional right.

"Seat belt fastened?" the pretty stewardess asked with a smile. He couldn't recall how many he had taken home with him for the night when he returned to New York after a business trip on the coast. At least half a dozen.

"Good thing for you," he smiled back.

"I've heard that line before," she answered.

"I'm sure you have."

"Welcome back to New York, Mr. Hirsh," she said, continuing on down the aisle with a friendly sway, letting him know that she

was available. Taking her home for the night might distract his mind from his somber thoughts and flashbacks to the funeral. But he didn't feel up to it yet. Turning his gaze toward the window, he stared out at the glitter of lights below as the aircraft made its decent back to the Big Apple.

Chapter Four

For whatever reason, perhaps the late hour, there were no photographers waiting outside his Upper Madison Avenue apartment building when he got out of the taxi with Cindy. First thing he did when he was home in his apartment was to pour himself a stiff scotch. He set the urn on the bar where it stood like a tennis trophy. Then he sat down by the large window in the living room and gazed out at the dark acres of Central Park below, a miraculous remnant of Nature in the steel and concrete metropolis. The view from his 78th floor apartment stretched from the George Washington Bridge to Midtown Manhattan. He enjoyed staring out at the panorama. He found it calming. Abstractly transcendental. At that elevation, the privileged rich who could afford such luxury living were cloistered from the noisy hustle and bustle of the city. Occasionally, an airplane crossed the sky, heading, in his imagination, to some exotic destination. He could even make

out a few stars in the heavens. Sitting by the window, staring down on the great city of New York, he felt like he was above everything, a very important person who had succeeded in life beyond the normal measure. There was something godlike in the feeling. Maybe that was the reason people were willing to pay so much money to live in high places. To feel like a god. If there were a being called God.

Only on a night like this, after Cindy's cremation, did Hirsh allow his mind the freedom of thought to contemplate upon such lofty themes. There were unanswered questions about the Big Bang that couldn't be denied. If at the beginning of time there was an explosion of gases, where had the gases come from? What created them? What caused there to be life on Earth? How did it begin? Who or what created it? What was death? Inside the golden urn on his bar, was there a soul or only ashes? If Cindy wasn't inside the expensive pot, where was she? Was there an afterlife? Resurrection? Heaven and Hell? His father, the chemist, the analytic man, the epitome of clinical observation and reason, who had spent four decades analyzing the pollution levels of the waters of the Hudson and East Rivers for the City of New York, to him the world of the spirit was nonsense. If you couldn't put a soul on a scale and weigh it, then it didn't exist. His mother didn't seem to care one way or the other. Two of his grandparents believed. The others he never knew. Call it fifty-fifty. Anyway, what did it matter? But if it didn't matter, why was his mind dwelling on it? Why had mankind been dwelling on the very same question for

thousands of years? Tomorrow, he would have some delivery service pick up the urn and take it to Rhode Island to Cindy's parents. He couldn't face the idea of delivering it himself. There would be tears and more tears. He wasn't built for gloom and strained conversation. Let his former wife be buried and gone already. Enough.

Most of the messages on his private home phone were brief words of condolence from friends. Nothing from his brother or children. They probably hadn't heard the news. His first wife, Gloria, who was now married to some loud-mouthed Italian businessman in Beverly Hills, wrote a cryptic SMS, "Better luck next time." Only three of the whatsapps on his smartphone attracted his interested. Julie, a budding dancer in the Julliard Ballet, whom he had dated on two occasions without ending up in bed, said that she shared in his grief. It didn't bother Hirsh that the girl was almost ten years younger than his daughter. In New York, anything goes. Live and let live. He enjoyed her wholesome company. If they attracted stares, it was because of her striking beauty, her tiptoe way of walking, and the way she pinned her hair like a bun on her head, not because of the forty-year gap in their ages. If onlookers wondered, they probably figured that he was her grandfather or agent. Anyway, what did he care? He was her lawyer. If the innocent beauty was going to lose her virginity to somebody, why not to a man she could trust?

The other message was from Margaret. The childless, divorced wife of a popular author whom Hirsh still represented, said he was welcome to stop by her apartment for a scotch and a cry. Samantha, an old college sweetheart, said she was in Paris for two weeks and ciao! That made the easy-going Margaret the top pick, since he didn't have the energy for the marathon talk session he would have to endure to make significant progress with the very straight Julie. With the more mature, albeit plump and wrinkling Margaret, there were only a few obligatory buttons he had to hit, listen to her woes for twenty minutes, and after two drinks and a joint, she was his. All in all, Margaret was a kind and caring person, more of a mother than a lover, but he was glad that he could please her and bring a few moments of pleasure into her lonely life.

The telephone kept ringing. Finally, he decided to answer. Standing up from the sofa by the window, he walked to his desk in a corner of the room.

"Hi, Dad," his son said at the other end of the line.

"Hi, Kevin," Hirsh answered in surprise. "I mean Avraham."

"That's OK, Dad. I'm still Kevin to you."

When his son became religious, he adopted his great-grandfather's more Hebrew-sounding name, Avraham. It was pronounced Abraham in English. Abraham Hirshberg. When Abraham's son, Noah, grew up, he shortened the family name to Hirsh, to make it sound less Jewish. Noah, in turn, called his

son, Steven Patrick, to erase any Jewish connection completely. The next generation, Hirsh's son, Kevin, opted to go backward, changing his name back to Avraham, with the Hebrew pronunciation instead of the English. He was twenty-four already. Hirsh hadn't seen him for two years, since the mixed-up youth set off on a journey around the world, which had ended up in Israel. Hirsh himself had only visited the Jewish Homeland once, some fifteen years earlier, a few years after his younger brother, Robert, the doctor, had moved there. As far as Hirsh's daughter, Wendy, was concerned, the last time he heard from her, she was in Tokyo, after having spent two years in a Buddhist monastery in Tibet. Hirsh had often quipped, with a spaced-out son, and a daughter in outer space, the one book he could never write was about raising normal children.

"How are you, *Abba*?" the boy asked.

"Did you hear?" Hirsh inquired, knowing that *Abba* meant father in Hebrew. To placate his religious grandfather, Hirsh's father had agreed to bar mitzvah his son, Steven. It had been a Reform ceremony with the men sitting alongside the women in the temple that looked like a church. A mixed-choir and band accompanied the Sabbath service. The young Hirsh read his Haftorah portion in English. Abraham Hirshberg walked five miles to get to the temple. Everyone else drove in cars. A few months later, his grandfather died from some unknown disease. At the time, young Steven had the feeling that he was

to blame, as if his devoutly religious grandfather had died of a broken heart.

“Hear about what?” Kevin inquired.

“About Cindy. She was killed by a bolt of lightning while she was playing golf.”

“Oh,” his son said, lowering his voice. “No, I didn’t. I’m sorry. When did it happen?”

“Yesterday, or maybe it was the day before.”

“Wow. Were you still married to her?”

“Legally, yes.”

“That’s too bad.”

“It’s bad for Cindy. As for me, I hardly spoke to her for years.”

Hirsh knew that his son never liked his third wife, the young tennis champion. Cindy tried to be nice to his children when they came for short visits, but she wasn’t the motherly type, and they weren’t her kids. Hirsh had divorced their real mother when Kevin was nine and Wendy fourteen. After that, he hadn’t spent much time at all with his offspring. When Gloria moved to California and remarried, taking the children with her, Hirsh lost any real connection with them. He sent money - that was all. A vacation meeting here and there. At most a sad hug and a tear. Everything is for the best, he told himself. Everything is for the best.

“How’s your uncle?” Hirsh asked, switching to a different topic.

“He’s great. And Grandma is doing fine, all things considered.”

That’s right, Hirsh remembered. His mother lived in Israel too.

“Why are you calling? Do you need money?”

“Actually,” the boy said. “I wanted to tell you. I’m engaged!”

“Engaged? To be married? To whom?”

“To a great girl named Sarah. I know you are going to like her.”

Hirsh chuckled. Abraham and Sarah. How nice, Hirsh thought. He didn’t know much about Judaism, but he knew some basic Bible stories like everyone else. Abraham was the first Jew and Sarah had been his wife.

“Is she religious?”

“Yes. She comes from a nice religious family. They don’t speak a whole lot of English, but I know you will like them too.”

“How long have you known her?”

“Almost two months.”

Hirsh paused while he poured himself another scotch. “That isn’t a very long time.”

“It’s normal for the community I hang around with in Israel.”

The surprised father walked back toward the window and stared out at the vast night sky.

“I may not know anything about religion, but I have some experience with marriage. Why rush into things? Get to know the girl first. Why make a decision that you may later regret?”

“Both of us are certain. And the Rosh Yeshiva agrees.”

“The Rosh Yeshiva?”

“The head of the school where I learn.”

“The place I donated the money to?”

“That’s right.”

Months previously, Kevin had asked his father to contribute ten-thousand dollars to the yeshiva where he was learning. While Hirsh had been supporting his twenty-four-year-old son for years, the youth wasn’t a spendthrift and managed with a modest monthly allowance. Hirsh would have gladly given him more spending money, but the boy refused. Since the donation to the yeshiva had been an exceptional request, the father had agreed, thinking it might help bridge the gulf between them.

“I never got a receipt,” Hirsh told his son. “If I have a receipt, I can deduct it from my taxes.”

“I have it in my wallet,” Kevin answered. “When you come to meet Sarah, I will give it to you.”

“What does she do?”

“She works in a dress shop for now. She’s saving money so she can enroll in college. She wants to be a teacher.”

“A teacher’s salary in Israel is probably peanuts.”

“We’ll get by, don’t worry. You won’t have to support us.”

“I’m not worried about supporting you. Why don’t her parents pay her tuition?”

“They aren’t rich people. And they have nine children. Sarah’s the youngest.”

Nine children, Hirsh thought. Almost a football team. “When are you thinking of getting married?” he asked.

“In another two months. We are looking for a wedding hall now.”

“Wooo. Slow down. Let me meet the girl first.”

“That would be great. When can you come?”

Hirsh gazed out at the lights of the city. “I can’t say at the moment. I have a law firm to run with lots of clients. I’m not free to take off at a moment’s notice. It’s unlikely that I can come now and then another time for the wedding. Israel is a long way from Manhattan.”

“You fly all over the world. Israel is closer to New York than a lot of places you’ve been. What’s the big deal?”

“For you it may not be a big deal, but for me it is. Plus, it seems I have a developing arthritis in one of my knees. I can’t sit very long without moving around.”

“So break up the trip. Fly to London and rest for a day. It’s just a hop over to Israel from there.”

“We’ll see. Does your mother know that you are planning to get married?”

“You’re the first person in America I’ve told.”

“What about your uncle Robert?”

“Sure he knows.”

“Has he met the girl?”

“Twice.”

“What does he say?”

“He thinks that she’s special, and so will you.”

Hirsh wasn’t convinced. “I’ll speak with him. I’ll phone you tomorrow evening. Do you still have the same number?”

“Absolutely.”

“Well then, *mazel tov*, I guess.”

“Thanks, *Abba*,” the boy said. “*Shalom*.”

“*Shalom*,” Hirsh replied.

On the one hand, Hirsh was happy that his son was getting married. Family life might settle him down, ground him to the earth, and do away with the wanderlust that had characterized the youth ever since he quit college and set out on a quest to find himself. On the other hand, why hurry things? Hirsh

himself had rushed unthinkingly into his disastrous second marriage with a beautiful but crazy human being, and the fiasco hadn't lasted a year.

His younger brother, Robert, was seeing patients when Hirsh called. His wife, Laura, didn't say a word about Cindy, so Hirsh figured she hadn't heard the news. Robert phoned back a half hour later.

"What's up, *Achie*?" the familiar voice asked.

Achie meant brother in Hebrew. While Hirsh tended to be a low-key pragmatist, helping others but looking after himself, his brother was a perpetual idealist, not paying attention to himself in his enthusiastic desire to save the world. Besides being an overworked family physician, he was a member of his community's emergency medical team, a doctor in the army reserves, a volunteer high-school basketball coach, volunteer teacher for bar-mitzvah boys, a certified *mohel*, father of six children, and a dedicated son, taking care of their mother in his home without letting her worsening dementia break his spirit and faith.

"I spoke to Kevin," Hirsh confided. "He told me the news."

"*Mazel tov!*" his brother exclaimed. "He wanted to tell you himself."

"He says that you've met her. What is she like?"

"A wonderful girl. Quiet, intelligent, modest, caring – just what the doctor ordered."

“The doctor, or his Rabbi?” Hirsh quipped.

Robert laughed. “You’ll come for the wedding of course?” he asked.

“I may come sooner. I want to meet the girl. How well can Kevin know her after only two months?”

“That’s the way it goes in the Orthodox community in Israel.”

“He told me the same nonsense. I’m sure religious people in Israel get divorced just like everyone else.”

“Sure they do. But you needn’t be pessimistic. By all means, come and meet her. Judge for yourself. You are welcome to stay with us.”

“I can afford a hotel.”

“Mom will be happy to see you, I’m sure.”

Hirsh chuckled again, but not out of humor. There was nothing funny about Alzheimer’s disease. And it wasn’t funny that he hadn’t seen his mother for almost three years.

“How is she?” he asked.

“In and out of reality. But aren’t we all. With Mom, it’s more noticeable, that’s all. Sometimes she seems to recognize me. Her bouts of anger have ended, thank God. Generally, she isn’t in pain. Her health, in fact, is remarkably good. Her blood pressure is more stable than mine.”

“You can tell her that I’ll be coming.”

“When?”

“When I formulate my plans, I’ll let you know. What’s the weather like?”

“The rainy season has started, but it isn’t winter yet, so you won’t need an overcoat. At this time of the year, on chilly days, I wear the Member’s Only Puffer you sent me for my birthday.”

“That was three years ago, no?”

“It still looks new.”

“I’ll bring my London Fog,” Hirsh said.

The brothers said goodbye. Hirsh sighed deeply. Once again, he felt exhausted. Emotionally and psychologically drained. The author’s wife would have to settle for a rain check. He longed more for some warm, human companionship than passion. He’d spend a last nostalgic night with Cindy, alone in the apartment together. Funny, his brother hadn’t mentioned her death at all. Either he didn’t watch TV, or the freak and tragic death of a former tennis star from America wasn’t considered news in the war-torn Middle East.

Chapter Five

Israelis waiting in the rotunda of the terminal lobby of the Ben Gurion Airport waved their hands in excitement as arriving passengers wheeled their suitcases out from the baggage-claim area. Steven Hirsh spotted his son immediately, standing beside a pleasant-looking girl with a shy happy smile. While she wasn't a Fredericks of Hollywood model, Hirsch could see why his son found her attractive. Her face shone with a simple, innocent charm. Hirsh noticed that her attire was very modest, in the manner of religious women. The sleeves of her blouse covered her arms down to her wrists, and the hem of her skirt ended just over her sandals. While he guessed that she had a cute figure, he really couldn't tell. His son, Kevin, wore a large knitted *kippah*. He sported a short scraggly beard. *Peyes* hung down the sides of his head like the sidelocks of a Yemenite Jew. He was wearing a plain denim shirt and khaki trousers, with the kind of leather sandals that *kibbutzniks* made famous. Seeing his father, he held up both his hands and waved them back and forth as if he were guiding an airplane toward a terminal ramp. "Dad!" he shouted. "Over here!"

Hirsh wheeled his medium-size suitcase behind him. In his London Fog raincoat and wool felt hat, he felt out of place, in comparison to the summer attire that most people seemed to be wearing. It was the Mediterranean, he recalled. Plus, he remembered, the airport was near Tel Aviv, not far from the sea. Probably in mountain-high Jerusalem it would be colder. It was a large modern terminal, not like the plain, architecturally-

drab building he remembered from his first visit to the country. The high ceiling was covered with colorful helium balloons that had escaped the fingers of heartbroken children. Besides billboards advertising Coke and Avis, signs were written in Hebrew.

After giving his son a warm, fatherly hug, he turned to the girl and held out his hand. Sarah blushed, not knowing what to do.

“Avraham warned me not to shake your hand,” Hirsh informed her with a kind and confident smile, designed to put the girl at ease. “You’ll have to excuse me,” he said. “I’m an American. We are like elephants in a shop filled with fine porcelain china.”

Gently, he took her hand and gave it a small shake, not at all certain if she understood English. “When we are alone, I’ll give you a hug,” Hirsh confided to her with a fatherly wink. Then he chuckled, half happy and half at edge. His son was looking at him with a nervous smile. Hirsh grinned to put him at ease. Here he was in Israel, the father, the wealthy lawyer, the rich American, the charming protégé of movie stars and famous writers, and he wanted to make a favorable impression, even though, according to the very little he knew about the girl, she wasn’t impressed with those aspects of life. She was marrying his son, not because he had a rich American father, but because she loved him. But Hirsh played the gallant role anyway, determined to be as charming as he could. He wanted to come across as a commendable human being and wonderful father. Not only to impress the girl, but to show his son that he hadn’t

come to Israel to condemn and break up the match, but rather to build the love and trust which father and son had never shared.

“Where’s my brother?” Hirsh asked.

“He couldn’t come,” Kevin answered. “There was a series of *piguim* a few hours ago near his settlement, and he’s on emergency call.”

“*Piguim*?” Hirsh asked.

“Terror attacks. Three of them, an hour apart. A drive-by shooting at a bus stop where five Israelis were wounded; a roadside bomb that killed the driver of the car, and a stabbing in the grocery store where Uncle Robert lives. Two people were wounded while they were shopping, and one of them, a pregnant woman, is fighting for her life in the intensive care unit at Hadassah Hospital-Ein Kerem. Robert was the first physician on the scene. The last I heard, they may only be able to save the baby.”

“How terrible,” Hirsh said in astonishment. “You’re kidding me.”

“Why would I do that?” Kevin replied.

Hirsh didn’t know. It seemed that terrorist attacks happened all the time in Israel. A week didn’t seem to pass without a TV news report of Arabs killing innocent Jews, and Israeli war planes bombing Gaza. But watching TV in his apartment in Manhattan was different than being in Israel, where the threat was real.

“I thought my brother lived in a suburb of Jerusalem,” Hirsh said, confounded by the disturbing news.

“In a way he does. Efrat is just fifteen minutes out of the city if you don’t run into traffic.”

“That’s where the attacks were?” Hirsh asked. “Where he lives?”

Kevin nodded his head. Hirsh recalled how perturbed he had felt back at Kennedy Airport when some El Al security dame had asked him a series of annoying questions when he arrived to check in. In other circumstances the good-looking young woman might have been worth a pass, but her stony expression gave him the chills. His best smile left her unfazed. “Who packed your suitcase? Who sealed it? Has it been in your possession all the time? Do you speak Hebrew? Have you been to Israel before? Why are you traveling? For pleasure or business?”

“My son lives in Israel. He’s getting married,” Hirsh has told her.

“Where does he live?”

“In Jerusalem.”

“Where in Jerusalem? Do you know the address?”

“Is there some problem?” Hirsh asked in irritation.

“Do you know the address?”

“He studies in some yeshiva. I don’t remember the name.”

The security guard glanced again at his passport. “What do you do for a living, Mr. Hirsh?”

“I’m a celebrity lawyer. The actor Craig Lane is one of my clients. You’ve seen his movies, haven’t you?”

Her blank, Humphrey Bogart expression didn’t even twitch.

“Do you know why I am asking you these questions?” she asked.

“I suppose so.”

“Has anyone handed you anything since you left your home?”

“No.”

“All right. Have a nice trip. And *mazel tov* on your son’s wedding.”

She smiled. The smile of a pretty young woman – not a soldier. Wow, Hirsh had thought. She’s human. “Halleluyah, halleluyah. Halleluyah, halleluyah...” The song he had heard when he had landed in Israel many years before rang in his ears. Now, standing in the Ben Gurion Airport arriving-passenger lobby, after hearing about the terror attack in Israel that morning, he understood that the pretty El Al security agent in New York was only doing her job. Israeli planes had been hijacked in the past. Others blown up. Terrorists could strike at any moment, in any place. That was the reality of building a Jewish State in the midst of a billion Arabs who insisted that the piece of controversial real estate in question was theirs.

“I’ve got to daven *Mincha*,” Kevin said. “Why don’t you two sit and order a coffee or juice, and I’ll be back right away?”

“I’ll come with you,” Sarah said in a melodious Hebrew.

Hirsh’s son grabbed the handle of his father’s suitcase and wheeled it away from the crowd toward a coffee and sandwich bar in the middle of the large rotunda. “Dad, you sit here and have something to drink, and we’ll be back in five minutes.”

Hirsh watched as the young couple hurried to an escalator and rode up toward an upper balcony where a synagogue was presumably located. The tired traveler stepped into line, deciding that a strong espresso was what the doctor ordered after the long, eleven-hour flight. In addition to his fatigue, his arthritic knee was hurting from sitting hours on end. In front of him, a man read from a copy of the *International Herald Tribune* as he waited his turn to place an order.

At first, the rather matter-of-fact announcement sounded in Hebrew. People who were waiting in line automatically abandoned their positions. People sitting at tables stood up and started to hurry toward the terminal exit. Others joked and took their time, as if it were a school exercise they had rehearsed too many times to take seriously.

“THIS IS AIRPORT SECURITY. EVERYONE IS REQUESTED TO IMMEDIATELY EXIT THE BUILDING. I REPEAT – EXIT THE BUILDING IMMEDIATELY UNTIL AN ALL-CLEAR ANNOUNCEMENT IS MADE.”

“What the hell?” Hirsh thought out loud.

“It’s a bomb scare,” the man beside him said. “Someone probably spotted a suspicious object. Most likely, some passenger unintentionally left a suitcase in the lobby. No need to worry. Let’s go.”

“My son went to pray in the synagogue. Maybe he didn’t hear the announcement. I have to tell him,” Hirsh insisted.

“There are loudspeakers on the second floor too. Don’t worry,” the pleasant fellow assured him.

Pulling his suitcase behind him, Hirsh hurried toward the escalator. A uniformed soldier stepped forward, blocking his path. “Everyone outside, please,” he said.

“My son is upstairs,” Hirsh nervously explained. “He went to pray.”

The soldier could have been the brother of the El Al security guard in New York. “Out of the building,” he repeated, giving Hirsh a shove in the right direction.

On his way toward the exit, Hirsh encountered a Hasidic Jew pushing a cart piled high with luggage and packages of diapers. “My son is upstairs in the synagogue,” the agitated celebrity lawyer told him.

“If he’s praying, then he has nothing to worry about,” the religious Jew responded.

Hirsh passed a bust of David Ben Gurion as he exited the building. Making a U-turn, he tried to enter through another door, but another soldier with a short rifle blocked his way.

“My son is inside,” Hirsh protested. “He’s praying. Maybe he didn’t hear the warning!”

“Move away from the building,” the soldier said.

“But my son is inside!” Hirsh declared.

He shoved his way forward toward the entrance but when the rifle barrel pressed against his abdomen, he halted.

The man with the *International Herald Tribune* took him by the arm and guided him away from the entrance. “He’s only doing his job, Mr. Hirsh,” he said. “Unfortunately, we can’t afford to take chances.”

“How do you know my name?” Hirsh asked as he allowed the fellow to lead him away toward the street where a large crowd had gathered.

“Last week, I saw your picture is in the newspaper alongside your wife,” he explained. “*Baruch Dayan HaEmet*. Blessed be the True Judge.”

Hirsh watched as a two members of a bomb squad, dressed like astronauts in padded black suits and helmets, hurried into the terminal wheeling a tiny robot-like contraption on a cart. More soldiers and security personal appeared from all directions. After two minutes of suspense, the sound of a small, muffled

explosion, like a “poof,” reached the street. Even before the announcement was made, people started to talk in a jocular fashion and head happily back to the terminal. Hirsh hurried inside. Kevin and Sarah were casually descending the escalator, looking like nothing out of the ordinary had transpired. The small force of security personal gathered their equipment. Once again, the terminal filled up with people, as arriving passengers who had been detained in the baggage-claim area were allowed to enter the rotunda.

“Are you all right, Dad?” Kevin asked, noticing his father’s pale expression.

“Thank God both of you are alive. Why didn’t you evacuate the building like everyone else?”

“I had to pray *Mincha*,” the youth answered. “Anyway, it was only a bomb scare. They happen all the time. Relax. Enjoy your vacation.”

“Vacation?” Hirsh replied. “I feel like I’ve entered a war zone.” Then, recalling that he wanted to impress the girl, he chuckled.

“Where is your father’s suitcase?” Sarah asked her husband-to-be in Hebrew.

“Your suitcase, Dad. Where is it?” Kevin translated.

“Oh, no,” the lawyer said, realizing that his suitcase was gone.

“I must have left it outside.”

Luckily, the abandoned luggage hadn't triggered another bomb scare. It was still on the sidewalk by a long line of taxis, looking like it was waiting for a ride.

"That's a blessing," Hirsh said in relief. He didn't have anything of value inside, but now that the suitcase was back in his possession, he wouldn't have to waste time shopping for clothes, socks, underwear, and the toiletries he had purchased at the CVS Pharmacy nearest to his office. "Where's your car?" he asked.

"I don't have one," his son answered.

"How did you get here?"

"We took the train."

"That's ridiculous. Tomorrow, after I feel settled from the flight, I am going to buy you a car."

"You don't have to, Dad."

"Yes I do. If you haven't noticed, we are living in the Twenty-First Century. People have cars."

They took a taxi to Jerusalem. Hirsh sat up front with the driver, a man about his own age, wearing a black kippah. Once in the car, Hirsh took off his hat. Actually, he didn't like to wear hats, preferring to show his full wavy locks, which he kept on the longish side, believing that it made him look more like a creative individual and less like a staid and uninspiring lawyer.

“The King David Hotel, please,” Hirsh told the driver. Turning towards Sarah, he said, “That’s where I stayed on my previous visit fifteen years ago.”

Sarah smiled and nodded her head.

“Do you understand my English?” Hirsh asked.

“She understands,” Kevin replied. “But she feels too shy to speak.”

“You don’t have to feel shy with me,” Hirsh told her. “Too bad I never learned Hebrew, but who ever dreamed that my son would decide to marry a *Sabra*?”

The young woman smiled. He noticed that she could use some dental repair, but she was certainly a treasure, Hirsh thought. Her purity and innocence were captivating. Not the kind of characteristics you found in New York. Even Julie, the aspiring ballet dancer, with all of her young charm, was no match for Sarah who possessed an unusual inner glow.

“Uncle Robert expects you to stay at his home,” Kevin reminded his father.

“Thank you very much, but the plan has changed. It sounds like he has his hands full. Besides, I need a good night’s rest. The King David Hotel is still around, isn’t it?”

“Sure,” his son answered.

“Magnificent place.”

Hirsh glanced out the car window at the scenery. It looked like any other highway in the world. No camels. No Biblical prophets. No Israeli tanks. It could have been New Jersey. “Will my telephone work here?” he asked, removing his smartphone from a pocket of his sport jacket.

“Whatsapp should work,” Kevin answered. “If you like, I can get you a regular line while you’re here.”

“What time is it in New York?” Hirsh asked.

“If it’s five PM here, then it’s ten o’clock in the morning.”

“Have you told your mother about your engagement?”

“Yes. She says that she will come for the wedding.”

Hirsh nodded. He supposed that for a few hours at the wedding, he and the boy’s mother could play the part of a smiling couple.

Whether it was because he felt tired from the flight, or because of the bomb scare at the airport, or the terror attacks, or from meeting his son after a long interval, or from being in a strange country where he didn’t feel in control, Hirsh felt ill at ease. He recorded a voice message for his secretary. “Good morning, Roger. I’m in Israel on the way to Jerusalem. Please check with the King David Hotel that my suite is ready, so I won’t have any hassle when I arrive. Thanks.”

He turned and smiled toward Sarah, thinking that the five-star hotel was going to blow her away.

“Do you want me to book a room for the both of you?” he asked. “It’s no problem.”

“No, Dad. That won’t be necessary. Thank you anyway.”

In the rear view mirror he noticed a blush on Sarah’s face and a smile on his son’s. Then he remembered that religious couples didn’t sleep with each other before they were married.

“Unbelievable,” he thought. Could it be that his son was going to marry a girl whom he had never kissed or hugged? That was truly incredible. How could a man know if a woman was compatible with him in bed unless he had slept with her, at least once before making such a milestone decision? On the other hand, if the woman was only good in bed, with absolutely nothing else in common, like with his second wife, and his third, that was no less problematic. Live and let live, he mused. If the boy wanted to live like a monk, that was his business. Before embarking on the journey, he had made a decision to be as non-judgmental as possible. He wanted to make peace with his sensitive and often irritable son, not drive him further away. But he made a mental note to mention the subject of sex when he and the boy had a few minutes alone.

“Maybe you want to go to the *Kotel* before the hotel?” Kevin suggested.

“I was there on my last visit to Israel. Has it changed?”

Kevin chuckled. “Not very much for the past few thousand years.”

When the taxi arrived at the elegant, world-class, King David Hotel, an assistant manager made a special point to greet the celebrity lawyer from New York. The mannerly, uniformed clerks at the front desk treated him like royalty. Hirsh was pleased with the ostentatious reception. No doubt, Sarah was impressed by the display of honor. Kevin understood what his father was doing, and didn't protest the show, realizing it was his father's way of demonstrating his love.

The truth is, Hirsh, for all of his famous clients, wasn't well known beyond the pages of the *Hollywood Reporter* and the *New York Post*. The showy welcome was more out of respect for the founder of the law firm, Walter Cohen, who had visited Israel on several occasions, making it a point to always stay at the famous hotel, chosen by film director, Otto Preminger, one of Cohen's stable of Oscar winners, for the terrace scene in the movie, "Exodus," between Paul Newman and Eva Marie Saint.

Before taking Kevin and Sarah up to see his suite, Hirsh escorted them around the grand opulent, old-fashion lobby and patio, as if he were showing off his home. Gazing out from the terrace, past the lush hotel garden, toward Jerusalem's Old City walls, Hirsh felt unexplainably moved. Something caused his body to shiver.

"Are you chilly, *Abba*?" his son asked.

Hirsh chuckled. "I guess I am. Maybe it's the cool evening breeze."

“Jerusalem is perched on the top of a mountain,” Sarah ventured to add in Hebrew. Kevin translated.

“If I am going to have Israeli grandchildren, I’d better learn Hebrew,” Hirsh joked.

Once again, the girl blushed. What a pleasant creature, Hirsh reflected, wondering how his astronaut of a son ever managed to bag her.

The hotel’s Presidential Suite was on the top floor of the six-story building, at the end of the hallway’s long red carpet. The bellman opened the door with a plastic card and wheeled the lawyer’s one piece of luggage into the room. Hirsh took note of the mezuzah on the doorpost. That was something, he thought. Mezuzahs on the doorways of hotel rooms! Maybe that’s what made it the Jewish State. Back in Manhattan, he had never fastened a mezuzah to his doorpost. Why advertise to the world that he was Jewish?

Hirsh gave the bellman a tip and entered the suite, noticing that his son and future daughter-in-law were still standing outside the door, whispering to each other.

“What’s the matter?” he asked. “Come on in.”

The elegant suite was completely carpeted with two large bedrooms and gigantic queen-size beds, with puffy, fairytale pillows. The spacious and white-carpeted bathroom sparkled with lights and mirrors. There was an expansive, beautifully-furnished salon with a large plasma screen on a wall, mini-bar

and mini-kitchen. A separate office contained a large mahogany desk and a wall-size, antique map of the world with Jerusalem at its center.

Sarah's eyes widened. "Wow," she said. "I've never been in a hotel room before."

Hirsh failed to believe what she said. How could it be? The girl must have been at least twenty or twenty-two years old.

"Not every hotel room is like this one," Kevin told her.

Once again, on the terrace, staring out toward the golden-lit walls of the Old City, with its church steeples, mosque towers, and stately-domed *shul*, all reaching up toward the sky, Steven Patrick Hirsh, the son of Noah Hirsh, the son of Avraham Hirshberg, once again felt a chill sweep over his body. "The view is a little different from Manhattan and Central Park," he quipped with a chuckle, hoping he wasn't going to have some kind of religious experience.

Returning to the suite, Hirsh once again invited his guests to stay. "I'll sleep in one bedroom, Sarah in the other, and you, Kevin, can sleep on the pullout sofa."

"We can't, Dad," his son answered.

Figuring it was another ancient religious ruling, Hirsh didn't want to argue.

“I’ll take Sarah back to her apartment where she lives with some girls, and then I’ll come back and spend the night if you want.”

“Of course I want. I’ve come here to see you and spend time together. But have some dinner with me before you go.”

“It’s getting late, *Abba*, and Sarah works tomorrow.”

“Can’t she take off a few days so we can spend time together?”

“She will, don’t worry.”

“At least let’s grab a sandwich or salad on the patio,” Hirsh insisted graciously.

“Not tonight. You’re probably tired anyway. I’ll be back in a few hours.”

Hirsh gave his son the extra entrance card to the room. “I’ll probably order room service, speak on the phone with your uncle, and get to bed. Don’t make a lot of noise when you return. Tomorrow morning, after breakfast, I want to buy you a car.”

“Maybe. We’ll see. Thanks for coming, Dad. Goodnight.”

Sarah said goodnight as well. Hirsh smiled warmly at the girl, causing her to bow her head and blush. Unable to resist a natural, lifelong habit, he couldn’t help but glance at her sway when she walked out of the suite. Beautiful creature.

Wonderful girl. He didn’t know who was the more impressed –

she of him, or he of her? One thing was certain - he was proud of his son. Maybe he would turn out to be a *mensch* after all.

Chapter Six

Dr. Ariel (Robert) Hirsh sipped on a cup of hot coffee in the intensive-care, burn-unit of the Hadassah Hospital-Ein Kerem. The unit was arguably the most sophisticated in the world. Unfortunately, the reality of life in Israel forced the Jewish State to be the very best in many fields, simply in order to survive the never-ending Arab aggression waged against it. Robert Hirsh knew that many people in the world thought otherwise, blaming the Jews for the conflict. The truth of the matter was that almost two decades prior to the Holocaust, the League of Nations had voted in favor of the reconstitution of the Jewish National Home in Palestine. More than a decade later, after the slaughter of six million Jews by the Nazi regime in Europe, the majority vote in the General Assembly of the United Nations, in November of 1947, gave the decision of the League of Nations added force in recommending that a Jewish State be established. In Tel Aviv, hearing the dramatic announcement over the radio, excited Israelis danced in the streets. Violence erupted when local Arab terror bands, supported by arm shipments from neighboring Arab countries, initiated attacks on

Jewish communities and the country's roads. The joint forces of the surrounding Arab nations attacked the tiny new Jewish State a month after it declared independence. The war, with time-outs here and there for the Arabs to lick their wounds, had continued ever since. Robert had read a dozen books on the history of the modern Jewish State. The situation, he felt, was slanted by authors with decidedly leftist viewpoints which, in his opinion, were cut off from reality. Their solution to the conflict was appeasement and compromise - to give away more and more land to the Arabs for a promise of peace. Israeli governments had adopted that wistful approach and received increasing terror attacks in return. The same ideological distortion filled the Israeli media, which sought to brainwash public opinion, in order to transform Israel into a liberal, Western society. Robert listened to the radio news in the morning during breakfast, and glanced at a more rightist news website operated by the settlers during the day, when he had a free moment, but he tried to focus on his work, his family, and whatever he could do for the community, rather than make himself constantly upset with the never-ending political struggles within the country.

The Israeli army was still on high alert in the aftermath of the most recent outburst of terror. Hamas claimed responsibility for the attacks that had been carried out in and around his community of Efrat. In Gaza, and in Arab towns and cities throughout Israel, joyous celebrations filled the streets over the slaughter of Jews. Robert had sacrificed his break time to drive

into Jerusalem to learn the status of the victims. According to the monitors above the hospital bed, the woman wounded by the road bomb, now bandaged from head to toe, was still breathing with the help of a respirator. Dr. Hirsh knew that it was a miracle. Medicine, and the special surgical team that had treated her for hours, had done all they could. It was the prayers of the nation that were keeping the woman alive. Her husband had died in their car when the bomb had exploded. The wife had suffered three-degree burns on fifty percent of her body. A hitchhiker at the nearby bus stop had managed to drag her out of the burning vehicle. He too had suffered severe burns to his face and arms and was still recovering from surgery. The terror victim, a forty-eight-year-old mother of ten, had been on her way to work as a midwife in the maternity wing of the very same hospital where she was now fighting for her life. On his way to Jerusalem, Hirsh's wife had phoned him to say that the midwife had delivered two of their children. The item wouldn't appear in the news stories about the terror attack, but this same Jewish midwife had brought more than a thousand Arab babies into the world during her long and dedicated career. Dr. Hirsh watched as a nurse checked the plastic bags of medicine that the patient was receiving intravenously. Because her own immune system had been decommissioned, the battery of medicines were her only defense against all of the potentially deadly bacteria which lurked in the hospital's corridors.

The first attack that morning had occurred at the crowded bus stop at the Gush Etzion intersection, a four-minute drive from Robert's home in Efrat. The bus stop, where several fatal attacks had happened in the past, also served Jewish hitchhikers who were headed for Jerusalem, some twenty minutes along the road. A car with Arab snipers passed by on the highway and opened fire with automatic rifles. One nineteen-year-old soldier was killed and two soldiers were badly wounded. Two high-school students were also wounded lightly in the shooting. Robert was just beginning his work day at the medical clinic near his home when he received the emergency call on his beeper. Trained as an emergency paramedic, in addition to being a general practitioner, he arrived at the scene concurrently with the ambulances from Gush Etzion. Twenty minutes later, just up the road, while the medical teams were speeding the injured toward Jerusalem, a road bomb exploded at the Elazar junction, instantly killing the Israeli driver, a Rabbi and teacher, and severely burning his wife, the woman whom Robert had come to visit in the hospital. Not long afterward, an Arab worker walked into the small supermarket in Efrat, pulled out a knife, yelled, "*Allahu Akbar!*" and stabbed an elderly man in the neck. With a cry of "Slaughter the Jews!" he pounced on his next startled victim, a pregnant woman, and stabbed her twice in the chest. As he ran outside still wielding his knife, the Arab was shot dead by a resident of the town who had a license to carry a revolver. A medic team returning from the scene of the earlier drive-by

shooting arrived almost immediately. One of the first physicians to reach the supermarket, Robert did what he could to stop the pregnant woman's excessive bleeding. It turned out that her husband had taught grade-school mathematics to all of Robert's sons.

"She's due to give birth in another two months," a woman shopper informed the emergency team.

"There's no blood pressure reading," a medic reported.

"No pulse," another medic reported. "She's not going to make it. We can do a cesarean to save the baby."

"Without immediate postnatal support it's doubtful," Robert declared. "Where the hell is the defibrillator!?" he shouted.

The crowd made way as another medic quickly readied the AED heart-shock machine that Steven Hirsh had donated to the town at the urging of his brother. Immediately, with the first jolt of electricity, the victim responded. Outside, a helicopter swayed to a landing on a nearby tennis court. Within minutes, the severely-wounded woman was being flown high above the traffic-jammed highway toward Jerusalem.

The Arab-Israeli war, Robert knew, hadn't started with modern Zionism. The conflict between Yishmael and Yitzhak was as old as the Bible. The battle wasn't over the Land of Israel alone. It was a religious war. The doctrines of Islam, as set forth in the *Koran*, demanded supremacy. Muhammad was the true prophet it taught. *Allah* had abandoned the Christians and the

Jews because of their sins and chosen the followers of Islam instead. All non-Muslims were infidels who must be forcefully converted or destroyed. But when the downtrodden Jews returned to the Holy Land, and time and again defeated the combined forces of *Allah* in war, the Islamic doctrine received a knockout blow. When the Jews transformed wasteland and desert into an agricultural miracle, and introduced medical, technological, and digital advancements to the betterment of the world, the camels of Muhammad were left behind in the dust, with only their oil wells to save them.

Dr. Robert Hirsh left the intensive-care unit and headed toward the building housing Hadassah's pre-natal department.

Wherever you looked you saw Arabs. At the government-supported Hadassah Hospital, as with all other Israeli hospitals, Arabs received the very same free medical treatment as the Jews. Often, in discussions with colleagues who harbored pro-Arab sentiments, Hirsh would tell them that the Arab countries which called for international boycotts of products from Israel, should also boycott the Israeli-created components in their smartphones, computers, pacemakers, MIR machines, lasers, life-saving pre-term birth innovations, and anti-cancer therapies, to cite but a few.

Noticing that his brother, Steven, had left several messages on his phone, he called back and greeted him warmly, apologizing for not having been at the airport, and appraising him briefly on the back-to-back terror attacks. "Our area is still on alert," he

told him. “Enjoy your son and Sarah. Rest up from your trip, and I will see you tomorrow.”

Arriving at the intensive-care facility of the pre-natal ward, the dedicated physician learned that the severely-wounded mother had died during her emergency operation, but that her premature baby was alive and doing well.

Robert Hirsh, the brother of Steven Hirsh from New York, didn’t have the luxury of being exhausted. Still on emergency standby, he had to get back to Efrat.

Chapter Seven

Kevin read over the breakfast menu as if he were preparing for an exam.

“Order whatever you like,” his father told him. “Don’t look at the prices. Or you can chose whatever you want from the buffet.”

“Ninety shekels is a lot of money for a bagel and lox,” the youth said.

“What does it come to in dollars?”

“Around twenty-five, I think.”

“That’s not so bad. It isn’t much cheaper in New York. I think I’ll have the same. Believe it not, I haven’t eaten a bagel and lox for ages.”

Hirsh noticed a frown on Kevin’s face as he gazed around the elegant breakfast room of the hotel. “What the matter?” he asked.

“All the waiters are Arabs,” the boy observed.

“So?” his father asked.

“So who needs them? As far as I’m concerned, all of the Arabs in Israel can go home to Saudi Arabia.”

“They probably feel the same about the Jews – they should all go back to Russia and Morocco.”

“We were here first.”

“Historically, that’s true. But you can’t deny that most of the residents in the country were Arabs when the Jews began to arrive in Palestine a hundred years ago.”

“Wandering nomads,” Kevin insisted. “The Arabs never had a sovereign country here. Before the State of Israel was established, the British ruled here, and before them, the Turks, and before the Turks, the Ottomans.”

“How about some hot coffee?” Hirsh asked, wanting to avoid a political discussion. In the first place, he really didn’t know a lot about the history of Israel, and he sensed that his son’s opinions were probably a lot more strident than his, so why bother getting into an argument, especially when he didn’t understand the background and complexities of the issues at hand, and when the goal of his visit to Israel was conciliation and peace with his son. Many other people, more politically apt than he was, had tried to solve the conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis without success, so he wasn’t about to try. For one thing, as an attorney, before drawing up a case, he did his homework. Facts were ammunition. Knowledge was the key to success. He had won many cases for his clients on the basis of a single piece of information that the other side had simply overlooked.

“Some hot coffee please,” he asked a passing waiter, giving him a better look now that his son had drawn attention to the fact that all of the waiters were Arabs. In truth, Hirsh couldn’t tell the difference from an Arab and an Israeli Jew. Except for the pale-complexioned Ashkenazim with distinct Jewish noses. They were clearly members of the “tribe”. A waiter with a small white towel draped over his arm poured the hot aromatic brew into their porcelain cups.

“What about the maître de?” Hirsh asked when the waiter retreated.

His son glanced toward the high wooden doors at the entrance to the large breakfast room. “An Arab,” he said.

“And the clerks at the front desk?”

“Arabs.”

“Maybe they work for cheaper wages.”

“If I ran a business, I wouldn’t hire them. Why give them a livelihood when they have been murdering Jews here for the last 100 years?”

The boy had point, Hirsh thought. In his book, nothing could justify wanton terrorism and the killing of innocent people.

Kevin had returned to the hotel suite late in the night. When Hirsh woke up at two in the morning, the boy still wasn’t there. He wasn’t asleep on the couch, and not in the other bedroom. Unable to fall back to sleep, Hirsh called Roger in New York to find out what was new in the office. Hirsh’s associates were covering bases for him, so he wasn’t concerned about his clients – he just liked to keep his finger on the general pulse of things, even when he was traveling. Roger reported that the actor, Craig Lane, had called several times, requesting that Hirsh contact him as soon as possible. Other than that, things were quiet. Jason, and Cindy’s lawyer had phoned, but when they heard that

he was out of the country for a week, they said they'd call back. Not wanting to lose his high-strung client who had fallen on hard times, Hirsh gave Lane a call.

"Boy, Steven, am I glad you called," the actor said with a sigh of relief.

"What's going?" Hirsh asked.

"I lost the keys to my apartment and the doorman had to let me in."

"So?"

"So what if some pickpocket stole my keys? He could break into my place and steal everything."

"Have your lock changed."

"I already did. But I'm worried. Now the locksmith knows where I live and he can break into the house any time he wants."

Hirsh paused before answering. He remembered the sudden twitch of the actor's head during his last visit to the office, and Lane's shaking hands. Maybe his nerves had short-circuited, causing some kind of paranoia.

"What do you want me to do?" Hirsh asked.

"Speak to the boss of the lock company. Threaten them with a lawsuit if someone breaks into my apartment."

Sometimes a law counselor had to serve as a shrink. "OK. I will," Hirsh assured the over-the-hill superstar. "Give my secretary the details of the company and I will call them. Consider it done."

"Thanks, Steven. You're a dynamite lawyer. I'd be lost without you."

After their conversation, Hirsh strolled out to the terrace. Below, the garden was dark and quiet. Spotlights on the boulders of the wall

surrounding the Old City made the Jerusalem stone seem to shimmer. Once again, Hirsh felt his body tremble. Not from the wind. The night air was cool, but not cold. Not a palm frond stirred. "Jerusalem," Hirsh thought. "Jerusalem." There was no place in the world like Jerusalem. You didn't have to be religious to feel it.

Hirsh returned to bed at three in the morning, hoping to catch a few winks of sleep before sunrise. Kevin still hadn't shown up. So he phoned him. "I'm all right, *Abba*," he said. "I was talking with Sarah in a small park near her building. We have lots to discuss before the wedding. I hope you like her."

"She seems like a very nice girl," Hirsh admitted.

"Wait till you get to know her better. And thanks for being so nice. She says that you're funny."

"Funny?"

"That means that she likes you."

"I like her too."

"Go to sleep. I'm walking back to the hotel. I'll be there in twenty minutes. Don't stay awake because of me."

To be sure he got some shut eye, Hirsh gulped down a sleeping pill. It had become a nightly habit, three or four times a week. Often at night, he had a bout of loneliness and the pills helped sooth the general anxiety which he felt. His physician, whom he saw twice a year, had recommended he meet with a neurologist who added a mild sedative to his medicine cabinet at home. When he spent the night with one of his lady friends, he slept like a baby. But he wasn't looking to get married, or to live with a woman so soon. That had always proving to be a different kind of headache. Sleeping pills did the trick, and they

were certainly a lot less expensive than a wife or the divorce which invariably followed.

Sure enough – when Hirsh woke up at sunrise, the boy was sleeping on the sofa. Just as the front-desk manager had promised, a copy of the *The Jerusalem Post*, was waiting in the carpeted hallway outside the suite door. **“Two Killed, Six Wounded in Terror Spree”** the main headline read. Accompanying the story was a photo of a blown-up car. The headline of a side story read: **“Midnight Arson Attack in Arab Village Leaves Child Dead – Price-Tag Suspected.”** A photograph showed a Hebrew word scrawled like graffiti on the wall of a house in the Arab village. Hirsh paid no attention to the details. His glance wandered to another story which reported that a leading financial magazine had named Tel Aviv one of the top ten hi-tech capitals of the world, ranking number 14 in total monies invested in startups. Amazing, Hirsh thought, what the tiny country had attained in a few short decades. Walter Cohen had called it, “Jewish *sechel*.” Miraculous was the only true way to describe it. The article also noted that in the annual United Nations World Happiness Report, Israel ranked number 14 out of 156 countries, considering factors such as family income, medical services, life expectancy, educational opportunity, and overall contentment.

Hirsh folded the newspaper in half and only glanced at it again during breakfast when they were waiting for the bagels they ordered.

“What does ‘price tag’ mean?” he asked Kevin, referring to the arson attack in the Arab village the previous evening.

“It implies an act of revenge, like the price you have to pay for something.”

“Did you hear about this?” he asked his son, showing him the newspaper.

The youth scanned the front page.

“As always, the police and the media have jumped to conclusions,” he said, setting the paper back down at the edge of their table. “They’re implying that the fire last night in the Arab village of Al-Aduma was carried out by Jews, specifically by the so-called ‘Hilltop Youth’ movement, an unorganized group of teenagers and Zionist idealists in their late teens and early twenties who live in tents, shacks, and unauthorized, makeshift outposts on the hilltops of Judea and Samaria - as if a Jew needs permission to dwell in the Land that Hashem bequeathed to our Forefathers.”

Hirsh hadn’t expected such a speech. Glancing at the bearded young man sitting across from him, with his intertwining side-locks and large knitted *kippah*, the estranged father realized that he knew less about his son than he imagined. This reincarnated version of his grandfather was an entirely new breed of Jew.

“Look at the photo in the newspaper,” the youth continued with the passion of a lawyer presenting his case before a crowded courtroom. “The word Hebrew expression ‘tag machir’ scribbled on one of the walls in the village means ‘revenge.’ Look at the slant of the letters. No Jew writes Hebrew that way. Either an Arab wrote it, or the *Shabak*.”

“The *Shabak*?” Hirsh asked.

“Israel’s Secret Security Services. If the arson wasn’t the result of some inner-village rivalry, which happens all the time, or perpetrated by the *Shabak* itself in an effort to frame the hilltop settlers, then I’ll eat the newspaper.”

Hirsh picked up the tabloid and looked once again at the photograph.

“Why would Israeli police do something like that against Israelis?” Hirsh asked.

“Not everyone in the government believes in the concept of ‘Greater *Eretz Yisrael*’ – that all of the Land of Israel, in all of its complete Biblical borders, belongs to the Jews. There are forces that want to weaken the settlement movement and crush the spirit of the settlers, especially the free spirit of the young idealists who don’t care about spending cold nights in a tent, or long nights in jail, in order to continue the mitzvah to settle our Homeland. A lot of people, from the Arabs, to the State Department in Washington, to the bleeding-heart, liberal, Leftists in Israel who want to live like Hebrew-speaking Gentiles, to Israel’s own Prime Minister, who doesn’t want to rock the boat while he’s in office, they all would like to frighten us away from the hilltops so that the Arabs can live there instead of Jews.”

“Us?” the lawyer asked.

“The settlers.”

“You seem to know a lot about the situation,” Hirsh noted.

“No more than anyone else who lives in Israel and listens to the radio. But the truth is that I’ve been living in the Shomron for almost a year, studying in a yeshiva for *baale t’shuva*.”

“I thought you lived in Jerusalem and studied in a yeshiva in the city.”

“I did at first. Then I moved. I didn’t tell you because I didn’t want you to worry.”

“Why should I worry?”

“It’s in the West Bank. The anti-Israel media makes it sound very dangerous to live there.”

“Is my brother’s town in the West Bank as well?”

“Yes.”

“Then yesterday’s terror attacks prove that the media is telling the truth, wouldn’t you say? I must add that from the occasional articles I’ve read in *The New York Times*, the settlers are the ones who provoke all of the friction, not the Arabs. ”

“*The New York Times* is probably the most anti-Israel newspaper in America. Don’t believe anything about Israel that gets printed there.”

“*The New York Times* happens to be a very respected newspaper. I don’t pretend to check out what happens in Israel every morning before I go to work, but you hear about fighting in Israel a lot more than in Holland or Japan. You can’t tell me it isn’t dangerous here.”

“Tomorrow, I’ll show you where I live and give you a guided tour of the area.”

“It sounds like we will have to rent a tank to make it back alive to Jerusalem.”

Kevin laughed.

“What’s the schedule for today?” Hirsh inquired, changing the subject. “I’d like to visit my mother and Robert this morning. And I want to buy you a car.”

“No problem. I made arrangements for you to meet Sarah’s parents this evening. They’ve invited us to their home in Ashkelon. It’s about an hour’s drive from Jerusalem along the coast.”

“I’d prefer to invite them out to dinner at a nice restaurant, or here at the hotel.”

“That isn’t necessary. They are simple people. Anyway, it’s customary when you get engaged to meet the family in their home.”

“When in Rome do as the Romans do,” Hirsh quipped with a chuckle.

“Thanks, Dad. I appreciate your positive attitude.”

“You’re the only son I have. Who knows? Maybe after this trip, I’ll fly to Tokyo to visit your sister, if she hasn’t moved on to her next adventure. Do you ever speak with her?”

“Once in a blue moon. I tried to convince her to come to Israel, but she said that there are too many Jews here.”

“Tell me,” Hirsh asked. “After you get married, where do you plan to live?”

“On the settlement where I live on now. At least at the beginning.”

“In an apartment or house?”

“Probably in a caravan.”

“A caravan?”

“A trailer. The rent is dirt cheap.”

“I’m willing to buy you a nice apartment in Jerusalem. Why live in the West Bank? I thought you said that Sarah wants to study for a degree. Aren’t the colleges located in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv?”

Hirsh would have gladly bought the couple an apartment in Manhattan, but he sensed that such an idea was a hopeless proposition. Arguments with Kevin had never yielded fruit, so he wasn’t going to start one now, especially not in the “Buckminster Breakfast Lounge” of the King David Hotel.

“There’s a college in the city of Ariel which is only a fifteen minute drive from Neve Pincus, the *yishuv* where I’m learning.”

“*Yishuv*?” Hirsh asked, unfamiliar with the word.

“Settlement,” his son explained. “There are about sixty families living there now. You’ll love the view. It’s on the top of a mountain.”

“You and your wife are going to be settlers on the top of a mountain?”

“You say settlers as if it’s a dirty word.”

“Well, that’s because whenever you hear the word, it’s used in a derogatory context. They are the ones who are most oppressing the Palestinians, isn’t that the case?”

“No. That’s a total fabrication. No one is oppressing the Arabs. They have a better life here than in any Arab country of their own. And in my opinion, the settlers are the most idealistic people in Israel. They are the pioneers of today, idealists like Uncle Robert who could be living material lives in the big cities, but who chose to sacrifice their own personal comfort for the continued building of the country.”

“Not everyone agrees with your opinion, you know. I have a client in Israel whom I hope to see during my trip. Daniel Kaplan, the writer. Have you read any of his novels?”

“He’s a screaming Leftist. I wouldn’t read one of his books if you paid me.”

“Well, fortunately for my firm, there are a lot of people who think otherwise and pay money to read his books. He’s not a bestseller like Roth was, or Heller, but he knows how to string words together. He seems to believe that the settlers are obstacles to peace, not the Arabs.”

“He’s an ass.”

Finally, their bagels arrived, as if they had to be flown in from New York.

“Saved by the bagels,” Hirsh quipped with a chuckle. “Let’s forget about politics. I didn’t bother to vote in the last U.S. elections, so there is no point in my getting embroiled here in a conflict I don’t understand, or particularly care about, to tell you the truth. You are here. Your future wife is here. My mother and brother are here, and it looks like my grandchildren are going to live here as well. That automatically puts me on the side of the Jews, if this is where you insist on living. But please do me one favor. Ask Sarah if she’d like to live in Jerusalem. I’ll buy you a lovely apartment. Let her decide.”

“There are lots of people living in Jerusalem,” his son, Kevin, turned Avraham, answered. “We still have to settle the rest of the Land.”

Chapter Eight

It didn’t take long to buy a car. Kevin convinced his well-meaning father that there was no need to buy a new car when a good, used car could be purchased for a quarter of the price. After making a phone call to a friend to ask his advice, Kevin took his father in a taxi to a reliable used-car dealership in the neighborhood of Talpiot. The modern-looking office was busy with customers, putting Hirsh at ease. He himself knew almost nothing about cars. Every two years he leased a new Audi which he parked in the garage under his building. If something went wrong with the vehicle, the leasing company made the repairs. Kevin picked out a 2012 Toyota with ninety-thousand kilometers on the mileage meter, which the Hebrew-speaking agent called, “almost new.” He said that the car belonged to a woman who used it to drive to the supermarket and back. Being an attorney by profession, Hirsh was

naturally suspicious, but he didn't have the time or the connections in Israel to check out if the price quoted was fair. The salesman himself told them to drive the vehicle to one of the Motor Vehicle Department's official "test lines" and have them check out the motor, brakes, and wheel alignment. The test cost only thirty dollars, and the examiner called the car a bargain. In less than three hours, the registration was transferred to Kevin. Father and son drove out of the dealership parking lot and headed toward Efrat.

"Thanks, Dad," the happy youth said as he steered onto the new highway heading south out of the city.

"Did you ask Sarah about the apartment in Jerusalem that I'd like to buy you for a wedding present?"

"I thought the car was going to be our wedding present – in addition to paying for the wedding, that is."

"The car is an engagement present. But now that you mention it, how much is a wedding in Israel?"

"At a nice wedding hall it costs from forty to seventy dollars a guest, but we can do it for almost free on the basketball court of the *yishuv*."

The father chuckled. "Sounds very romantic – getting married on a basketball court. What if it rains?"

"Everyone gets wet, but it won't be the end of the world. The main thing is the *simcha*."

Hirsh new what the word meant. Not because he had learned Hebrew, but rather, to coin a Jackie Mason witticism, it was one of the words assimilated Jews used to make them sound more Jewish.

"Who pays for the wedding?" Hirsh asked.

“Usually, the families split the cost.” Kevin paused. “But in this case, since Sarah’s parents aren’t rich people, it would be a big *mitzvah* if you could pick up the tab.”

Mitzvah was another word he knew.

“And if I don’t want to be such a big *tzaddik* and pick up the tab, then what?”

Hirsh surprised himself. He knew more Hebrew words than he thought. A *tzaddik* was a very righteous person. Working with so many Jews in the entertainment world of New York demanded a beginner’s lexicon of Jewish words and expressions. Like with the “*abisaleh*” Yiddish he could throw around when needed. He knew what a *tzaddik* was because every year around Hanukah time, a bearded Chabad rabbi dropped by the office to *shnor* a little *gelt* for the organization, and each time he called Hirsh, “a *tzaddik*.”

“Then we get married on the basketball court.”

Hirsh laughed good-naturedly. “What’s her father do?”

“He’s retired now. He used to be the electrician, handyman, and plumber in a high school. Sarah says he still does some private work in people’s homes, and if there is a problem in the synagogue that needs fixing, they turn to him.”

“And the mother?”

“She’s a housewife.”

“That’s a noble occupation.”

“She raised nine children.”

“That is quite an accomplishment,” Hirsh noted, frankly astounded.

“I’ve never heard of such a thing.”

“In Israel, in the religious community, it isn’t so unusual.”

“I suppose raising nine children could keep a woman busy.”

“Sarah’s father was orphaned in the Holocaust. He receives some kind of reparations payment from Germany for that. But it’s not a lot of money.”

Hirsh’s chuckle sounded like an “hmpf.” A decade ago, reading about the tics associated with Tourette’s Syndrome, Hirsh had gone to an Upper East Side neurologist to ask whether his sudden, spontaneous chuckling could be a tic. The physician said that very little was known about Tourette’s, but since the chuckles didn’t affect his life in an adverse fashion, Hirsh shouldn’t worry about them. That very statement caused Hirsh to chuckle, which prompted the doctor to chuckle as well. “If they are a manifestation of an underlying factor of Tourette’s,” the neurologist added, “you seem to have found a way to cover them up by simply brushing them off so that people don’t think twice about them. It may be that they are some kind of nervous twitch. A psychiatrist may be able to shed more light on that.”

Hirsh didn’t bother to follow the suggestion. He had never been to a psychiatrist, and he wasn’t about to begin at the age of fifty. Why should he? He was a successful lawyer with enough money in the stock market to live comfortably for the rest of his life. Many of his colleagues took different medications to ward away depression and anxiety, but all he needed to keep happy was exercise, an occasional scotch, a sleeping pill now and then, and a bout of female companionship a couple times a week. He supposed there were cobwebs in the shadowy recesses of his past, but he saw absolutely no reason to unravel them. Live and let live was his motto. Everything is for the best. My business is my business, and, as your attorney, 15% of your business is mine.

“I’ll pay for the wedding,” Hirsh told his son. “In a nice wedding hall. To make her parents happy.”

“You really are a *tzaddik*, Dad.”

After traveling through a short tunnel, they left the city behind.

“Welcome to the West Bank,” Kevin said to his father.

“Oh boy,” the New Yorker answered. “Why’d you tell me? Are you sure that it’s safe?”

“Don’t worry, because of what happened yesterday, there will be soldiers and police all along the way.”

On the left side of the road, a high wall blocked out the view of the countryside completely.

“What the hell is this wall?” Hirsh asked.

“When Israel first built this by-pass road to avoid driving through the city of Bethlehem, Arab snipers would fire at Jewish motorists. So instead of throwing the Arabs out of the country, we built this stupid wall.”

“You’d really like to throw all of the Arabs out of the country?” the father asked.

“Just the terrorists, and their parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins. That’s they only way the rest of the Arab population will let us live in peace.”

“Why do you call them Arabs and not Palestinians?”

“Palestinians is an invention of *The New York Times*. There is no such thing. The Arabs who lived in the country under the British Mandate were nomads. They never had sovereignty here. If you want to be

historically accurate, the original Palestinians were the Jews. They inhabited the country 2000 years before Muhammed was born.

“How big is the city of Bethlehem?”

“I don’t know. Maybe two-hundred thousand.”

“Isn’t that where Jesus was born?”

“It’s where King David was born a thousand years before the fairytale story of the virgin and the manger. And two-thousand years before Islam was invented. In other words, we were here first.”

Traffic began to slow as they approached a second tunnel. Compared to New York’s Brooklyn Battery Tunnel and the Holland Tunnel under the Hudson River, the length of the tunnel was laughable. The traffic slowed to a crawl.

“How do you like the feel of the car?” Hirsh asked.

“It’s great, Dad. *Todah.*”

“What’s slowing down the flow of traffic? Another bombing?”

“Could be. There’s an army checkpoint at the end of the tunnel, and they may be carefully checking the passengers in the cars and baggage in the trunks to make sure no one is carrying explosives or weapons.”

Sure enough, after leaving the tunnel, they reached an army checkpoint manned by armed soldiers, several of whom were tough-looking young girls, reminiscent of the El Al security agent whom Hirsh had encountered at Kennedy Airport. In the opposite direction, a long line of cars and trucks waited to be inspected before traveling on to Jerusalem. Along the peak of the hillside overlooking the road, gigantic villas enjoyed a commanding view of the landscape.

“Who lives in those mansions?” Hirsh inquired.

“Arabs.”

“Arabs?” his father repeated with a tone of surprise.

“That’s right. Poor oppressed Arabs.”

A girl with a very serious-looking automatic rifle held out a hand and Kevin stopped for inspection.

“Why all the traffic?” he asked her in Hebrew.

“The funerals of the murdered Rabbi and the woman who was stabbed in the grocery store,” she replied.

Kevin explained to his father what the soldier had said as the car picked up speed. Every few-hundred yards, an army jeep or police car idled by the side of the road. Hirsh felt apprehensive but made sure he didn’t show it, not wanting his son to think he was a coward.

“Have they caught the terrorists?” he asked.

“No yet. The army and *Shabak* are still searching, from village to village. No doubt it’s a small cell of terrorists working together. We’ll apprehend them for sure. The question is - will we catch them before they strike again?”

“There could be another bomb planted on this road,” Hirsh nervously noted.

“It isn’t likely. Too many police here today.”

“Why didn’t we order bullet-proof windows for your car?”

“You shelled out a lot of money already.”

“I want to know you can drive these roads in safety. Have them installed when we get back to Jerusalem.”

Soon, a picturesque landscape of valleys, terraced hillsides, olive trees, and vineyards stretched before their eyes.

“When he was young, this is where the shepherd boy, David, pastured his father’s sheep,” Kevin related.

“It’s beautiful,” his father admitted. “It looks a lot like Italy.”

“To me it looks Biblical. The first time I rode on this road, on a bus to Hevron, I fell in love with the country and knew that I had to live here. I had an overwhelming mystical feeling that after traveling all around the world, I had finally come home.”

His father was silent. There certainly was a magic to the scenery. Hirsh felt a pull, like a calling, a vague *déjà vu*, from far, far away. But he immediately switch off the feeling. New York was his home. America. The United States had been a refuge for millions of Jews when they had nowhere else to flee. If there were Jews who felt more home in Israel, then that was the right thing for them. Live and let leave. With all of the uninhabited hillsides and valleys he saw along the way, it seemed to him that there was plenty of room for Arabs who wanted to live in Israel as well. If the Palestinians believed that Palestine was their home, then they had every right to live in the country, just like the Israelis. If they had complaints, then let international forums and courts solve the conflict. That’s what the legal system was for. That’s why he had chosen to become a lawyer. Terror and murder certainly weren’t the answer. In his opinion, if the Arabs and Israelis couldn’t reach some agreement on their own, then some international arbitrator had to be appointed to solve the problem. Violence and terrorism weren’t the answer. Hirsh had no sympathy for causes that slaughtered innocent people as a method of achieving their goals.

Like an experienced tour guide, Kevin pointed to a cluster of villas at the peak of a hill. “That’s the Jewish settlement of Neve Daniel. Efrat is to the left. It started as a small cluster of homes as well, but kept spreading and spreading.”

Hirsh stared at the line of apartment buildings stretching the length of the opposite hillside. “That’s a settlement?” he asked. “It looks like a city.”

“*Baruch Hashem*,” his son remarked. “Its development was helped a lot by a Rabbi from Manhattan who moved to Israel. Rabbi Riskin from the Lincoln Center Synagogue, near where Granny used to live.”

Hirsh knew the West Side neighborhood well. While he had never attended the synagogue, he had seen hundreds of concerts, ballets, operas, and films in the nearby Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, one of his favorite cultural places in New York. And on many occasions, he had met with clients and dates in the restaurants and bars across the street.

“On the left is the Elazar bus station where the Rabbi was murdered,” Kevin reported.

The bus stop was nothing more than a bench and a small roof. Army jeeps were parked on both sides of the road. A few soldiers stood guard.

“The driver who was killed stopped to pick up a *trampist* – a hitchhiker. He left the highway to stop by the roadside, out of the way of passing vehicles. A car with some Arabs was standing across the street, not far from the entrance to Elazar. People probably assumed they were Arab workers. Apparently, they triggered the bomb that killed the Rabbi and severely injured his wife.”

The Toyota crept along after an endless line of cars heading toward the Gush Etzion Junction where the first terror attack had occurred. Hirsh kept silent. His head felt heavy. His heart pumped faster than usual.

“Some of those villas are as big as the mansions of Martha’s Vineyard,” he noted, to change the subject, as they passed the older section of the Efrat. He chuckled. “There’s even a tennis court.”

The court was empty. Naturally, he thought about Cindy. Her court was empty now too. Maybe she was playing up in Heaven, or maybe she was playing down in Hell. And maybe there were no such things as Heaven and Hell. Anyway, how could you play tennis without a body, and without a tennis racket and balls? Hirsh had a friend, a fellow lawyer, who fell ill with a serious lung condition which forced him to quit work a year before he died. Day and night to pass the time, the incapacitated fellow listened to round-the-clock news on a small transistor radio and watched news programs on a miniature television. His wife told Hirsh that he hardly slept, worried that if he closed his eyes he would die. The radio and television were more important to him than she was. In his will, he requested that the radio and mini-TV accompany him in his coffin on his final journey. So, maybe, Hirsh mused, if you could watch TV news in Heaven, you could play tennis as well.

Discouraged with the slow-moving traffic, people parked their cars by the roadside and started to walk.

“Where are they going?” Hirsh asked.

“To the funerals of the Rabbi from Elazar and the pregnant woman from Efrat. The Gush Etzion Cemetery isn’t far away in the settlement of Alon Shvut. It’s the general cemetery for the area. There will be thousands of people there. Do you want to go?”

“Go to the funeral? What for? I didn’t know them. Did you?”

“No, not personally, but that doesn’t matter. In Israel, we are all one big family. We fight a lot between us, but when someone is murdered, it’s like your own father, or brother, or son. I’m sure Robert is there. Do you want me to call him?”

Helicopters circled overhead. Hirsh felt dizzy. Jet lag, he reasoned. The time difference was catching up with him. “You don’t have to call him,” he said. “Let’s go to see my mother. Robert must have told her that I am visiting. She is probably waiting to see me.”

People continue to leave their vehicles and trek toward the cemetery. Hirsh was amazed. For a period of time, his beautiful wife Cindy had been one of the most famous women in the world, yet fewer than twenty people had gathered for her funeral, the majority of them paparazzi photographers. And here, literally thousands were coming to the burial of a little-known Rabbi and a simple mother who worked as a midwife.

“When JFK was assassinated, a lot of people came for his funeral,” Hirsh recalled. “But I don’t think as many as this.”

Suddenly, there was a loud wail of sirens. The American visitor tensed. The cars ahead of them edged toward the side of the road as a cavalcade of large, black, bullet-proof Cherokee Jeeps and police cars sped by.

“The Prime Minister,” Kevin explained.

“I hear he has legal problems,” Hirsh commented. “Maybe he could use a good lawyer.”

Chapter Nine

Hirsh's ninety-year-old mother and her Filipino helper were alone in the three-level house. Everyone else was at the funerals. Holding her by an arm, the middle-aged caregiver guided the fragile woman to an easy chair in the salon. Her slippers shuffled slowly over the floor. Very gently, the practiced attendant lowered Harriet Hirsh into the chair. Seeing the look of distress on his father's face, Kevin squeezed his hand. "*Shalom, Safta,*" he said with a happy voice. "We have a surprise for you today."

When the old woman was seated, she stared at her oldest son without recognition. Her face was wrinkled, but it was his mother's face. Hirsh had to fight back a tear. His mother's eyes gazed at him blankly, then her head turned to look in another direction. For the moment, Hirsh was speechless. After his father had died, his mother had gotten older and older before his eyes, as if she had lost her enthusiasm for living. For the first few years, she lived alone, then, in spite of her protests that it cost too much money, Hirsh had hired a live-in housekeeper from Jamaica so she wouldn't be alone. "I don't need her! I don't need her!" his mother insisted, every time he came for a visit, which he did two times a week, trying his best to be a dutiful son. Sometimes he played rummy with her, sometimes they sat together and watched TV. After a year, she no longer offered him cakes that she baked. Instead, she bought Entenmann's when she went shopping with the housekeeper, Marella. In the winter, she complained about the cold, so he bought a condominium in Miami Beach, packed up her belongings, and whisked her and the Caribbean-accented Marella away to Florida. He chose the expensive apartment, not only for its convenience to the

Bal Harbour shopping center, but because two of her old friends from New York had apartments there also, affording his mother built-in companionship. When Mrs. Hirsh began to phone her son each day, speaking in a whisper, telling him that the Jamaican woman was stealing her money, Hirsh began to worry. While it was possible, there wasn't a lot of cash in the apartment. In addition to her salary, Hirsh gave the caretaker a monthly sum for expenses and the use of a credit card, which Hirsh reviewed on a regular basis to make sure the purchases listed were necessary. In his opinion, Marella was trustworthy. Before long, his mother invented a tale that the Jamaican woman had moved her family into the condo. It wasn't hard to investigate the charge and determine it was a flight of his mother's imagination. Discussing her worsening dementia with his younger brother, Robert, in Israel, the kindhearted father of six and always busy family physician, insisted that their mother spend the rest of her days in the Holy Land, where he could look after her medical needs, and where she could enjoy her grandchildren. Hirsh didn't protest. He had only visited her in Florida once, and in that regard, Israel wasn't so much farther away. He knew his brother would take care of their ailing mother better than he could, and the opportunity to be around her grandchildren was a bonus which Hirsh couldn't offer.

"It's Steven, Grandma, your son," Kevin said, in a louder-than-normal voice. "Steven from America."

The old lady gazed in the direction of her grandson.

"America?" she said. "This is America."

"No, Grandma," Kevin answered. "We are in Israel. Steven came to visit you all the way from New York."

The old woman seemed to be thinking. Or maybe she wasn't thinking at all.

"Does she understand things?" Hirsh asked.

"Sometimes," his son assured him.

Hirsh bent down to her level, so that he could look into her eyes. "Hi, Mom, it's me. Steven. Steven Hirsh, your son, the lawyer."

The old woman's head turned to the figure in front of her. She stared vacantly at him, as if trying to place a familiar voice from her past. "A lawyer?" she asked.

"Yes, Mom. A lawyer. A very successful lawyer to boot. With a lot of movie-star clients."

"You're a movie star?" she asked.

Hirsh chuckled. "No, Mom. I'm a lawyer."

"Noah?" his mother asked.

"No, Mom. I'm Steven. Dad's name was Noah."

"Noah," she repeated. "I want to go home."

"You are home, Grandma," Kevin told her.

"I want to go home now!" she insisted. With surprising strength and energy, she raised herself out of the chair. The caretaker hurried forward. "Get the car somebody! I want to go home!"

The caretaker steadied the determined old woman on her feet and held onto her arm as she began to walk out of the room.

"You can't let her walk outside," Hirsh protested.

“When Grandma gets one of her super-energy spells, it’s good to go with it and not make her upset,” Kevin told his father. “If you resist, she only gets angrier.”

“This is the West Bank!” Hirsh reminded him.

“Inside the *yishuv*, there’s nothing to worry about,” the youth replied.

“Tell that to the old man and pregnant woman who were stabbed in the grocery store yesterday,” Hirsh shot back. He hurried forward to stop his mother, but before she reached the door, Robert appeared in the doorway.

“Sorry I’m late,” he said with his familiar large grin. His wife, Laura, appeared behind him. She was a nice-looking woman, but, at the moment, her face looked drained. A young uniformed soldier followed, an automatic rifle dangling from a strap across his chest. He was one of Robert’s sons. Hirsh had forgotten his name.

“Mamma. Where are you going?” Robert asked in a calm, soothing voice that seemed to immediately relax their high-strung mother. He held up a finger toward his brother, as if to say, “It’s great to see you, but give me a minute with Mom.”

“I’m going home,” the old woman repeated.

“This is your home, Momma. I’m your son, Robert, and your son Steven is here too. Come say hello.”

He put a comforting arm around his mother and led her back toward the salon. When they reached Hirsh, they stopped. “See, Mom, it’s Steven.”

“Steven?” she asked.

“Yes, Mamma,” he said.

“Is it really you?”

“Yes, Mamma.”

“Where have you been?”

“I’ve been working.”

“Always working. Why do you have to be such a workaholic?”

Her surprising turnabout and clarity made everyone laugh.

“Life is expensive these days,” Hirsh said with a chuckle and a deep breath of relief now that his mother had returned from the faraway world she seemed to inhabit.

“Let’s all sit down,” Robert said, letting the caregiver lead their mother back to the easy chair. Then he gave his older brother a loving bear hug, while emotionally reciting the blessing of gratitude to God upon seeing, after a long interval of time, a cherished relative or friend: *“Baruch atah Hashem, elokanu melach haolam, m’chayi matim.”*

“Amen!” Kevin answered.

“Amen,” Hirsh echoed.

When his brother released him, Hirsh had a chance to greet Robert’s wife. “Hello, Laura,” he said. He didn’t remember how religious his brother was, and whether it was alright for him to kiss his wife or hug her, so he stood where he was. When she didn’t step forward on her own, he figured that it was a no-no to touch her, so he just smiled.

“Hello, Steven,” she answered. “Welcome.”

“I hope you’ve been well.”

“Thank God.”

“I brought you a gift of appreciation,” he said, holding out a small and narrow gift-wrapped box. “For taking care of our mother.”

“You didn’t have to,” she replied with an embarrassed look toward her husband.

“You can give it to her,” Robert said lightly, with another big grin, sensing his brother’s tenseness.

The necklace had cost a thousand dollars. Nothing ostentatious or showy, but pretty nonetheless.

Laura opened the wrapping and the box of jewelry. “It’s beautiful!” she exclaimed, clearly pleased.

Hirsh was glad she liked it. After all, she couldn’t easily exchange it in Israel, and while he knew a lot about women and what they liked, religious women were totally foreign creatures to him.

“Who’s this Rambo?” he asked, turning to the soldier.

“Yisrael,” his brother answered proudly. “Our twenty-year old. He’s already a company officer.”

The boy was a man already. Broad shoulder with a square, Kirk Douglas jaw. Hirsh shook his nephew’s hand.

“Some uncle I am, forgetting the names of your kids. Where are the rest of them?”

“Our oldest, Yonaton, is a pediatrician in Beer Sheva. He has three kids, thank God. Rivki lives in the Golan and is a social worker like her mother, with twin boys and a little girl. Hannah is still single, working as a nurse in her first year at Shaare Zedek Hospital. Yisrael is our soldier, and Arik and David are in high school yeshiva. They were at the funerals with friends, so they should be getting home soon, anxious to see their uncle from America.”

“I’ll warm up some Sabbath leftovers,” Laura said, withdrawing into the kitchen.

“You don’t have to bother,” Hirsh said. “I’ll eat when I get back to the hotel.”

“Nonsense,” Robert told him. “Believe or not, we have microwaves in our backward country. Come, sit next to Mom.”

Hirsh’s brother lifted a chair by the dining room table and set it down by the easy chair, where their mother had drifted off to sleep.

“Mom’s been sleeping a lot lately, especially after one of her bouts of energy,” Robert explained. “Outside from a little abnormal blood pressure now and then, her overall health is good, thank G-d. At first we suspected Alzheimer’s, but she seems to suffer from a slightly lesser form of dementia, where she is in and out of reality, sometimes in her own painless world, and then back to being an active part of the family. She asks about you whenever she’s in her alert phase, and she was genuinely glad to learn you were coming for a visit, though I don’t think she realizes that you live so far away. Sometimes she talks as if Dad is still with us, and sometimes she remembers that he’s gone.”

“I can’t tell you how appreciative I am, to you and your family, for taking care of her,” Hirsh said emotionally.

“Nonsense,” his brother said. “Her presence is a blessing for all of us.” He pointed to the caregiver. “Delia treats Mom like a mother, and she’s better than a team of ten doctors and nurses, believe me.”

The lady from the Philippines blushed, as much as a dark complexioned person could blush.

“I have a present for her too,” Hirsh stated. He really didn’t, but he decided to give her five-hundred dollars before he left the country, along with five-hundred for each of his brother’s children.

Kevin reminded his father and uncle that they couldn’t visit for long because he was driving his father and Sarah to Ashkelon to meet her parents, and he didn’t want to be late. Robert insisted that they come to Efrat for a long and leisurely *Shabbat*, a few days away, along with Sarah, when they would have plenty of time to talk and spend time with Mom. As if hearing her name, the old woman opened her eyes and looked directly at her eldest son.

“Steven?” she asked. “Is that you?”

“Yes, Mom. It’s Steven.”

Seeing the happiness in his mother’s eyes made his visit worthwhile, above and beyond everything else.

“How is Gloria?” she asked.

Gloria was Steven’s first wife, whom he had divorced some fifteen years previously. Once and a while they spoke, primarily about matters concerning their wayward children.

“Gloria is fine, Mom. Just fine. She sends her regards.”

“I’m glad.” she said. She smiled, then her expression stiffened and she stared off into space, as if something else, in some other world, had attracted her interest. Hirsh glanced at his brother who nodded with a small, sad smile.

“What was life all about?” Hirsh wondered.

Chapter Ten

Kevin did the driving and his father sat in the front seat. Sarah sat in back, dressed in a pretty dress – not the kind of elegant engagement dresses that girls wore in America, but a simple, modest, long-sleeve outfit that hid the curves of her figure all the way down to her shoes. Whereas in America, the style for a woman was to show off as much as she could, Sarah preferred to hide everything. As least, Hirsh reflected with a private chuckle, the girl wasn't wearing gloves.

Having set out from Jerusalem early in the evening, the darkness hid whatever sites they passed along the way. Hirsh ask Sarah to tell him some things about her parents so he could plan a line of friendly conversation. The fact that Sarah had never spent a night in a hotel said something about her parents and her upbringing, but Hirsh was curious to learn more. The only thing he knew about the father's occupation, electricity and plumbing, was that if you had a problem, you asked your secretary to call someone to fix it. From the little Kevin had told him about Sarah's parents, it didn't sound as if they would be interested in hearing stories about showbiz celebrities and the movies, but you never could tell. Old Craig Lane movies had probably made it to Israel, just like they were screened everywhere else. Plus, asking Kevin's fiancé about her family was a way of drawing the shy girl out of her sweet silence and getting to know the baby-maker his son had chosen, who, if she inherited her mother's fertility genes, was liable to bring Hirsh a half-dozen *Sabra* grandchildren or more. Maybe because she was sitting in the back seat and didn't have to address Hirsh directly, or maybe because she was more comfortable now, after her fear of their initial meeting had passed, the girl spoke English more fluently than she had at their first meeting. It was still the ungrammatical, heavy-accented

English of a person who had grown up speaking a different tongue, but at least it made communication possible.

“My *Abba* is 76 years old, and *Ema* will be 65 in a few months,” Sarah related.

An eleven year difference, Hirsh thought. That meant that he and her father had at least one thing in common – they both liked younger women. If Sarah was 24 like Kevin, then the old crow had fathered the girl when he was 52. Hirsh knew it was possible. After all, Billy Joel fathered a baby when he was 68, and Charlie Chaplin had a kid when he was 73. That’s why Hirsh, when he was sober enough to remember, always took precautions.

“My father never really his parents. The Nazis took them away when he was a baby in Rumania. Sensing their time was limited, they managed to send their youngest child out of their village with a merchant who put him in a Gentile orphanage until he was two-years old, when a surviving aunt took him to Spain, where he lived in some type of children’s home until he was ten. Both of his parents and his eight siblings perished in the Holocaust. Then the aunt took him to Morocco. From there, when he was a teenager, he went with a group of young Jews to France where they were trained in a *Hachshera* camp, before immigrating to Palestine. He met my mother on the kibbutz where they both were working.”

“Your mother is an Israeli?” Hirsh asked, forgetting what his son had told him.

“Yes,” Sarah replied. “She was born here. Her parents escaped the Nazi roundups by living in the forests of Germany. But my grandmother died of pneumonia. After the war, my grandfather brought the remains of the family to Palestine just before Israel became a State.”

What could Hirsh say? “Nazi bastards,” was the only thing that came to mind. It would sure make one hell of a novel, he thought. Maybe he could get one of his literary clients to write it.

“If I were the Prime Minister of Israel,” Kevin said. “I would tell all the Jews in Germany to get out of the country, and then I would drop an atomic bomb on Berlin.”

“Then it is good you are not the Prime Minister,” his father replied.

Hirsh expected a quiet, if somewhat awkward and uncomfortable hour or two at Sarah’s home, meeting with her parents. Was he ever surprised! What he figured would be a short and intimate engagement party, turned out to be more like the opening wedding scene of the movie, “The Godfather.”

Sarah’s parents lived along a narrow tree-line road in well-kept, middle-class neighborhood in the sleepy, seaside city of Ashkelon, a town which the explosive development of the country seemed to have ignored. Kevin said it was a mere kilometer or two away from the Gaza Strip, and that many roofs in the town had been hit by missiles, fired by the Hamas and the Jihad Islam. The one-story, small-looking house seemed dark from the nearby parking lot, but as they approached, a blaze of colored lighting lit up the yard, with a blast of happy music and “*mazel tovs!*” Hirsh had never experienced anything like it. Students of the yeshiva in the Shomron where Kevin was studying, who looked like copies of his side-locked son, ran forward to greet them. One of them banged on a large African-style bongo drum. Another skull-capped and bearded musician, who turned out to be Sarah’s brother, played on a small electric organ. A spotlight glowed on Hirsh and the soon-to-be engaged couple as they approached the house. Sarah lowered her head in embarrassment, but Kevin was all smiles. An elderly couple, obviously Sarah’s parents, waited at the gate of the yard, wide smiles

on their faces. The father stepped forward to hug Hirsh. For a 76 year-old fellow, he moved with surprising agility. Kevin's friends grabbed them and herded them into a circle of men-only dancing on the artificial lawn. The joyous Hasidic wedding music uplifted everyone's spirits. Hirsch and Sarah's father grinned at each other as if they were lifelong friends. No small talk was necessary. Hirsh had been accepted into the tribe. A short distance away, the happy bride-to-be danced a hora with the women, her mother, sisters, and friends who had gathered for the celebration. Suddenly, Hirsh felt something move between his legs and he was hoisted into the air on someone's shoulders. Sarah's father joined him in the sky, followed by Kevin. The bongo beat quickened. Everyone sang. The organ sounded like a full-piece orchestra. A clarinet joined the ensemble. Hirsh felt unsteady in the air as he rode on his precarious perch, but his son and Sarah's father seem as confident as could be, so he did his best to enjoy the ride. Down below in the yard, he could see a lot of children. Finally his ride ended, and he was gently lowered back to earth. With a racing heart, he grabbed the old man's hand and pulled him away from the continuing dancing. Hirsh was no stranger to exercise, tennis games, and bi-weekly jogs through Central Park, but he was breathing harder than the man who had survived the Holocaust as a youth.

"Shalom, shalom," the girl's father said with a happy smile. "I am Yosef. Welcome to Israel," he added with a rudimentary English.

"Shalom to you, Yosef," Hirsh responded. "I am Steven." If he had a Hebrew name, he couldn't recall it. "This is some party. Thank you for inviting me."

Although the host of the evening nodded happily, Hirsh wasn't sure of the extent of his English vocabulary.

“*Makutana*,” Hirsh said in Yiddish, somehow remembering, more-or-less, the word for in-law.

“*Maakutan*,” Yosef nodded. “*Du farshteysh Yiddish?*”

Hirsh shook his head no. “*A bisela*.”

“I understand very little English.”

“That’s all right. My son can translate.”

“Do you speak French?” the Israeli asked.

“Yes, I do. I studied French in high school and college.”

“I speak French. I lived in Morocco and France as a youth.”

Hirsh recalled the story of his orphaned childhood. As the Yiddish writer Sholom Aleichem would say, “To make a long story short...” It turned out that one of Sarah’s brothers also was an electrician, like his father, and he had strung up the festive lighting for the party. The mother and Sarah’s four sisters had done the cooking for the sumptuous meal that followed on tables set up on the lawn. You needed a scorecard to keep track of the family members. The brother who played the organ was a teacher in grade school. Her eldest brother was a Rabbi who headed some organization. Another brother was a businessman. Her fifth brother did something in the army. And number six was an accountant. Together, Sarah’s siblings had 40 children. Another eight great grandchildren were scattered here and there around the house, in carriages, or with baby-sisters in their homes around the country. In comparison, Hirsh’s truncated *mishpuchah* totaled his brother’s family, his mother, and his own two children. He had a distant aunt and uncle in American who he rarely saw, and two first or second cousins whom he hardly remembered from his youth.

In the course of the evening, Hirsh exchanged a few polite sentences with Sarah's mother, a simple-looking woman from the past generation, with an unassuming demeanor and a kind smile. Her father, he learned, had been killed in one of Israel's wars, and her mother was in a physical rehabilitation hospital, recovering from hip surgery due to a fall. Hirsh shook hands with the brothers and was introduced to the sisters. Everyone told him what a wonderful son he had. One of the grandchildren asked him if he really knew actors in Hollywood, and looked noticeably disappointed when Hirsh said he didn't know the actor who had smashed all box-office records in his role as the latest Joker.

"*Mazel tov!*" Robert greeted his brother when he arrived with Laura and four of his children.

Why didn't you tell me you were coming?" Hirsh inquired, flushed with emotion.

"We wanted to surprise you," Robert said.

Hirsh's brother served as translator for all of the small talk. His doctor son brought his family from Beer Sheva, and his daughter Rivki made the long drive from the Golan Heights with her family to join in the family *simcha*. During a break in the dancing, Kevin asked his overwhelmed father how everything was going.

"Super," his father replied, truly enjoying the party. "Everything is super. Everyone is very nice. But tell me – do I have a Hebrew name? I don't remember."

"Tzvi."

It sounded familiar. "How do you know?"

“That’s what it says on your *Ketubah*. Remember, I asked you to send it to me.”

The only reason that he had a *Ketubah* was because the grandparents of his first wife had insisted they have an official Jewish wedding. When Kevin said he needed to have the Jewish marriage document sent to him in Israel for administrative matters with his making *Aliyah*, Hirsh had asked Gloria to send it to the boy. It was Gloria who insisted that Kevin have an official bar mitzvah when he became thirteen. To Hirsh, it hadn’t been important, and indeed the expensive affair had little Jewish content, a few Hebrew blessings by a Reform rabbi, who was more like a talk-show host compared to the charismatic spiritual figure whom Kevin had chosen to be his Rabbi in Israel, Rabbi Aharon Blass, the head of his yeshiva, who arrived at Sarah’s home in Ashkelon in time for the festive meal.

All of the students hurried to greet the holy-looking Torah scholar when word came that he had arrived. Dancing around him and singing, they escorted him to the house, where he greeted Kevin and Sarah’s father with a bow of respect. Though he stood in a humble, stooped-over manner, he gave Hirsh a handshake as granite-like as Mount Sinai. His full white beard seemed to shine. His eyes were strikingly serious and smiling at once. He acted in a cordial, down-to-earth manner, but the air of Torah scholarship and holiness which surrounded him set him apart from the people around him. Somehow, Hirsh recalled that the countenance of Moses had shone after his protracted sojourn on the mountain talking to God. Awe by his holy appearance, the people kept their distance. Extending a smiling, “*Mazel tov*,” to Hirsh, the Rabbi was seated with the honored guest from New York, at the center of a table, between Kevin and Sarah’s father. When he spoke, silence fell over the crowd. He kept his words short, all the time smiling, but speaking with a seriousness that stretched from the Exodus from Egypt to the

Holocaust and the rebirth of the Jewish Nation in Israel, which he called the most important historical event in the chronicles of mankind. Kevin whispered a capsule translation. The engagement in Ashkelon of Avraham and Sarah, was not a private *simcha*, he said. Rather, like the bond between the Avraham and Sarah of old, the father and mother of the Jewish Nation, the engagement and wedding-to-be represented another foundation stone in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Their union was witness to the prophesied ingathering of the exiles, Rachel's children returning to the Promised Land from the ashes of Auschwitz and the Diaspora of America. Their decision to marry was the *simcha* of the entire Jewish Nation, of *Clal Yisrael*, and he blessed the *Chatan* and the *Kallah*, the groom and the bride, and the happy parents, the families, and friends, and all of the Jewish People the world over that they would all merit to see the coming of *Mashiach* and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, may it be soon. Everyone answered with a resounding, "Amen."

Chapter Eleven

A phone call awakened Steven Hirsh at seven in the morning. He picked up the I-phone on the night table by the bed. It was Robert.

"Don't get alarmed," he said. "Last night, Kevin was arrested."

"Arrested?" Hirsh said, sitting up in bed. He shook his head to shake off a feeling of heavy drowsiness. He was exhausted from jet lag and the intensity of the past few days. "Arrested by who?"

"By the Israeli police."

“What the hell for?”

“They want to interrogate him about the arson in the Arab village where an infant was killed. I know it sounds scary, but don’t get upset.”

“Kevin?” Hirsh asked, wondering if he were dreaming. “The police think that Kevin is involved in the killing?”

“They arrested a lot of kids,” Robert explained in his cool doctor voice.

“In my opinion, the Israeli Secret Service is just searching for information, hoping that one of the youngsters will break under interrogation.”

“It’s preposterous,” Hirsh declared. “Kevin was with me, here at the hotel on the night of the arson.”

Then he remembered. It was the night he had arrived in Israel. Kevin had been out most of the evening. He returned to the hotel around four or five in the morning. Hirsh had woken from sleep at three o’clock to go to the bathroom and his son still hadn’t returned. He said he had been with Sarah, in a park, talking about the upcoming wedding. There it was. The boy had an alibi. Sarah could testify that Kevin had been with her.

“Get some breakfast,” his brother said. “I’ll make some phone calls and see what I can learn. I’ll call you back.”

“How did you find out?” Hirsh asked him.

“A lawyer called me.”

“Kevin has a lawyer?”

“Not his own personal lawyer. There’s an organization that deals with these type of cases. Often, people who live in the settlements are accused of involved in what’s called ‘nationalistic crimes,’ meaning illegal actions against Arabs. It isn’t the first time this kind of thing has

happened. Usually the suspects are released within a week. Sometimes it takes longer to free them. It depends on political factors and the scope of the investigation. More often than not, the detainees are sent home without any charges against them. I'll explain it all later."

"A week of interrogation?" Hirsh asked in concern, though he was relieved to learn that a lawyer was already involved. "Where is he now?"

"I don't know where they are holding them," Robert answered. "I'll find out and call you back. If I can, I will try to find someone to pinch hit for me this morning so I can come to Jerusalem. I'll let you know."

Robert ended the conversation. Hirsh was stunned. He recalled the article in *The Jerusalem Post* about the arson in the Arab village and the death of an infant, which the report termed an act of revenge in response to the terrorist attacks carried out by Arabs the preceding morning. All signs pointed to the group of radical Jewish youngsters, whom, the newspaper noted, had carried out similar acts of revenge in the past.

"Holy Moses," Hirsh exclaimed out loud.

Chapter Twelve

After the engagement party in Ashkelon, Robert had driven Hirsh back to Jerusalem. Sarah stayed with her parents to help clean up after the bash. Kevin drove to Neve Pincus with his friends, telling his father that he would meet him the next day in Jerusalem. During the night, the police raided the makeshift dormitory of the yeshiva where Kevin was

living. Nine students were arrested, including Kevin Avraham Hirsh. They were herded into a police bus and driven to Shin Bet headquarters in the Shomron, in the basement of the modern police station in the city of Ariel. Since the arrests had taken place in the middle of the night, when Hirsh looked at *The Jerusalem Post* in the morning, the front page only ran a capsule summary of the breaking development in the Al-Aduma village arson and murder case. Robert called back while Hirsh was eating breakfast. Knowing that his brother would want to speak with a lawyer, he had arranged a meeting at the office of the “Tzedek Tzedek” Civil Rights Organization, whose team of dedicated attorneys specialized in helping Israeli soldiers and settlers who found themselves in legal trouble involving the Arab populace. Robert told his brother to take a taxi to an address in the center of town, where one of the lawyers, Leah Degan, would be waiting to talk with him, free of charge, in line with the volunteer nature of the non-profit operation. Robert said the group had been established in response to increasing arrests of soldiers and settlers, very often on baseless charges, for political reasons. “For example, this is an election year. The Prime Minister wants to attract more voters from what’s called the political Center, a large camp of voters between the Left and the Right. By getting tough with the settlers, he can prove to them that he isn’t in their pocket and thus attract votes from the moderates.” There were other factors as well, Robert said, but he didn’t have time to explain. “Leah?” Hirsh asked. For some reason, he didn’t like the idea of a female lawyer. Could it be that beneath his liberal exterior, he was a chauvinist at heart? Could it be that a woman lawyer was great for any ordinary client, but he wanted a man for his son? Now that he thought about it for that fraction of an instant, he noted that over the past decade, he had only hired one female attorney for his firm, and she had

quit the job after a short term of work, not because he had gotten fresh with her – he hadn't. Strange.

"Leah is a top attorney," Robert replied. "She specializes in this type of thing. She and my wife are good friends."

"I want the best lawyer in the country," Hirsh insisted. "Not someone for free."

"Big-name Israeli lawyers won't do us any good. They don't handle these type of cases. They'd have to learn the *Alef Bet* of *matzarim minahaliim*."

"Of what?"

"It's called 'administrative detention' – something that belongs in a Kafka novel. Leah will explain it to you. Trust me, brother. She's the best person for this type of thing. Twenty years ago, when she was pregnant, her husband of less than a year was murdered by an Arab terrorist. As a young, single mother, Leah worked her way through law school and dedicated herself to putting, and keeping, terrorists in jail. She's a tiger. And she cares for her clients. For her, law is more than a job. Listen, I'll speak with you later. I have to see a patient."

"Uh oh," was the first thought that popped into Hirsh's mind when he met the shapely civil rights lawyer. Immediately, he was attracted to her with the type of magnetic pull that he had never been able to overcome in the past. She looked to be about forty-five years old, which put her comfortably in his range. She glanced up at him from over her glasses while she talked on the phone. The moment their eyes met, he knew that he would make a pass at her. For her part, her eyebrows didn't even blink when she saw him. Motioning him to enter her office, she continued on with the phone conversation in rapid-fire Hebrew. She was wearing a billowy long-sleeve white blouse that

covered her curves. Her hair was long and brown, without being stuffed under a bandana like religious women wore. Her features looked Mediterranean. Her eyes dark brown. True, she was a lawyer, a professional woman, and probably the last thing on her mind was having an affair with the worried-looking client who sat down in the chair on the other side of her desk. In contrast, Hirsh was a man, an American male, a man who lived in the world of celebrities, where a man was a hunter, and a woman was prey in a game that was more popular than baseball and football combined. As sad as it might be, even though Hirsh's son was sitting somewhere in an Israeli Secret Service interrogation room on suspicion of being involved in a murder, even so, Hirsh couldn't keep himself from admiring her attractiveness. Half-scolding himself, he resolved to push the thought out of his mind and concentrate on the business at hand. If filmed with a camera, the encounter would have looked like two mature and professional adults engaged in a very focused and business-like conversation, but in a corner of his mind, the notion bit him now and again like an annoying mosquito.

"Excuse me," she said, when she ended the phone call.

"I know how it is," he replied politely.

"That's right. Your brother mentioned that you are an attorney."

When she swerved a bit in her swivel chair, Hirsh was able to make out her figure. Catching himself, and inwardly ashamed of his inappropriate and puerile reactions, he made up his mind to put all distracting thoughts out of his mind.

"He's a big fan of yours," Hirsh told her, thinking it might flatter her.

"He speaks of you highly."

"Your brother is a *Tzaddik*. He speaks highly of everyone."

A small smile appeared on her face and vanished. She was all business, like a lot of professional women he knew. Often, they tried to project an air of toughness, like a man, as if femininity was a weakness in a world governed by males. Hirsh was familiar with her type. Interestingly, once you broke through the ice, these female tigers often turned into playful kittens.

“What kind of law do you practice?” she asked. Hirsh noticed that she spoke English fluently, with a slight foreign-sounding accent.

“Mostly entertainment law,” he replied.

“Contracts,” she said plainly, as if it was something mundane. Hirsh felt a bit piqued. But maybe, he thought, he was overreacting to an insinuation she hadn’t intended at all.

The worried father let out one of his small, half-nervous chuckles.

“Contracts, lawsuits, libel and character defamation. Copyright infringements, and artist’s rights. We do some criminal work as well,” he answered, as if in defense. “Not long ago, we successfully defended a famous football player who was accused of killing his wife.”

“Did he commit the crime?” she asked.

“Probably,” Hirsh answered candidly.

“I probably wouldn’t have taken on the case,” she said.

“Don’t you think that everyone is entitled to a defense?”

“In theory, but I set limits for myself.”

Hirsh wondered if she were speaking just about law, or if she set limits on other things as well. Apparently, she had never remarried after the murder of her husband, but that was none of his business, so he put the opening pleasantries aside and asked about his Kevin.

“Where are they holding my son?”

“In the *Shabak* facility in Petach Tikvah,” she answered. “After the youngsters were arrested, they were taken to the police station in Ariel, in the Shomron. First thing in the morning, they were brought before a judge in Petach Tikvah, to receive permission to detain them for an extended interrogation, in line with the law, though, in national matters, it is a rubber stamp performance. Judges almost never interfere with the *Shabak* in the early stages of an arrest and investigation.”

Hirsh had already learned that *Shabak* stood for *Sherut Bitachon Clalli*, meaning General Security Services, also known as the *Shin Bet*, the first two Hebrew initials of *Sherut Bitachon*. It was something like the F.B.I. in America, or the United States Secret Service. Israel also had an international security service called the *Mossad*, which paralleled the CIA. Not knowing anything about law in Israel, Hirsh felt like a non-swimmer floundering in deep water. He would have to rely on the woman at the other side of the desk.

“What are they charged with?” Hirsh asked.

“They don’t have to be charged. All the *Shabak* has to say is that the suspects represent a threat to national security.”

“They haven’t been charged with a crime?”

“Not at this point in the investigation.”

“What do the police suspect?”

“In cases like these, while the police are the ones who take suspects into custody, the General Secret Services give the orders. The *Shabak* endeavors to conduct its activities in a secret fashion. In addition, the police requested a gag order on the roundup of the suspects, including

the whereabouts of the detainees, and the court agreed, as it usually does when the *Shabak* is involved. Nonetheless, we have people in the police department who help us, and who are working on getting us all the information they can. Apparently the *Shabak* wants to connect the young people with the arson and resulting murder of the infant in the Arab village of Al-Aduma, after the three recent terrorist attacks in and by Efrat.”

“If it is a matter of paying money to get information, I will be happy to help,” Hirsh volunteered.

“At this point money won’t help, Mr. Hirsh,” the civil rights attorney said in her very business-like, and, to Hirsh, somewhat condescending fashion. “Perhaps, in a few days, to help our people find out what happened that night in the village, money may play a role. We have called for a press conference in another two hours, like we normally do in these cases, in order to create whatever pressure we can on the *Shabak* and the courts, and in the political arena.”

“Let me speak to the press,” Hirsh suggested. “Maybe if I tell them how preposterous all of this is, as an attorney from America, they will let my son go.”

“At this stage of the investigation, I am not sure it would carry much weight, but I will ask the advice of my colleagues.”

“I don’t mean to pat myself on the back, but I have some very influential friends in the United States.”

“Once again, I appreciate your concern and your desire to help, Mr. Hirsh. Nonetheless, America is America, and Israel is Israel. Our legal system is not quite the same as yours.”

Hirsh had a keen sense of evaluating a person’s weaknesses and strengths. For example, more often than not, he could tell when a client

was lying. Obviously, the woman across the desk enjoyed being in control. After all, this was her office, she was the attorney on the case, and he had come to her for her expertise and assistance. He understood all that perfectly well, but he wasn't interested in conducting power games. The future of his son was at stake, and he wanted to be an equal partner of the legal team, not a helpless parent who knew nothing about the law.

"Is the President of the United States a big enough name?" he asked her.

For a second or two, she seemed a little off balance. For a moment, at least, the balance of power shifted. In the chessboard of Hirsh's brain, the enemy queen was under attack.

"Perhaps," Mr. Hirsh. "I am glad that you told me. For the moment, let's keep that card in our deck."

That's better, Hirsh thought. At least the word, "our," included him.

"Excuse me for my ignorance, Mrs...."

"Degan."

"Mrs. Degan."

"Since you are Robert's brother, I suppose you can call me Leah. Did you know that Laura and I are good friends?"

"Really?" Hirsh flashed one of his big, client-winning grins. "In that case, you can call me Steven."

"Would you like a cup of coffee, or a glass of water, or some Coke?" she asked cordially, still holding on to her formal business posture.

"A glass of water would be welcome. I've been told to drink a lot of water in Israel." Out came a chuckle, like a tick.

Leah stood up from the desk and walked a short way to a small table clustered with plastic cups, bottles of water and Coke, and a box of cookies. She was tall for a woman, Hirsh's height, thin with womanly hips. She wore the type of long skirt that Sarah wore. For some strange reason, Hirsh wondered if she could play tennis and thought for a moment about Cindy.

"To be frank with you," Hirsh said, as she poured water into a cup. "I am like a greenhorn immigrant in America who just got off the boat from Europe. I have no idea how the law works in Israel. My brother mentioned something called, *mazrim minimally*, or something that sounds like that."

"*Matzarim minhaliim*," she corrected. When she set the cup on the desk close to Hirsh, he noticed that she wasn't wearing a wedding ring on any of her fingers. Sitting back down at her chair, she resumed her cool, lawyer-client posture. "The phrase means 'administrative detention' or 'administrative arrest.' It was established in the Land of Israel by the Turks, when they ruled here, and afterward continued by the British. Basically, it gives the authorities the right, in the interest of the State, to arrest an individual and keep him or her imprisoned, for an indefinite length of time, for no stated reason or cause, without pressing charges or bringing the person to trial, or allowing him the right of counsel, or to meet family, or with any representative of the outside world. In administrative detention, a person can be held without trial, without having committed an offense, on the grounds that he or she plans to break the law in the future. The person is detained without legal proceedings, by order of the regional military commander, based on classified evidence that is not revealed to the suspect. This leaves the detainees helpless – facing unknown allegations with no way to disprove them, not knowing when they will be released, and without being charged, tried or convicted. Though

torture is generally prohibited in Israel, except in cases where there is an immediate threat to the community, like when an act of terror is known to be in the planning and execution stages, many cases of torture have been reported during the investigation of suspects, in non-emergency situations as well. While the General Security Services traditionally employed administrative detention against Arabs, in the fight against terror, when acts of revenge by Jews against Arabs became more frequent, a Jewish Anti-Terror Department was created within the *Shin Bet* to crush the phenomenon. When the Stalin-like policies of administration detention became excessively used, often against Jews who were innocent of any crime, our organization was established in order to defend the rights of suspects. We do not always succeed, but our presence and pressure has often worked to shorten periods of imprisonment and set innocent people free without charges being filed. We campaign against the use of torture without justified reason, strive to lessen whatever criminal charges are eventually filed, and we represent defendants who are brought to trial.”

“That sounds horrendous,” Hirsh said. “I thought Israel was a democratic State.”

“It is. Administrative detention is an exception to the rule. While it is easy to condemn it, in many many cases, it has enabled Israel to save Jewish lives by preventing imminent terror attacks by Arabs, what are called, ‘ticking bombs,’ putting would-be killers behind bars before they can carry out their plans. That is the reason it has not been erased from the books. It helps Israel survive in a very complex environment of ongoing terror and war.”

“And the nefarious Jewish Anti-Terror Department, is that democratic as well? It doesn’t sound like it to me.”

“It’s a big problem,” she admitted. “Unfortunately, there are forces in our country that work against the country itself. That is to say, there is a secular elite who seek to impose its Weltanschauung over the State of Israel, a holdover from the early days of the State when the secular Zionists, who were enamored with socialist and communist ideology, controlled the government. Their adherents have metamorphosed into a liberal, pluralistic cult who seek to transform the Jewish State into a country like any other, like a Switzerland in the Middle East, with no real connection to Judaism or Jewish culture and tradition, and with no connection to the original aspirations of the Nation of Israel, as set forth by the Prophets of Israel of old. In a sense, they operate as a State within the State. Their tentacles have a hold on the courts, the army, the media, the world of academics, the Shabak, to name just a few.”

“I am afraid that you’ve lost me,” Hirsh told her.

“I’m sorry. Once and a while, I lecture about the subject, but, you’re right, it does require a basic background knowledge of the country and its history. Suffice it to say, in very simple terms, that just as you have a struggle between the liberals and conservatives in America, we have a similar struggle here in Israel.”

“I don’t understand what it has to do with my son and the people who live in the settlements.”

“The people who live in the settlements, whom the media portrays as Biblical fanatics, tend to believe that Israel should remain a Jewish State, and not an anamorphous, multi-cultured mishmash of the people who live here, whether they be Arabs, Christians, Druse, refugees from Sudan, or Jews. A good many of the settlers, like the ultra-religious, want Jewish Law, not civil law, to be the law of the State. They want Jews to rule over all of the land and not give large chunks of it away to the Arabs. Because of their fervent Jewish beliefs, the secular elite

views them as enemies, no different from Arab terrorists, for whom they often have more sympathy. If they are enemies of the liberal, pluralistic, non-Zionist and non-Jewish State they wish to create, then a special department of the General Security Services is needed to deal with them. Is that explanation any clearer?”

“I’d be interested to learn more,” Hirsh answered, impressed with her mind. “But, frankly, for the moment, I am more concerned about my son.”

“Of course.”

“Is there a chance that he will be tortured?”

“There’s a chance.”

“And there is nothing we can do about it?”

The civil rights lawyer sadly shook her head.

“What kind of torture?” Hirsh asked.

“To name a few: not letting suspects sleep; verbal abuse; not letting them go to the bathroom; hanging suspects upside down during interrogations; moderate physical beatings which don’t leave a mark. All in all, God forbid, it can be a very psychologically damaging experience.”

“I can’t believe it,” Hirsh said with another nervous chuckle and a twitch, which made him think of Craig Lane. “We have to do something,” he pleaded. “My son is innocent. He didn’t do anything. He has an alibi. He was with his fiancé all that night. She can testify in his behalf.”

The lawyer straightened in her chair. Her eyes became alert. “That’s an important piece of information. I’d like to speak with her as soon as possible,” she said.

“Of course,” Hirsh told her. “Of course.”

Chapter Thirteen

Outside Shin Bet Headquarters in Petach Tivka, a hundred people had gathered to protest the arrests connected to the arson and killing that had been perpetrated in the Arab village of Al-Aduma near Efrat. Most of the demonstrators were young hilltop settlers, and the parents and families of the detained suspects, who were not allowed visits from their wives, parents, or lawyers. Amongst them, and probably the most vocal, were rightest activists who held up posters in Hebrew, reading, “Police State” and “Kahane was Right.” A battery of newsmen filmed and photographed Leah Degan as she presented the arguments of the civil rights organization, which had called for the press conference outside the jail where the “political prisoners”, as she called them, were incarcerated. Kevin’s frustrated father didn’t understand her Hebrew. After answering questions from the reporters, the very attractive and charismatic attorney introduced Sarah, who stated that she had been with Kevin in Jerusalem on the night of the arson. When the young, freshly-engaged girl broke into tears, all of the photographers and film crews pushed forward to get better angles. Predictably, the heart-broken girl was the star of the show. After she answered a few questions about Kevin, her parents escorted her away from the mob. Then the photogenic lawyer returned to the forest of microphones and addressed her remarks in English to the foreign journalists who had gathered from all over the world.

“The days of Stalin and the KGB are over,” she said. “We have gathered here, outside of the Petach Tikva Headquarters of the Israel Secret Services, where the civil rights of a group of teenagers is being brutally trampled, and where they have been incarcerated without any charges brought against them, without access to legal counsel, without being brought before a judge, in clear violation of their civil rights, all for clearly political purposes. We demand their immediate release. In the past, teenagers have been arrested by Israel’s Secret Service, imprisoned for weeks without being allowed to speak with lawyers or family, and even tortured. We call upon the justice system in Israel, the Knesset, and the Prime Minister, to put an end to this reign of judicial terror which reminds us of the ugliest days of anti-Semitism which Jews suffered under totalitarian regimes, when Jews were stripped of all rights and freedoms.”

In the middle of her statement, a group of the hilltop teenagers pushed down barricades, rushed forward and ran toward the entrance to the building housing the Israel Secret Service Headquarters. Immediately, a small force of policemen raced forward and started to grab them, shove them to the ground, and beat them with clubs. The other demonstrators voiced a roar of protest. When a group ran forward to help their beleaguered comrades, Hirsh spontaneously joined them, fed up with being a passive spectator while his son was in jail. As he headed toward the building, a water truck opened fire with its cannon, knocking protestors off their feet with its powerful spray. Hirsh found himself drenched and sitting in a puddle on the street. Cameramen didn’t know where to point their cameras first. Teenagers were arrested and hauled off into the building. A bullhorn shouted out orders. A police helicopter appeared in the sky. The wet crowd of demonstrations retreated toward the other side of the avenue. Hirsh hobbled along with them. Sarah and her parents came forward to help

him. Her father grabbed his hand. A broad smile lit Leah's face as she watched the uproar. "Great TV," she thought, knowing that the uproar would dominate the evening news. Great publicity for the cause. In addition, the spontaneous civil disturbance was the best way to put pressure on the *Shabak* and the courts. The political echelon would have to react. If the Prime Minister backed the *Shabak* and the police, he would lose voters on the political Right, and if he criticized the authorities, the Left would lynch him in the media, pasting him with digital tar and feathers.

"Welcome to Israel," she greeted Hirsh with a broad grin.

"I want to speak with the media," he told her.

"Your turn will come," she assured him.

"I want to speak with them now!" he barked, feeling uncomfortably out of control.

"Trust us, Mr. Hirsh," she said. "We've faced this situation before. I know it isn't easy for you. It isn't easy for the any of the parents here. You just have to trust us, and things will be all right."

Before he could answer, reporters clustered about her, shoving him out of their way. Tossing her hair back like an actress in a movie, she answered a question.

"What the hell was she waiting for?" Hirsh wondered, feeling that he should be the one speaking to the cameras, not her.

Chapter Fourteen

In the distance, the Old City wall seemed to glow in the Jerusalem darkness. Hirsh sat on the terrace of the King David Hotel, dining with Israel's most famous living writer, Daniel Kaplan, whom Hirsh represented in New York. While the soft-spoken and serious novelist didn't approach the law firm's other writers in sales, he had a respectable following. Even though Hirsh wasn't familiar with the ins-and-outs of Israeli politics, he knew that Kaplan was the darling of the intellectual elite – whom Kevin called, “screaming, liberal, anti-Jewish Leftists.”

“If you expect me to help you with your son, I am very sorry, but there is no way that I can,” the international, award-winning author said after Hirsh had explained Kevin's problematic legal quagmire. “While I hope that your son turns out to be innocent of all involvement in this atrocious murder, in my opinion, these teenage savages are a cancer in Israeli society, the gravest danger to the country since Netanyahu became Prime Minister following the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by another one of these megalomaniacal religious zealots. In my opinion, they, and their madmen Rabbis who interpret every word of the Torah as literal law, are the modern reincarnation of Shabbatai Zvi.”

“My son isn't like that at all,” Hirsh assured him.

“As I said, I certainly hope not. But for me to speak out in his defense while he is being interrogated by the *Shin Bet* would be as out of character as Superman robbing a bank.”

Hirsh let out a little chuckle. “I understand,” he said.

“It isn't my reputation that I am worried about,” the novelist said. “It is the principle of the matter. Whether your son was involved or not in the despicable crime, just the fact that he lives on the same hilltop with a cult of messianic teenage lunatics, on land which clearly belongs to the

Arabs, on Palestinian territory which Israel illegally occupied at the end of the Six-Day War, and whose indigenous population we have been oppressing ever since, this fact alone makes him an enemy of the Jewish People and an obstacle to peace. I hope you understand.”

“To tell you the truth, I am not up to date on Mideast affairs, nor has the subject ever attracted my attention in any meaningful way. At the moment, I am merely a distraught father who wants to help his son.”

“Of course,” the writer said with a small smile. “I wish you good luck, but I strongly recommend that you do whatever you can to distance your son from this group.” A glow of animosity spread over the writer’s face. “These messianic Jewish terrorists have committed serious attacks in the past out of a radical and distorted Zionist ideology. They believe the State of Israel has no right to exist in its present form. Their main objective is to bring about a government ruled by Torah law. Fortunately, they are few in number. Otherwise, I am convinced that they would launch an underground rebellion in order to appoint a religious king, who would, of course, expel all non-Jews from the country. Needless to say, a horror like this would totally undermine Israel's ties with other countries, leaving us completely alone in the world. My hope is that I will be dead and gone by then.”

“It sounds like a fanciful story for another novel,” Hirsh quipped. Realizing that he was wasting his time with the writer, as far as helping Kevin was concerned, Hirsh ended their meeting before dessert, claiming that he had to make a number of phone calls to New York, which he immediately did when he returned to his suite. To his surprise, his secretary, Roger, informed him that Craig Lane was on his way to Israel. Out of cash, the down-and-out actor had asked Roger to book him a flight, saying that he had to urgently meet with Hirsh, claiming that he was about to shoot out his brains with the revolver he kept in the dresser near his bed. Not wanting to take any chances,

Roger had booked him on a midnight departure from Kennedy Airport, which meant he would arrive in Israel the following afternoon.

Oh crap,” Hirsh responded. “He must be drunk out his mind, from morning till night.”

“He sounded a bit off the handle,” Roger agreed.

Before Hirsh could begin to think what he was going to do with the depressed and manic actor on his hands, his cellphone rang. It was Leah Degan. She wanted him to come immediately to the district court in Jerusalem. Kevin had lost consciousness in jail. The police had taken him to a hospital in Tel Aviv. Under the circumstances, there was a chance that a judge might allow the youth’s father to visit him in the hospital. But they had to act fast before the police returned him to Petach Tikvah, she said.

Immediately, Hirsh took a taxi to the court building in the downtown area of the city, adjacent to the Jerusalem City Hall. A security guard requested to see his passport. He explained why he was there and was allowed immediate entry into the large building which the British had built during England’s mandate over Palestine. After emptying the contents of his pockets into a small plastic container, he passed through the metal detector. Two security personnel watched his movements in an unconcerned manner. One pointed his hand in the direction of a long arched corridor. “Room 132,” he said. At that hour of the evening, the building seemed empty. His footsteps echoed in the hallway. Leah was waiting. She sat on a bench, talking on the telephone. Seeing him, she pulled her legs closer to the bench and stood up.

“How is Kevin?” was Hirsh’s first question.

“I’m not sure,” Leah responded.

“Was he tortured?”

“I don’t know.”

Frustrated and angered, Hirsh curled his hands into fists.

“The judge is waiting for you,” she informed him. “I filled out all the needed paperwork. It shouldn’t take more than a minute.”

Hirsh chuckled nervously. “You’ll translate for me?” he asked, feeling totally out of control, in a strange country, where people spoke a strange language, standing in an old stone-arched corridor that looked like a dungeon from the time of the Turks.

“You can speak in English. The judge is American.”

It was a small room. The black-robed, middle-aged judge sat on the type of raised wooden platform you found in most courtrooms. He sported a neatly trimmed beard and wore a kippah. A stenographer sat beside him. “Mr. Hirsh?” he asked, looking up from a file.

“Yes, your Honor,” Hirsh answered.

“It is a pleasure to meet you,” he said with an unexpected smile.

“Thank you, your Honor,” Hirsh responded, feeling more at ease.

“I regret that your visit to Israel has taken an unpleasant turn. And may you be comforted for the loss of your wife.”

“Thank you, your Honor,” Hirsh replied once again, glad to learn that someone in Israel read the world news.

“You request the court’s permission to visit your son in the hospital, is that right?”

“That’s correct, your Honor.”

“Granted. I will have the order prepared. You can wait outside for a minute or two while we type it up.”

“Thank you, your Honor.”

Leah smiled.

“Tell me,” the judge continued. “Can we expect a new Craig Lane movie in the near future?”

Hopefully,” Hirsh answered, a bit surprised. “In fact, he’s on his way to Israel now for a visit.”

“Really? He’s planning to make a movie in Israel?”

“It could very well be.”

“How nice. My wife is a great fan of his.”

“Perhaps I can arrange a meeting while he is here,” Hirsh suggested, suddenly realizing the star’s unexpected visit to Israel might turn out to Kevin’s advantage.

“That is very kind of you, but as a judge, I have to be very careful not to mix business with pleasure.”

“Of course,” Hirsh replied.

“And you should know,” the judge added as Hirsh and Leah turned toward the door. “You have one of the best defense attorneys in the country.”

Leah blushed at the compliment. While it was reassuring to hear, Hirsh wasn’t about to hand out a high grade as long as his son was still in jail. The civil rights attorney might be the most attractive in the country, Hirsh was prepared to grant her that, but he still wasn’t convinced that she was the best criminal lawyer to be found.

They drove in Leah’s Audi. While Hirsh noticed the 120 kilometers-per-hour speed limit signs along the wide Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway, his driver apparently didn’t. The speedometer hovered at 140. Sensing his

uneasiness, she informed him that the police looked the other way at night when the roadway was relatively empty.

“For your information, the judge would have granted our request even if you didn’t represent famous actors. He’s a commendable individual. He goes by the books without allowing political factors to influence his decisions. If anything, his sentiments lie on the Right side of the spectrum. He’s a settler himself. He lives in Neve Daniel, down the road from Efrat. We were lucky that he was the presiding judge on duty. Some other judge could have rejected our request.”

“Do you know why my son lost consciousness? Was he tortured?” he asked once again?

“It could be. I don’t know.”

“How did you learn he’s in the hospital?”

“We have people who sympathize with our cause,” she replied in a tone that indicated she didn’t want to disclose further details. “In the courtroom, the judge expressed his condolences. Your wife pass away recently?”

“Yes. About a week ago.”

“Then you’re still in mourning. I’m so sorry.”

Mourning? For Cindy? Maybe for her youth and her beauty. But not for Cindy herself, he silently mused.

“We were in the process of getting divorced,” he informed her. “We’ve lived separately for several years.”

“She was Kevin’s mother?”

“No. I divorced Kevin’s mother fifteen years ago. I remarried with a woman who turned out to be crazy. That lasted a year. Cindy was my third wife.”

Leah nodded her head without responding, keeping her eyes on the highway.

“What about you?” Hirsh asked. “My brother told me that your husband was killed by a terrorist not long after your marriage.”

“Yes. He was. Twenty years ago. I was pregnant at the time.”

“You never remarried?”

“No. Please excuse me,” she said. “I have to make a phone call.”

Her phone was clipped onto a plastic stand just to the side of the steering wheel. Her watched as she punched in a number code. Obviously, she didn’t like speaking about her past. When a voice answered the ringing, she spoke in rapid-fire Hebrew. Hirsh didn’t understand a word.

“That was one of my colleagues,” she told him when the phone conversation ended. “One of the teenagers in custody confessed to having been in the area of the Arab village a week before the arson attack. He said that for some time previous to the attack, plans were formulated to carry out revenge attacks in the area, but nothing was decided upon and no actions were taken as a result of their meetings. So far, he refuses to provide his interrogators with the names of his friends who participated in the discussions.”

“Maybe he was tortured,” Hirsch said. “Maybe he said what he said under duress.”

“It’s possible. We won’t know until we are able to speak with the detainees.”

“How was your husband murdered?” Hirsh asked.

“He was shot while driving home after work.”

“He was alone in the car?”

“There was a hitchhiker with him.”

“Was the terrorist caught?”

“Yes. The Shabak discovered where he was hiding. He was sentenced to life in prison, but in a prisoner exchange, he was released and sent out of the country.”

“Where is he now?”

“I’m no longer interested in knowing,” she said. “For a while he was reported to be in Beirut. I stopped keeping track. I wasn’t going to sneak into Lebanon and kill him, so why continue to dwell on an injustice I couldn’t correct?”

“So you decided to become a lawyer instead.”

“Yes.”

“It must have been difficult with a baby.”

“I’d rather not talk about it, Mr. Hirsh. Not now. Maybe some other time.”

She withdrew into silence. Hirsh remained quiet too. They drove by the airport to the right of the highway. It seemed that a year had passed since his arrival. The phone rang, and once again, the civil-rights lawyer spoke in undecipherable Hebrew. This time, the call lasted ten minutes. The car veered right at an exit sign reading Haifa in English. In another few minutes, they reached the Sheba Medical Center. Two policemen were stationed outside the entrance to the Intensive Care Unit. Leah handed one of them the court order. He looked at it, handed it to his

buddy, and put in a call to his superior. His head nodded up and down as he listened. For a long interval there was silence at the other end of the line. Hirsh and Leah waited in anticipation. Then the cop nodded again and turned toward the woman lawyer.

“You’re the attorney, Degan?” he asked.

“That’s correct,” she replied.

“All right, but only the father.”

Leah smiled at Hirsh and nodded. He followed the cop into the intensive care unit. Another policeman stood at the nurse’s station, reading a newspaper. The steady beeping of monitors, and the breathing sounds of respirators, filled the large room. Seeing Kevin awake on a bed, Hirsh strode toward the boy. He was dressed in hospital pajamas with his large skullcap, like a bandage on his head.

“Dad!” he exclaimed, happy to see his father.

Kevin was sitting up, resting on the pillows behind his back. His arm was hooked up to a slim tube leading up to a plastic pouch bulging with some type of liquid solution. There were no marks on his face, Hirsh noted. When he bent down to embrace him, the youth immediately stiffened as if his father had touched a painful wound. Hirsh straightened.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “How are you?”

“I guess I’m OK,” the boy responded. “They’re still doing tests, but I feel a lot better now.”

“What hurts? What did they do to you?”

Kevin glanced at the two cops who stood at the end of the bed.

“We’d like to be alone,” Hirsh told them.

“Impossible,” one of them answered in his rudimentary English.

“I was interrogated and tortured,” the boy said.

“Tortured?” Hirsh asked, feeling dizzy. “How?”

“They screamed at me and wouldn’t let me sleep. Then they hung me upside down. When I wouldn’t answer their questions, they finally took me down.”

Hirsh felt himself swoon. An alert nurse standing nearby quickly dragged a chair over to the bed. She guided Hirsh as he collapsed. He felt his body trembling. The nurse held a comforting hand on his shoulder.

“Are you all right?” she asked in Hebrew.

“He doesn’t speak Hebrew,” Kevin said. “Maybe bring him some water.” Then turning to his father, he said, “I’m OK, Dad. Don’t worry.”

“Don’t worry,” Hirsh replied. “My son is arrested in a strange country on the suspicion of murder, whisked off to some secret underground prison, denied legal counsel, interrogated and tortured until he has to be rushed to a hospital, and you tell me not to worry.”

“It could be worse. At least the police and torturers are Jewish. After being persecuted for 2000 years by the *goyim*, today we have our own Jewish police and prisons. We can thank God for that.”

Hirsh didn’t know whether to chuckle or cry. His son wasn’t normal, that was for sure. What the hell was he mumbling about? What did it matter whether the police were Jews or Gentiles? Torture was torture.

“What else?” he asked the youth in amazement.

“They tied my feet together, and tied my hands behind my back, and made me sit in a chair, forcing me to lean forward till it felt like my

stomach would burst. It doesn't leave marks," Kevin explained. "At some time in the interrogation, I managed to flip the chair backwards but my head hit the floor. I must have passed out. When I got here, they did an EEG test, which the doctor said was OK. Then they wheeled me to the CT Unit to x-ray my brain. I guess they are still waiting for the results. But I feel much better now. I just have a headache. They offered to give me an aspirin, but I refused to take it. Who knows what it might be spiked with? Anyway – you don't have to worry. I'm innocent. I didn't do anything against the law. They are just using scare tactics, that's all."

"What about your friends?"

"I don't know. They put us all in separate cells. But they're all innocent too. I already told you. It's a political witch hunt. I didn't volunteer any information, and neither will my friends. Without doubt, the Arabs committed the arson in the course of one of their clan quarrels. The Hellenists in the *Shabak*, and the Machiavellian sect who really runs this country, are trying to pin the blame on the Jews, that's all, in order to shatter the spirit of the settlers, believing that their use of political terror can overpower the truth of the Torah – all in the name of democracy."

"Time's up," a policeman said.

"What are you talking about?" Hirsh asked in irritation.

"Five minutes, that's it."

"That's not what it said in the court order," Hirsh protested.

"The court order didn't say anything about time. Your son is being held in administrative detention. Family visits are limited to five minutes, if at all. That's the law."

“Where is torture permitted in the law?” Hirsh demanded to know.

“It’s permitted in special cases,” another cop said. “Ask your lawyer. She’ll tell you. Let’s go.”

Holding Hirsh by his elbow, the police officer gave his arm a lift. Hirsh stood up from the chair. He bent down and kissed his son on the forehead. “Be strong,” he told him. “I’m going to do everything I can to get you out of this mess, don’t worry.”

“I’m not worried, Dad. *‘Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I fear no evil.’* Tell Sarah that I love her and that I’m feeling fine. I’ll be home in no time, don’t worry.”

“I’m not leaving the hospital until I hear from your doctor that the CAT scan is clean,” he told Kevin. “I’ll be waiting outside in the corridor. Tell the doctor I want to speak with him when he has the results.”

“The main thing is that he is feeling alright,” Leah said as they waited in the hospital corridor by a coffee-dispensing machine.

“The world is going to hear about this,” Hirsh promised in anger.

Leah excused herself to make a phone call. Hirsh didn’t have to wait long for the results of the X-ray. A doctor came looking for him with the news that everything was normal. He said he had signed a release order from the hospital.

“Are they going to take him back to jail?” Hirsh asked.

“I don’t know. I’m a doctor, not a policeman.”

On the drive back to Jerusalem, Hirsh’s feelings of frustration and anger grew stronger. “I want to speak with my son’s Rabbi,” he said. “I want to go the Arab village and see for myself what’s going on there. Are the police investigating the people who live in the village, or only the Jews? I’ll hire a private detective. I’m willing to pay a large reward for

information about the real arsonist and killer. I'm tired of cat-and-mouse games. I want action and I want results. I don't give a damn if this is Israel and not America. The law is the law. There are other ways besides torture to discover the truth. Money talks, believe me. There isn't anyone who can't be bought. No one is going to torture my son and get away with it. Not the Pope and not the Prime Minister of this *meshugenah* country. Do you understand?"

Leah didn't answer. Within a minute, Hirsh had fallen fast asleep. His snores filled the car. What a strange character, she thought to herself, answering another phone call.

The exhausted celebrity lawyer slept most of the way back to the King David Hotel. Awakening, he looked around in embarrassment, realizing that they had reached Jerusalem.

"Where are we?" he asked, trying to get his bearings in the darkness.

"Back at your hotel," Leah answered.

She slowed and drove into the palm-lined, circular driveway of the stately hotel.

"Sorry I fell asleep," he apologized.

"I can't blame you," she said. "You must feel totally drained.

"Would you like to come up to my room for a drink?" he asked her bluntly.

"What for?" she asked in surprise.

"To discuss the case," he replied.

"We can discuss the case tomorrow in my office," she answered.

"Tomorrow. I want something done now!"

“For the moment, there is nothing we can do.”

“Then just come with me to my room until I calm down.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Hirsh, I’m very sorry, but I’m religious.”

“What does that have to do with anything?” he asked. “Oh, oh. I’m very sorry, if that’s what you thought,” he said, as if an intimate hour of Middle-Eastern hospitality was the last thing on his mind. “If you prefer, we could have a drink in the hotel bar.”

“I appreciate the offer, but I am acting as your son’s attorney, nothing more.”

Her hands held fast to the steering wheel, as if to make sure that she stayed in the car.

“Religious women aren’t allowed to sit in bar and have a drink with a man?” he questioned her, feeling that, at least for the moment, she was off balance and that he had the upper hand.

“That isn’t the way things are done in Israel,” she answered.

“I’m an American, not an Israeli,” he said.

“Goodnight, Mr. Hirsh,” she said curtly.

“Just a drink. I promise. Hey, I’m old enough to be your father. I guess I’m just in need of a little companionship and a sympathetic ear, that’s all. This has been a trying experience for me. What do you say? One drink in the bar, and we’ll call it a night.”

“I don’t drink.” she said.

“Then a cup of coffee.”

“I don’t drink coffee at night.”

“Then a piece of chocolate cake and a glass of milk,” he said with a chuckle.

“Goodnight, Mr. Hirsh,” she said with a tone of finality. Reaching forward, she dialed a number on her phone.

“OK, OK, sorry if I offended you.”

“Goodnight.”

“Goodnight, Leah,” he said with a small smile, trying to look as forlorn as he could. “I appreciate everything you’re doing. I want you to know that.”

“It’s my job,” she said and began to speak to someone on the phone.

Hirsh got out of the car. He was exhausted. The car screeched away, just like in the movies. Hirsh chuckled. You can’t blame a guy for trying. When he returned to his room, he poured himself a scotch and phoned Roger.

“Please call up my friend, Brad Banks, at the *New York Post*,” he instructed him. “Ask him to get me an interview with their correspondent in Israel, at my hotel, first thing in the morning.”

Chapter Fifteen

“What *chutzpah*,” Leah thought to herself as she drove home to Efrat. Inviting her to come up to his room for a drink! What a silly American. Like a character in a movie. What a weird creature. She tried to laugh it off, but she couldn’t. It bothered her that he had the nerve to even

think about such a ridiculous idea. Was she some Hollywood actress who would jump into bed with a man she hardly knew? Was that what women were like in America, she wondered. How awful. But why think about it? Why let it bother her? Who did he think he was?

Once she drove past the tunnels and army checkpoint, the remaining stretch of the road to Efrat suffered from severe under-lighting. It wasn't enough that the Arabs traveling the road tended to drive like maniacs, threatening drivers coming from the other direction every time they tried to pass the vehicle in front of them - on top of that danger, it seemed that the government went out of its way to keep the narrow winding road as precarious as possible, in order to discourage Jewish settlers from living in Judea and Samaria, the heartland of Biblical Israel. How self-defeating. If it wasn't for the idealism of the settlers, the Arabs would expand their villages, putting a choke hold on Jerusalem. Her thoughts jumped back to Hirsh. What incredible nerve he had to invite her to his hotel room the third time they met. And that smug little smile of his – as if he were Craig Lane himself – not that she wasted her time at the movies, but she had seen the actor's photograph in newspapers. Yes, Hirsh was good looking, so what?

To stop thinking foolishness, she reviewed the phone conversation she had just finished with an associate at the office. Out of the nine hilltop settlers who had been arrested by the *Shabak*, seven had solid alibis. Witnesses were ready to testify that they had seen the suspects on the night of the arson-killing in places far from the Arab village. The other two maintained they had been in Kumi Ori, on the *givah* adjacent to Neve Pincus, studying with each other in the tent that served as their yeshiva, and later in the caravan that served as their dorm. There was no substantial reason that they had to be kept in prison. For the glaring lack of evidence, and because any incriminating testimony that they voiced was the result of illegal methods of interrogation, her plan was

to demand that they be freed to house arrest until charges were officially filed before the court.

Her three-bedroom apartment was dark and empty. One bedroom for her, and one for her twenty-two-year-old daughter who was living with some other girls in Haifa while studying for a Master's Degree in Art Therapy. She used the third bedroom a home office and guest room. Switching on a lamp in the living room, she sat on the sofa and closed her eyes in exhaustion, sensing that one of her twice-a-week migraines was on the way. Framed on the wall was a photograph of her young husband which she had taken on one of their trips to the seashore. She hadn't seen his radiant smile for twenty-two years, but she felt he was still smiling at her, encouraging her to be happy and to go on living. Her daughter, Yaffa, came into the world four months after terrorists had snuffed out his life in his prime, a half a year after their marriage. Leah had waited two years before dating another man. She even thought that she was on her way to the *chuppah* again, when her fiancé got cold feet and called off their engagement. In reaction, she switched off her heart and buried her disappointment, anger, and pain, first into her law studies and then into law practice itself. She continued to be religious because that's how she was raised, and that's what her parents and friends all expected, but her passion for Judaism and her attachment to God withered to a barely burning flame. Performing the commandments of the Torah in a routine fashion, the Tablets of Sinai became shattered stones that she pasted together into the tenets of modern judicial law. True, the pursuit of justice and righteousness were pillars of Judaism, but the, "*You shall love the lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and with all of your might,*" was missing. Once in a while, she dated. Friends set up *shiduchim*, and men made advances, but that part of life was buried, with whatever shattered memories remained of her husband after the bus he was

traveling on had been blown up by a suicide bomber. She was married to her job and to the cause. A few divorced women she knew, the less religious, encouraged her to join a secret group of divorcees and widowers who were open to relationships, including sex, without the religious requirement of being married. That didn't appeal to her. Not that she didn't have stirrings of that nature. She did. And she often longed for the comfort that only the touch of a man could bring. But for two decades she had accustomed herself to a life without love. She loved her daughter, and her daughter loved her. She was thankful for that. But, in her heart of hearts, a daughter wasn't a man.

Sighing, she stood up and walked in to the kitchen. Sliding open a cabinet, she took out a bottle of sweet Moscato wine and filled half a glass. A little wine helped soothe her headaches and calm her thoughts. Now and again, without a little something to drink, it was hard for her to sleep. Medical cannabis had become legal in Israel, and she knew some respectable people who took a puff or two at night, claiming that it took their tensions away, but she rejected the idea, feeling that it was part of the general liberalization of Israeli society which she viewed as a danger to the fabric of the Jewish State, believing that the country should be a beacon of morality to the nations, and not fall to the level of "everything goes." According to new legislative amendments, possessing a small amount of marijuana was no longer against the law. While she was familiar with all of the logical reasons for the so-called reform, among them to free the police from chasing after juvenile users, in order to deal with more serious crimes, she had seen too many cases where kids had started with grass and ended up experimenting with drugs which severely messed up their lives.

She peeled a banana and poured herself a glass of orange juice which she mixed with water to cut down the acidity. Meeting Robert's brother had been a total surprise. The look in his eyes had pierced her defenses,

awakening some long lost emotion she believed she could never experience again. He gazed at her boldly, touching the woman in her, and she wasn't accustomed to that. Occasionally, other men she met looked at her that way as well, but Hirsh had a smile of confidence in his look that irked her. The nerve, she thought. Did he really believe that she could be attracted to such a foreign creature who lived in a make-believe world of celebrities and superficial fame? Certainly any kind of serious relationship with him was out of the question. Not because he wasn't religious. In truth, she wasn't very religious herself. Yes, she wore skirts down to her ankles and blouses with long sleeves, but that was part of the role she had to play in the community in which she lived – along with the wall of protection it afforded her, like a suit of armor, shielding her from the barbs of emotions she didn't want to relive.

The wine relaxed her. She giggled. An affair with a person like Hirsh was a ridiculous notion. It was out of the question. Ha ha ha ha ha. Absolutely ridiculous. Absolutely out of the question. Ha ha ha ha ha.

Chapter Sixteen

Hirsh chose to break the story to New York's sensational tabloid, the *New York Post*, because he was a good friend of the celebrity-page editor, Brad Banks, supplying him with the latest news and inside stories about clients whose livelihood depended on how many times their pictures appeared in the media. It turned out that the paper didn't have a full-time correspondent in Israel. The fellow who showed up at the King David Hotel looked like an African ivory hunter who'd feel more at ease in the hotel bar than in the elegant breakfast room. Sitting

down at the table, he introduced himself as Kelly Connors. He wore a safari vest with large bulging pockets, baggy khaki trousers, and hiking boots. A bulging pouch filled with camera lenses was strapped around his waist, and a Nikon camera with a zoom lens was slung over his neck. A wide-brimmed safari hat covered his head. He looked like he was ready for adventure. His handshake was like a bear's. After Hirsh's encounters with the few Israelis he had met, he was happy to meet with an American.

Briefly, Hirsh filled him in on the story, telling the reporter that he wanted it to be a feature article in the tabloid's weekend edition. To heighten the impact, Hirsh said he wanted to drive out to the hilltop outpost in the Shomron, near Neve Pincus, where Kevin was living. After taking some photos and maybe speaking with the Rabbi, Hirsh wanted to visit the Arab village where the arson and murder had transpired.

"I'm game," the smiling, blue-eyed journalist said. "My jeep's waiting outside. *Vamos!* Let's go!"

As he stood up from the table, a beeper in one of his pockets sounded a chime. "Excuse me," he said, taking a quick glance at its screen. "Two rockets were fired from Gaza and intercepted by the Iron Dome defense system."

"Does that happen often?" Hirsh asked.

"No question about it," Connors replied. "The Arabs like to launch missiles. I've only been in the country six months, but it seems to be a regular pastime with them. It's probably in response to the arson and murder you mentioned," he said. "It's like a knee-jerk reaction. '*An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth.*'"

"Whose side are you on in the battle?" Hirsh asked him.

“The side that pays me more money.”

“Which side is that?”

“As of this morning, the Jews.”

It turned out that the likable fellow enjoyed talking. Driving out of the city, it was like Hirsh was interviewing him, without having to ask any questions. The character didn't shut up. He said he was divorced with two kids in the Bronx. He had traveled to Vietnam, Bangkok, Shanghai, Tibet, Sri Lanka, and Kenya. He said that he crossed the Sahara on a camel, and climbed half of Everest before his toes froze. “Two of them had to be amputated,” he informed Hirsh, who replied with a chuckle. His travelogue was endless, as was the list of women he met in each port. It was a wonder that he hadn't already died from disease.

“I hit the jackpot when I got a freelance assignment to write a feature story for a British tabloid about prostitution in Dubai. You'd think that in an Islamic republic like the UAR, where the local women have to cover themselves from head to foot, and where sex before marriage is forbidden, you wouldn't find prostitution, but the hotels and bars are crawling with hookers from all over the world. I have a whole gallery of photos if you want to see. I ended up staying for close to a year, freelancing for a bunch of newspapers. That's how I learned to speak Arabic.”

“You speak Arabic?” Hirsh asked.

“Enough to get around without someone taking advantage of me. In every foreign place, you have to be careful, but with Arabs, you have to start out with the premise that they are lying. It's a part of the culture. Not that the rest of the world is much better. In London, they lie with a polite bow and smile. In Paris, they cover the stink of their lies with perfume. And a foreigner in Manhattan is lucky if he still has his wallet

by the end of his first day in the Big Apple. Why is it called the Big Apple? After the apple in the Garden of Eden. Sin City.”

“I live in Manhattan,” Hirsh told him.

“Then you know what I mean.”

“It isn’t so bad.”

“Maybe because you’ve gotten used to it. I work for the *Post*, but I hate to be in the city. Maybe that’s why I travel so much.”

The journalist’s driving bordered on reckless. Like an impatient New York cabbie, he enjoyed pumping the horn. Occasionally, he would shout out at the driver of another car. At speed bumps in the road, he didn’t bother to slow down. “The jeep is leased,” he informed his wary passenger. “If it falls apart, what the hell do I care?”

Soon they were driving along the winding curves of a desert wilderness landscape. There were more boulders on the hillsides than trees. Mountain ascents gave way to roller-coaster descents. In front of them, in the opposite lane, a car suddenly speeded toward them, as the driver recklessly attempted to pass the car in front of him. Connors honked loudly in warning. The onrushing vehicle seemed to fill the windshield of the jeep. “Jesus!” the journalist exclaimed. Desperately, he veered to the left, careful not to fly off the road into the bordering ravine. Hirsh braced himself for the certain collision. Suddenly, the driver of the onrushing vehicle swerved back to his own lane, averting a crash.

“Damn idiot!” Connors cursed. “Didn’t I tell you? The Arabs are wild men.”

Hirsh let out a long breath of relief. “For my sake, slow down,” he told his excitable driver. “I want you to write an article, not a death notice.”

“I want to get there as fast as we can,” the freelancer confided. “This road travels through Indian territory, and I don’t want to get scalped.”

“How do you know the driver was an Arab?”

“Only Arabs drive like that. They place no value on life. If they kill a Jew in the process, then they get to go to a martyr’s heaven with seventy virgins serving their needs. Besides, the car had the white and green license plate of a Palestinian vehicle. Israeli plates are yellow.”

“You have a journalist sticker on the windshield. Doesn’t that help keep you out of the conflict?”

“Not when some Arab in a hurry decides to step on the gas. When that happens, the sticker won’t protect us.”

It turned out that the journalist’s apprehensions weren’t without reason. Once again, his beeper sounded its tiny alarm. Connors read the message without slowing down. “A terrorist attack near Shilo,” he told Hirsh. “A drive-by shooting, just like at the Gush Etzion Junction last week. At least one person dead, several wounded.”

He placed the beeper by his seat, where you could rest a cup of coffee or Coke. “Shilo isn’t far up the road,” he told his unsettled passenger.

Sure enough, before reaching the settlement of Shilo, they encountered a traffic jam. A soldier standing near an army jeep directed drivers toward the side of the road so that police cars and ambulances could reach the scene of the shooting. With sirens screaming, emergency vehicles sped by the long line of cars. Connors read out the beeper updates as they flashed on his tiny screen. Gradually, they reached the site of the shooting. Two ambulances speeded by in the opposite lane, in the direction of Jerusalem. Soldiers were everywhere. The shooting attack had occurred at the bus stop on the road, where hitchhikers waited for rides. Young settlers, boys and

girls, chased after video news cameramen, yelling out chants of protest. Hirsh stared out the window as Connors drove slowly past the scene. The gunmen had opened fire at a group of yeshiva students on their way to their Torah academy in the settlement of Elon Moreh. According to the beeper reports, one of the victims was killed, and two severely wounded.

Connors braked, shifted the car into park, and opened his door. "Get out," he told Hirsh. "I want a few pictures."

Hirsh followed orders. Quickly, Connors found an angle he liked and snapped a few shots of Hirsh with the bus stop in the background. Then he pointed the lens at himself and snapped a selfie.

"Let's go," he said, as a chorus of honking horns sounded behind them.

"Do you have a tape recorder?" Hirsh asked when they were back on the way.

"Sure thing," the journalist answered, removing a miniature device from a safari-vest pocket. During the remainder of the half-hour ride to the mountaintop settlement of Neve Pincus, Hirsh detailed the story of his son's arrest and incarceration.

"They tortured the poor bastard?" Connors exclaimed, as if he could feel the pain. "Now that isn't very civil, is it?"

Army jeeps were stationed along the narrow highway. Helicopters hovered overhead. The journalist told Hirsh that the choppers were a part of the army's efforts to track down the terrorists. Reducing the speed of the jeep, Connors drove through what looked like an Arab town, with shops and automobile garages lining the road, and signs in flowing Arabic lettering. Arabs in long white gowns and kefeyahs on their heads strolled leisurely across the narrow and bumpy two-lane

highway, disrupting traffic, as if they were the lords of the road. Hirsh noticed a mosque with a tall minaret.

“It looks like Saudi Arabia,” Hirsh said.

“Have you been there?” Connors asked.

“No. Never.”

“I have. Nice place. Quiet. No crime. Boring as hell at night. If you talk to the wrong woman, you can get your arm cut off. Lots of money floating around.”

A sign on the road informed motorists of the distances to Yitzhar, Itamar, Har Bracha, Elon Moreh, and Nablus, all within ten kilometers.

“Are they Jewish settlements?” Hirsh asked.

“All of them except for Nablus, which is called Shechem by the Jews. It’s a big Arab city, loaded with terrorists. At the end of the Six-Day War, Israel ended up with all of this territory, which had been under Jordanian sovereignty until then. At that time, there weren’t any Jews living here at all. But then the settlement movement started, and small Jewish communities began popping up on hillsides here and there, surrounded by Arab villages. The Biblical hero, Joseph, is buried in Nablus. His tomb is holy to the Jews. A group of settlers established a yeshiva there until the Arabs overran the place. When the Oslo Peace Agreement was signed, most of the West Bank, excluding the settlements, was handed over to the Palestinians, who were awarded general control of the area. In some places, like this, where there are Jewish settlements, Israel maintains military sovereignty. It’s an impossible situation. The Arabs want all the settlements dismantled, but the settlers have no intention of leaving. In my opinion, Oslo was a gigantic mistake. Instead of bringing peace between the Arabs and the Israelis, it gave the Arabs cities and huge tracts of land like the Gaza

Strip and the area we've been driving through, which they turned into terrorist havens. The Likud governments that rose after Oslo had an opposite ideology from the Left. They backed the settlers, maintaining that the settlements prevented the Arabs from taking over the heartland of the country. They claim that if the Arabs controlled these mountaintops, they would be able to launch rockets freely into Tel Aviv and all the large Jewish cities along the coast. Ariel Sharon was a big war hero, but when he became Prime Minister, he lost his nerve and evacuated all of the Jews from Gush Katif, down south. The Arabs turned the area into one big launching pad. Almost every week, they fire rockets at the Israeli towns and cities nearby. Any other country in the world wouldn't tolerate that kind of military aggression. Imagine if Mexico fired missiles at Texas. Within the same day, Mexico would no longer exist. Why Israel puts up with it, don't ask me. I always thought the Jews were smarter than everyone else. But the Jews here in Israel are stupid. Maybe it's the hot summers that melt their brains. Who knows?"

"Are you sure that we are traveling in the right direction? I didn't notice Neve Pincus on the highway sign."

"It's too small," Connors informed him.

The settlement of Neve Pincus was built on the summit of a mountain overlooking the surrounding region. Connors estimated that 60 Jewish families lived in the *yishuv*. They drove through the streets of modest one and two-story houses, the kind you might find in a working-class neighborhood on the outskirts of New Haven. School playgrounds were loaded with children. Young women wearing colorful kerchiefs, wound high on their heads in a queenly fashion, strolled along the streets, many of them carrying infants and pushing baby carriages. Most of the men Hirsh saw were in their thirties or forties, all wearing knitted

yarmulkes with *tzitzit* dangling down from their shirts. Some of them had rifles swung over their backs. Others had revolvers shoved into their pants. It reminded Hirsh of a Hamish village – Israel style. Connors stopped the jeep on a dirt roadway surrounding the small settler colony. Hirsh followed him out of the vehicle to a look-out point with a wooden bench. The sun was shining, but a stiff and chilly wind penetrated his golf jacket. His hair blew over his forehead, forcing him to brush it away with his hand. In the far distance, across the lowland which stretched across the western belly of the country, tall buildings lined the Mediterranean coastline.

“That’s Tel Aviv,” the reporter said. “A scud rocket fired from here could reach it in less than a minute.”

From the mountain-top vantage point, Israel’s modern metropolis looked no more than a three-wood shot away. Connors raised his camera and captured the New York celebrity lawyer gazing out at the view.

“If you ask me, the people who live here are real pioneers,” the maverick journalist said. “They’re defending the country, there’s no doubt about that.”

Hirsh was impressed. Standing on the summit of the mountain, seeing how the densely-populated coastline was so vulnerable to missile attack from the heights of the West Bank, he suddenly understood the strategic importance of the region. Until then, the West Bank was just a term in the news. He had never bothered to look at a map, and if he had, the flatness of a map could never show the reality of the situation. You had to stand in a settlement at the top of a mountain in the Shomron to realize why the area was so vital to the Jewish State. Certainly, he thought, no general in the United States Armed Forces would ever agree to surrender such a strategic military position to an

enemy of America. Israel was loaded with army generals and perhaps the best soldiers in the world – how the hell could they ever think of turning these mountaintops over to Arabs, who openly stated that they wanted to drive all the Jews into the sea?

A jeep approached and stopped by the lookout where they were standing.

“Everything OK?” the driver asked in Hebrew with a South-African sounding accent.

“Just enjoying the view, bloke,” Connors responded in English.

Hearing his mother-tongue, the settler switched into English. “Need any help,” he inquired, noticing the press emblem on the windshield of the car.

“My son lives here,” Hirsh told him. “On some hilltop outpost. In a dormitory. Right now he’s in jail.”

Connors clicked off some photos with his Nikon.

“What’s his name?” the settler asked.

“Avraham. Avraham Hirsh.”

“I don’t think I know him. Was he arrested with the group of boys from the yeshiva?”

“Yes. Can you show us where he lives?”

“No problem. It’s called, ‘Geula Shlema.’ You can see it from here.”

He pointed to a miniature cluster of wooden shacks, caravans, and tents about five football fields away on a neighboring hillside. “Follow me,” he said.

“Man, would I love to live here,” Connors remarked with a dreamy voice. “On a remote mountaintop like this, a person can get away from it all, do you know what I mean? Not for the rest of my life, mind you. A half a year maybe, to get my mind clean. Being a garbage collector is a profession more noble than journalism. You can’t believe the trash you have to write to sell newspapers. Gruesome murders, sex scandals, celebrity nonsense. Especially for rags like the *New York Post*. That’s why I prefer to be a foreign correspondent. There’s less filth to write about. Do you know what I mean?”

Hirsh didn’t answer. He was overwhelmed with the Biblical starkness of place, and with the feeling that he didn’t know his son at all. How could a rich and spoiled kid, who had grown up in New York and Beverly Hills, raised on movies and popcorn, want to live in a desolate and windy place like this? They followed the settler’s jeep along a rocky dirt path which could hardly be called a road, passing a vineyard of young, unripe vines, and some low bushes here and there in the empty fields. A dog barked and a young settler-type, wearing a Clint Eastwood poncho, with a rifle strapped over his shoulder, stepped out from a primitively constructed guard booth and waved as the two jeeps passed by. As if recognizing the white Israelis license plates on the jeeps, the guard dog ceased its nervous warning. Another youngster, sporting the side-locks and curls of a Rastafarian, sat reading a book by the gate of a sheep pen containing maybe thirty sheep. No older than sixteen, he too had a rifle resting across his knees. Hirsh chuckled. He himself had never held a rifle in his life. A young woman, looking like an African queen with her high and regal head covering, and carrying an infant draped over her shoulder, appeared in the doorway of a shack. Seeing the security jeep of the settlement, she disappeared back into her very fragile-looking home.

Getting out of the car, another blast of brisk mountain wind greeted them. Hirsh had to keep brushing his wavy locks of hair out of his eyes.

“Blessed Virgin Mary,” the journalist said in wonder. “There’s God in this wind. I can feel Him.”

The wind blew the odor of the sheep pen into Hirsh’s nostrils, and the baaing of the animals filled his ears. The New York lawyer was speechless. Why would his son choose to live here, from all the places he had visited throughout the world? Once again, he realized with a feeling of deep epiphany that, even with all of the religious and Zionist propaganda he had heard, he couldn’t understand or fathom his son’s beliefs. He chuckled, at a loss for words. “Live and let live,” he thought. “Everything is for the best.” But, on this occasion, the shield of aphorisms didn’t comfort him at all.

“Your boy must be some believer,” Connors said, with a voice filled with admiration. “I can’t wait to meet him.”

“The yeshiva is in the tent,” their guide informed them, speaking in fluent Afrikaner English. Hirsh noticed that he too carried a gun in a hip holster. “There are about six students in the program for young people who have decided to return to their roots. They sleep in the caravans here. There’s a regular yeshiva in Neve Pincus with about fifty young people. Most of the kids who were arrested learn there with *HaRav* Aharon Blass.”

That was the name of the Rabbi who had come to Kevin’s engagement, Hirsh remembered.

“The two families who started this outpost live in the shacks. The sheep in the pen belongs to them. Most of the day, the two husbands graze the animals over the surrounding hillsides so that Arabs can’t claim that the land belongs to them. That’s how it works here. Wherever you

graze your flock, or plant orchards, vineyards, or crops, that land belongs to you. Like squatters rights. Naturally, the *Yishmaelim* claim that everything belongs to them, handed down to them for generations, but more often than not, their claims are more fiction than fact."

Hirsh noticed a generator on the ground and a large metal container of water with three faucets. Another shack, the size of a small closet, was probably their outhouse, he thought, wondering where they showered.

Connors changed lenses on his Nikon and snapped off photo after photo. "Hard to believe," he said, "that all the presidents and prime ministers and kings in the world can't sleep at night because a bunch of Jewish teenagers live in shacks and tents on hilltops in the middle of nowhere. They aren't bothering anyone. Why should all of the world make such a big stink about it?"

Hirsh walked over to a caravan which was about ten yards long. "Can I go in?" he asked.

"Sure," the settler said.

The trailer was empty except for the four cots in each of its three rooms. There was a sink with a faucet, and a countertop, but no kitchen, no refrigerator, no stove, no table or chairs. Hirsh was amazed twice over. Amazed at the abject poverty of the trailer, and amazed that his son lived there. During the two days he had been with the boy, Kevin had expressed a few radical beliefs, but his behavior had been relatively normal. Now, Hirsh couldn't help but wonder – and worry. Maybe the boy had been brainwashed by a cult of religious fanatics who believed that conquering these Biblical hilltops would bring the Messiah. At the engagement party, his friends had seemed like pleasant people – but perhaps their great energy and joy was the ecstasy of

delusion and the mindless worship of a spiritual talisman. While Rabbi Blass was a far cry from the few Rabbis Hirsh knew in America, who were more like the social directors on a cruise ship than holy men, he didn't come across as a charlatan. But maybe Hirsh had misjudged him. Maybe the novelist, Daniel Kaplan was right. Maybe Kevin had fallen into a cult of messianic crazies.

"I'd like to meet with my son's Rabbi," Hirsh said, thinking that maybe he could shed light on his son's unnerving transformation – assuming that the Rabbi wasn't crazy himself, as Kaplan seemed convinced.

"If he's not teaching," the settler from South Africa said. "Let's have a check. You can speak to him in English. Once upon a time, he studied engineering in London, but he decided to become a Rabbi."

The building housing the yeshiva stood in the center of the settlement beside the main synagogue. The enthusiastic noise of *Gemara* learning sounded loudly from the *Beit Midrash* study hall, where some fifty young boys sat at tables facing each other, engaged in lively arguments over disputed points in the Talmud. This, Hirsh reflected, was probably how his grandfather had learned Torah, and his grandfather's father before him, all the way back to the time when the Sages of Israel had taught Torah on these very same hills of the Shomron. Hirsh himself had never been in a yeshiva before. He knew what the students were learning only because of a Barbra Streisand movie, in which she pretended to be a boy in order to win the attention of the yeshiva's star student. The Jewish lawyer, who studied and practiced civil law most of his adult life, had never once opened a tractate of Talmud, the large volumes of Oral Law which the students were studying, vibrantly debating some ancient Talmudic discussion, as if it had life-and-death relevance for the Jews of today. If he had studied a tractate or two, he would have discovered that the foundation of all civil, property,

monetary, and criminal law could be found in the pages of the Talmud. But no one had ever told him, and if he had read, here and there in law school that a certain law had its source in one of the twenty volumes of *Gemara*, or in the Five Books of Moses, otherwise known as the Torah, which these fellows and their Rabbi believed were the living and eternal words of God, he had never bothered to check the matter out for himself, considering it a question of religion, which he was not interested in at all, even though his grandfather had believed in it, and now his very own son.

The settler, Yehoshua, who said that his name in Cape Town was Winston, approached the *Rosh Yeshiva*, Rabbi Aharon Blass, who sat studying alone in a corner at the front of the hall. When he stood up, the learning in the Beit Midrash stopped, and everyone stood up in respect until their long-bearded commander walked into a side room. Winston waved for Hirsh and Connors to follow.

Once again, Hirsh was struck by the mix of seriousness and joy in the eyes of the Rabbi. The two men shook hands, and the head of the yeshiva motioned for Hirsh to sit in a chair by a desk piled high with books. Bookcases covered the walls of the small study. Framed on a wall was a painting of a *shtreimel*-crowned Rabbi whom Hirsh didn't recognize. Connors stood by the doors taking photos. The Rabbi, who looked to be Hirsh's age, but who might have been younger, spoke to Winston in Hebrew.

Yehoshua translated. "The Rabbi requests only photographs - not video."

Hirsh nodded at the journalist.

"We are very happy that your son is learning here with us at the yeshiva," Rabbi Blass said with a warm smile, speaking in a slow but

fluent English. “He is a very fine man – a *Tzaddik*. You should be very proud of him.”

“I can’t say that I always understand him,” Hirsh answered.

“It is not uncommon that the generation of the parents fail to understand their children, but it is written that the day will come when the heart of the fathers will be one with their sons, and the hearts of the sons with their fathers. God willing, that blessing will happen with you and Avraham during your visit, and, of course, should you decide to remain in the Holy Land to help us rebuild in the inheritance of our Forefathers, the Land which the Almighty, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, bequeathed to his children, the Jews.”

“Aren’t all people in the world God’s children?” Hirsh asked.

“Of course. But there are children who merit a special love and attention. For instance, God granted the Arab nations lands rich in oil. To the Children of Israel, He gave the Land of Israel, and the mission to teach the rest of mankind about the supreme authority of the One and Only King of the Universe.”

“I believe my son is innocent regarding the arson that occurred in the Arab village,” Hirsh said, getting to the point.

“So do I,” the Torah scholar agreed. “All of the boys are innocent. This afternoon, I am beginning a hunger strike outside of the jail where they are imprisoned in Petach Tikvah. I will sleep in a tent there until they are released. Six of the boys were learning with me the night of the crime. Your son was with his fiancé. The other two were on the *givah*. Everyone has a witness who can testify where they were.”

“Who committed the arson?”

“That is a question for the police. That’s their profession. My profession is teaching Torah. I can tell you how to kosher a chicken, or why your son has chosen to live in Israel, but police matters are for the police.”

“I would be glad to hear about my son. I love the boy very much, but I don’t understand him.”

“There are certain souls in the world who have a passion for truth. Your son is one of them. Most people are contented with just getting by, and with accepting things the way they are. But, thank God, the Almighty has also placed special souls in the world who reject compromise and who want the world to be like *Gan Eden*, the Garden of Eden. First, they search for the truths in themselves, and then they search for the truth of the universe, like with the original Avraham of the Bible. As a youth, he yearned to discover who created the world. When God saw Avraham’s great passion, He commanded him to journey to the Holy Land – to the Land of Israel. This is the center of the spiritual world. Only from here can God’s Presence be clearly experienced. Everywhere else, the His light is hidden by spiritual pollution. Your Avraham has the same searching soul as his namesake. That is why he is here.”

“Does he have to be here on the top of this mountain? Why can’t he live in Jerusalem?”

“Thank the good Lord, there are a lot of people who live in *Yerushalayim*. We need to populate these mountains as well, and every other portion of the Land which God gave to our Forefathers as an eternal inheritance, from the Nile River to the Euphrates.”

“The Nile River is in Egypt, and the Euphrates, if I am not mistaken, is in Iran?” Hirsh replied

The Rabbi grinned, but chose not to elaborate.

“Why can’t my son learn Torah in Jerusalem?” the worried father insisted on knowing.

“Let me ask you a question,” the Rabbi said. “Why do you think the United Nations is vehemently opposed to Jews living in a few trailers on this desolate mountain?”

“I don’t know,” Hirsh replied.

“They seem to give the matter paramount importance. They vote in favor of sanctions against Israel almost every week.”

Hirsh waited for the explanation.

“The nations of the world don’t care about the Palestinians. Assad can murder a million Arabs in Syria, and the world doesn’t say a word of protest. The nations of the world are opposed to our being here because they know that it is the truth, and they do not want the truth to rule in the world. What is the truth? The truth is that God created the world, and that He is its King, and not the United Nations. God decreed through the Prophets of Israel that the Jewish People would one day return to these mountains. If that happens, and we only need to look around and see that it is happening today, right here on this mountain, that means that the Prophets of Israel spoke the truth, and that the God of Israel is the ruler of the world, and that the Torah is His law, and that is something the world does not want to accept or allow. In their folly, they think that if they can prevent your son from living here, they can disprove the Torah and keep God up in Heaven, so that they can continue to run things on Earth and continue to live the sordid lives that they live. But God long ago decreed what will be in the future, and those prophecies shall all come to pass. They care coming true now. The Jewish People have returned to our Biblical Homeland, just as God promised. We are rebuilding *Yerushalayim*. Old people and young

people fill the hills of Judea and Samaria, just as our Prophets foretold more than two thousand years ago. Have I answered your question, Mr. Hirsh?”

Hirsh felt the Rabbi’s deadly serious, yet happy eyes pierce through his being. At a loss for words, he chuckled. He glanced at Connors and chuckled. His expression was serious too.

“I’d probably have to sit here and learn at your yeshiva for ten years before I understood,” Hirsh finally replied with a chuckle.

“You are welcome to do just that,” the Rabbi said, standing. “For the moment, you will have to excuse me. It is time for me to teach a class. You are welcome to join me in Petach Tikvah outside the prison. We can continue our discussion there.”

Chapter Seventeen

On the way to the Arab village where the arson attack had occurred, the jeep drove by Efrat. Hirsh phoned his brother, Robert, but he was seeing a patient. He said he’d call back. Before leaving Neve Pincus, with Connors waiting inside the jeep, Hirsh had phoned Leah to apologize for his behavior the previous night, not because he felt he had done anything improper, but because she was the attorney defending Kevin, and he didn’t want his hormones to lessen Kevin’s chances of a speedy release, while keeping the path open for a possible future score before he returned to New York.

“Let’s forget about it,” she said.

“I’m sorry if I offended your sensitivities,” he told her in the best tone of apology that he could muster.

“I’m an attorney, Mr. Hirsh, not a Manhattan call girl.”

“You are absolutely correct. I never thought otherwise. I regret that you misinterpreted my intention. I suppose I wanted a little companionship, that’s all.”

“You will have to excuse me, Mr. Hirsh. I have work to do.”

“How about meeting for dinner tonight?”

“No thank you.”

“I want to meet about the case.”

“We can meet in my office. My secretary can schedule an appointment. One moment while I put her on the line.”

Hirsh chuckled. She was an indignant little thing. Proud and spunky. He liked that.

On the way to the Al-Aduma village, Connors explained that under the terms of the Oslo Agreement, the different areas of Arab populations in the country were given different classifications. The village of Al-Aduma enjoyed civil Palestinian authority, but remained under Israel’s military jurisdiction.

“Is it safe for us to go there?” Hirsh wanted to know.

“I’ve never heard of a case in which foreign journalists were attacked. Usually reporters are against Israel, so the Arabs treat them like allies.”

“Following the assumption that Jews weren’t involved in the arson, I am prepared to pay for information about the crime. Solid information that can stand up in court. If you can find someone willing to talk, then

you will be rewarded as well. Let the villagers see that you are handing out cash. Maybe we'll manage to hook some fish that way."

"Arabs don't like to squeal on other Arabs. They can get themselves killed for that. In addition - if an Arab sells a property to a Jew, he has to flee the country. The Israeli Secret Service receives most of its information from Arabs secretly working for Israel, or from special Israeli agents who live amongst the Arabs. If some Arab is even suspected of collaboration with the Jews, he is executed mafia-style, with or without proof. So I wouldn't count on some miracle."

"I am not counting on a miracle. I am counting on the magic of cash."

Hirsh removed an envelope from his sport jacket and set it on the dashboard in front of Connors. It was filled with one-hundred dollar bills that he had bought at the hotel with one of his credit cards. "When you ask someone a question, slip him a hundred dollars. Let him know that there's a lot more for reliable information."

"Will do," the reporter for the *New York Post* said with a smile.

Two Israeli army jeeps blocked the entrance to the ascent up the hillside to the small community. A soldier looked over Connor's press card and passport, accepting his explanation that Hirsh was the New York newspaper's chief editor, visiting from America. With a wave of his hand, he allowed the jeep to pass. Leah had partially managed, in an appeal to the court, to remove the media blackout that the *Shabak* had initially placed on the case. While reporters could report on the arson and murder in a general fashion, and the fact that suspects had been detained, no details of the investigation were allowed to be publicized. Journalists were free to visit the site of the crime. Judging by the number of press vehicles parked by the olive grove at the entrance to the village, the place had turned into a big attraction.

Unlike the giant villas which Hirsh had noted in the Arab communities on the outskirts of Jerusalem, the houses of Al-Aduma were far more modest, mainly one and two-story buildings constructed from cement, many with cable-TV satellite dishes on the roof. Three women sat on the ground beside large wicker baskets, removing twigs from a large heap of olives. Dogs appeared from all directions, as if to greet the visitors. The scent of grapes filled Hirsh's nostrils as they walked along the dirt road leading toward the houses. An elderly resident wearing a head covering and long white gown offered to be their guide. Connors conversed with him in Arabic. The talkative fellow led the way excitedly to the scene of the now, world-famous crime - a small, flame-charred shell of a house located on the periphery of the village, surrounded by reporters, photographers, and film crews. The focus of everyone's attention was the Hebrew word "REVENGE" scrawled in hurriedly-written letters on the wall off the neighboring home. Hirsh recalled what Kevin had said after seeing the photograph of the graffiti in the *Jerusalem Post*, the morning after the arson, that the flamboyantly-styled lettering was not the penmanship of a Jew. Connors snapped some pictures and questioned their guide in Arabic. Hirsh saw him slip the man a hundred-dollar bill. The fellow's eyes opened, and he turned to Hirsh, babbling away in Arabic, guessing that he was the source of the reward. Connors motioned Hirsh to follow as the Arab led the way through the village to a makeshift cemetery where he stopped and pointed to a small, freshly dug grave.

"The child who died was two-years old," Connors informed Hirsh, translating the report of the Arab. "The parents tried to save him, but by the time they woke up, the room was filled with smoke."

"Did anyone in the village see the arsonists?" Hirsh asked.

The Arab began a long speech, pointing this way and that. When he stopped, Connors translated.

“He says that one villager saw two young Jews, settler types. Another saw three. Another saw one young Jew running away from the village.”

“Speak to them all,” Hirsh instructed the journalist.

The Arab continued his report, as if remembering something new. Someone had seen four settlers get into a car with Israeli license plates and speed away from the village.

“Did you see anyone?” Hirsh inquired.

“No,” he answered in English. “I was sleeping.”

“Didn’t the barking of dogs wake you up?” Hirsh asked him, not because he had lots of experience in criminal law, but because he had grown up watching the famous fictional lawyer, Perry Mason, on TV.

The elderly villager switched back to Arabic. “He doesn’t remember hearing the barking of dogs,” Connors explained.

“That’s strange,” Hirsh remarked. “You would think that guard dogs would bark as loud as they could if a group of strangers prowled through the village in the middle of the night. Unless, the arsonists were people from the village whom the dogs recognized and not strangers at all.”

“No, no, no, no,” the Arab said excitedly, understanding the implication in Hirsh’s deduction. “Jews, Jews, Jews,” he insisted. “The killers were Jews. Settlers.”

You didn’t have to be Sherlock Holmes to sense that something was fishy. Kevin’s Rabbi, Leah, and Kevin himself all doubted that Jews had committed the crime. Remembering that Craig Lane was arriving in Israel that afternoon, and that he wanted to visit his mother before

heading back to Jerusalem, Hirsh glanced at his smart-looking Geneva Quartz sport watch.

“I’ve got to go,” he told Connors.

The Arab spoke in a rush.

“He asks if you want to speak with the family?” the reporter said.

“Not now. You stay. Talk to whomever you can. Do you have the envelope with the money that I gave you,” he asked loudly and clearly so that the Arab was sure to understand. He looked toward the elderly man, then turned back to Connors, emphasizing his words by moving a step closer, as if he didn’t want anyone to hear. “If you meet someone interesting, we can meet him in Jerusalem in a more confidential atmosphere, if you understand my meaning.”

The experienced journalist nodded. “Got ya. I’ll find you a ride back to Jerusalem.”

Again the old fellow jabbered quickly, his hands fluttering like wings.

Hirsh didn’t wait for a translation. “Thank you for your help,” he said. Turning, he began to walk back in the direction of the car.

“I’ll be back in five minutes,” Connors said to the dismayed villager. Catching up to Hirsh, the reporter led the way back toward the charred home. The Arab followed behind them, calling after them, as if he didn’t want to lose his turn in the line at the bank.

“He says that he knows everyone in the village. He wants us to meet more people. He promises that it will be worth our while.”

“Keep walking,” Hirsh told him.

When they reached the journalists still crowded around the burnt house, Connors asked in a loud voice if anyone was driving back to

Jerusalem. A photographer draped with cameras and dressed a lot like Connors step away from the crowd, and said, “You’ve found a driver. I’m on my way back to the city now.”

“I just need a ride to Efrat,” Hirsh told him.

“No problem,” the man replied. “I’m happy to oblige.”

Civil fellow, Hirsh thought to himself.

“I’ll phone you later,” Connors said with a wave.

“Ron,” the photographer said. “Nice to meet you.”

“Steven.”

“What newspaper?”

“The *New York Post*.”

“You don’t look like a reporter. One of their editors?”

“Actually, I’m one of their lawyers.”

Ron had a jeep similar to Connors. “Hop in,” he said. The moment Hirsh shut the front door, he felt a lump in his throat. An Arab newspaper lay on the dashboard. A few strands of colorful beads hung down from the mirror. The photographer set his I-phone into a holder by the radio, punched a code button with his finger, and started the engine. “Alo,” a voice sounded. Ron spoke back in fluent Arabic. The jeep rumbled forward along the bumpy road. Hirsh felt his heart drop. He was driving in the West Bank with an Arab! The safety switch locking the doors of the vehicle sounded with a loud CLICK. Hirsh chuckled. “*Oy vay*,” he thought, imagining headlines in all the New York newspapers with a photograph of his dead body lying by the side of the road in a ditch.

“What do make of the murder?” the driver asked him when he ended his short phone conversation.

For a moment, Hirsh's head was too muddled to answer. "The murder," he mumbled.

"The child who was killed in the fire. The Jews pretend they are better than everyone else, but it turns out they are just as bad as the rest of us."

The jeep reached the main road and turned toward Jerusalem. The engine roared as the Arab journalist hit the gas, honked his horn, and swung into the center of the road to pass the slow-moving truck in front of them.

"In my opinion, the settlers are like a cancer spreading over the hillsides of Palestine. What do you think?"

"I really don't know," Hirsh replied. "I'm just beginning to learn about the situation."

"Excuse me if I sound angry. Imagine killing an innocent child. That is something inexcusable."

"I agree. But haven't many innocent Israelis been murdered in terror attacks as well?"

"You're not a Jew, are you?" the Arab asked.

"No," Hirsh answered. "Believe it or not, there are lawyers in the world who aren't Jews." Somehow, he managed to chuckle.

"This is Efrat," the driver said, slowing down and pulling the jeep to the side of the road by a bus stop. "I hope you don't mind my leaving you here on the highway. I have to get back to Jerusalem in a hurry. Efrat is a short walk up the road."

The locks of the car doors opened with another loud CLICK – the click of freedom.

“Thanks,” Hirsh said, hopping down to the ground. His body was trembling. He took a deep breath. Looking around, he realized he was standing all alone on the West Bank highway, not far from the site of the terrorist attacks that had left several Jews dead and wounded, just a few days before. Quickly, he started to walk up the road that led to the large Jewish settlement. Civilization, he thought. He started to jog. Back in New York, he jogged through Central Park at least twice a week. His cardiologist said that for a man of sixty, he had the heart of a twenty-year old. Running was usually a pleasure for him, except during his bouts of arthritis. He jogged up the gentle incline that led toward the guarded gate of the town, trying not to put too much pressure on his knees. He didn’t bother to ask passing cars for a lift, not wanting to take a chance on another Arab driver. Breathing hard, but not out of breath, he made it to the entrance of the town. A honk sounded behind him. It was Robert’s wife, Laura, in her small Toyota.

“Can I give you a ride?” she asked with a smile.

Thank God, Hirsh thought. Relieved, he got in the car.

“What are you doing here?” she asked, clearly surprised to find her brother-in-law at the entrance to the *yishuv*.

“I came to visit my mother.”

“By bus?”

“Actually, I got a lift with an Arab.”

“An Arab?” she asked.

Hirsh briefly recounted his latest adventure. In what seemed like a minute, they reach his brother’s home. Laura switched off the motor.

“How long have you known Kevin’s lawyer?” he asked her, regaining his usual composure now that he was still alive.

“Leah? Maybe twenty years. We’re good friends,” she answered, pausing to open her door.

“Why didn’t she ever remarry?” he asked.

“She never found her knight in white armor.”

“Do you think that could be me?” he asked, not getting out of the car.

“Are you for real?” she blurted out, staring at him in wonder. “Leah is a serious woman.” She fumbled for words, not wanting to offend her brother-in-law. “I mean she isn’t a tennis player or an actress. Sorry.”

“My first wife was a solid woman, remember?”

“Yes. I liked her.”

“I blew that one, I admit. Becoming a celebrity lawyer filled my head with stars.”

“Steven, you can’t be serious. Among other things, Leah is religious.”

“That doesn’t bother me.”

“Well, it may bother her that you’re not. She isn’t a rabbi, but she respects the Jewish laws.”

“Since when is dating against the law? She’s considered to be single, isn’t she? So am I.”

“You are a lot older than Leah is. Besides, she would never leave Israel. Forget it. It’s completely out of the question.”

“Right now, I’m here. And if something serious were to develop, I could visit a few times a year. I know of marriages like that.”

“You are talking like a child. Besides, you don’t even know each other.”

“I have a feeling,” he answered. “Ask her for me.”

“Ask her what?”

“Ask her how she feels about me.”

“Steven, you are wasting your time.”

“Ask her anyway. Casually. She’ll laugh off the suggestion, but try to draw her out. No woman wants to remain alone for the rest of her life.”

“She’s had offers in the past. I’ve never cross-examined her. I’m not a lawyer.”

“Do me a favor. Ask her in a general way,” he said, wanting to put the idea into Leah’s head. “I have a lawyer’s hunch.”

Laura laughed lightly. Hirsh chuckled. They got out of the car. His mother was sitting in the salon with her Filipino helper. The television was turned on, but her eyes weren’t following the images on the screen. Her thoughts were somewhere else, far away from Arabs and terrorist killings, far away from Hollywood and Broadway stars, in her own world, wherever that was – there was no way of telling.

The lady caregiver stood up so that Hirsh could sit by his mother.

“Look who’s here, *Ema*,” Laura said. “Steven.”

The old woman turned her head to the man who sat down beside her.

“Steven?” she asked. She stared at his face. “How are the children?”

What could he say? That Kevin was in jail and her granddaughter in Tokyo or Timbuktu?

“They’re both doing great, Mom,” he said. He leaned forward, reached out and gently held one of her frail hands in his.

“Do you want something to eat?” she asked.

Hirsh was amazed to discover that his mother was still a part of the world. "I'm fine, Mom," he said.

"Have something," his mother insisted, glancing over at Laura.

"I'll heat up some food," she said.

"How is whatever her name is?" his mother asked.

"Gloria? She's fine."

"Your father is dead."

"I know, Mom."

"I will soon be with him."

"Nonsense. You are going to live forever."

"Did you know that Robert is a doctor?" she asked.

"Yes, Mom. We are all very proud of him."

"What about the other one?"

"Steven?"

His mother nodded her head.

"He's a lawyer."

"He's a good boy too."

Hirsh felt like crying. Instead, he chuckled. He looked up, but Laura had disappeared into the kitchen. The Filipino woman couldn't provide him the sympathy he needed. A teared formed in one eye. He leaned forward and kissed his mother.

"I'm Steven," he told her.

"Steven?" She stared at him blankly.

“Yes, Mamma. Steven.”

Her expression didn't change, as if he weren't there. “I have a son named Steven,” she said. Her eyes closed in fatigue. She seemed to drift off to sleep. Hirsh kissed her forehead, squeezed her hands in his, and stood up with a sigh.

“Laura,” he called. “How can I get a ride back to Jerusalem?”

Chapter Eighteen

Hirsh was resting in his hotel suite when the phone rang. It was Craig Lane calling.

“Thank God,” said the famous actor. “It's great to hear your voice.”

“Where are you,” Hirsh asked.

“In the driveway of the King David Hotel. That's where you're staying, isn't it? I'm in a taxi. I don't have the cash to pay the fare from the airport.”

Hirsh chuckled at the way life plays tricks. Once upon a time, Lane's box-office profits had topped one-hundred million.

“Use your credit card.”

“I can't. My angel of a wife had them all cancelled.”

“*Oy gevalt*,” Hirsh mumbled, not sure why the Yiddish expression had flashed in his mind. At the moment, a broke, paranoid, and suicidal actor was the last thing he needed in his life. “I'll be right down,” he said.

“Steve!” Lane cried. “Don’t hang up. Keep talking to me.”

“I’ll be downstairs in a minute,” the lawyer assured.

“Keep talking to me, please.” Then, after a pause, the obviously flipped-out actor whispered, “I don’t like the way the taxi driver is looking at me in the rearview mirror.”

“Maybe he recognizes you,” Hirsh said, leaving his suite.

“There’s nothing to recognize. I’m not the same man that I was. And even back then, I wasn’t me.”

Hirsh recalled a line from Shakespeare. “Though it be madness, there be reason in it.” Thank God the fellow hadn’t lost it completely. The phone connection ended when Hirsh entered the elevator. Wouldn’t you know it? The car stopped at each floor to accept other descending passengers. Finally, the elevator doors opened to the hotel’s large and opulent lobby. Hirsh hurried along the carpeted floor and didn’t wait for a bellman to open the lobby door. As the security guard looked on, he pushed his way through the revolver door. Dusk was falling over Jerusalem. A cab was waiting in the circular driveway. The impatient-looking driver was standing by the car. Inside, looking imprisoned, in the back seat behind closed windows, Lane pressed his nose against the pane. He wore the floppy tennis cap which Hirsh had given him, and a pair of dark sunglasses. Both of them together weren’t a very effective disguise. Anyone who had seen any of his thirty movies, would have picked him immediately out of a crowd.

“Are you his brother?” the cabbie asked with an angry tone. “I don’t have time to waste all day.”

“I’ll pay you – don’t worry,” Hirsh assured him. “Did you keep the meter running?”

“Of course I did. Those are the rules.”

“How much do we owe you?”

“Waiting is overtime. Double the usual. Three-hundred shekels.”

Hirsh figured the fellow was exaggerating, but he didn't want to argue. He couldn't tell if the driver was an Arab or a Jew. It didn't really matter.

“Do you know who your passenger is?” he asked.

“I don't care if he's the Pope. Just pay me my money and let me continue my work.”

Hirsh handed him three bills. “Where's his luggage?” he asked.

“He didn't have any.”

“No luggage at all? Not even a carry-on?”

“Nothing.”

The driver pressed on his remote, unlocking the doors of the taxi. Lane climbed out and wobbled on his feet, as if he were drunk. Smiling broadly, he fell forward into Hirsh's embrace. His breath smelled of booze. “Great to see you, old buddy,” he said, taking off his dark sunglasses.

“You've been drinking,” Hirsh said.

“I had a couple on the plane,” the actor admitted.

“If you don't have any money, how'd you pay for them?”

“The stewardess recognized me, even with my sunglasses. In the old days I would have bagged her. She had a cute smile and a great pair of legs, but lately, I'm as impotent as a corpse. I never thought it would happen to me.”

“I hope it never happens to me,” Hirsh replied.

“You? Hell no. You’re as strong as Tarzan.”

“Didn’t your cardiologist tell you to keep away from booze?” Hirsh knew the answer, because he had escorted Lane to the doctor when he complained of recurring pains in the chest. After a battery of tests, the expensive heart specialist told Hirsh that everything looked clean, and that the pains were probably muscle spasms resulting from tension. But he advised the actor to lessen his consumption of alcohol before he poisoned his liver.

“I’d die without booze,” Lane said. “Without whiskey, I can’t function.”

“No luggage?” Hirsh asked.

“I had a piece in New York, but when I noticed some guy following me, I left it in the lobby of the terminal as a decoy in order to shake him.”

“Someone was following you?” the lawyer asked.

“For days now. Whenever I leave my apartment, I’m followed. Someone wants to kill me. That’s why I came to Israel to be with you.”

It sounded to Hirsh that the actor had stepped into an Alfred Hitchcock movie that was playing in the movie-theater of his mind. Poor guy. The problem was that Hirsh had his own troubles to worry about.

“You must be exhausted from the trip. Get yourself some sleep in my suite, and then we’ll figure out how to get you some clothes and whatever you need.”

“I can’t fall asleep without my sleeping pills, and I left them in my suitcase back in New York,” the troubled actor informed him.

“My brother lives in Israel. He’s a doctor. I’ll have him write you a prescription.”

“You’re an angel, Steven. I don’t know what I would do without you. Thanks.”

“Excuse me,” an excited voice said behind them. It belonged to a young Israeli fellow in his thirties who was holding the arm of his girlfriend or wife. “You’re Craig Lane, aren’t you?” he asked with a noticeable local accent.

“Once in a while,” the actor quipped, straightening up instantly. Public recognition had the same effect on him as a stiff gulp of scotch.

“Hey, great! Welcome to Israel! Are you here to shoot a film?”

The girl accompanying the guy was all smiles to meet the famous actor.

“Maybe, kid. We’ll see. I’m here to check things out.”

Before Hirsh could whisk him away, another young passerby hurried over. “Craig Lane!” he exclaimed in perfect American English. “Colossal! I don’t believe it!” He turned to a group of friends. “Hey guys!” he called. “It’s Craig Lane!”

“Let’s go,” Hirsh said. Taking Lane by the arm, he hurried toward the entrance to the hotel. The alert doorman opened the front door. The security guard stepped forward to intercept the actor’s young fans. Hirsh quickly escorted Lane to the elevators. Seeing a bar sign, the actor braked. “How about one for the road?” he asked.

“I have scotch in my room,” Hirsh assured him, pushing him into an elevator. A dark-skinned man wearing a business suit and an Indian turban followed them inside the elevator. After one glance at Lane, he burst into a broad smile, and chimed in a sing-song accent, “You are Craig Lane! My pleasure. My very great honor and pleasure! I have seen all of your movies. All of them. We love movies in India.”

When the doors of the elevator opened on the second floor, the excited fellow continued to talk as he backed out into the hallway. "Have a good stay in Israel, but don't forget us in India. Come for a visit. Wait please." Quickly, he held up a smartphone. "One picture for my family, please." But the doors of the elevator closed before he could take a selfie with Lane.

Once in the spacious hotel suite, Lane headed straight for the bar.

"Pour me one too," the haggard lawyer told him.

"Don't forget to call your brother about the sleeping pills."

With a shaking hand, the nerve-shattered actor filled up a glass with Johnny Walker Black.

"There is ice in the silver canister," Hirsh told him. "I don't know how but it is always full."

Lane took a long slug. His eyes glanced around the suite. "Nice pad," he said. "Are you sure you locked the door?"

"You can relax now," Hirsh told him. "You lost your stalkers back in New York."

"Thanks to you, Steven. I don't know how I can ever repay you."

Lane walked unsteadily to the sofa and plopped down without spilling his drink.

"Are you hungry?" Hirsh asked. "I can order something from room service."

Lane finished the whisky, draining the glass without taking a breath. His head dropped forward onto his chest. Either he was either sleeping or dead.

Hirsh treated himself to a scotch on the rocks. With the actor crashed out on the sofa, it couldn't be called drinking alone, but he felt that way. In a hotel room, in a strange country. True, his mother, brother, nephews, nieces, and his son, weren't far away, but he felt alone nonetheless. Someone knocked on the door. Maybe it was the night maid who turned down the blanket of the bed and filled up the ice bucket. He hadn't ordered room service. Setting his drink on the bar, he walked across the carpeted salon to the door, stepping carefully to one side lest a blast of machine-gun fire blow him away. Obviously, his own exhaustion and the actor's paranoia had gotten the better of him.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"Connors," came the reply.

Hirsh opened the door. The journalist, stripped of his cameras, entered the room. Hirsh closed the door. "Nu?" he asked.

The reporter stopped dead in his tracks and stared across the room. "Am I seeing things?" he said. "That's Craig Lane. What the hell is he doing here?"

"Sleeping."

"In Israel. What the hell is he doing in Israel?"

"I'm his attorney."

The journalist's face lit up like a Broadway sign. "Fantastic!"

"What's so fantastic about it," Hirsh asked, walking back to his drink.

"Murder stories are a dime a dozen in New York," Connors said. "When a Palestinian gets killed in Israel, *The New York Times* makes a big deal out of it, but at the *Post*, it's hardly news. A story about the son of a big

celebrity lawyer getting arrested and tortured on suspicion of murder, that makes things a little more titillating, but without your connections at the newspaper in New York, it wouldn't make the front page. But the fact that the actor Craig Lane flew to Israel when he learned about the injustice, that's headline news for a week!"

"He didn't come to Israel because of that."

"You know that, and he knows that, but the world will believe whatever I write. That's what the media is all about."

Hirsh nodded his head. "I like it. Pour yourself a drink. I like the idea. The only question is, can I sober him up enough to carry it through?"

"What? He's a great actor. It'll be peanuts and popcorn for him. And it's probably better if you let him keep pickled. A lot of actors perform better when they're stewed."

"It could work. I like the idea. You write the story. Send it to New York. I'll tell the editor I want him to give it priority attention."

"You won't have to, believe me."

"What did you learn from the Arabs in the village?" Hirsh asked, changing subjects. Before Connors could answer, Hirsh's telephone rang. It was Leah.

"Shalom," she said.

"Shalom," Hirsh replied, trying to hide his surprise.

"I'd like to speak with you about the case," she said in a professional tone.

"Absolutely. On the phone, or at your office?"

"My phone is tapped. You can come to my office."

“Now?”

“If you like. I’ll be here for another few hours.”

“I’m on the way.”

“You remember the address?”

“I wrote it down.”

“Fine,” she said, ending the conversation.

Hirsh looked at the journalist.

“The old man we met told me about the village,” he said, beginning his report. There’s a long, ongoing history of clan rivalry. It began as a land dispute. First, a vineyard was set afire and a grove olive-tree saplings uprooted in revenge. Then a woman got raped. Her husband killed the rapist and is serving a life sentence in prison. Then his own wife was raped and murdered in a case which has never been solved. The arson this week is the third arson attack between the warring families.”

“How much did the information cost you?”

“Five-hundred bucks.”

“Did you get any names?”

“The names of the families, that’s all. Nothing associated with the recent arson attack which the old man still claims was carried out by young settlers.”

“Do the police know all this?”

“Without any doubt. Apparently, it isn’t a secret.”

“Then why are the Israeli police insisting that Jews committed the crime?”

“Did you ever see the movie *Chinatown*?” the reporter asked.

“Sure. I used to play tennis in Central Park with Faye Dunaway.”

“Remember what Jack Nicholson says to the detective at the end of the film?”

“Not really.”

“Forget it, Jake. It’s Chinatown.”

Hirsh wasn’t sure what the line meant. He had never been a philosopher. “Get to work on the newspaper story,” he said. “I have an appointment to meet with my son’s lawyer.”

“On the double,” Connor’s assented, heading back toward the door.

“Wait a minute,” Hirsh called after him, looking down at Craig Lane sprawled on the sofa.

The journalist paused.

“There’s a computer here in the office of the suite. I can’t leave Lane alone. He’s in a rotten condition. That’s another story. I need a babysitter while I’m gone. You can work on the article here, and I will order you room service. What do you want to eat?”

“I have my laptop in my jeep. At the same time, I will download some pictures.”

“Go get it,” Hirsh told him. “I’ll take a quick shower. If Lane wakes up while I’m gone, assure him that I’ll be right back. Don’t let him go sightseeing. I don’t want him getting lost.”

Chapter Nineteen

Hirsh took a taxi to the building in the center of town which housed the civil rights organization. The door was locked. He pressed the call button of the intercom by the door. A man's voice answered. Hirsh told him his name and said that he had an appointment with Leah. When the buzzer sounded, Hirsh let himself in, wondering if Robert's wife had spoken to her. The voice over the intercom belonged to a tall, husky, bearded, settler type who toted a handgun in a hip holster which bulged out from under his tucked-out shirt. His no-nonsense expression was framed by *peyes* and large knitted *kippah*. "Your son is a good boy," he said in simple English, leading Hirsh to Leah's office. The attractive attorney was sitting at her desk. Hirsh had met women who were more beautiful. But there was something in Leah's Mediterranean look that made him feel warm inside, as if he had known her for ages. Ignoring him, she told the hulky settler to please ask the others to join them.

"Something new?" Hirsh asked.

"Have a seat please," she said in her most professional tone.

Hirsh thought to make a quip but changed his mind, not wanting to take the chance that she would be offended. Behind him, two young, clean-shaven attorneys entered the room. They looked like the young attorneys you could find in any successful law office in Manhattan. One wore a white shirt and tie. The other had his shirt collar open in the typical Israeli fashion, but basically they looked alike. The strapping settler followed them into the room. He gave the impression that he could pull a bear apart with his hands. Leah introduced Hirsh to them as Avraham's father. The big guy turned out to be the founder of the organization. Leah introduced him as Meir Bronstein, but said that everyone called him "Haystack". Hirsh didn't catch the names of the young lawyers who stepped forward to shake his hand. Call them Joe

and Eddie. The celebrity lawyer from New York sat in the chair opposite Leah's desk while her co-workers chose the small sofa. Haystack leisurely made himself a cup of black coffee.

"In cases involving Arabs, we sometimes hire people to provide needed information" Leah began, looking to her team on the sofa.

"A fellow working for us has turned up some interesting things," one of the young attorneys said.

"Apparently," the other lawyer continued, "for several years now, the village has been torn by clan feuding."

"I know," Hirsh interrupted. "It began as a land dispute. First, a vineyard was set afire and a grove of olive-tree saplings uprooted in revenge. Then a woman got raped. Her husband killed the rapist and is serving a life sentence in prison. Then his own wife was raped and murdered in a case which has never been solved. The arson this week is the third arson attack between the warring families."

The attorneys were dumbfounded. Leah sat with her mouth opened wide. Only Haystack seemed unimpressed.

"Who told you all that?" Leah asked.

"I visited the village today. You shouldn't underestimate Americans. After all, we were the first country to put an astronaut on the moon."

"And to invent bubble gum," one of the attorneys said with a smile.

"And talking movies," his partner added.

"I'm very impressed," Leah admitted.

Hirsh bowed his head.

"The question is where do we go from here?" Joe said.

“Our informant thinks we might be able to learn more details about the recent arson if we spread some money in the right places,” Eddie explained.

“And our organization doesn’t have money on hand to pay for the information,” Leah said.

“How much money do you need?” Hirsh inquired.

“For the moment, ten-thousand dollars,” Joe replied.

“I may be able to obtain the same information for less,” Hirsh declared, happy to see that the winning cards were all in his hands.

“When will we know?” Joe inquired.

“And how can we be sure that your channels are trustworthy?” Eddie asked.

“Good questions,” Hirsh answered. “I will try to let you know in a day or two.”

Leah and her co-workers exchanged glances.

“Time is of the essence here,” Joe said.

“For me more than for you,” Hirsh responded. “It’s my boy who is sitting in jail.”

“If you need an income tax write-off in America for the money, we have a sister organization in New York with official United States tax-exempt charity status,” Eddie remarked.

“Mr. Hirsh,” Haystack said. “You have had a chance to see a small part of our work. As you know, your son is in jail with a number of his friends. We represent them all. At the moment, we are representing another five settlers who are wasting their lives in prison. Four of them have been incarcerated for more than two years, without any charges

against them. Our civil rights organization is the only address in town when innocent people like them get into trouble unjustly with the authorities who act out of political reasons, in total disregard of the democratic rights of the suspects, rights of freedom and dignity to which every person is entitled under the law. It is not every day that a famous lawyer from New York enters our office. I too have done a little investigating. As founder of this organization, I am asking you to donate one-hundred-thousand dollars, not ten thousand.”

Leah and her colleagues sat in surprised silence. Hirsh chuckled. In the past, he had donated tens of thousands of dollars to the Metropolitan Museum, the New York City Opera, the Lincoln Center for the Arts, New York University, Mount Sinai Hospital, the March of Dimes, the Biafra Welfare Fund, Israel Bonds, and respectable sums for a few candidates hoping to become Mayor of New York City and Governor of New York, but never such a large sum at once, not that it would have depleted his savings and stock accounts in any noticeable fashion.

“I will certainly consider making a generous donation,” he answered, not losing his cool.

‘Wonderful,’ Haystack said with a bow of his head. “I apologize, but I have to be going. Thank you for coming this evening.”

“Thank you,” Hirsh answered, standing up from his seat. The two men shook hands. Haystack, savior of the poor and needy, had a grip like iron. Joe and Eddie also shook hands with Hirsh and stepped out of the room after their boss, leaving Hirsh and Leah alone. Hirsh sat down once again.

“He can be very straight forward,” Leah commented, as if in apology.

“That’s quite all right. So can I,” he added with his friendliest grin. With her tanned complexion, he couldn’t tell if she blushed.

What a ham she must think I am, he thought to himself. He had decided to act low key, and not scare her away, but here he was again, acting like he was in a beach bar on Long Island.

Fortunately, the phone rang. Leah swiveled in her chair to the side and nodded her head while she listened to some report. Ending the conversation with a sentence in Hebrew, she looked at Hirsh with a curt smile, indicating that their meeting was over. He remained in his chair, facing her with a smile that silently said, "Now that the meeting is over, let's be friends."

"Laura spoke to me about your conversation with her," she confided with a look of embarrassment. "Mr. Hirsh, I am certain that you mean well. I am very flattered. But you must understand, we live in two different worlds."

"Sometimes people who live in two different worlds can have a wonderful relationship," he countered.

Leah laughed. "With you living in New York and me in Israel?"

"Now that my son is getting married and intends to live here, I will be visiting more often. And a vacation to New York a few times a year might be good for you, to get away from the tension of your work."

"I love my work," she insisted.

"So do I. But human beings weren't created to work all the time."

"Men and women were created to get married and have children, not merely to go to the movies together and have fun."

"I would consider having another child if it is important to you."

Her eyes fluttered when he stared at her directly, waiting for her response.

“Woooo,” she said. “Hold your horses.”

“In the modern times we live in, there are many types of relationships and arrangements.”

“You sound like an attorney drawing up a contract.”

“It could be very romantic,” he suggested.

She chuckled. Hirsh chuckled too.

“Has anyone ever told you that you are very blunt?”

“I thought Israelis appreciated bluntness,” he said. “Like with Mr. Haystack.”

Leah stood up, looking uncharacteristically perplexed. “I don’t know how we got started on this conversation. It certainly has nothing to do with your son’s predicament.”

Once again, Hirsh couldn’t help but admire her figure. At the same time, he didn’t know himself how serious he had been with his proposal. Often, he had told women all sorts of whimsical things to get them into bed. But he sensed that something was different this time. He stood up, facing her from the other side of the desk. She was almost his height.

“Why don’t you let me take you out for a drink or a cup of coffee? Maybe you would like something to eat. You choose the place.”

“Thank you for the offer, Mr. Hirsh, but I still have work do.”

Hirsh glanced at his watch. “It’s almost nine o’clock in the evening,” he reminded her.

“An attorney’s work is never finished. Isn’t that what they say?”

Hirsh thought about Craig Lane, wondering how he was.

“Perhaps I felt that way when I began my career,” he told her, “but now I have associates who help me.”

“I am afraid that I don’t have that luxury. We are a small organization, and my colleagues are overworked themselves. Can I call you a taxi?”

“Only if you share it with me.”

This time, he gazed at her from his heart.

“My car is in a parking lot nearby,” she said. “Give me a few minutes to finish up, and I will meet you outside.”

His heart skipped a beat. So did hers. What was she doing, she thought? Hirsh smiled. “Wonderful,” he said. “No hurry. Take your time. I have some phone calls to make. But don’t change your mind.”

He left her office and found his way out of the building alone. Outside on the sidewalk, he phoned Connors. Lane was still sleeping. “Like a baby,” the journalist said.

“How’s the article progressing?” Hirsh asked.

“Fabulously. I think you’ll like it.”

“Send it to New York when you finish. You don’t have to wait for me.”

“Will do, boss.”

“And order yourself something to eat.”

“I already did. A hamburger and a plate of French fries. And a new bottle of Johnny Walker, if it’s alright with you.”

“If it doesn’t interfere with your writing, why not?”

“I can’t write a paragraph without it.”

Leah appeared wearing a light jacket and looking like a million-dollar donation.

“My car is just down the street,” he said.

They walked without talking. Her sandals clicked on the sidewalk. Apparently, she had a monthly deal at the parking lot. Waving to the attendant in a small booth, she continued toward her Audi at the back of the dark and deserted yard. Instead of walking on to the passenger’s side of the car, he followed her as she took the key out of her jacket pocket. When she turned around, he was in front of her. Their eyes met. He reached forward and held her shoulders. She didn’t say no. Her eyes only asked that he be gentle. Softly, he leaned forward and kissed her. She didn’t resist his embrace. When he squeezed her more tightly, she turned her head away and breathed deeply. Her body trembled. Her eyes gazed at him, flushed.

“That’s enough for tonight,” she said with a gasp. “That’s enough, please. I don’t know what got into me.”

She looked like a young embarrassed girl who had been kissed for the very first time.

“You don’t need to feel sorry,” he said.

“I feel so silly. I don’t know what to say. This is happening so fast. I’m sorry. You’ll have to excuse me. I have to go home.”

Quickly, she got in the car and started the motor.

“Wait, Leah,” Hirsh said.

“You can get a taxi on the street,” she told him. “Thank you. We’ll speak.”

Then the car leapt into reverse. In a moment, she sped out of the lot. Hirsh stood alone in the darkness. For some reason, he felt like a teenager. He chuckled. His son was in jail, and here he was standing in a deserted parking lot as happy as could be. Something was happening

and he didn't know what it was. Hirsh realized that he hadn't felt really happy for years. Wasn't that strange, he thought?

Chapter Twenty

The conference hall in the King David Hotel was jam-packed with reporters from Israel and the rest of the world. Connors was right. The name of the famous actor attracted them to the press conference as if it were Oscar night in L.A. The fact that he Craig Lane was visiting the Holy Land was news in itself. The surprising connection with the murder in the Arab village made the story too unique to miss. Just hours before, the front page of the morning *New York Post* announced: SON OF CELEB LAWYER JAILED IN ISRAEL. Photos of Hirsh, Craig Lane, and Leah accompanied the headline. Question: why Leah? Answer: what's a murder story worth without a pretty women? When Leah heard that her picture graced the front page of every newsstand in Manhattan, and in the tabloid's Internet edition all over the globe, she was shocked.

Hirsh spotted her standing at the very back of the hall near the door. No one paid attention to her. Nor to Haystack whose height made him stand out in the crowd. All eyes and camera lenses were pointed forward to the front of the room where Hirsh stood with Craig Lane, in front of a King David Hotel banner. Connors, who had organized the gathering with the help of the hotel's public relations department, stood to the side of the stage. Kevin's camera-shy fiancé, stood behind Connors, away from the limelight. When the actor stepped up to the microphone on the podium, he was met with an ovation. Hirsh was praying that he didn't collapse on the stage. No doubt, it would have

made a good story, but it would have detracted from the main goal of getting his son out of jail.

The seasoned actor rose to the occasion. Seeing all off the reporters, the flashing cameras, and film crews, he came alive. The attention was like an elixir. It was truly a miracle, Hirsh reflected. In the morning, when the nerve-shattered celebrity woke up and discovered that he was in Hirsh's hotel suite in Jerusalem, an almost angelic calm graced his face. Standing on the terrace, gazing out at the Old City, he said, "Jerusalem. Holy Virgin Mary. Jerusalem." Then, as if traveling back in time, he said, "On Sundays, when I was a kid, my Mamma dragged me with her to church. I hated it. My father stayed at home and got drunk. After working like a mule all the week, Sunday was his day of rest. Church bored me, but Christmas I liked. I enjoyed singing Christmas carols with other kids my age, songs of peace and joy and love. I liked the smell of the Christmas tree and the excitement of waiting for Santa. I realize today that religion is a lot of baloney, but who doesn't shed a nostalgic tear on Christmas?"

"We never celebrated Christmas," Hirsh told him.

"That's right – you're a Jew," the actor said. "It isn't your fault. You were born that way. It doesn't make a difference to me. Jews are good lawyers, and that's what really counts."

After a cold shower, Craig Lane began to look like his old self again. Hirsh had room service send up a bagel and lox platter to his suite. The actor chomped on a cream-cheese filled bagel with relish. Who knew when was the last time he had eaten? Hirsh explained the mission before him, like a director detailing the character that an actor had to portray. Lane nodded his head. Playing roles was a game he enjoyed. He slipped in and out of identities with the ease of a man changing pajamas. "The bastards actually tortured the boy?" he asked in

indignation when he heard the story. When Hirsh finished, the actor told him, "I'll do anything I can to help out, Steven. You can count on me."

Indeed, the moment he stepped on the stage before the crowd of reporters, he captured them with his Hollywood magic and charm. Everyone applauded. Lane held up his hands to hush the crowd. "Enough, enough" he said. "We are not here for me."

"Craigy!" a woman's voice screamed out and everyone laughed. There were more whistles and cheers, as if this was Israel's chance to thank the actor for having given them hours and hours of good times at the movies. Connors winked at Hirsh, as if to say, "See, my idea was right."

"Ladies and gentlemen," the actor began, looking poised and in command, as if he had never touched a drop of alcohol in his life.

The rows of reporters grew quiet. In the crowded hall, Hirsh noticed a lot of people without microphones and cameras. Before the press conference began, Connors had whispered that a lot of government aids and undercover agents were present.

"Ladies and gentlemen. Thirty years ago, I shot a few scenes of film in your country. I am sorry to say that I haven't been here since. One of my films was set in Israel, but we really shot it in Morocco, because we couldn't get an insurance company to offer us a policy in the middle of the Intifada. But as sorry as I am for not having had the opportunity to visit the Promised Land since then, I am even sorrier about the death of a Palestinian infant in the village of Al-Aduma. Along with that, I am shocked by the terrible injustice perpetrated against the son of my dear friend and attorney, Steven Hirsh, who is standing at my side."

Like a practiced orator, the actor paused for effect. Hirsh didn't know whether to bow his head in acknowledgment or remain standing on the

podium like a mummy. He didn't like the limelight. Glancing around, he tried to spot Leah, but the lights shining on the rostrum were too bright. Beside him, Lane looked around, as if something was missing. A waiter hurried forward with a glass and pitcher of water which he set on the white-clothed speaker's stand.

"Water?" the actor asked aloud, drawing a roar of laughter from the crowd. "I haven't drunk water since I married my fifth wife."

Another rumble of laughter and cheers filled the hall. Hirsh glanced worriedly at Connors, afraid that Lane was about to lose it. Finally, he spotted Leah, who stood stiffly, in tense anticipation by the door.

"How can it be, that in the holy city of Jerusalem, the Biblical city of righteousness and justice, the home of the Sanhedrin, where justice went forth to the world, to all Peoples, how can it be that an innocent child is murdered and an equally innocent youth is arrested, tortured, and left to wallow in jail?"

Once again, Hirsh's gaze encompassed the room. Journalists, known for their cynical and skeptical natures, listened with rapt attention. Hirsh recalled the film in which Lane had portrayed a passionate lawyer, whose gripping courtroom summary to the jury earned him an Oscar nomination for Best Actor of the Year, if not the coveted gold statue itself.

"What proof is there that the suspects were involved in the crime? None. Who saw them in the Arab village? No one. How many Arabs from the village have been detained and interrogated, even though the Israeli police knows the history of violence and clan rivalry that has existed there for years? Why are these young people caged up in prison without any charges filed against them and without the freedom to speak to a lawyer? I thought that Israel was a democracy? I've come

here to get some answers and to demand that Kevin Hirsh and his friends be set free. In addition, how is it that in the past week several Israelis have been killed in terrorist attacks, yet no one has been arrested? If the police can't supply the answers, I hope the Prime Minister will. Thank you all for coming."

Reporters shouted out questions. "Do you plan to speak with the Prime Minister?"

"Is it true that you and your current wife are getting divorced?"

"Why haven't you appeared in a film over the last three years?"

Connors rushed forward and hurried Lane off the stage. The private bodyguards he hired for the occasion stepped in front of the actor and pushed reporters away, clearing a path to the door. Hirsh got a glance of Leah as she fled from the hall. Could it be that instead of impressing her, the theatrical press conference had turned her off? Or maybe she felt piqued that Hirsh had taken the ball out of her hands? The night before in the parking lot, when they had kissed, Hirsh had experienced a feeling he hadn't felt for as long as he could remember. Love? After a lifetime of unhappy relationships, he was too much of a pragmatist to call the feeling love. But it was a feeling nonetheless. A real feeling – not something artificial or a mundane longing for physical comfort. He had felt something tender and caring, something fresh and innocent, something young. Was that love?

It was his turn at the microphone. Brooding about Leah, he made his speech short, outlining the things about the Arab village that Connors had discovered. At first the questions of the media centered about the case, but the journalists were more interested to learn more about Craig Lane and his unexpected visit to Israel.

“Are you implying that there is a cover-up by the police, or from a higher source?”

“Was your son really strung upside down by the Shabak and beaten?”

“Did Craig Lane come to Israel just because of this case, or is there some other reason?”

When the press conference was over, Connors and his team of rented bodyguards returned to escort Hirsh to his suite, where Craig Lane was enjoying his second scotch since his highly successful performance. Hirsh motioned Sarah to come along. He wanted to talk with the confused-looking girl and explain what was happening as best as he could. Haystack followed them to the elevator and pushed his large frame inside. “He’s OK,” Hirsh told the bodyguards who wrestled with the giant to keep him away.

“I received a phone call from the Attorney General’s office,” he announced. “They want to make a deal.”

“What kind of deal?” asked Connors.

“They will have Kevin released on two conditions. First, he has to agree to keep away from Judea and Samaria for half a year and not meet with any of his friends from Neve Pincus.”

The elevator reached the top floor. The door slid open. The passengers stepped into the corridor leading to Hirsh’s suite. Everyone looked up at the strapping civil-rights advocate.

“The second condition,” he reported, “is that you and Mr. Lane leave the country.”

“That’s absurd!” Hirsh protested. “What kind of *chutzpah* is that?! My son lives here. My mother lives here. My brother lives here. Plus, I’m a

Jew. This is the Jewish Homeland, isn't it? And my son is getting married here in another month."

"Not if he's in prison," Haystack noted.

"It's illegal to kick us out of the country!" the New York lawyer proclaimed. "We're Americans not terrorists!"

"They kicked Meyer Lansky out of the country and let the Feds put him in prison in America. And he was a Jew," Connors noted.

Haystack explained. "In their eyes of the government, you are leftist agitators acting to undermine the State of Israel, like BDS boycott activists who haven't been allowed to enter the country."

"That's crazy!" Hirsh replied. "We aren't siding with the Arabs. We're demanding that the authorities put the blame for the arson and murder on them! And we have no political motives whatsoever. I want my son released from jail, that's all."

The freelancer Connors added his journalistic opinion. "Tell them that if they kick Craig Lane out of the country, the negative publicity will never cease. Israel will be painted as a fascist State."

"You can tell them that I am not leaving," Hirsh concluded.

"I will tell them," Haystack replied, following them down the carpeted corridor.

They discovered Craig Lane fast asleep on the couch. The room smelled like scotch. A whiskey glass lay on the carpeted floor by his feet. The bottle of Johnny Walker Black on the bar looked as depleted as the actor.

"Well, he played his part brilliantly," Connors quipped. "We can put him in a taxi and put him on a plane to New York, and that will satisfy one of the conditions."

“I’m not leaving the country,” Hirsh stated. Not yet.” Glancing at Sarah, he gave her a reassuring smile.

“If they release your boy from the slammer, you can return for the wedding,” Connors reasoned.

“They may not allow me back into the country,” Hirsh replied, not disclosing the real reason for not wanting to leave the country – Leah. He hoped the theatrics hadn’t chased her way.

Haystack stepped out on the terrace and spoke on the phone in Hebrew.

“Do you still need us?” a bodyguard asked.

“Stick around for another hour,” Hirsh answered. “You can watch TV in the study. I’ll order some snacks and drinks.”

Haystack returned to the suite. “I passed on your response. They will get back to me. Meanwhile, I have to prepare some things in the office in the event they bring Avraham to court to cut an agreement.”

“What about Leah?” Hirsh asked. “Where is she?”

“She asked to be removed from the case,” Haystack replied.

Hirsh felt a hole in his stomach. “I’d like her back on the case,” he said. “She’s a good lawyer.”

“She makes her own decisions,” Haystack answered.

“You’re her boss, aren’t you?”

“We work together as a team.”

“Civil rights teams who work on a voluntary basis need money to keep their organization going, isn’t that what you told me?” Hirsh asked in a

not so subtle manner, hinting at Haystack's request for a hefty donation.

"I will speak with her," the bearded Israeli said. "But I don't promise you that she will agree."

Chapter Twenty-One

The quickly-arranged court hearing was held in Petach Tikvah, in a building not far from the *Shin Bet* headquarters. Hirsh rode with Sarah in Connors' jeep. The bodyguards stayed in the suite to babysit Lane. Haystack said that he and Leah would meet them outside of the courthouse, but when they arrived, Leah wasn't there. Joe and Eddie were taking her place.

"Where is Leah?" Hirsh asked.

"I tried to persuade her to come. Sorry," the jumbo settler said.

"I've never heard of such a thing," Hirsh responded, piqued by her absence. "She's the attorney on the case, isn't she?"

"She has a will of her own," Haystack explained. "Don't worry about your son. He is well represented."

"This is boiler plate stuff," Joe said.

"A simple deal – thanks to you," Eddie added, smiling at Hirsh. "The show you staged in the hotel today put a lot of pressure on the police and the government. If all goes well, Avraham can drive back with you to Jerusalem."

Sarah flashed a smile of relief, but Hirsh felt crestfallen that Leah hadn't chosen to come. A sensation of emptiness in his stomach returned, a feeling of being all alone in an unfamiliar place, like a child lost in a shopping center unable to locate his mother.

"The Attorney General's office spoke once again with me," Haystack related. "They've agreed to drop the demand that you and Lane leave the country."

That was at least some solace, but Hirsh felt worried and annoyed that his inchoate romance with Leah had been aborted, just like several potential progeny with women he barely knew.

Since it was late in the evening, the only people in the building were security personnel. Even though Haystack had a license to carry a revolver, he left it in his car to avoid unnecessary hassles when they passed through the security check.

A friend of Connors was waiting for them, a reporter for the Hebrew newspaper, *Maariv*. Connors explained that they helped each other out now and then, exchanging information and stories. Hirsh wasn't allowed to enter the courtroom with the lawyers, or even to meet with his son in the hallway. When the legal team walked down the corridor, their footsteps echoed loudly in the empty building. In the meantime, the reporter from *Maariv* interviewed Hirsh, who spoke freely about his worries, about the torture his son had suffered, about his visit to the Arab village, about his suspicion that the Arabs had committed the arson and murder, and that the Israelis, for reasons he didn't fathom, were hiding the truth and framing the youngsters from the hilltop outpost. After a wait of forty minutes, Haystack returned to the lobby where Hirsh was impatiently waiting.

"Where is Avraham?" Sarah inquired.

“He refused to accept the deal,” Haystack informed them.

“What?” Hirsh asked in disbelief.

Sarah looked dumbfounded as well.

“He demanded that all of his friends be released as well. I think the prosecutor representing the State was taken by surprise. He doesn’t have the authority to make a decision to free all of them by himself. The judge told Avraham to think about the offer and then postponed the hearing for another week.”

“Another week?” Sarah asked faintly.

“You should be proud of your son,” said one of the civil rights attorneys. “He has principles. He’s faithful to his friends. He doesn’t place his own welfare first. Those are leadership qualities. You raised your son well, Mr. Hirsh.”

The normally glib New York lawyer found himself lost for words. Principles, faithful, leadership? Those were qualities he himself didn’t possess. Nor did Kevin’s mother. From whom had his son inherited those genes? From his great grandfather perhaps. Although a quiet man, he was a man of character. “Everything is for the best,” he would say with a granite belief in the faithfulness of the Lord.

“You should be proud of Avraham as well,” the young attorney said to Sarah in Hebrew. “You found yourself a genuine hero – a *gever*.”

“Will the prosecution agree to release his friends as well?” she asked.

The attorney turned to his partner. Joe to Eddie, or Eddie to Joe.

“The Head of the *Shin Bet* is the one who makes the call,” he replied.

“He’s the top of the ladder?” Hirsh wanted to know.

“In internal security matters like these,” Joe replied.

“The Prime Minister is the top of the ladder,” Haystack corrected. “He’s in charge of the *Shabak*.”

“Can you get me a meeting with him?” Hirsh asked.

The burly settler shook his head. “I don’t think so. But your actor friend probably can. Whenever famous entertainers come to Israel, the Prime Minister manages to find the time to be photographed with them.”

Hirsh turned to Connors. “Call your buddies at the hotel and find out how Lane is doing,” he told him. Then, turning to Haystack, he said, “Please get in touch with the Prime Minister’s office and ask for a meeting between the Prime Minister and Lane, with me coming along as Lane’s attorney.”

“No problem,” the agreeable settler consented.

“Can I come along?” the reporter from Maariv asked.

“No,” Haystack answered flatly.

“I’d like Leah to be there,” Hirsh told the big settler. “It’s a superstition I have. If the original lawyer drops out from the picture, it’s bad for the case.”

“I’ll tell her,” Haystack said, sensing that the celebrity lawyer from New York wanted Leah to be present at the meeting, not for professional reasons alone.

Chapter Twenty-Two

On the drive back to Jerusalem, Connors received a call from the Prime Minister’s office, saying that a ten-minute meeting had been arranged

for seven o'clock that evening, with the request that passport numbers be provided ahead of time, and that Mr. Lane and Mr. Hirsh arrive at the Prime Minister's residence at 6:30 for security purposes.

"Tell him that Leah Degan will be there as well," Hirsh cut in.

"I don't know her ID number."

"Tell Haystack to message it to them," Hirsh instructed. He wanted her to be there at the meeting, figuring it might win him back some brownie points with her.

The call bolstered Hirsh's downcast spirits, but when they arrived back at the hotel they discovered Craig Lane and his babysitters as drunk as could be, watching a wrestling match on cable TV. The two bodyguards stood up and wobbled on their feet when Hirsh and Connors walked into the suite. Lane laughed, obviously feeling no pain. Two bottles of scotch stood empty on the bar surrounded by fallen soldiers of beer. The only thing drinkable was a lone bottle of an Israeli red wine that had been waiting on the bar counter since Hirsh's arrival. Room service hadn't cleared away what looked like plates of hamburgers and French fries.

"I love wrestling," Lane exclaimed. "It's completely fake, like acting. I could have been a wrestler myself, but I don't like getting hit. Acting is much cleaner. I must have been in a hundred fight scenes in my films and I never got hit even once. It's all done by stuntmen. Movie are a big fake like wrestling, but in wrestling you have to take a lot of blows because of the people at ringside – it has to look real. Anyway, where the hell have you bastards been?"

The actor stood up from the couch, then immediately swooned and collapsed back down onto the cushioned sofa. "Oh, brother, what a headache I have. Does anyone have any aspirin?"

Hirsh and Connors exchanged dubious looks. They had an hour to get Lane sober before the meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister. “Mission Impossible,” Connors said, gazing down at the inebriated star. For a while, Hirsh’s law firm had represented Tom Cruise, the “Mission Impossible” mega-star, but now, given the situation and his somber mood, Hirsh didn’t bother to tell anyone about it. At the moment, he frankly didn’t care. Not just because actors were always changing lawyers like socks, but because with his son in jail, he didn’t give a crap about Hollywood.

“I have some aspirin in my toilet kit,” he said, answering Lane. The truth was that he was prone to headaches, mostly at night. If he didn’t want to take a sleeping pill, a single aspirin tablet often did the job.

“Maybe we can postpone the meeting,” Connors said. Hirsh stared at Lane who had fallen back to sleep.

“Strip him and throw him into a cold shower,” Hirsh ordered. “Sober him up.”

“NO WAY!” the actor cried out. “I HATE COLD SHOWERS!” His shoulders twitched. His arms moved. With a groan and great effort, he raised himself up, like a dizzy boxer getting up from the canvas at the count of nine. “Give me a drink!” he barked.

Hirsh didn’t know what to do. Connors nodded his head, as if to suggest there was nothing to lose. One of the bodyguards found a corkscrew and started to open the wine bottle.

“WHAT’S TAKING SO LONG?!” Lane roared. “A man could drop dead from thirst!”

Before the bodyguard could pour a glass, the actor grabbed the bottle and gulped down a few hardy swigs of the burgundy liquid. “Best wine I

ever tasted!” he exclaimed, taking a close look at the label. “What is this? Arabic?”

“Hebrew,” Connors informed him.

“The Jews can do everything,” Lane declared. “The best bagels, the best film directors, the best wines, the best showbiz agents and lawyers.” Then, as an afterthought, he said. “I’ve been imprisoned in this hotel suite all day. Let’s do something.”

“We’ve been invited to meet the Prime Minister,” Hirsh informed him. “Are you up to it?”

“Why not? I’ve met the presidents and kings of just about every place you can mention. They love actors. Who can figure it out? Most of us are low-life bums who can hardly read. Maybe it’s because presidents and kings are actors too. A Mark Twain said, ‘All the world’s a stage.’”

“That was Shakespeare,” Hirsh corrected.

“That’s right, Steven. Thanks for reminding me. Let’s go.”

A football team of photographer’s was waiting in the lobby of the hotel. The bodyguards shoved them away and cleared a path to the exit. Lane finished the bottle of wine during the ride to the Prime Minister’s home. It seemed to sober him up. Hirsh tried to phone Leah, but she didn’t answer the call. Nor was she waiting for them outside the heavily guarded residence on Balfour Street. Before passing through the gate, the jeep was carefully checked, inside and out. Connors showed his press card to the security team, and after the passport of Hirsh and Lane were cleared, the jeep was allowed into the parking lot of the mansion. Armed security personnel escorted them to the house. On the way to the meeting, Hirsh had briefed Lane about their mission. All he had to do was play his charming self, as he had on a million public occasions. Hirsh said that he would do the talking. Their escorts led

them to a sitting room that looked like a library. “The Prime Minister is known to be a night owl, reading a different book every night,” Connors reported. After a short wait, the Prime Minister appeared, accompanied by his smiling wife, two guards, and a photographer. Hirsh wasn’t a news addict, but he immediately recognized the square-jawed, good-looking face. With a broad grin, the Prime Minister extended his hand to Craig Lane.

“A real pleasure,” the famous leader said. “For me, certainly for my wife, and a pleasure for all the people of Israel.”

The First Lady offered her hand as well. “If I kiss you on the cheek, will I be shot?” the actor joked.

Everyone laughed. She blushed when he kissed her on the cheek. The photographer snapped the photo that made the front page of the morning newspapers.

“How are you, Steven?” the Prime Minister asked with his resonant voice and perfect English. His tone was casual, as if they had been good friends for years. “Rivki and I would like to express our condolences over the tragic death of your wife.”

For a moment, Hirsh was puzzled. The death of his wife? What wife? Then he remembered poor Cindy. He hadn’t thought about her for days. Obviously, the Prime Minister’s team had done their homework.

“Thank you,” Hirsh answered.

“She was a wonderful tennis player. I met her once in London, after her Wimbledon victory.”

For a flash, Hirsh wondered if they had had an affair.

“We enjoy your movies,” Rivki informed Lane. “I often watch them for a second and third time in the evenings when I’m not needed at my husband’s side.”

“I hate to watch movies,” the actor told her. “I guess it’s because I know how fake they are.”

“What brings you to Israel?” she asked.

“I came when I heard that Steven’s son was in trouble.”

“I did my best to free him,” the Prime Minister said. “I understand his loyalty to his buddies is more important to him than his freedom. That’s a noteworthy trait. The Betar Movement was founded on that.”

“Mr. Prime Minister,” Hirsh said slowly. He knew their time was limited, so he got straight to the point. “The people interrogating my son know he and his friends are innocent. The police know they are innocent. The judge knows they are innocent. All of the Arabs in that village know they are innocent. And you, as head of Israel’s Intelligence Services, know that they are innocent as well. Then why is my son still in jail?”

“This is the Middle East, Mr. Hirsh,” the Prime Minister replied calmly with his winning smile.

“What the hell does that mean?” Hirsh asked bluntly, as if he were in a sailors’ bar. He was tired of hearing the same lame excuse, as if the Middle East was different from anywhere else.

“I understand your frustration, Steven,” the Prime Minister replied calmly. “Don’t we, Rivki?” he rhetorically asked his wife. “I am told that we are making progress in solving the case. Sometimes, these matters take time. On the one hand, there have been instances when the youngsters known as ‘hilltop youth’ have committed serious crimes. Arrests are important in gathering information, and in acting as a

deterrent to keep hot-headed youngsters in line – especially after a terror attack in which Jewish blood is spilled. Sometimes, arrests can give the real culprit a false sense of security which leads him to boast to his comrades about his wrongdoing. Other times, a broad range of political factors are involved, both internal and international. It's a very complicated affair, like a movie with a twist ending, something I am sure that Craig can appreciate." The Prime Minister paused to smile at the actor. "I am sure you have heard about the murderous terror attacks we have suffered in the past few days. While we are speaking, our special commando units and undercover agents are arresting and perhaps eliminating the terror cell that carried out the shootings. I ask you to be patient regarding your son. I apologize for all of the distress which you feel, and I applaud Mr. Lane for his concern that justice be served. Hopefully, if your son agrees to be less of a hero, he will be home well in advance of his wedding."

There was no question of the Prime Minister's charm and intelligence. And everything about his open straightforwardness and sincerity said that he was speaking the truth. But being a longtime New York lawyer, Hirsh didn't believe a word that he said.

Chapter Twenty-Three

On the drive back to the King David Hotel, Connors was interviewing Lane on his long and illustrious career when the jet-lagged and hungover actor fell asleep in the front seat of the Land Rover.

"Call the hotel and ask them how we can get him up to the suite without a crowd of reporters," Hirsh told him. They were instructed to

drive into the delivery entrance at the side of the building. Connors said that before the State of Israel was established, in the underground struggle against the British, Menachem Begin's Irgun soldiers, disguised as milkmen, had used the same entrance when he blew up half of the building, which was being used as the British Military Headquarters. The bodyguards dumped Lane into a waiting wheelchair and took him up to the sixth floor in the service elevator. Connors called it a night.

Determined to see Leah, Hirsh decided to drive to Efrat in Kevin's car, which was parked in a lot by the hotel. Fortunately, the GPO "Waze" navigator, which the Israelis had developed, was equipped with an English application. Hirsh told the voice at the other end of the device the name of the street where Robert lived, and when the destination was processed and cleared, he drove off into the Jerusalem night, glad that he had the confident and reassuring voice of the GPO navigator to keep him company along the way.

Leaving the city, he recalled his drive to Efrat with Kevin and the boy's explanation of the high walls bordering the roadside to prevent Arabs from turning the highway into a shooting gallery. Even before he reached the tunnels which led to the West Bank, he heard the roar of helicopters flying overhead. At the army checkpoint, vehicles were stopped and checked carefully before being allowed to continue. A female soldier, Sarah's age, shined a flashlight in his face and studied his passport.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To visit my brother in Efrat," he replied stiffly.

Nodding, she waved him on. Like on his previous trip, the roadway was filled with police and army vehicles. Siren screaming, an ambulance sped by on the way to Jerusalem. Flares lighted the sky. Remembering

what the Prime Minister had said, Hirsh phoned his brother from the car and told him that he was on the way to Efrat.

“There’s a lot of action on the road,” Hirsh reported.

“We located the hideout of the terrorists responsible for the recent wave of attacks,” Robert told him. “Our commandoes surrounded the house in a village not far from Efrat. In the shootout, two of the terrorists were killed and three captured. The village is under quarantine until the army is certain that no other terrorists are hiding out in the area. I learned the details on my beeper. For the moment, there is a media blackout. One of my boys was involved in the action.”

Hirsh didn’t know whether to drive slowly along the dark, winding curves, or to hurry and get to the city-like settlement as quickly as possible. He also didn’t know what he was going to do when he got there. Knock on her door? Beg her to let him inside? It was close to midnight. What if she called the police?

His mother was already asleep. His brother was talking on the phone with the worried mother of a sick infant.

“You look exhausted,” Laura told him in the kitchen while she heated water for tea.

“I probably am,” he answered.

She set a plate of homemade cookies on the table while she waited for the water to boil. Hirsh sat in a chair and stared at the plate, not liking cookies, but, at the same time, not wanting to hurt her feelings.

“Have you eaten dinner?” she asked. “I can heat up a plate of lasagna if you like.”

Hirsh couldn’t remember if he had eaten dinner or not. He didn’t think he had. “Have you spoken lately to Leah?” he asked.

“Yes. She phoned me. She says that you are chasing after her like a hungry bear.”

“That’s what she said? Like a hungry bear?”

“Yes.”

“Some women would like that.”

“This isn’t New York, Steven.”

“I’ve been told that fairy tale before,” he said in irritation. “What the hell is the difference? Men are men, and women are women. They date, they have relationships, sometimes they get married, and sometimes they get divorced. Don’t tell me that religious Jews are different. They have feelings and hormones like everyone else.”

“Steven, you are a wonderful guy, but Leah isn’t for you.”

“She could have fooled me last night when she kissed me. Did she tell you about that?”

“Yes, she told me. She says she regrets it. A spirit of foolishness entered her head for a moment, that’s all.”

“A spirit of foolishness? What the hell is that? It felt pretty serious to me.”

“She hasn’t been with a man for decades.”

“What is she waiting for? The Messiah?”

“I suppose she isn’t waiting for anyone anymore. She’s a complicated person. I advise you to forget about her.”

Robert appeared in the kitchen doorway holding a jacket. “I’m jumping over to the Friedmans to check their baby,” he said. “Hi, brother. I’ll be right back. Have something to eat.”

Once again, Hirsh and Laura were alone in the kitchen.

“Lasagna?” she asked. “Or would you prefer toast and eggs.”

Hirsh stood up. “I’m going to talk with her,” he announced.

“You can’t barge in on people in the middle of the night,” his sister-in-law protested.

“First of all, she is the lawyer for my son. Second, I can’t stay in Israel forever. Third, I know when a woman is interested in a man. She is frightened of change, and of her emotions, that’s all.”

“A good summation, but we’re not in court. What do you need her for, Steven?”

A good question, he thought.

“Another conquest to add to your list? Your Mediterranean Championship Trophy?”

He straightened. Her remark made him chuckle. Not a chuckle of mirth. Indeed, he wondered, why did he need her? He had women waiting for him back in New York. Given his professional standing, his wealth, and the celebrity-filled galaxy he inhabited, women were as plentiful as the stars in the heavens. He simply wanted her – wasn’t that reason enough?

“I’m sorry,” Laura said. “I don’t mean to be nasty. But Leah has been hurt in the past. Leave her alone.”

“Phone her,” he said. “Tell her I’m on my way to speak with her.”

“No, Steven.”

“Where does she live?”

Laura didn’t answer.

“I’ll find her myself,” he said.

“Your brother will be displeased.”

“Live and let live. His life is his life, and my life is mine.”

Managing a smile, he turned and walked out of the kitchen. He walked out of the house. What the hell was he going to do now? Start knocking on doors? Not knowing what else to do, he got into Kevin’s car. Not having Roger to call, he phoned Connors and asked the journalist to find out where Leah Degan lived in Efrat. A minute later, his telephoned beeped with the address. 12 Yehuda HaMaccabee Street. The car’s GPO navigator did the rest of the work. Within a few minutes, Hirsh found the address. It was a relatively new, three-story apartment building. Hirsh discovered Leah’s name on one of the mailboxes in the lobby. He walked up a stairway and knocked on her door. His heart beat rapidly as if he were a teenager on his first date. He heard quiet footsteps as he stared at the one-way peephole on the door. A mezuzah affixed to the doorpost guarded the apartment like a sentinel on duty. He himself hadn’t bothered to put a mezuzah on the doorpost of his apartment in Manhattan. Why advertise that he was Jewish?

“What do you want?” she asked from the other side of the door.

“I want to speak with you,” he told her.

“There is nothing to speak about. I resigned from the case.”

“Not about the case. About us.”

“There is nothing to speak about.”

“What about the few moments we shared in the parking lot?”

“Forget about that.”

“I can’t.”

“I lost my head for a few moments, that’s all.”

“Leah, open the door. I don’t want to wake up the neighbors.”

“Please go away. If they don’t call the police, I will.”

“Can’t we speak in a regular fashion? I promise I won’t touch you.”

For a few seconds, she didn’t answer. “Why can’t your overblown ego understand that no is no?”

“Leah, please,” he pleaded. “I feel something special for you, something I haven’t felt in years.”

“You live in a fantasy world.”

“And what about you? What about the make believe world you’ve built for yourself – the princess imprisoned in the castle surrounded by impenetrable walls?”

“Goodnight, Mr. Hirsh.”

“Please, Leah. Be reasonable. I am not going to rape you. Open the door.”

“Go back to New York.”

Hirsh sighed. Unwilling to take no for an answer, he knocked on the door.

“Go away! Please,” she said.

“I love you,” he told her.

“You don’t know what love is.”

“I’ll learn.”

“Go away,” she repeated.

“Listen, Leah. I realized I’ve taken some wrong turns and messed up my life. I admit it. I’m sixty years old, and I’m tired of living alone. I want to get married. I think we can make it together. I want to try.”

“You’re not religious.”

“I’ll become religious,” he promised. “My brother, Robert, became religious. I can too. I’ll eat kosher and keep Shabbat. Just open the door and we’ll talk all about it.”

“You only want to get into bed with me.”

“Jesus Christ,” he said in exasperation.

“Don’t say that name. It isn’t allowed.”

“Nothing’s allowed. For God’s sake – let yourself live a little.”

“I’m *niddah*,” she told him.

“What’s that mean?” he asked.

“I’m ritually impure. I haven’t been to a mikvah in years.”

Hirsh vaguely remembered something about the subject, that Orthodox husbands and wives couldn’t have sex when the wife was having her period. “So what?” he answered. “I haven’t been to a mikvah either. It doesn’t matter to me. Just open the door.”

“It could never work.”

“Yes it could.”

When she didn’t answer, he knocked again. Then he heard her speaking on the phone in Hebrew.

“Leah, what are you doing?” he asked.

“I phoned the local police,” she replied. “It shouldn’t take them more than a few minutes to get here. I told them that a crazy person was knocking on my door.”

Hirsh chuckled nervously. His grandfather was wrong. Everything wasn’t for the best. In fact, life could be a big pile of dung.

Back on the street, as he got in the car, he saw the flashing lights of a police vehicle approach in the distance. In consideration for the late hour, its siren was silent. Rather than starting the motor and risking a speedy getaway that would draw their attention, he leaned toward the passenger’s seat so that he couldn’t be seen. The police car stopped on the other side of the road. Hearing the doors of the police car close, Hirsh waited thirty seconds, then sat up and ignited the engine. The policemen had already entered the building. Unobserved, he drove away, proud of his little maneuver. Craig Lane could not have done it any better.

He drove back to Robert’s home. His younger brother sat at the salon table, reading what Hirsh judged to be a religious text because of the way he bobbed back and forth, as if he were praying in shul. “Aren’t you going to sleep,” Hirsh inquired.

“What about you? You look exhausted.”

“So do you.”

“As soon as I finish a few more chapters in the *parsha*.”

Hirsh knew that the word *parsha* referred to the weekly Torah portion. Maybe that proved that he wasn’t a total ignoramus when it came to Judaism. He had mastered regular law. He could master Jewish texts as well.

“Laura said you went to see Leah.”

“About the case.”

“Kevin’s case or yours?”

“And what may my case be?”

“I forget what we used to call it. Something like a case of uncontrolled hormones.”

Hirsh chuckled. “Why do you people find it so hard to believe that I may have fallen in love?”

“I remember back when I was in college, you used to say, ‘Love, lust, what’s the difference?’”

“I like her, all right? Isn’t that enough? She seems like a good woman. Interesting, hard-working, sensitive, and pretty. Don’t you think so?”

“Laura says she’s terrific.”

“But not for me.”

Robert didn’t answer. The sound of slippers scraping along the floor made him look toward the entrance of the salon. The Filipino caregiver held their mother’s elbow and guided her gently into the room. Robert stood up and moved an easy chair closer to the table, helping to lower the old lady onto the padded cushion.

“Steven?” she asked. Is that your voice I heard?”

“Yes, Mom. You still have great ears.”

“When did you get here?”

“To Efrat?”

“To wherever we are.”

“We’re at Robert’s house.”

“Robert? Is he here too?”

“I’m right beside you, Mom.”

Mrs. Hirsh looked from one son to the other and held out her shaking hands. Smiling, she squeezed their fingers with an iron grip, as if she would never let go.

“I thought I was dreaming, but you are both here. Don’t ever go away. Your father left me. Don’t the two of you ever leave me alone.”

Chapter Twenty-Four

Hirsh spent the night in the empty bedroom of his nephew who was in the army. In the morning, he woke up to the shouts of his mother screaming that someone had stolen her purse. Quickly, he took off the pajamas Robert had lent him and put on his clothes. His brother hadn’t returned yet from morning prayers at his shul. His younger children, Arik and David, were busy in the kitchen, getting ready for school. The volume of the kitchen radio was loud enough for the entire house to hear. A Hebrew newscaster spoke a mile a minute, broadcasting the news.

“What happened?” Hirsh asked one of his nephews.

“We caught the terrorist gang that carried out the recent attacks,” the boy answered.

“And you’re famous,” his other nephew said. “There’s a big story about you and Kevin in *Maariv* this morning. With a picture of your wife, the golfer.”

“She was a tennis player,” Hirsh corrected.

“It must have hurt like crazy, getting hit by a lightning bolt,” his other nephew noted, with an involuntary shudder.

Hirsh headed for the salon. “I want my purse back!” his mother demanded. The caregiver helped her toward her recliner. “Sit, sit,” she told her, but the agitated old woman refused to sit down.

“Don’t tell me what to do,” his mother cried. “I’m not in prison. I’ll do what I want. Everyone is after my money, that’s all. You can’t fool me. Somebody stole my purse.”

“No one stole your purse,” Laura said to her calmly. “We’ll find it, Mother, don’t worry,” she assured, giving Hirsh a sad, frustrated look.

“Who are you?” his mother suddenly asked, gazing at him as if he were a total stranger.

“I’m your son, Mom. Steven.”

“Liar,” she said. “All of you are liars! You only want my money. I want to go home. If you don’t take me home, I’ll phone the police.”

“You don’t have to,” her granddaughter said. “They’re here.”

To everyone’s surprise, two uniformed policemen entered the room, followed by an officer. Surveying the faces in the room, he addressed the startled New York lawyer.

“Steven Hirsh?” he asked.

“That’s correct.”

“Arrest them, officer,” the old woman demanded. “They stole my money. Arrest them all!”

The Filipino caretaker looked as confused as the officer. Robert hurried into the room. "My mother has dementia," Robert explained to the commanding officer in Hebrew.

"Don't talk in Yiddish!" Mrs. Hirsh shouted. "Don't talk behind my back!"

The caretaker guided Mrs. Hirsh out of the salon. Down the corridor, two helmeted soldiers stood holding automatic rifles. "I'd prefer to do this without handcuffs," the police officer told Hirsh. "We need to ask you some questions at headquarters."

"Are you arresting me?" Hirsh asked, still shaky with surprise.

"I can if you force me to,"

"Don't you need a warrant?" Robert asked.

"I advise you, Mr. Hirsh, to come along peacefully."

"What is this about?" Robert inquired.

"Just part of the ongoing investigation regarding his son."

"I want to speak to my lawyer," Hirsh asserted.

"You can speak with your lawyer when we get to headquarters," the officer said.

Hirsh looked questioningly at his brother and Laura, hoping that they would think of a way to extract him from the mess. They returned his gaze blankly.

"Call Connors and tell him to take Lane on a long tour of Jerusalem tomorrow," he instructed them. "And have Leah inform Haystack that the police have taken me to wherever they plan to take me."

"Where are you taking him?" Robert asked the officer.

“Petach Tikvah.”

Robert nodded. Even Hirsh understood. The *Shabak* had engineered his arrest.

“They stole my money!” a voice called out from somewhere in the house. “Arrest them immediately and throw away the key! Do you hear me? Arrest them and put them in jail! Don’t believe them! Don’t believe a word they say!”

Chapter Twenty-Five

When they reached the Israel Secret Service Shin branch headquarters in Petach Tikva, Hirsh was escorted to a small and windowless room in the basement of the building. The only furniture was a desk and three chairs. Hirsh wondered if Kevin had been interrogated in the very same room. His bald-headed and civilian-dressed interrogator motioned for him to sit down.

“This entire comedy is absolutely ridiculous,” Hirsh said to let out a bit of his frustration and anger. He chuckled, realizing that it was hardly a place and time to chuckle. But that was the way he often reacted when disoriented or upset.

“I demand to see a lawyer,” he said.

“After you answer a few questions.”

“Then I refuse to talk.”

The interrogator smiled. Obviously, he had encountered uncooperative suspects in his career. “Just a few questions,” he assured. “If you haven’t done anything illegal, you have nothing to hide.”

“I demand to see a lawyer. I demand to see a lawyer. I demand to see a lawyer. Do you understand English?”

The interrogator glanced at the Shin Bet agent who was standing a few steps away behind Hirsh. The fellow lifted a bulging sack from off the floor, stepped forward and poured its contents onto the desk. Automatic rifle, revolvers, silencers, grenades.

“These weapons were purchased with the ten-thousand dollars you sent to your son,” the interrogator said with a penetrating stare.

Hirsh felt his head twitch. Fear seized his stomach. He chuckled. He wondered how Craig Lane would react in a situation like this in one of his movies. “I donated the money to a yeshiva,” he said.

The interrogator opened a drawer of the desk and took out a photograph. He slid the picture toward Hirsh. It was a photo of the same weapons spread out on the mattress of a dormitory bunkbed in what looked like a small caravan. “We found them at the yeshiva, in your son’s room, in the caravan he shares with some friends.”

“Oh, my God,” Hirsh thought in horror. His interrogators stared at him. “I demand to see a lawyer,” he said.

“Aren’t you a lawyer?”

“Yes. I am a lawyer in New York. A celebrity lawyer.”

“You are going to be a big celebrity yourself when the press gets ahold of the story,” the Israeli facing him said, in a tone that sounded like blackmail. “Maybe you should pack your bags and go back to New York before you find yourself in serious trouble, Mr. Hirsh.”

Hirsh nodded. He nodded again. He realized what was happening.

“I want to speak to a lawyer,” he said.

The chief interrogator nodded at his younger comrade. With no expression on his face, he walked forward toward Hirsh. The interrogator open a desk drawer and removed two strips of white cloth. First, Hirsh’s mouth was gagged, then he was blindfolded. His burst of resistance was quickly subdued. His hands were tied to the chair behind him. He struggled to no avail. Then his legs were tied. He tried to yell out but couldn’t generate more than a muffled complaint. He heard a door open and close. Footsteps approached him.

“Are you sure you don’t want to tell us about your involvement with your son and his terrorist buddies?” the interrogator asked.

Unable to see, unable to speak, Hirsh squirmed back and forth in the chair, but someone held it in place.

“We have something that may help you to remember,” a new voice said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

Gagging, Hirsh managed to mumble and shook his head no.

Suddenly, he experienced an excruciating pain in the back of his neck. His body quaked. Waves of electricity raced up and down his spine. Inside his head, he heard a terrible scream. It was the worst pain he had ever felt in his life. A tracer shock gun, he thought. They were shooting invisible shock waves straight into his spinal cord. The vibrations caused his body to jerk in spasms from his brain to his groin.

For some reason, he thought about God and how he had lost his virginity with a girl named Judy in high school. Then came Brenda. At first, he didn’t enjoy it so much. But he felt like he had to do it to be a real man. Then it became a habit.

“Do you remember now?” the interrogator asked.

Hirsh felt too weak to speak. His body hadn't recovered from the first shock before they gave him another, even stronger than before. After Brenda came Barbara, and Julie, and Carolyn, his second cousin. Then came a list of pretty co-eds, many with names he didn't remember, after pot parties and the like. Who was it who sang the song, “Don't you love them when they're going out the door?” Hirsh's body went soft with exhaustion.

“Do you have something to tell us, Mr. Hirsh?” the interrogator asked.

Hirsh struggled to say something, but he couldn't even muster a horrified chuckle. He tried to break free of his bonds but the cords pinned him fast to the chair. Even if he wanted to talk, he couldn't with the gag stretched tightly across his mouth. In law school, there were nights and matinees with an endless, nameless parade. His first wife Gloria afforded him a rest from his life on the hunt, until he began cheating on her, enjoying the excitement of his clandestine rendezvous more than the pleasure which they provided. “Forgive me, God,” he thought, “for my wanton and unholy transgressions.”

Before losing consciousness, he heard the interrogator say, “In an hour you will feel better than new. If you decide to complain to someone, you have no proof, and no one will believe you anyway. And always remember, we have many unexpected ways to teach people like you and your son a lesson.”

When the lawyer from New York returned to this world, he was lying on his back on a jail-cell floor, gazing up at the ceiling. “Everything is for the best,” he heard his grandfather say. With a chuckle, he drifted back to sleep.

Chapter Twenty-Six

Two policemen led Hirsh up a flight of stairs and down a corridor to a large room where suspects and prisoners were allowed to speak with their attorneys or family.

When he sat down in a booth, Leah was facing him on the other side of the thick plastic window. Seeing her, he managed a smile.

“Things aren’t as grim as I thought they were,” he said, with a painful chuckle. “If you are here because you care about me, then getting arrested was worth it.”

“I’m here because you told them you wanted to speak with your lawyer,” Leah replied in her flat professional voice.

“That’s the only reason you came?”

“Yes.”

“I always heard that Israelis were tough. You certainly try hard to prove it.”

Hirsh shuddered, recalling the torture he had suffered. His heart was still throbbing, and not because of her.

“You don’t look good,” she remarked. “What did they do to you?”

Hirsh gazed behind him. A guard stood not far away. Perhaps he was out of hearing distance, but Hirsh figured that the entire room was bugged. Who knew? Maybe Leah herself worked for the *Shabak*. Hirsh felt like he had entered the Twilight Zone. He wouldn’t have been surprised if Rod Serling appeared in the doorway.

“Did they torture you?” she asked.

“No more than you do,” he replied.

Her eyebrows twitched, but she maintained her professional demeanor.

“According to the rules, a detainee is allowed five minutes with his attorney,” she said. “There isn’t time to joke.”

“This whole thing is a joke. They know I didn’t give Kevin money to buy weapons.”

“That’s why they brought you here?”

“Didn’t they tell you?”

“No. The *Shabak* had the court impose a news blackout on your arrest. They are letting me speak with you only because your brother has a friend high up in the ranks of the Police Department. What can you tell me?”

“A half year ago, Kevin phoned and asked me if I could donate ten-thousand dollars to his yeshiva. I figured what the hell, maybe it would bring us closer together. At the time, I thought he was learning in Jerusalem. The police showed me two rifles, two revolvers, silencers, ammunition, and a few grenades. They said they found the stash under the floor of the caravan dormitory on the settlement outpost where Kevin’s been living. They have photographs to back them up.”

“Photos of what?” Leah asked.

“Of the weapons in the caravan.”

“The *Shabak* could have planted them there.”

“That’s what I figure,” Hirsh agreed. “I gave the money to the yeshiva because Kevin said it was a great *mitzvah*. I never knew anything about

weapons, and I am sure that my son didn't know anything either. He may have screwed-up ideas, but he isn't a violent person."

"They are trying to scare you so you will get off their backs."

Hirsch nodded. Two policemen escorted another prisoner into the meeting room and sat him down in another booth with a thick window.

"Try not to speak with other prisoners," Leah advised. "Anyone could be a *Shabak* agent in disguise."

"Can you get me out of here?" Hirsh asked.

"Maybe if you agree to leave the country."

"Only on the condition that you come with me."

Leah tried not to blush. "You live in a movie," she answered, dismissing the remark.

"So do you," he told her. "The question is - can we make our scripts intertwine?"

"Time's up," a voice said behind him. The guard stepped forward to take Hirsh back to his cell.

"Please call my secretary, Roger, in New York. My brother has his number. Tell him to ask my colleague, Peter, to speak with the President and remind him that he owes our law firm a favor."

Leah was a quick thinker, but Hirsh's instructions left her confused.

"What President?" she asked.

"The President of the United States," he said, hoping it would impress her. "Have Peter tell the President that someone made a copy of the embarrassing tape, and that we are holding it for safe keeping. I want the President to order your charming Prime Minister to get me and my

son out of this rat hole as fast as he can. With all of my son's friends as well."

"What tape?" Leah asked.

The prison guard put a hand on his shoulder. "Time's up, *hever*," he said. "Your suite is waiting for you."

Hever meant friend. Some friend, Hirsh thought. Gazing at Leah, he raised his right hand and rested it against the thick window which separated them. Without knowing why, she raised her hand and placed it against the window, opposite his, as if their fingers were touching. In the past, she had done the same with other clients, as a gesture of solidarity, encouragement and hope, to assure them, in their isolation and imprisonment, that they were not alone. Was that why she did it now?

When she left the building, a teenager with the unmistakable appearance of the hilltop youth movement, was waiting for her on the sidewalk. Most likely, he was a friend of the unfortunates captive inside the *Shin Bet* facility behind her, the suspects in the Al-Aduma case who still had been denied their right to meet with a lawyer.

"HaRav Blass would like to speak with you," he informed her.

Across the congested city avenue, a large tent had been erected in a small park and playground for children. The Rabbi from the yeshiva in Neve Pincus and some students sat around a folding table, carrying on with their learning. Posters reading: "Jews Have Rights Too!" were taped to the barricades that had been set up by the police. People passed by on the sidewalk, going about their business, many of them anxious to get home after a day of work. It was the second or third day of the Rabbi's hunger strike to draw attention to the plight of his imprisoned followers. When Leah approached, the white-bearded

Torah scholar stood up and walked to the sidewalk, telling his students to carry on with the learning. He nodded as the lawyer approached, having met her on several similar occasions involving settlers who had suffered encounters with the special Jewish Division of the *Shabak*. His keen glance gazed up toward the roof of the headquarter building across the street.

“If they try to record our conversation with their high-powered microphones, the rush-hour traffic will surely interfere, but I have been told that they have special filters which can eliminate distracting noises, is that correct?”

“I suppose so, yes,” Leah answered, noticing two agents on the roof of the building.

“For that reason, when the weather allows, I learn with my students on the sidewalk, and not in the tent, hoping that our words of Torah will enable our ease droppers to discover the great wisdom of our Sages and inspire them to turn back from their mistaken ways.”

“They are holding Avraham’s father for questioning,” she told him.

“So I was told. You were able to speak with him?”

“Yes. His interrogators showed him weapons and told him that they were purchased with money he donated to the yeshiva.”

The Rabbi shook his head sadly. The usual smile in his eyes was missing. “Nonsense,” he said. “That isn’t true. The money was used to enlarge the yeshiva’s kitchen.”

“They are trying to scare him into leaving the country. He is somewhat of a known personality in America, and he has a famous actor with him who has drawn a lot of attention to the police’s behavior regarding the treatment of the boys.”

“I see,” the Rabbi said. “May Heaven help him, along with the rest of the prisoners.”

“Maybe you can influence Avraham to accept the deal to free him, on condition that he keep away from the yishuv? That may help free his father as well.”

“On the contrary. What Avraham did, refusing the offer unless everyone was set free together, without restrictions, is a very praiseworthy thing.”

Leah nodded. “Can I ask the Rabbi a question – not related to the case?”

“Of course.”

“Not long ago, at a wedding of one of the boys in the yeshiva, the Rabbi gave me a blessing that I should marry soon.”

“Nu?” he asked. The gleam returned to his eyes as he waited to hear the good news.

“I know that it is a *mitzvah* for a man to get married. Is it a *mitzvah* for a woman as well?”

“Certainly,” he answered. “While the imperative is more on the man, in line with his active nature in the world, The Creator commanded both to Adam and to Eve, ‘*Be fruitful and multiply.*’ That can only occur through the sanctity of marriage.”

“I already have a child,” Leah said.

“The Torah also states, ‘*It is not good for the man to be alone.*’ Similarly, it is not good for a woman to be alone.”

The Rabbi’s smile was like a certificate of confidence.

“What if things don’t work out?” she asked.

“First, we go forward with a positive attitude, with the faith that the marriage will be blessed with love and success from Above. If there is a basis of attraction, and if one’s partner is a God-fearing individual, then problems can be resolved by rising above egotistical issues to embrace the higher goal of rebuilding the Jewish Nation in our Land.”

The angry honking of rush-hour drivers surrounded their conversation. Someone honked on his horn in a musical fashion, in solidarity with the sidewalk protest. “Free the prisoners,” the driver yelled.

“The man isn’t religious, and he doesn’t live in Israel,” Leah explained.

“You will help him to become religious, and to bring him to Israel. The spark of Torah rests in the heart and soul of every Jew, waiting to burst into flame, as our inheritance from Sinai.”

“It would take a miracle.”

“Israel is known as the Land of Miracles. Soon, we will celebrate Hanukah. In Eretz Yisrael, the letters on our dreidels stand for ‘A great miracle happened here.’ A miracle can also happen to you.”

The Rabbi’s smile was like a magic whitener that could wash away all of the stains on a garment.

“His work is in New York. He wants me to move there.”

“Convince him to move here. Today, in the global village we live in, with communications so advanced, many immigrants from America live in Israel and still manage to work at their jobs. If necessary, he can fly back to New York when needed, that’s all. Today, it’s almost as common as traveling from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv.”

Leah nodded. He made it sound so simple. “Thank you, Rabbi,” she said.

“Success and blessing,” he said.

Driving back to Efrat, Leah's thoughts weighed heavily on her mind. Rabbi Blass's faith was as solid as Mount Sinai itself. While Leah believed in the Torah and its teachings, her faith in God had been shaken when terrorists killed her husband. From that moment on, her trust in God, and in life, had never been the same.

A phone call from Haystack brought her back to reality. Craig Lane had been taken into custody when his visit to the Temple Mount had triggered a riot. An Israeli policeman was dead. Three Arabs had been killed by Israeli gunfire. Jerusalem was on high alert. Demonstrations were taking place in Arab cities. Arab teenagers were hurling rocks on the highways leading to the settlements. Leah didn't tell him about her meeting with Hirsh. Nor did she call Robert to pass on Hirsh's crazy message to his law office in New York. She was on the way to inform him in person. No doubt, either her phone was tapped, or the *Shabak* had hidden a microphone in her car. Maybe both.

What could the secret tape be about, she wondered? If the President of the United States had fooled around in his past with some woman, that was his personal business. Confidential information. Accustomed to being an attorney, she didn't think it was proper that the whole world should know. Plus the President had backed Israel on several key issues. Nevertheless, since she had agreed to return to the case, she had to be true to her client, whether he agreed with him or not.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

Earlier in the day, Craig Lane had gazed up at the huge boulders of the Wailing Wall. The journalist Connors, his tour guide for the day, claimed

that the ancient Wall had been a part of the Jerusalem Temple, which had been the center of Jewish life in the Land of Israel until the Romans destroyed it two-thousand years ago. Lane glanced around at the Jews who stood pressed to the Wall, clutching its surviving stones, silently praying - not to the stones, Connors had explained - but to God. The famous actor believed there was a God, though he never paid any attention to Him. But now, as the saying went – when in Rome do as the Romans do. The actor stepped up to the Wall, reached out and touched a boulder that looked like it had been scorched by an awesome fire in the distant past. “Please, God,” he prayed. “Finish my divorce, and don’t let my wife take all of my money. She cheated on me, and if I cheated on her first, it didn’t mean anything more to me than a handshake. Help me to cut down on the booze, and let me get my head together. And give me a meaty role in a movie which will earn me an Oscar and allow me to get back on my feet. Help out my good buddy, Steven, and free his kid from jail. Amen.”

With a small bow, he turned and walked away from the Wailing Wall. Connors was waiting for him at the back of the plaza. The movie celebrity was wearing his baseball cap and dark sunglasses, and so far that morning, no one had recognized him. Worshippers hurried toward the Wall, not paying any attention to the Hollywood star.

“Did you take a picture of me?” Lane asked.

“Quite a few,” the journalist replied, planning to do a feature spread on his day touring in the Holy City with the actor.

Further along the wide plaza in front of the Wall, Lane noticed a group of tourists holding small American flags. They followed their tour guide up a ramp toward a gate high up on the Wall.

“Where are they going?” Lane asked.

“To the Temple Mount.”

“What is the Temple Mount?”

“The actual site of the ancient Jewish Temple. The Muslims built a few mosques there a thousand years after the Temple was destroyed. They claim the site belongs to them and not to the Jews. It’s a political powder-keg.”

“Let’s have a look,” the actor said.

Connors led the way up the wooden ramp. At a security booth, an Israeli army soldier did a double take when he looked at Lane’s passport.

“Craig Lane, the actor?” he asked enthusiastically.

“Unfortunately,” the actor answered, removing his sunglasses.

A big smile lit up the soldier’s previously tough expression. “Esty!” he called to the female soldier nearby. “It’s Craig Lane!”

The young girl hurried toward them with her full battle gear and automatic rifle. “*Lo human!*” she gasped in Hebrew. “*Lo human! Ani lo maamin!* I don’t believe it.” Impulsively, she stood on her tiptoes and gave Lane a kiss. “Wow!” she exclaimed. “Can I have a selfie?”

The actor was happy to oblige. Connors snapped off a series of photos of his own. “Wow!” the girl joyfully exclaimed. “I don’t believe it!”

Not wanting to draw undue attention, Connors pushed Lane through the arched doorway leading to the Temple Mount. It was a broad sunlit plateau, about the size of several football fields. Across the way, Arab teenagers were busily engaged in a game of soccer. To their right, a large mausoleum-like structure stretched across the cobblestone plaza. Connors said it was a mosque. In the distance to the left stood a magnificent golden-domed building. Hundreds of Muslims knelt on the

ground praying toward Mecca, their butts facing the striking octagonal edifice. In answer to Lane's question, Connors said it was an Islamic shrine, called the Dome of the Rock. "The Arabs believe it is the site from where the prophet Muhammed flew to Mecca on a winged horse. Jews believe it marks the site where the Ark of the Covenant rested in the chamber of the ancient Jerusalem Temple called the Holy of Holies.

"Take a few pictures for me, will you?" the actor requested.

"Let's get a little closer," the photographer said. "The angle is better there."

Lane noticed that an Israeli soldier was accompanying them a short distance away. He spotted other soldiers on the Mount, scattered between groups of tourists led by tour guides. Sunlight glistened from the golden dome in a truly celestial fashion. Lane whistled in appreciation. The shrine's Islamic architecture was beautiful.

"Why don't I join the Arabs and pray alongside of them," Lane suggested. "That will make an interesting picture."

"I don't advise it," the journalist replied. "Jews aren't allowed to pray on the Temple Mount, and they might mistake you for one."

"I don't understand. If this is the site of the ancient Jewish Temple, why can't Jews pray here? It's their country, isn't it?"

"I agree with you, but a lot of things don't make sense in the Middle East."

Connors told Lane to stand where he was and asked him to remove his baseball cap and sunglasses. As he raised his camera to photograph the actor, loud shouts sounded not far away. Turning, Connors saw a mob of Arab teenagers. They had abandoned their game of soccer and were running directly their way, at least a dozen of them.

“Craig Lane! Craig Lane!” they screamed.

Seeing them charge, Lane panicked. He started to run in the opposite direction, back toward the Temple Mount entrance. Not able to make out what the Arabs were screaming, Connors bolted as well, quickly catching up with the actor. The teenagers continued their excited charge. Disturbed by the raucous, the Muslim worshippers stood up and joined the charging youngsters, thinking that some Israeli provocation has caused the commotion. Seeing what looked like an attack on the tourists, an Israeli soldier fired a canister of tear gas at the stampede. Other canisters of tear gas exploded in the center of the apparent rampage. From out of the smoke, a bullet shot cracked in the air. An Israeli soldier fell wounded. His comrades answered with volleys of live ammunition. Cries of “Allah Akbar!” filled the air from a loudspeaker on top of the mosque. Cries of “*Itbah Al-Yahud!*” “Slaughter the Jews!” echoed over the Temple Mount. Almost immediately, the cries of revenge echoed all over the Old City. Lane and Connors raced toward the Temple Mount exit, where they were grabbed and surrounded by soldiers and police. Gunfire and more explosions sounded behind them.

“Let go of us!” Connors demanded.

“Shut up!” a commander barked. “You’re under arrest!”

“I’m a journalist!” Connors protested.

“I’m an American!” Lane declared.

“Take them away!” the commander ordered.

“He’s Craig Lane!” Connors told them.

“I don’t care who the hell the idiot is,” the Temple Mount commander replied. “Take them to the station and don’t let them leave till I get there!”

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Returning to Efrat from Petach Tikvah, before driving to Robert’s home, Leah stopped at her apartment to say hello to her daughter, Yaffa, who had taken a three-day break from her college studies. After giving the slender girl a welcoming embrace, she held her at arm’s length for a motherly inspection.

“The love of my life,” she told the dark-complexioned girl, who seemed to have suddenly become a young woman. “You get prettier and prettier each time I see you.”

“You saw me two weeks ago, *Ema*,” Yaffa replied.

“I can never see you enough,” the proud mother answered.

“Do you want me to transfer to Hebrew University, so I can be close to you in Jerusalem?” the girl asked with a touch of loving sarcasm.

“Absolutely,” Leah quipped, and they both shared a laugh.

“Maybe I can even return to living at home.”

“There’s no shame in that,” Leah responded.

“It’s a new world, *Ema*. None of my friends live at home.”

“Hey, wait a minute. It isn’t because you have a boyfriend, is it?” the mother asked.

“And what if I did?” the girl replied. “What’s wrong with that?”

“You’re all mine, that’s why. I don’t want to share you with anyone else.”

Yaffa laughed. “You should have been a stand-up, *Ema*, instead of a lawyer.

As always, Leah’s phone rang. Glancing at the screen, she decided not to answer. “Haystack,” she explained. “I’ll call him back on my way to Robert.”

“Why doesn’t he use whatsapp?” the girl asked.

“That’s the type of person he is. He prefers remaining in the Stone Age. What are you plans?”

“I’m going to drive into the city to meet with a girlfriend.”

“Maybe you should take the bus.”

“Why?”

“Now that we neutralized the terror cell behind the recent attacks, there’s bound to be a reaction. And I understand that an incident on *Har HaBayit* today has aroused the anger of the Arabs.”

“I heard about it on the radio. Did you really see Craig Lane?”

“From a distance.”

“What does he look like?” she asked, as if meeting a Hollywood star was the coolest of cools.

“Well, he has two arms, two legs, a mouth and a nose just like the rest of us.”

Yaffa laughed. “Do you want me to make you a cup of coffee or tea?” she asked her mother.

“No, thank you sweetheart. Maybe when I get back – if you are still around.”

“I’ll be going soon.”

“Then tomorrow morning. You have a key to the apartment?”

“That’s how I got in.”

Kissing her daughter, Leah walked to the door, then paused with her hand on the handle.

“Since we mentioned the subject of boyfriends, how would you feel if I were to marry again?”

“Oh, *Emá*,” the girl exclaimed happily, raising up on her tiptoes. She ran to her mother. “You? Really? I don’t believe it.”

“Neither do I. Not so fast. I’m not rushing into anything. I just wanted to know. Would you be happy?”

Her daughter pretended to think. Her expression soured. She placed her hands on her hips in a pantomime of anger. “Happy? I’d be miserable. You are the love of my life. I don’t want to share you with anyone else!”

Then she burst out laughing. Leah laughed with her. They hugged.

Robert, needless to say, wasn’t at home. Laura said that he was studying Gemara with his *hevruta* at the nearby yeshiva, and should be home in another half hour. In the meantime, she invited her longtime friend into the kitchen for a piece of cake.

“Robert is quite a guy,” Leah told her good friend.

“An angel.”

“What’s his brother like?”

“As a lawyer or a person?”

“A person.”

“I thought you weren’t interested,” Laura said, setting a plate of chocolate cake on the kitchen table.

“I’m not, but he’s so persistent. Maybe he knows something that I don’t know.”

“When will the police let him go?”

“I don’t know.”

“Why did they arrest him?”

“Maybe to worry Avraham and get him to talk.”

“They really think that Avraham was involved in the Al-Aduma arson?”

“You can never know with the *Shabak*. They may have some real information connecting him to the affair, or they may be looking for some.”

“Listen, Leah,” Laura said, returning to her question. “I’ve known Steven for a long time. He’s a good person, and a lot of times his attentions are commendable, but he’s an American.”

“What does that mean?”

“Americans like games and sports. Instead of going to yeshiva, American Jews go baseball and football games. That’s how they are raised. For them, a woman is a toy to play with until they get bored.”

“Your husband isn’t like that,” Leah noted.

“Robert is an exception. But he’s a *baal tshuva*. He put a lot of effort into becoming a *mench*.”

“I know a lot of men who moved to Israel from the United States. They seem like good people to me.”

“They’re the cream of the crop. Idealists. You have to be to leave a materialist *Gan Eden* like America for a tiny country that’s always at war.”

“The Rabbi said I shouldn’t throw the possibility into the trash.”

“What Rabbi?”

“Aharon Blass.”

“Everything looks rose-colored to him.”

“Steven’s that bad?”

“You’re a lawyer and a good judge of personality. What does your woman’s radar tell you?”

“My radar has been jammed by my emotions.”

“You mean you’re hooked?”

“Something like that. I don’t know if it’s him, or the idea of finding someone to share my life.”

“Has he proposed to you?”

“I think so. I don’t really remember. We’ve kissed. He wants me to return to New York with him. He says he’ll keep Shabbat. Who knows? Maybe he’ll have a religious awakening like Robert did.”

“And maybe I’ll lose ten kilo and become a star in the Tel Aviv ballet,” Laura joked.

Leah stared at the cake on the table with a glum look on her face.

“Do you want coffee or tea?” Laura asked.

“No thank you.”

“Listen, Leah. If you want the advice of a friend, forget about him. Let him go back to New York alone, and then see what happens. If he keeps coming back to Israel, professing his love and promising to become a rabbi, then you can think about his offer seriously. But maybe what he feels is just passion. Maybe you’re just his latest toy. Maybe when the novelty wears off, he will dump you like he dumped his previous three wives, and who knows how many girlfriends? Give the decision some time.”

Leah nodded her head. “That makes sense.” For a few moments she sat in silence. Then she said, “You really don’t like him.”

“I love him,” Laura replied. “He’s my brother-in-law. He can be a funny guy. He has a generous heart, and he’s rich. But his psychoses stretch coast-to-coast, from New York to LA. I don’t mind that he dumped his mother here for us to look after. She’s Robert’s mother too. Give it a whirl if you want, but I think you will be better off in life without him.”

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Leah was waiting in the lobby of *Shin Bet* Headquarters in Petach Tikvah when Hirsh was set free. Dressed in a tan raincoat, with a red belt tied at her waist, she could have passed for a Hollywood actress. For the first time in days, she flashed him a winning smile.

“What about Kevin?” Hirsh asked her.

“They are releasing him too,” she informed him. “With all of his friends.”

“When?”

“Now. At least that’s what the police told me.”

“Does Sarah know?”

“Yes. She is waiting outside in the car.”

“Thank God,” Hirsh said.

“I must say I am very impressed,” Leah admitted.

“We Americans aren’t total morons, the way Israelis seem to think,” he answered, relieved that her ice shield had melted.

“Who are your friends?” she asked, noticing that two plainclothes agents were staring at them from across the lobby. Hirsh turned to see his escorts.

“They’ve given me six hours to leave the country. I guess they want to make sure I board the midnight flight to New York. I hope they at least booked me a first-class seat like I requested.”

“Six hours? You’re kidding?” she asked with a tone of tension in her voice.

“They may be jokers, but they don’t kid around. At least they agreed that Kevin and his friends can go free without any restrictions. That’s the deal. For the sake of my son, I consented.”

“Evicting people from the country is an action the government takes only against the most radical BDS activists. That’s not you at all.”

“Apparently, the Prime Minister doesn’t like outsiders interfering in the way he runs things. Nor being told that Israel stands to lose half of their annual military budget from Uncle Sam.”

“What about your son’s wedding?” Leah asked, still absorbing the news that Hirsh was spending his last few hours in Israel.

“His mother will come.”

Instinctively, they walked further away from their stalkers. “Can you tell me what the tape is about?” she asked in a whisper.

Hirsh lowered his voice. “This is confidential just between me and you. My colleague is the only other person who knows about it. If the matter gets leaked, someone could kill me. Israel isn’t the only country that has a secret service. The President, when he was the Governor of New York, before he entered the Oval Office, had a lover, who secretly filmed one of their rendezvous. When he dumped her, she threatened to blackmail him. The President asked us to help. She received a lot of money, and we managed to keep the story out of the newspapers. A year later, she drowned mysteriously while vacationing in the Caribbean. There were rumors, but nothing to prove that the President was involved.”

Leah nodded in understanding. Down the corridor, they heard the sound of happy singing. Kevin and his side-locked buddies appeared like the actors at the end of a Broadway musical, returning on stage to the enthusiastic applause of the crowd. They danced their way into the lobby. Kevin hurried forward to give his father a hug. Suddenly, Hirsh was lifted into the air on someone’s shoulders. The jolt sent a wave of pain from his still-tender groin to the very top of his head. He still hadn’t told anyone about the torture he suffered, and, with all of the anger he felt, he wasn’t sure that he would ever disclose the details

after having received a no-nonsense warning that the Israeli Mossad had agents all over the world, whether in Manhattan, on an island in Tahiti, or via a good-natured waiter in the finest restaurant of Paris who knew how to deal discreetly with enemies of the State of Israel. In a moment, Kevin joined Hirsh in the air. Father and son clasped hands as Kevin's friends sang happily in Hebrew and danced around them in a joyous celebration.

Rabbi Blass joined them out on the sidewalk. He too was lifted into the air on somebody's shoulders. Holding hands, the bearded Rabbi, Hirsh, and Kevin were paraded along the avenue like Yehuda and the Maccabees returning from a victorious battle over the Greeks.

A light drizzle dampened the windshield on the drive back to Jerusalem. The wipers swayed rhythmically back and forth. All that was missing to make the movie scene complete in Hirsh's mind was romantic music. Leah drove and Hirsh sat beside her, filled with hope by her suddenly friendly demeanor.

In the back seat, Kevin and his overjoyed fiance smiled at one another, careful not to touch, and not to hold hands, as Jewish law required before a couple was officially married under a wedding *chuppah*. Leah glanced now and then at the rearview mirror. The same two unmarked cars had been on their tail ever since they drove away from *Shabak* Headquarters in Petach Tikvah.

"We are being followed," Leah informed her passengers.

"By the media or by the Shabak?" Hirsh asked.

"The *Shabak*."

When Kevin asked about his father's detention and how he had managed to free the whole group, Hirsh said that certain friends had helped him, but that he wasn't free to disclose their names.

“The car is probably wired,” Kevin said to Leah. “If they hadn’t done it before, they probably did it when you were inside the building. They work fast. Even without a bug in the car, nowadays the police can hear everything via people’s telephones, even when they’re turned off. Or the car behind us can is probably filled with the latest recording equipment listening to everything we say with a high-powered microphone.”

“Wonderful country,” Hirsh quipped.

“Wonderful world,” Leah responded. “It’s no different in Washington or Moscow, or in New York,” she noted, glancing at him with a smile.

“Do you want Sarah and me to get married in New York?” Kevin asked his father.

“No. No. Get married here in Israel with all your friends and your Rabbis, and Sarah’s family. Your mother will come, that’s for certain. After the wedding, if you like, you can visit me in New York. I’ll show Sarah the town. She’ll love it. Won’t you, Sarah?”

The modest girl blushed. “I am sure I will,” she said.

“You’ll have everything the way you want it. Kosher food, Shabbat, your own apartment, the works.”

“Thanks, *Abba*,” Kevin said.

Hirsh glanced at Leah.

“You are invited too,” he told her.

“I’ve never been out of Israel,” she replied in a noncommittal fashion. “I never even applied for a passport.”

“It’s time you got one,” Hirsh said.

“Look like the rain is ending,” she noted, changing the subject and switching off the wipers.

When they reached the King David Hotel, the two unmarked cars parked across the street. In the lobby, several other well-dressed, athletic-looking types could have been secret agents. Kevin told his father that Sarah and he were going for a short, half-hour walk. Lane, Connors, and Haystack were waiting for them in the suite.

“*Baruch haba!* Welcome! Welcome,” the big Israeli greeted, giving both Hirsh and Kevin an exuberant bear hug.

“I understand you’re leaving the country tonight,” Haystack said.

“I’m afraid so,” Hirsh responded, glancing at Leah who had strolled away to the terrace to gaze at the view.

“Tonight?” Lane exclaimed.

“Don’t worry. I’m taking you with me.”

“Not so fast, Steven. I don’t want to go back to New York. I like it here. I’m having a wonderful time. I haven’t received such wide attention for years.”

“We toured the Temple Mount today,” Connors told Hirsh. “A group of Arab teenagers recognized Mr. Lane and charged toward him in their excitement. Soldiers fired tear gas into the mob. When an Arab opened fire on the soldiers, they responded with live ammunition. It was chaos. The police took us to a police station in the Old City, then to their Russian Compound headquarters. Haystack showed up and persuaded them to let us go.”

“If you don’t come back to New York with me, where will you stay?” Hirsh asked.

“I’ve invited him to stay with me,” Haystack answered.

“I see,” Hirsh replied, putting one and one together. For all of his altruism, the Israeli had to keep his organization afloat. No doubt, he saw the famous actor as a way of boosting funds, not knowing that his cash assets were frozen until his divorce case was settled.

“I may learn in a yeshiva,” Lane said.

“A yeshiva?” Hirsh asked in surprise.

“To learn about Judaism,” the actor explained.

“What for?”

“Most of the directors and producers I’ve worked with are Jews. You’re a Jew. My accountant’s a Jew. My doctors and my shrink are Jewish. Maybe it’s time that I become Jewish myself. Haystack says he knows a rabbi who runs a course for converts.”

“You want to convert to Judaism?” Hirsh asked in wonder.

“Why not? I’ve played a lot of roles in my life. Why not a Jew?”

“It will make a great story,” Connors noted and Craig has promised my first rights.

Someone knocked on the door. Hirsh’s heart skipped a beat, figuring the *Shabak* boys had come to whisk him to the airport. But it was his brother, Robert. His mother dozed peacefully in a wheelchair guided by her Filipino caregiver. Kevin and Sarah stood in the carpeted corridor behind them, alongside Robert’s wife, Laura.

“I figured you’d like to say goodbye to *Ema*,” his brother said.

“Yeah, sure, thanks,” Hirsh replied, feeling overwhelmed by events, out of control, as if his life had been taken over by someone else. He invited the farewell committee into the suite. Standing by the sliding door to the patio, Leah looked on as Hirsh’s family made their way to the salon

of the suite. Seeing Laura, as their eyes made contact, she recalled their conversation about Hirsh and her friend's adamant warning.

"*Emma*, wake up," Robert called to the old woman, as if she were miles away. "Wake up! Steven is here. He is flying back to New York tonight and wants to say goodbye before he leaves."

Their mother's eyes opened. "Steven?" she asked.

"That's right, Mom," Hirsh said, choked up inside, not knowing if he would ever see his mother again. "Look who is with me. Craig Lane. The famous actor, remember?"

Hirsh grabbed Lane's hand and pulled him forward. The actor bent down until he was face-to-face with the old woman in the wheelchair. "Hello, Mrs. Hirsh. It's a pleasure to meet you. I'm Steven's friend. He's my lawyer."

"You're the actor?" she asked.

"That's right," he nodded.

"My son is an actor too," she said.

Leah and Laura exchanged glances.

"That was back in high school, Mom," Hirsh protested.

"He starred in plays," Harriet Hirsh proudly remembered.

Everyone laughed. Hirsh chuckled. Laura looked at Leah and nodded her head, as if to say, "I told you."

"I've got to pack a few of my things," Hirsh said, needing a breather to let his wired emotions calm down, feeling that was on the verge of tears. "Order room service for everyone," he told Connors. "Wine, whiskey, drinks, cake, whatever people want."

Leah watched as he disappeared into one of the bedrooms. Charged with emotion herself, she felt she could use a glass of wine, but she declined, wanting to maintain her outward composure.

In the bedroom, Hirsh wheeled his small suitcase out of the closet and started to pack the few items he had, wondering how he would steal some time to be with Leah alone. Maybe she would drive him to the airport, he thought. Haystack appeared in the doorway.

“I’ll send you a check for your services,” Hirsh told him. “And something extra for you organization in appreciation for helping Kevin and his friends. I don’t know how long Mr. Lane will remain excited over his new adventure in life, but I am willing to send you a monthly allowance for him until he comes back to his senses and returns to New York. I don’t picture him turning into a new Moses, but if you can manage to keep him away from liquor until he dries out, that in itself will be a big *mitzvah*.”

Wishful thinking, Hirsh thought, as he wheeled his sole piece of luggage into the crowded salon. Lane and Connors stood by the bar, drinks in hand, singing a farewell, “For he’s a jolly good fellow; for he’s a jolly good fellow; for he’s a jolly good fellow that nobody can deny.”

The door of suite was opened, and, waiting in the corridor, stood two Israel Secret Service agents wearing blue pin-striped shirts and ties, with sport jackets covering their guns.

“I want to say goodbye to my attorney,” Hirsh told his well-wishers. Crossing to the terrace, he took her a hold of Leah’s arm, and, before she could protest, guided her onto the small patio, sliding the glass door closed behind them.

“Come with me back to New York,” he said. “I want to marry you.”

“I don’t believe you,” she said, avoiding his intense gaze and looking away towards the golden floodlit walls of the Old City of Jerusalem. In her mind, she heard Rabbi Blass’s words of assurance, her daughter’s happy blessing, and Laura’s adamant warning. Was the man sincere, or was he just a good actor like his mother had remembered?

“I’ll take polygraph,” he insisted. Be fair. Give me a chance. You’re declaring me guilty before the trial begins.”

Leah turned to face him. Her body felt rigid. Inside, she was trembling.

“I am tired of living alone,” he told her with a look of truth in his imploring eyes, as if he were baring his soul. “I’m tired of being with women who don’t matter to me. Come with me, Leah, please.”

When he reached out to hold her hand, she pulled away, gazing back toward the people waiting for them in the suite, and the Shin Bet agents by the door.

“It’s impossible, Steven. We’ll speak on the phone. Let’s give things some time.”

“You’ll come for a visit at least?” he appealed, like a youngster leaving home for boarding school.

“Maybe,” she told him to end the conversation. Flushed and out of breath, she pulled the terrace door open and returned to the suite, with a casual laugh and flick of her head, to hide her emotions. “Well, we won the case, and that’s the thing that counts,” she joked, as if finishing their lighthearted conversation.

Sensing her friend’s uneasiness, Laura stepped forward and took her hand. Kevin gave his father a hug when he reentered the room.

“Thanks for everything, *Abba*,” he said, giving Hirsh a hug and a kiss.

“Thank you so much,” his fiancé, Sarah, echoed.

“*Mazel tov!*” Hirsh told them. “Have a wonderful wedding.”

“You’ll be the first to see the video,” Kevin promised.

Connors shook the lawyer’s hand. “Have a great flight, buddy. We’ll keep in touch.”

“Thanks for all your help,” Hirsh told him.

“Have a safe trip, brother,” Robert said, stepping forward to give him a hug.

“After the wedding, come to New York with your wife for a visit,” Hirsh told his younger brother. “You both deserve a vacation. And bring Leah with you. I’ll show you all the town.”

He turned to Leah for a final short glance, and waved his hand goodbye.

“Thank you, Laura, for looking after my mother,” he said. When he bent down to kiss the sleeping woman, he choked, not with a chuckle, but with a real sob. “So long, Mom,” he said, as teardrops fell from his eyes. His brother gripped his hand and led him toward the door. Kevin followed with the suitcase.

“Did you manage to get to the *Kotel*?” his son asked him.

“Next time,” Hirsh said.

The agents waited silently. Down the carpeted corridor, two other agents stood on alert, as if he was some kind of dangerous criminal or foreign spy.

“Are you the fellows from the limousine service?” Hirsh managed to joke. “Sorry to have kept you waiting.”

“No problem. The airplane won’t depart until you arrive,” one of them assured him.

The other reached out a hand and grabbed the handle of the roll-along. “We’ll take over now,” he said in Hebrew.

Hirsh felt a hand grab his elbow. He turned to get a last look at Leah, but she wasn’t standing by the door with the others. His escorts surrounded him, leading him to the elevator. Hirsh felt a metal handcuff close tightly around his wrist. Next stop – the Ben Gurion Airport.

Chapter Thirty

Hirsh hadn’t flown in the economy-class section of an airplane for over two decades. While noisy Israeli passengers squeezed into their narrow seats all around him, he stood angrily in the aisle, jostled every time someone walked by.

“Please take your seat, sir,” a voice said behind him.

She was dark complexioned like Leah, about Leah’s height and build, but a good ten years younger. Harried from the task of getting everyone in their seats and ready for take-off, her curt, practiced smile betrayed her frustration. Nevertheless, her overall persona oozed sensuality.

“Do me a favor, sweetheart,” Hirsh said with his very best smile. “It seems that I have been placed in economy class by mistake. There is no possible way that I can fly across the ocean in this cattle car. It’s out of the question.”

“I’m sorry, sir,” she answered quickly while her dark brown eyes darted around the cabin at the pre-flight disorder. “You have to be seated like everyone else.”

Hirsh took out his wallet. With a clipped chuckle, he handed her a gold credit card. “I’ll be happy to pay the difference in fare,” he told her. “See if you can find me a more comfortable seat up front. Here is my business card. You can look me up on LinkedIn or Wikipedia. And here’s four-hundred shekels I didn’t have time to spend. Buy yourself some perfume in Duty-Free.”

The Delta stewardess stopped in her tracks. She looked at him for the first time and flashed him a real smile. No doubt, Hirsh thought, a good-looking girl like her had been propositioned on flights all over the world. She knew how to put two-and-two together without a lot of make-believe conversation. Either there was chemistry or there wasn’t, it was as simple as that.

“Let’s go see,” she told him.

She led the way, darting in and out of passengers like a fleet-footed halfback. From behind, she reminded him of Cindy. Carrying his raincoat, he followed her down the crowded aisle toward the far more peaceful business class.

“For now, you can sit in my seat,” she said, motioning to a wide empty seat on the aisle. “When things settle down, I’ll see if anything is available up front. Is that alright with you, Mr....”

“Hirsh. Steven Hirsh.”

“Mr. Hirsh,” she said with a sweet, fun-loving smile that a lot of stewardesses have when the plane ride is over. “In the meantime, I have work to do. Make yourself comfortable. I’ll be back once we’re in the air. If you need anything, let one of our flight attendants know. My

name is Sarita.” Her accent reminded him of Leah, but her vowels sounded even more Mediterranean. Her perfume had the lure of oriental spices.

Another Sarah, he thought, glancing at the name tag pinned to her more than ample chest. Sarita Asif. A nice Israeli girl. With a charming, flirting smile, a small hop and a youthful gait, Sarita wiggled down the aisle like a Victoria Secrets model parading down the runway while a crowd of buyers and fashion editors looked on.

“Fasten your seat belts. Chair backs in an upright position,” she repeated as she returned to economy class where she was stationed.

Sitting in the adjacent seat was an elderly Arab dressed like a sheik with an Arab-style head covering and a long white tunic. He reminded Hirsh of the old man from the village of Al-Aduma who had shown him and Connors around. The two men nodded in civil recognition, and Hirsh sat down, hoping that he wouldn’t have to engage the fellow in conversation during the scheduled ten-hour flight.

Sarita reappeared a half-hour later, after the cabin lights had been romantically dimmed and passengers were beginning to drift off to sleep on the nightlong voyage. Hirsh had already downed his first scotch. Slowly recovering from his pressure-cooker trip to Israel, he was looking forward to resuming his far more tranquil and predictable life in New York.

When Sarita returned, he was standing by his seat, stretching his legs. If he sat for too long, his arthritic knee started to ache. “*L’chaim*,” she said, handing him a plastic glass with scotch and water. “The business-class steward told me your preference.”

The fact that Hirsh was twice her age didn't seem to bother the pretty stewardess at all. The opposite. Some women prefer father-figures. He could tell by the happy look on her face that she was already his.

"Wow," she said. "That's some list of clients you have!"

"Yes. I've been lucky."

"Billy Joel, Bruce Springsteen, Tom Cruise, Craig Lane."

"Tom Cruise isn't with us anymore. He moved to another firm."

Hirsh had a modest entry on Wikipedia, but obviously it was enough to win her companionship for a night or two. His secretary, Roger, had written it for him. The entry included a short bio, a few sentences about the law firm, a list of past and present clients, and an inflated description about a New York City Good Citizen Award which he had won for initiating a fund for handicapped children. In truth, it was Roger who did all the work, writing letters and speaking to donors on the phone, but Hirsh got the credit. That was life. The rich get richer and famous – the poor stay the same.

"I'm so sorry about your wife," she said. "I read about her death on Google."

Ahh, he thought. The ghost of Cindy returns. "Yes," he said with feigned sadness, thinking he could get some mileage points out of the tragedy.

"How was take off?" she asked.

"Very smooth."

"Our pilot is one of the best. If you like, I can introduce you to him."

"Maybe later. Where are you sitting? I didn't mean to take your seat."

"It's nothing. We have special seats for take-off and landing, plus there are a few empty seats at the back of the plane. Usually, I don't sit in

business class, but every month I'm awarded a bonus. In any event, we have to be on our feet most of the flight. Sometimes, it's exhausting, but I have a three-day holdover in New York before my next flight. Do you live in the City?"

"Yes. I have an apartment on the Upper East Side."

"Great," he said with a broad smile. "I'm tired of hotels."

"Ding, Ding, Ding," a little winning bell rang in his ears. Another little bell sounded, and a call button lit up down the aisle on the panel above a seated passenger. "I'll be right back," she said. "I'll bring you your credit card. I left it with the chief steward."

"L'chaim," he said, raising the glass in a toast.

"To New York," she said with a laugh.

"To New York," he said with a chuckle, watching her walk graciously away down the aisle to respond to the passenger call.

Hirsh chuckled at her remark, "I'm tired of hotels." That was original. Refreshing. After his haggard week in Israel, he was too exhausted to play games.

Few minutes later, Sarita returned with two miniature bottles of Johnny Walker Black.

"Can you join me in another 'L'Chaim,'" he asked.

"When we get to New York. You won't be surprised to know that it is my favorite city."

"Mine too."

"I want to go to a Broadway play while I'm there. Maybe two."

"I'll take you," he volunteered.

“You won’t be too busy with work?”

“I’ll find the time,” he told her, regretting his offer immediately. Usually, after enjoying the company of a stewardess, he was glad to get rid of her, as the Rolling Stones sang, “Don’t you love her when she’s walking out the door?” But maybe this time it would be different.

The sheik in the seat next to his asked her a question in Arabic. Sarita replied in the same language. He spoke again, and she responded at length fluently, as if it were her native tongue.

“You speak the language like a pro,” Hirsh noted.

“I’m an Arab,” she told him.

“Oh,” he said. To hide his surprise, he chuckled.

“My father is what you would call a modern Muslim. My mother is a Christian. We’re Israeli Arabs. Does it make a difference to you?”

“Not at all. Why should it?” he replied, adopting his straight lawyer face.

“You’re Jewish, aren’t you?” she asked.

“Yes. Modern Jewish.”

“A lot of Jewish people don’t like Arabs.”

“That’s their problem. I keep away from politics. People are people. We’re all the same. Live and let live, I say.” He chuckled and took a gracious gulp of scotch, enjoying the small charge it gave him.

“I feel the same way,” she said. “I like Jewish men. They’re cultured and easy-going like you.”

Hirsh smiled. If that’s what she believed, he didn’t want to dissuade her.

“I’ll catch up to you on my next round of the plane,” Sarita said, then proceeded on with her work.

Hirsh sat down next to his long-robed neighbor. The fellow played with a string of prayer beads in his hand. Twisting the cap off one of the miniature bottles of scotch, Hirsh replenished his drink. Funny, he thought, thinking about the congenial stewardess. As best as he could remember, he had never been in bed with an Arab.

Chapter Thirty-One

Entering his Manhattan apartment, Hirsh noticed that there was no mezuzah on the door. Maybe he should get one, he thought, before Kevin and Sarah came to visit after their wedding. Still wearing her uniform, Sarita followed him into the roomy, two-bedroom pad. Downstairs in the opulent lobby of the 88-story hi-rise, the Jamaican doorman didn’t bat an eye when he walked in with the young stewardess.

“Hi, Mr. Hirsh,” he greeted. “Back from your trip?”

“It’s good to be back in New York,” Hirsh answered.

“I’ve always wanted to go to Jerusalem,” the fellow said with his sing-song calypso accent. “We have a lot of people in Jamaica who are descendants of the Jews. You know. The Rastafarians.”

“Yes, I know. Bob Marley was a client.”

Hirsh had smiled at Sarita and led her on toward the marble front desk of the mirrored lobby

“Greetings, Mr. Hirsh,” the uniformed front-desk clerk said with a welcoming smile.

“Hi there, Wally,” Hirsh replied, giving him a wave.

“Need help with your luggage?”

“We’ll manage, thanks.”

“The Knicks have started the season with a roar,” the desk clerk said.

“Good to hear. Let’s hope they keep it up.”

“Would you like your mail, Mr. Hirsh, sir?” the smiling Wally asked, not giving Sarita a second glance.

“I’ll pick it up later,” Hirsh told him.

Now, in the apartment, he switched on a system of decorator spotlights. The entranceway opened into an expansive salon with two leather couches, an easy chair in front of a large plasma screen, a formal dining area with a glass table and tall-backed wooden chairs. The whole space was carpeted. A colorful modern painting graced one wall and an orderly bookcase the other. A long picture window, running almost the whole length of the wall opposite them revealed a panoramic view of Central Park.

“Dreamy,” Sarita whispered as she surveyed the celebrity lawyer’s apartment.

“My bedroom has a mind-blowing view of downtown Manhattan, and from the guest room you can see the George Washington Bridge.”

“What fun!” Sarita exclaimed.

“Feel at home.”

Not standing on ceremony, she ran to a couch and plumped down on the soft cushions, kicking off her shoes and slipping out of her official Delta overcoat.

“Want to join me?”

“In a minute,” he said, taking off his London Fog. He walked over to the bar and poured himself a scotch preferring to be a little high whenever he made love.

“What about the drink you promised me?” Sarita asked.

“Help yourself,” he said. “There may be some white wine in the refrigerator if you like. Maybe some orange juice if you want a screwdriver. I have to make a phone call.”

Glad to be at home, he carried the mobile phone to his easy chair and sat down facing the TV. Picking up the remote from the adjacent mahogany, elephant-shaped table, a souvenir from a wildlife safari, he switched on his customary news channel and raised the volume so his guest couldn’t hear every word.

“What a view!” she declared, dancing circles along the length of the window. “New York! New York,”

Playfully, she sang a few verses of the song, pantomiming Liza Minnelli, whose mother had been one of the original clients of the firm. Hirsh spoke with Roger.

“You’re back, Mr. Hirsh?” he asked.

“Yes. I just arrived at my apartment. How’s everything?”

“Everything is calm and peaceful, especially since Mr. Lane flew to Israel. Will you be coming to the office today?”

Hirsh watched the enchanting girl swirl away into the kitchen. “Maybe late in the afternoon,” he replied. “I have to catch up on some sleep. Can you patch me through to Peter?”

Sarita’s flight jacket flew through the air and landed on the dining room table. “Can I take a shower, *Abba*?” she called.

“Sure,” Hirsh answered. “It’s right down the hall,” thinking that the girl was going to be a lot of fun.

“I haven’t seen him this morning. Let me buzz his office.”

Hirsh took a long gulp of scotch. On the plane, he had munched on a bagel and downed a cup of black coffee, but nothing more than that.

“Peter doesn’t seem to be answering,” Roger informed.

“That’s OK. I’ll see him when I get to the office.”

Hirsh figured that was a better strategy. More likely than not, Peter’s phone had been tapped after contacting the President about the tape. Hirsh’s home phone as well. He would take a walk in the park with his colleague and converse with him there.

Suddenly, his attention was seized by the news on TV. A squadron of Israeli police pulled a handcuffed Arab out from a police van and escorted him toward Police Headquarters in Jerusalem. The voice of the anchorman reported that a captured Palestinian terrorist in Israel, a partner in the recent terror attacks in-and-around the settlement of Efrat, had, in an apparent plea-bargaining deal during his investigation, given information regarding the identity of the arsonist and murderer in the El Aduma Village case. The Palestinian was an inhabitant of the village whose family clan had long been at odds with the family of the murdered Arab child. Under police interrogation, he had confessed to the crime.

Then, to Hirsh's surprise, Zorro and Leah appeared on the screen, standing on the sidewalk in front of their office. Hirsh's heart skipped a beat as the very photographic attorney stepped up to a microphone. Her name and the name of the civil rights organization appeared on the screen as she spoke.

"While we are glad that the murderer of the child has been apprehended, we protest the actions taken by the Prime Minister of Israel and the Israel Secret Services for having stripped the rights of a group of yeshiva students, keeping them unnecessarily under military detention, without recourse to legal representation, when, in fact, they had absolutely nothing to do with the arson and murder."

"*Abba!* What are you watching?" Sarita called from the bathroom.

"Nothing," Hirsh called back. Aiming the remote at the screen, he terminated the end of the story.

"I can't find a bath towel," the stewardess called.

Hirsh placed the remote back on the small table. He finished the scotch and stood up from the comfortable chair. Then with an unsteady wobble, he chuckled and headed down the hallway toward the girl.

OR...

Chapter Thirty-One

Entering his luxury Upper East-Side Manhattan apartment, Hirsh noticed that there was no mezuzah on the door. Maybe he should get one, he thought, before Kevin and Sarah came to visit after their

wedding. Still wearing her uniform, Sarita followed him into the spacious, three-bedroom pad. Downstairs in the opulent lobby of the 88-story hi-rise, the Jamaican doorman didn't bat an eye when he walked in with the young stewardess.

"Hi, Mr. Hirsh," he greeted. "Back from your trip?"

"It's good to be back in New York," Hirsh answered.

"I've always wanted to go to Jerusalem," the fellow said with his sing-song calypso accent. "We have a lot of people in Jamaica who are descendants of the Jews. You know. The Rastafarians."

"Yes, I know. For a short time, Bob Marley was a client."

Hirsh had smiled at Sarita and led her on toward the marble front desk of the mirrored lobby

"Greetings, Mr. Hirsh," the uniformed front-desk clerk said with a welcoming smile.

"Hi there, Wally," Hirsh replied, giving him a wave.

"Need help with your luggage?"

"We'll manage, thanks."

"The Knicks have started the season with a roar," the desk clerk said.

"Good to hear. Let's hope they keep it up."

"Would you like your mail, Mr. Hirsh, sir?" the smiling Wally asked, not giving Sarita a second glance.

"I'll pick it up later," Hirsh told him.

Now, in the apartment, he switched on the system of decorator spotlights. The entranceway opened into an expansive salon with two leather couches, an easy chair in front of a large plasma screen, a

formal dining area with a glass table and tall-backed wooden chairs. The whole space was carpeted. A colorful modern painting graced one wall and an orderly bookcase the other. A long picture window, running almost the whole length of the wall opposite them revealed a panoramic view of Central Park.

“Dreamy,” Sarita whispered as she surveyed the celebrity lawyer’s apartment.

“My bedroom has a mind-blowing view of downtown Manhattan, and from the guest room you can see the George Washington Bridge.”

“What fun!” Sarita exclaimed. “How many rooms are there?”

“Three bedrooms, one of which I converted into a home office, three bathrooms, the living room, salon, and kitchen.”

“What’s the other bedroom for?”

“My children. Not that they visit very often.”

“It’s grand.”

“Feel at home.”

Not standing on ceremony, she ran to a couch and plumped down on the soft cushions, kicking off her shoes and slipping out of her official Delta overcoat.

“Want to join me?”

“In a minute,” he said, taking off his London Fog. He walked over to the bar and poured himself a scotch, preferring to stay a little tipsy until he crashed from all of the alcohol he had consumed on the flight.

“What about the drink you promised me?” Sarita asked.

“Help yourself,” he said. “There may be some white wine in the refrigerator if you like. Maybe some orange juice if you want a screwdriver. I have to make a phone call.”

Glad to be at home, he carried the mobile phone to his easy chair and sat down facing the TV. Picking up the remote from the stylish, Neolitico Italian glass table, with its curving glass base, he switched on his customary news channel and raised the volume so his guest couldn't hear every word.

“What a view!” she declared, dancing circles along the length of the window. “New York! New York!” she sang, playfully pantomiming Liza Minnelli, whose mother had been one of the original clients of Walter Cohen's firm. Smiling at her impromptu Off-Broadway show, Hirsh spoke with Roger.

“You're back, Mr. Hirsh?” he asked.

“Yes. I just arrived at my apartment. How's everything?”

“Everything is calm and peaceful, especially since Mr. Lane flew to Israel. Will you be coming to the office today?”

Hirsh watched the enchanting girl swirl away into the kitchen. “Maybe late in the afternoon,” he replied. “I have to catch up on some sleep. Can you patch me through to Peter?”

Sarita's flight jacket flew through the air and landed on the dining room table. “Can I take a shower, *Abba*?” she called.

“Sure,” Hirsh answered. “It's right down the hall,” thinking that the girl was going to be a lot of fun.

“I haven't seen him this morning. Let me buzz his office.”

Hirsh took a long gulp of scotch. On the plane, he had munched on a bagel and downed a cup of black coffee, but nothing more than that.

“Peter doesn’t seem to be answering,” Roger informed.

“That’s OK. I’ll see him when I get to the office.”

Hirsh figured that was a better strategy. More likely than not, Peter’s phone had been tapped after contacting the President about the tape. Hirsh’s home phone as well. He would take a walk in the park with his colleague and converse with him there.

Suddenly, his attention was seized by the news on TV. A squadron of Israeli police pulled a handcuffed Arab out from a police van and escorted him toward Police Headquarters in Jerusalem. The voice of the anchorman reported that a captured Palestinian terrorist in Israel, a partner in the recent terror attacks in-and-around the settlement of Efrat, had, in an apparent plea-bargaining deal during his investigation, given information regarding the identity of the arsonist and murderer in the Al-Aduma Village case. The suspect was an inhabitant of the village whose family clan had long been at odds with the family of the murdered Arab child. Under police interrogation, he had confessed to the crime.

Then, to Hirsh’s surprise, Haystack and Leah appeared on the screen, standing on the sidewalk in front of their office. Hirsh’s heart skipped a beat as the very photographic attorney stepped up to a microphone. Her name and the name of the civil rights organization appeared on the screen as she spoke.

“While we are glad that the murderer of the child has been apprehended, we protest the actions taken by the Prime Minister of Israel and the Israel Secret Services for having stripped the rights of a group of yeshiva students, keeping them unnecessarily under military detention, without recourse to legal representation, when, in fact, they had absolutely nothing to do with the arson and murder.”

“Abba! What are you watching?” Sarita called from the bathroom.

“Nothing,” Hirsh called back. Aiming the remote at the screen, he terminated the end of the story.

“I can’t find a bath towel,” the stewardess called.

Hirsh placed the remote back on the small table. He finished the scotch and stood up from the comfortable chair.

“What the hell am I doing here?” he mumbled.

Then with an unsteady wobble, he chuckled, and grabbed the handle of his suitcase. Before he knew it, he was back in the lobby.

Placing the keys to his apartment and a one-hundred dollar bill on the front desk, he told Wally, *“Let the girl spend the night in my apartment, but I want her out in the morning. Be gentle. I’m flying back to Israel.”*

“Forget something there?” Mr. Hirsh.

“Almost,” he replied.

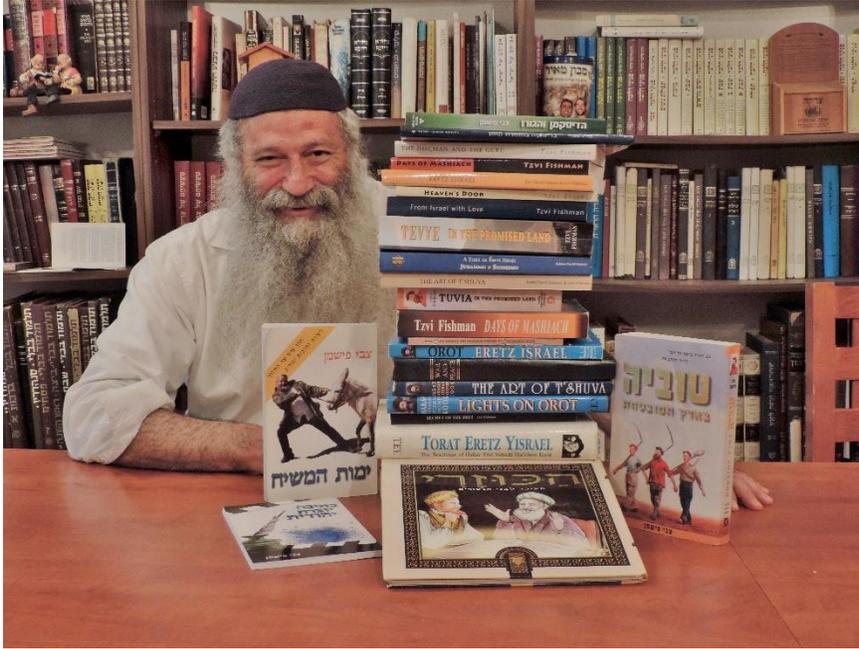
Outside on the sidewalk, he asked the Jamaican doorman to flag him a cab.

“Where to, sir, Mr. Hirsh,” he asked.

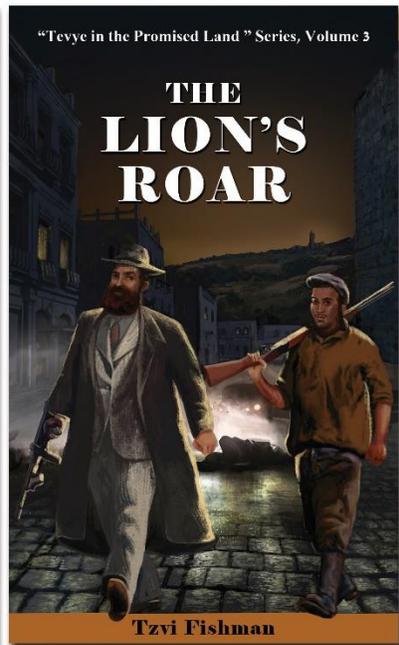
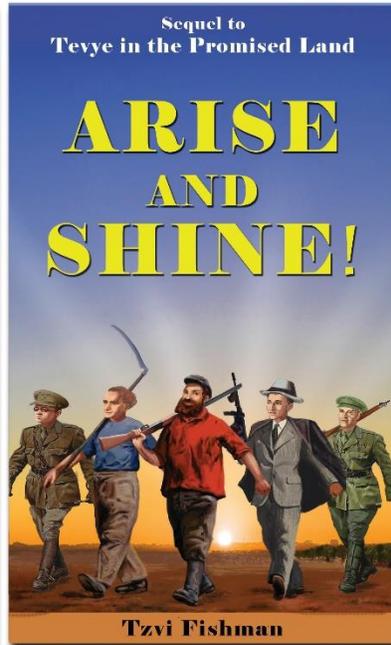
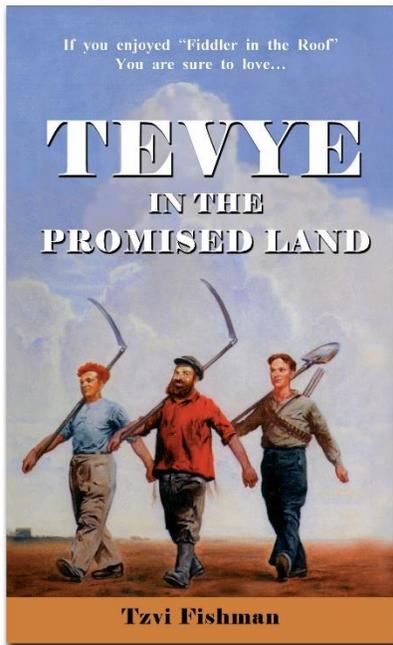
“Jerusalem,” he told him.

THE END

About the Author



Before moving to Israel in 1984, Tzvi Fishman taught Creative Writing at the NYU School of the Arts and sold 4 original screenplays to Hollywood. He has published nearly twenty novels and books on a wide range of Jewish themes, many available at Amazon Books. He is the recipient of the Israel Ministry of Education Award for Creativity and Jewish Culture. Recently, he produced and directed the feature film, "Stories of Rebbe Nachman." Presently, he is working on Volume Four of the *Tevye in the Promised Land* series. Website: tzvifishmanbooks.com



“The *Tevye in the Promised Land* series is a wonderful achievement. For adults and young people alike, these historical novels about the rebirth of the Jewish Nation in the Land of Israel are powerful tools, inviting people to enjoy once again the almost lost art of reading. The incredible drama of Modern Zionism, along with the towering personalities which dominated the era, their heroism and great ideals, come alive in the pages of this fun-reading saga. If the next volumes of the series possess the same passion and charm, then Mr. Fishman has created a literary treasure for the Jewish People.” Yisrael Medad, Menachem Begin Heritage Center

All three volumes of the *Tevye in the Promised Land* Series are available at Amazon Books.

For more information: www.tzvifishmanbooks.com