

OUR PROMISED LAND





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Our Promised Land
Published by Synergy Books
P.O. Box 80107
Austin, Texas 78758

For more information about our books, please write to us, call 512.478.2028, or visit our website at www.synergybooks.net.

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Publisher's Cataloging-in-Publication available upon request.

LCCN: TO COME

ISBN-13: 978-0-9840760-1-7

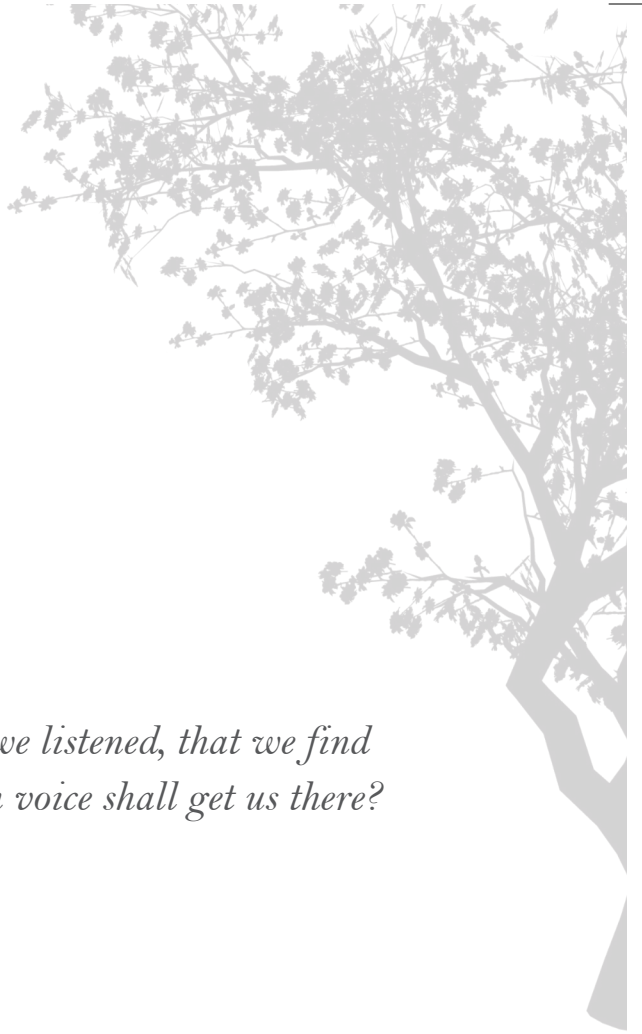
ISBN-10: 0-9840760-1-8

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This is a work of fiction. All of the characters and events portrayed in this book are fictional, and any resemblance to real people or incidents is purely coincidental.

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*To what voice have we listened, that we find
ourselves here? Which voice shall get us there?*







A Timeline

Although *Our Promised Land* is a work of fiction, what follows is a timeline of the historical background against which this story is set.¹

1550–1200 BCE: Israel conquers Canaan

597: Second deportation to Babylon

132–135 CE: Second Jewish revolt against Roman rule; the Diaspora

570: Mohammed is born

1917: The four-hundred-year rule by the Ottoman Empire is ended by British military conquest; British Foreign Minister Balfour pledges support for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine

1. The timeline was compiled and paraphrased from information posted on the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs web site: <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Facts+About+Israel/History/Facts+about+Israel-+History.htm>.

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1922: Britain is granted the mandate for Palestine by the League of Nations; Transjordan is set up on 75% of the land and the other 25% is designated the Jewish national home

1939–1945: The Holocaust is perpetrated by Nazi Germany

1947: The United Nations proposes the establishment of both an Arab and a Jewish state

1948: The British Mandate ends on May 14, and the state of Israel declares its existence; on May 15, five Arab states invade the newly formed Israel and the IDF (Israel Defense Forces) is established

1956: The Sinai War is fought

1967: The Six-Day War is fought, and Jerusalem is held solely in Israeli possession

1973: The Yom Kippur War is fought

1978: The Camp David Accords are negotiated, including a framework for comprehensive peace in the Middle East and a proposal for Palestinian self-government

1987: There is widespread violence (Intifada) in the areas occupied by Israel

1996: Terrorism against Israel escalates; Operation Grapes of Wrath seeks to end Hezbollah's attacks from Lebanon on northern Israel

2000: The Second Intifada begins

2002: Israel conducts Operation Defensive Shield in response to continued Palestinian terrorist attacks; Israel begins construction of a wall to isolate Palestinian communities on the West Bank, the source of numerous attacks against Israelis

2007: Israel declares the Gaza Strip hostile territory after Hamas violently seizes control of its government

2008: Hoping to cripple Hamas's influence, Israel reenters the Gaza Strip in reaction to continued missile attacks launched from there on Israel



Prologue

From Ancient Times

How many generations has it been since we first indulged the madness? This was the question Ma'ath often asked the voice. Sometimes it answered. Sometimes it did not. Today the cloudless sky was silent. The sun beat down on him and drew forth sticky beads of sweat, but no answer. He dug his foot into the parched dust and gazed across the valley at his sleeping brother, Cosam. Between the two brothers their father's sheep grazed peacefully. He kicked at the dust. The brothers' dogs lay round the flock, lazy in the midday heat. Soon the flock would be thirsty, Ma'ath knew. They would have to move. Maybe he could move the sheep before his brother awoke, he plotted halfheartedly.

He was weary of his brother always having to prove that he, Cosam, was the stronger, the faster, the more whatever. To prove his manliness? But did it not actually prove something quite the

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opposite? Why, did it seem, did Cosam not hear the voice? Why did Ma'ath but Cosam did not? What was the voice that one brother heard it but the other did not? Ma'ath conjectured the voice was in his brother, too, only Cosam did not listen to it as Ma'ath did. Ma'ath wondered why his brother made himself insensitive to it. Was it a good reason that made Cosam ignore it and a bad reason Ma'ath listened to it? How could two brothers born less than a year apart be this different? Maybe it was nothing more than brutishness on Cosam's part. Maybe it was that Cosam needed to evolve but as yet had not.

Ma'ath was glad his brother napped. How was this thing to be settled, the brute in Cosam and the angel in Ma'ath? Ma'ath mused that, on this earth, the gentle are no more than lambs to be herded, shorn, and slaughtered by the dominant brutes. How many generations of lambs have already been murdered, tortured, and raped so that the brutes could establish their dominion and rule by these monstrous means? Ma'ath pondered this, magnifying the conflict he had with his brother to universal proportions, the way mad prophets do. Yet it was undeniably the pathetic human reality, and why? For what good reason, that rational people could make sense of in the light of day, do things have to be this way? Always, the conquerors come, speaking another language, bearing only their own selfish will. To conquer, to subjugate, to steal from those they conquer all that the conquered have toiled to produce, the brutes come, inevitably, generation after generation. One empire is conquered and subjugated by the next, in an endless circle of death and destruction.

Ma'ath's favorite daydream was to imagine that there might be a kingdom somewhere on this earth that did not come for brutish conquest and domination, that this kingdom would be based upon peace and love. And it would prove to the brutish empires of this earth just how self-destructively insane they were. Ma'ath feared that this kingdom could not be of this earth.

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Among his own people such a place was yearned for, but they believed it could only be gained after death, this place called heaven. Was it true that it is impossible for such a place to exist on this earth, that it is childishly unrealistic, even irresponsible, to believe otherwise? Was it true that at some point every man must abandon his idealism and embrace the reality, however distasteful that might be, because there is no other way?

Ma'ath sadly drew the whistle he had carved for himself from the girdle of his robe. His brow furrowed, he gently blew, the notes almost too delicate to survive long in this earth's troubled sky. Without warning, Cosam struck Ma'ath in the back with his shepherd's staff, knocking him to the ground.

Ma'ath grunted.

Cosam stood over his brother, grinning down at him maliciously. "You must learn to be more alert, my brother," Cosam chided. "There are sheep in this world, and those that eat the sheep."

Ma'ath winced, dust in his eyes and mouth, his shoulder afire from the blow his brother had struck with his staff. Such a one to have as a brother, Ma'ath lamented to himself. Cosam towered over him. Ma'ath saw how that strange power surged in his brother's blood—saw how delighted Cosam was that his brother was vulnerable to him, and that he could physically dominate him. Cosam snatched the whistle from his brother's hand. Ma'ath leapt to his feet. The whistle was precious to him. "Damn brute!" Ma'ath cursed to himself.

Cosam read his brother's fury and taunted him with it, daring him to react. The brothers stood eye to eye. Cosam dared his brother to fight him without a word spoken between them. *Come. Fight back. Are you afraid? Give me an excuse to whip you, my brother.* Cosam held out the whistle, taunting his brother with it. Then Cosam held it up to his lips, pretending to daintily play it as Ma'ath would, never taking his eyes from his brother's. Ma'ath wanted to fall upon his brother, to strangle him with his bare hands.

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Ma'ath forced himself to banish the thought of vengeance. Rather than attacking his brother as Cosam may have deserved, Ma'ath brushed the dust from his robe with dignity. He would not be as brutish as his brother, no matter how much Cosam provoked him. "Do you know what you are like, my brother?" Cosam asked Ma'ath, eyeing Ma'ath's whistle with disdain. His eyes closed, Ma'ath turned away from his brother, wishing that he could close his ears, too.

"You are like a dainty girl," Cosam said, berating his brother. "Someday you shall make some man like me a good wife. Can you not picture yourself in some man's harem?" Cosam laughed.

"Are you jealous?" Ma'ath asked in a near whisper, determined to maintain his composure.

"How could your womanness make me jealous?"

Ma'ath turned back to his brother and spoke into his eyes. "Because you are too rough and brutish to ever be sensitive, to ever know peace and tranquility. You are too crude to ever really enjoy a flower or feel the delicate things of this earth. Though you are afraid to admit it even to yourself, is it not gentle peace that your own heart desperately craves?"

Grinning malevolently, Cosam held the whistle out to his brother. "You see through me, deep philosopher," Cosam said insincerely.

As Ma'ath reached for his whistle, Cosam snapped it in half. Without straightening his back, Ma'ath picked up his staff from the dust next to him and upended his brother. There was no exhilaration in the deed for Ma'ath, not like there was for his brother. Only a foul taste. *What next, my brother?* Cosam lay in the dust, a strangely satisfied grin smoldering in his eyes. He did not move to protect himself from further attack. He was sure that none would be forthcoming. His brother was too dainty for that, too philosophical. Without warning, Cosam lashed his own staff at Ma'ath's legs. Ma'ath deftly turned the blow away.

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“What? Has my brother become brutish?” Cosam mocked as he scrambled to his feet.

“That is what you want, is it not, my brother? You shall not be content in your own brutishness until you have made me just as you, will you?” Tears poured from Ma’ath’s eyes. They both breathed heavily now. Adrenaline drove them both.

“You should have pressed your advantage when you had me down,” Cosam suggested, to mock, not advise.

“I am not like you,” Ma’ath said, wiping the sweat from his dusty brow.

“No?” Cosam swung wildly at his brother.

Ma’ath leapt gracefully clear of the blow, but Cosam stalked furiously. Cosam swung again and again, his staff swooshing through the hot air. Ma’ath defended himself brilliantly, but presented no offense. He was only willing to defend himself.

Already they both tired in the stifling heat. Ma’ath’s heart was not in this fight, but Cosam was obsessed with it. So the fight continued. Ma’ath defended himself against his brother’s relentless onslaught. He knew that his brother would not stop until he fully reasserted his brutish dominance. Halfheartedly, he swung at Cosam’s legs. Cosam had been waiting for this opening. He slashed at Ma’ath’s exposed face. Ma’ath craned his head away, but to no avail. His brother’s staff slashed Ma’ath’s cheek. Cosam panted lustily, his grin triumphant. *See, my brother, I am still the monarch lion.* He taunted Ma’ath with his expression. Ma’ath reeled in shock from the sudden blow. Droplets of blood plunged down his cheek in an angry red torrent, splattering in the dust. Cosam knew that this would end the fight. He had won. Once again, he had asserted his glorious dominance. His heart throbbed, gloated. Tears welled up in Ma’ath’s eyes, burning bitter tears. Covering his eyes, he left the gash exposed for his brother to see. Trembling, he turned and walked up the hill toward the river.

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“Where are you going, brother?” Cosam called out, as if he had only now awakened from his nap and none of this had occurred. We have to move the sheep. They have exhausted the grass here. They are thirsty.”

“We are brothers, Cosam,” Ma’ath said pitifully, weeping as he reached the crest of the hill. He turned back and looked down on his brother, his tears and blood mingling, and cried out, “Cosam, we are brothers!”

Cosam uncomfortably met his brother’s tear-filled eyes. Guilt at what he had done to his brother reflexively insinuated itself, but Cosam squashed his conscience as if it was nothing more than a little insect pestering him. Instead of listening to his conscience, he openly admired his handiwork. Instead of being ashamed of himself, he chose to be proud of himself.

Ma’ath saw the look on his brother’s face, and it tore into his heart as brutally as Cosam’s staff had his cheek. He sadly turned and went down toward the river.

“Hurry, *brother*,” Cosam said, cruelly emphasizing the word.

Ma’ath broke into a mad dash. With satisfaction, Cosam looked out over the grazing flock, proud to be the dominant beast here in this valley. Ma’ath ran desperately with legs that wanted to leave this world. He beat at his own head, yanking out clumps of his own black hair. Spit overflowed from his mouth, and his gaping wound glistened obscenely in the blazing sun. It was as if the bleeding wound had drained his very soul. He hated himself at that moment more than he hated his brother. He hated this world for how it was, how it demanded that every man be a beast or perish, but he hated himself more for being weak and giving into the hatred when he knew better.

Suddenly, he stopped. His breath kept running, but he froze in his tracks. He tried to clear his eyes, so full of teary sweat. There, on the rock beneath him, was a prince sunning himself upon his back, his eyes closed. In the distance, Ma’ath heard chariots and dogs baying—must be hunting dogs. The

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prince must be out exerting his royal privilege. Ma'ath gasped as quietly as he was able for air. "Oppressor," Ma'ath muttered, cursing the prince. Yet he was fascinated by him.

Then Ma'ath noticed a snake coiled menacingly near the prince's head. In the prince's exertion, he must not have noticed the snake sunning itself upon the rock, in its kingdom and its domain. Now the snake prepared to assert its dominance over its domain, as all the beasts of earth must. Without thinking, Ma'ath moved. He did not consider whether he should allow nature to take its course. Though the prince was an enemy, from the kingdom that had brutally conquered his own, Ma'ath moved. The snake was set to strike, yet the prince remained oblivious to its presence.

With the fluidity of the wind, Ma'ath descended down upon the serpent. Just as it sprang to strike, he smashed its head with his shepherd's staff. The resounding blow startled the prince to his feet. In the same motion, the prince drew and defensively brandished his sword. The two men stood eye to eye.

The prince wondered at the shepherd before him. He glanced at the gash on the shepherd's cheek and then into his eyes. The look in the shepherd's eyes was not threatening. Ma'ath carefully, deliberately pointed at the serpent's bashed corpse with his staff. Finally, the prince understood the circumstances, realized the shepherd had just saved his life, but instinctively the prince did not fully relax. The shepherd managed a smile, and the prince returned the gesture by sheathing his sword.

"Do you know what you have done, simple shepherd?" the prince asked. "You have killed one beast to spare another." Ma'ath shook his head, unable to understand the prince's foreign tongue. "I know that you are unable to understand what I am saying, but I am eternally grateful for what you have done," the prince said, marveling that the shepherd would be moved to save his life. The two were enemies by birth. Yet this simple shepherd had saved his life.

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Ornate war chariots charged up to the boulder. The horses that drew them whinnied and stamped. The hunting dogs yelped furiously, their keepers straining to hold them in check.

“How did you get that vicious wound, my nomadic savior?” the prince inquired, indicating the still-bleeding gash with his deep brown eyes. Though he could not translate the words, Ma’ath understood the question. Dabbing the unrepentant wound, he shook his head, embarrassed, and looked down at the rock. The prince’s entourage clambered up the rock, their swords and spears menacingly directed in Ma’ath’s direction. “Imbeciles!” the prince barked at them. “This man has just saved my life. Put up your weapons before you hurt yourselves.”

Though no older than Ma’ath, the prince’s command had an aggressive regal authority. Despite the prince’s rather boyish appearance, the warriors submissively saluted the prince, their entire upper bodies bowed, as they put up their weapons. Then the general stepped forward and reluctantly bowed, but only with his head, not with his neck. The prince wryly noted this.

“My prince, your life is ours,” the general said, but failed to either hide or disguise his displeasure with the prince’s youthful impetuosity.

“Quite, my general. My father, the king, would have even you, his favorite commander, tortured and put to the death if anything happened to me, your prince. Would he not? That is why I do not understand why you and your men do not try harder to keep up with me.”

The prince smirked at the general. He had been playing these little games ever since he could walk. At a very early age, he had become aware of his royal authority and had enjoyed wielding it, mischievously but not maliciously. He was a relentless tease, exuberant, vibrant, and spirited. But the general was a bluntly disciplined man, not disposed to humor, which was precisely why the prince was especially fond of teasing him. The general frowned, impatient.

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“You know the shepherd’s tongue, my general. Tell him that we are both equally and eternally grateful for the deed he has performed this day. Indeed, he has saved the life of every man here. Tell him that,” the prince commanded.

“For what?” the general asked abrasively.

The prince drew a deep breath, making sure that the general knew he was displeased with his insolence. The general was a proud old warrior. This undisciplined whelp did not frighten him, even if he was the prince. Long ago, many battles past, he had ceased to fear death in any shape or form.

“You and I shall be holding a banquet in this shepherd’s honor in order to express our mutual gratitude,” the prince said, taunting the fearless general. “Have our physician minister to this shepherd’s wound. Then show him to my chariot. He shall be riding with me.”

The general gritted his teeth. He did not even lower his head this time; he merely acknowledged and deferred to the prince with his eyes. The prince feigned a glare. Actually, he admired the general’s unbridled spirit. The general knew it, and that was the only reason he tolerated the prince.

While the general thundered at the physician, the prince went down to the river to refresh himself. He waded into the lazy current, not bothering to unstrap his sandals. The water was almost uncomfortably warm, but it was wet, and refreshing for that. He only now relaxed from the earlier excitement, his legs still rubbery. He looked back up the bank at the obviously terrified, barefoot shepherd. The prince chuckled to himself. What would it be like to be a nomadic barbarian in this world? There was genuine romanticism in his musing.

Though the physician protested, not wanting to dirty himself with the unclean barbarian, he roughly wiped at Ma’ath’s wound and applied the special mud he had concocted from this very river’s bottom. Ma’ath winced as the amused prince watched the two of them. The prince looked forward to questioning the

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shepherd about his life. The prince thought the shepherd must have some unusual tales to tell. It would be good entertainment in any case. As he strode up the bank to his chariot, Ma'ath protested to the general, "I must return to my sheep. My brother waits. We must move the flock to new pastures. Tell the physician thank you." The prince turned and, with a simple hand gesture, ordered the general to ignore the shepherd's protests.

Ma'ath prostrated himself then rose to take his leave. The general laid a powerful hand on Ma'ath's slender shoulder. Ma'ath involuntarily dropped his staff. "You have saved the prince's life, shepherd. It is his duty before our God to honor and thank you. It is your duty before your God to accept the honor," the general explained gruffly. Ma'ath remained convinced that he should return to his brother and their father's flock. But the general was very persuasive. The general herded Ma'ath to the prince's chariot. The shepherd went, shoulders hunched, eyes cast down at the ground.

"Would it not be more appropriate for the unclean one to follow behind the chariot, Prince? Remember the customs of our people. You offend more than our men's noses," the general said.

"How do you dare lecture me?" the prince replied, though he could not deny the shepherd's ripe odor.

"Your father, the king, commanded me to watch over you, Prince, and I will do my duty, by God, however humiliating and distasteful it might be to me."

The prince smirked. He knew he enjoyed torturing the general too much. But it was such great fun getting under the general's skin. "Do you forget that someday I will be king, my general?" the prince asked.

"I do not forget this unfortunate fact for even one second. By then I shall have too few teeth to be your general," the general replied, sighing in relief.

"I shall come to your tomb daily to torment you," the prince threatened.

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“I shall be buried in a secret place,” the general countered.

“You would do that, you vain peacock, just to avoid me?” the prince asked, laughing.

The general pushed Ma’ath up into the prince’s chariot. Holding his breath, the prince took Ma’ath’s hands and showed him where to hold on. Then he motioned to his driver, who gratefully whipped the horses so that Ma’ath’s stench might trail behind rather than hover over them. The great war chariot lurched. Ma’ath was nearly thrown out. The prince laughed at the absurdity of it all. Ma’ath self-consciously stared down at his hands and held on for dear life. The rumbling of the wheels was deafening. The humble shepherd looked at the weapons and the prince and at the blazing sun in the great sky and did not even realize that he stank, that that was the joke the driver and the prince shared. Ma’ath thought it was something else. Enjoying Ma’ath’s wide-eyed wonder and terror, the prince urged the driver to go faster. The horses already strained in the blistering afternoon sun, but the driver whipped the horses faster. Those following behind flared out to avoid the choking dust cloud roiling off the prince’s chariot. Keep up they must.

Soon they left the lands where Ma’ath’s tribe was allowed and entered into the prince’s domain. Ma’ath had never been over to this side of the river in his entire life. What lay over here had always been another world for him. To come here was to die. Only if they did not provoke those who had conquered them and they paid their taxes of tribute were they allowed to live at all. Ma’ath contemplated the prince in his hunting finery, his head bowed, out of the corner of his eye. The prince noted the shepherd’s childlike simplicity.

Soon they rumbled through the conqueror’s fields, and the workers that toiled there stopped to watch them pass. Ma’ath saw them gesture animatedly and became even more self-conscious. What had this day wrought? He knew these slaves had been gathered from his own conquered tribe.

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They turned onto a paved road, raced over a hill, and the palace came into view. Ma'ath's jaw dropped in awe. It was magnificent. Everything Ma'ath had ever heard about it was true. The nomadic shepherd had never seen anything like this.

Finally the driver reined in the exhausted horses. Ma'ath turned and saw the general grimly pull up behind them. The others were still out of sight over the hill. As they approached the palace, they passed through an encampment of merchants in caravan. It was all incredibly exotic to the simple shepherd. A wild-looking man stood in the road.

"Why does the prince allow the unclean one in his royal chariot?" he shouted at the prince.

"When is the last time you bathed, prophet?" the prince sarcastically returned.

"I bathe in the Spirit of the Lord!"

"It does little for your odor in this world."

The prophet frowned. Nobody recognized him as a prophet but himself. All those who encountered him deemed him a madman. He knew this. It did not stop him from playing the role of public conscience.

Ma'ath, so far from his brother and the hills of their tribe, grew increasingly more uncomfortable. The prince sensed this and patted Ma'ath to comfort him, but only succeeded in startling and frightening him.

"Drive on, driver," the prince commanded.

The horses shunted the prophet aside.

"It is not me you offend!" the prophet called after the prince.

"How could it be that the Lord would ever talk to that crazy fool, much less designate such a man his spokesman?" the prince asked himself.

They came to the palace's front gate, and the great ornate door opened. There stood a regal white-haired man. It could only be the king. Ma'ath gulped. It was he who had slaughtered

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and robbed his people. The king waved, and the prince warmly returned the gesture.

When the prince dismounted the chariot, he waited for Ma'ath to get down, but the terrified shepherd clutched the railing, his hands white and stiff from the strain. The prince gently pried Ma'ath's hands loose and helped him down. Together, they ascended the marble stairs toward the king. The son bowed in respect to his father. Ma'ath dropped to his knees, touched his forehead to the milky white stones, and remained in that humbled position. Behind them, the general bowed from the waist.

"What has the hunt produced this day?" the king asked, directing his gaze at the groveling barbarian. "I thought my son and my general were out hunting for wild boar, not campaigning."

The prince grinned. Father and son relished teasing one another. "This man has saved my life," the prince announced. He urged the reluctant shepherd to stand up, but Ma'ath would not budge, too frightened to look into the hated king's face. How had he ever looked into the prince's eyes?

"We shall have to hear this sure-to-be-interesting tale," the king declared. He looked to the general questioningly. Gritting his teeth, the general shrugged. The expression was familiar to the king. The monarch shook his head sympathetically.

"With my father's leave, we shall banquet in this man's honor," the prince declared. The king skeptically raised a white eyebrow.

"Might some gold coins have sufficed, my son?"

The prince smiled and threw his arm around his father's shoulders. "Really, Father, I am surprised at you. A few gold coins. Is that all your son's life is valued at? Is there no more gratitude in your royal heart for such a noble deed? Though he is an unclean barbarian, he still saved my life from a serpent."

The king eyed his general. "A serpent? Really?" The general lowered his eyes with shame. What could he do or say that would undo this?

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“Take your savior to the kitchen so that the servants may properly prepare him,” the king ordered. “I cannot wait to hear the particulars. A serpent, you say.”

The prince thought to suggest that Ma’ath be bathed and prepared within his own private chambers, but sensed that it would not please his father. There was a flurry of orders. Servants appeared and forced Ma’ath to his feet. With obvious disdain, they led the unclean one back to the kitchen area.

Ma’ath was awed by the beauty and opulence of the palace. The kitchen was huge and full of activity. Ma’ath had never seen so much food. A calf roasted on a great spit. All those in the kitchen stopped what they were doing and observed the barbarian shepherd with disdain. Apparently, they had not heard that he was a hero and would have a banquet in his honor. They briefly argued among themselves. The loser led Ma’ath out the door holding his nose. That door opened through the outer wall of the palace into the open air. There was a trough of water there used for washing the vegetables and such. The servant motioned for Ma’ath to bathe there, but Ma’ath was not so inclined. Impatient with the shepherd fool, the servant tugged at Ma’ath’s robe, stripping him naked before he could resist. Ma’ath had never been more humiliated. The servants who watched at the window pointed and laughed. The servant who had stripped him threw Ma’ath’s robe on a heap of rotting refuse. Ma’ath’s heart sank.

As the servant forced the reluctant shepherd into the trough, a call came from within. The servant went back inside the palace. Ma’ath clambered out of the trough and retrieved his robe from the rotting refuse heap. With desperate haste, he fled the palace. His legs could not carry him fast enough. Would his brother ever forgive him?



Chapter 1

We Are Not Animals

Ms. Liebowisc stood before the table as if it were an altar. She stared down at the relics and heirlooms arranged upon it and rubbed her troubled head with an elegant hand. It was the bittersweet memories of more than three hundred years that she contemplated. That was how long the family had occupied this stately house.

As she clenched her delicate fists, tears welled up. It had been almost a year since that terrible night, but she remembered it well. “Let us leave now while the borders are still open,” she had pleaded with her husband. “For Ellie’s sake.”

“How can we just leave what generations suffered to build?” her husband had countered. “This is our home. Where will we run to? How many times must we Jews flee in this world before we will finally find a place from which we need never flee again? No. We will not run from these monsters. We will make our

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stand right here. It is as much our home as the Nazis'. We shall not run from these monsters."

Though she had pleaded and cajoled, insisting that the Nazis could not be reasoned with, that the irrational emotions of the moment had gone beyond that, her husband had brought her to stand before this very table and gone through the family history with her. He had declared that these roots were too deep in the ground to be dug out without scarring the earth herself. They were a part of this land as surely as any other German. Like every other German, they had sacrificed; they had lived and died, endeavored and suffered to build what they had. Ten generations of laughter and tears, successes and failures had transpired under this roof. Where would they go that Jews would be welcomed? It was their duty as Jews to the generations to follow to make their stand right here, to not run away in fear, to bring these dark chapters of history to an end, right here, right now.

Her husband had spoken out publicly and directly challenged the irrationality of the Nazi doctrine. Then the Nazis had come in the middle of the night, hidden by the mask of darkness, and knocked their door down. In their terror, the Liebowiscs had not even dared to rise from their beds. The uniformed madmen had dragged her dear, beloved husband from their bed and forced him to dress, ignoring her hysterical protestations that her husband had done nothing wrong, that he was a German patriot, that they were good people, good citizens. Their ancestors had fought and died in every German war. "We are Germans just like you!" she had screamed at them. They had only smirked at her, a hideous, demonic smirk. When she attempted to tear her husband from their grasp, it was her husband who calmed her. He promised her that everything would be okay, to remember her dignity and be strong. Surely, this was all an unfortunate mistake that reason would rectify. Bolstered by her husband's undaunted courage, she had composed herself and watched them take him away.

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Despite daily inquiries to the authorities, that was the last time she had seen or spoken to her husband. She thanked God that she still had their precious son, Ellie. She had wanted to take their son and flee, but she could not—not until she learned the fate of her husband, not as long as there was any hope that he might still be alive.

There was a sudden knock at the door. It startled her from her nightmarish recollections. To compose herself, she drew a deep breath and smoothed her dress. She dabbed at her nose with a dainty handkerchief, went to the door, and opened it. It was Mr. Breyer, an elder of the Jewish community. Though she recognized him, she had never spoken to him before this moment. “You must forgive me, Mr. Breyer, I am not receiving guests today,” she said, unable to hide her wretchedness.

Mr. Breyer folded his hands in front of himself and looked down at the ground, feeling as miserable as she did. “Please, Mrs. Liebowisc, it is I that must beg your forgiveness. I must talk to you,” he pleaded quietly.

She hoped for a second that Mr. Breyer might have good news about her husband. No. He seemed too distressed for his news to be good. “I’m sorry,” she said, dreading the worst. “Please, do come in, Mr. Breyer.” She placed her hand on his and ushered him in.

When they sat down in the drawing room, she politely inquired if there was anything she could bring her guest. Finally, he dared to look her in the eye, his own eyes glassy with sorrow. “I had dared to hope that you were bringing me good news at last,” she said, trying to smile bravely, but Mr. Breyer’s forlorn expression told her there was none. Mr. Breyer cast his gaze down at the floor again, unable to look at her, and regretfully shook his weary head.

“What am I to do? When will my husband return? It has been so very difficult without him,” she said, attempting to explain her moroseness, why she had not brightly inquired how

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Mr. Breyer was, why she could not hold a normal conversation with her visitor.

“None of us is without grief in these terrible days,” Mr. Breyer said, his eyes still cast down at the floor, “and I am afraid we have little more to offer each other than sympathy. You have my most heartfelt sympathy, Mrs. Liebowisc. How is Ellie?” He dared to look into her drawn face.

“What do we need sympathy for, Mr. Breyer? We are the Chosen People. Is this our reward, to live lives of suffering and persecution century upon century?” she asked, though not of Mr. Breyer really. “How many times have Jews had to ask this question of each other and their God, Mr. Breyer?” she asked, though she knew that there could be no answer for such a question. “Ellie is doing as well as can be expected for a boy whose father was kidnapped in the middle of the night by men who are not quite men at all.”

Mr. Breyer only nodded. What could he say? An awkward silence followed, and still she waited for him to answer what he could not, what no man could. Finally, she spoke. “Why do I have the awful feeling that you have come to tell me something that I do not want to hear and you do not want to tell me?”

Mr. Breyer nervously bit his lip. God, he wished he did not have to do this, to be here under these circumstances. Tears welled up in his sad eyes. “I do not know how to tell you what I must,” he said, voice quavering. “My dear God,” he lamented, “why must I be the messenger?”

“Messenger of what, Mr. Breyer? Do you have bad news of my husband? Please tell me. I can no longer stand the suspense,” she pleaded.

He shook his head, tears streaming down his cheeks into his gray beard. “I am sure you have heard about the resettlement,” he said with great difficulty.

Mrs. Liebowisc’s entire body sagged, and her face went pale white. Mr. Breyer reached out to her and consolingly placed his

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hand on her trembling shoulder. "I am more sorry than I can ever express in words," he said, begging for her forgiveness.

She abruptly stood up. "Why us?" she demanded, as if it were by Mr. Breyer's decision.

"We all must go eventually," he said, trying to reassure her. He wished that it could all be different somehow, but knew very well that it could not be. He stared down at the floor again, so frail and vulnerable himself, and wept.

"We won't go. We refuse to go. Not without my husband," she said defiantly.

Mr. Breyer gently took her hand into both of his. "We have no choice in this matter. You have tragically seen this for yourself."

"What about my husband? Will he be allowed to resettle with us?"

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Liebowisc, I know nothing about such things. Only what I am told. Please understand. They have told me nothing. All we can do is hope and pray. None of us can escape this. Not me. Not you. Not anyone. I am sorry," he said, apologizing again as if it were all his fault.

They pitifully gazed at each other. She could see his misery was as great as her own. She rose and embraced him, ashamed that she had given him such a hard time. They consoled each other. She stepped back from him at last and wiped her eyes with her kerchief. "I shall have to make arrangements to pack and ship our belongings," she said.

Mr. Breyer shook his head sadly. "Only the clothes you are wearing. Nothing more."

She stared at Mr. Breyer incredulously, not sure that she had heard him correctly.

"They have told me that everything we require will be provided for us when and where we arrive for resettlement," he explained.

"That's ridiculous! How can we be expected to leave behind our roots as if they never existed?"

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“I cannot answer for the Nazis or this monster they call the Reich. Please forgive me, Mrs. Liebowisc. I do not mean to appear callous or short with you. Unfortunately, there are others I must inform. Their distress, I am sure, will be no less than your own. I am sure that you understand. This has been the worst day of my life.”

Mr. Breyer, who had held back his tears during this speech, broke down again. “Forgive me,” he said, sniffing miserably.

“I understand,” she said, though she did not.

“You are to be at the train station at ten sharp tomorrow morning. Bring nothing except yourselves, not even your clothes. They say they will be providing everything we need, even our clothes, when we arrive at our new homes.” He rose and placed his hand on her shoulder. “Please forgive me for being the bearer of this news.”

“It is not yours to be blamed for,” she said, shaking her head in disbelief.

“What if we are not at the station tomorrow? What happens then?” she asked.

“Very grave consequences are threatened. That is all I can say. That is all I care to say. You know these monsters. You know what they are capable of. Please. For your own sake, cooperate. The only hope we have is to make the best of a terrible situation.”

She nodded, covering her mouth with her hand, as if she could stifle her anguish with her hand.

“God be with you, Mrs. Liebowisc. I will find the door myself.” In shame, he fled.

“God be with you, Mr. Breyer,” she whispered, gazing over at the table with the artifacts on it.

Even in her worst nightmares, she could not have imagined anything this disjointedly, grotesquely irrational.

In opening the door to let himself out, Mr. Breyer encountered Ellie. The old man’s heart sank lower yet, if that were

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possible. Ellie sensed Mr. Breyer's tortured state of mind. "What is the matter, Mr. Breyer? Have you some news of my father?" Ellie asked fearfully. Both the old man and the boy were too distraught to exchange any normal kind of greeting. Mr. Breyer helplessly shook his head, and fresh tears ran down his cheeks. He could not bear to face Ellie with this. Unable to speak, he went without a word. He wondered how he would ever be able to inform the others on the list.

Ellie hurried into the house and saw his mother standing at the table with the artifacts on it, her head bowed. "What is the matter, mother? What was the matter with Mr. Breyer? He was so upset he could not even speak to me just now at the door. Has he brought some dreadful news of father?" Ellie asked.

At the sound of her dear son's voice, she composed herself with dignity, drawing her tears back into her heart. "No. We have no news of your father." She took her son in her arms and hugged him close as if he were going away.

"Then what was Mr. Breyer here for?" he asked into her bosom.

"He was here to inform us that we must report to the train station tomorrow morning at ten for resettlement."

"Resettlement?" he asked, gasping in confusion. "What about father? We cannot go without father."



The next morning, the two of them stood outside the door to their home. Ellie's mother nervously held the keys in her hand, jangling them, unwilling to lock the door, afraid it would be for the last time. Her whole arm shook when she finally put the key in the lock and turned it. She told herself that she must not think that way, that somehow everything would right itself; her husband would return from wherever he was, and life would be normal again. For Ellie's sake, she had to believe this. For her

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own sake, she must resist and overcome outright resignation, or what hope was there? She turned to Ellie and forced herself to smile. "All set then?" She put her arm around his shoulder and they began to walk down the street. Each carried a suitcase crammed with everything they could squeeze in.

The birds in the lush green trees sang like they do on every beautiful summer day. It had already grown hot, though it was still early in the morning. It would be a beautiful day indeed. Children laughed and played out in the street. Everything seemed so normal, so happy, except what lay in their hearts. It was too beautiful a day for what was in their hearts.

As they silently walked toward the train depot, they passed rows of shops. "Jew" was obscenely scrawled across several of the shop windows. Ellie looked down at the Star of David that his mother had sewn onto his coat lapel. Yet it seemed like any other day in his young life. He looked at his mother, and she bravely smiled back at him, encouraging him that everything was going to be okay. He smiled back at her, her smile and that moment indelibly burned into his heart forever. The rest of his life, he would not be able to forget his mother's smile in that terrible moment.

"Good morning, Mrs. Liebowisc and Ellie. How are the two of you this fine summer day?" a shopkeeper called from his doorway with neither accusation nor malice.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Brandt," Mrs. Liebowisc said somberly.

"Going on holiday?" the shopkeeper inquired, as good friends do of each other.

She shook her head.

"We do not know where we are going." Ellie said. "Have you heard about resettlement?"

"What?" Mr. Brandt was flabbergasted. "The fools are actually doing it."

The two of them nodded and continued down the street without another word.

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“God be with you,” Mr. Brandt called out to them. He went back into his shop, shaking his head.

When Ellie and his mother entered the depot, they were directed by some young soldiers to the far platform, where they saw their friends and neighbors gathered. They nervously hugged and greeted each other, everyone afraid to speculate about what awaited them. Huddled in small clusters, they whispered to each other. Then the commandant appeared, flanked by uniformed soldiers armed with machine guns. Ellie could not help but feel that this would be no ordinary move from one city to another, not with the soldiers armed as they were.

Ellie nudged his mother and pointed out to her that Mr. Breyer was among a group of elder Jews who followed the commandant up onto the raised portion of the platform next to the tracks. His mother grimly nodded. As the commandant looked down from the platform and surveyed the assembled, a hideous smile faintly creased his lips.

As the crowd grew silent, the commandant began to speak. “As you all know, our beloved Germany is locked in a life and death struggle with our hereditary enemies. It is our German duty and honor to bring order to this troubled and confused world. It is the glory of our German heritage to become the administrators of a new world order. To achieve such a worthy goal, all Germans—each of us—must do our part as it is given to us. It is our duty as Germans. There is no greater honor for a true German than to sacrifice oneself for the greater glory of the Fatherland. Our courageous führer is especially aware of the sacrifice implicit in what you people are called upon to do here this day. We require your cooperation and your noble labor if our great German nation is to prevail in the achievement of our magnificent goal.”

“But I am a lawyer,” a man called from the throng gathered there in front of the commandant.

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The commandant snidely thought to himself that Germany no longer required Jew lawyers, but he hid his sneer in order to perpetuate the illusion he had constructed for them. "We have greater, more important needs than lawyers in these critical days," the commandant explained. "We are at war. If we do not all sacrifice and pull together in the best way we are able to serve the Fatherland, we shall not succeed in our noble endeavor. I am quite sure that each and every one of you understands precisely what it is that I am saying. I am sure that each of you is as great a German patriot as I am."

"If this is so, why must we be resettled? Why can't we make our noble sacrifice here, among our friends and neighbors, where our fathers and their fathers' fathers made their homes?" another voice called from the throng of Jews.

"What is your name?" the commandant demanded of the man that called out.

"Albert Kohl," came the proudly defiant reply.

"Albert Kohl, the führer feels in his heart that it is best for the German nation as a whole if everyone lives together in their own culture. That is all that we are doing here. I am sure that you comprehend exactly what it is we are about here, and that you agree with the concept," the commandant said, pretending to reason with the man.

As he spoke, a locomotive chugged slowly up behind the platform from which he spoke. It pulled behind it a string of cattle cars.

"No, I do not understand," Mr. Kohl said boldly, continuing to challenge the commandant. "Nor do I believe anyone else here understands this so-called State Policy." There was a universal nod, and a collective murmur passed through the throng.

"My best friends are not Jews. I do not need to be with only Jews. No offense intended to my friends and neighbors here, but my culture is as much German as Jewish," Mr. Kohl said proudly.

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The commandant adjusted his thick-lensed glasses and feigned patience with Albert Kohl's protest. "I sympathize, Mr. Kohl. However, the policy has been set. There are to be no exceptions. I repeat, there are to be no exceptions. If you require further explanation or if you have any further complaints, I will be happy to continue this discussion with you in my office. We do have a timetable to keep here. You must forgive me." The commandant glared down at Mr. Kohl. "Do you have any further questions of us, Mr. Kohl?" the commandant dared.

Mr. Kohl began to speak, but his wife covered his mouth with her hand. For his wife, he stifled himself.

"Very well," the commandant said, smiling. "Does anyone else have something to say?" His gaze swept across the throng. No one else dared to speak, not even among themselves, as they stood in stunned silence. "Very good. Now, as I look out over you, I notice that many of you have brought luggage, even though you were told not to. I am sorry if any of you were given the wrong impression. You will not require any luggage. When you arrive at the location for resettlement, the German government will provide you with everything you will need. No luggage is allowed on board the train. Please, we ask your cooperation. When you are invited to board the train, everyone leave your baggage here upon the platform. There are absolutely no exceptions," the commandant insisted. "Very well, I wish everyone a pleasant and safe journey to your new home. We are sure that you will find your new home to be more than satisfactory."

The commandant then turned to Mr. Breyer, who had been standing behind him during his speech. "I have invited an elder in your community to speak to you today," the commandant said, cueing Mr. Breyer. Mr. Breyer seemed not to have heard the commandant. He stood there motionless, his head hung. "Damn you, Mr. Breyer!" the commandant said in a hoarse whisper. "If these people panic or refuse to cooperate because of you, I shall hold you individually responsible. Be assured that

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you and your family will be on the very next train. Do you hear and understand me, Mr. Breyer?"

A big tear rolled down Mr. Breyer's face. He nodded and shuffled to the front of the platform. He tentatively cleared his throat, but could not speak. The commandant nodded at him impatiently. "As we discussed," the commandant urged.

"Please be assured," Mr. Breyer managed to say at last, his voice no more than a whisper, "everything is going to be just fine in our new homes. The authorities have assured me that all our needs will be well taken care of. There is nothing to be afraid of if we all cooperate. Please cooperate and there will be no trouble."

A murmur passed through the throng. The commandant had thought that one of their elders saying these things might make it easier for them to accept, but he uneasily noted that Mr. Breyer's halfhearted speech seemed to have the opposite effect. The commandant pulled Mr. Breyer by the sleeve from the front of the platform and angrily glared into the old man's eyes. Mr. Breyer bowed his head, his own eyes cast down. "Thank you, Mr. Breyer. One of your elders," the commandant unnecessarily reminded them. He held up his watch to look at it. "Ah, I see by my watch that it is time to board. Please step forward now and board the car nearest you. The soldiers will help you to board. Please remember that no luggage is allowed on the train. Just leave your bags here on the platform. We will take care of them for you. There are no exceptions. Thank you, we greatly appreciate your cooperation. Once again, have a safe and pleasant journey, and best of luck in your new homes."

Nobody moved, though the soldiers had thrown open the cattle cars' doors. Everyone had expected that this train would pass, and a passenger train would pull up for them to board. Mr. Breyer, desperate to make amends for his earlier performance, called out in a broken voice, "Please board now. Please cooperate. Please?"

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A few, compelled by Mr. Breyer's pitiful urgency, began to move toward the train. "Everyone now," the commandant ordered, smiling at Mr. Breyer, pleased with the old man's initiative.

"We are not animals!" someone shouted from among those who refused to move to the train. "This train is for cattle, not human beings!"

The commandant jumped down from the platform into the throng, and they all shrank away from him. The man who had shouted was left all by himself, except for his family that clung to him. The commandant approached him and slapped him across the face with a black-gloved hand. The man spat in the commandant's face. One of the guards at the commandant's side smashed the man in the face with the butt of his gun. As the man lay unconscious on his back, his family wept over him.

"We do not want to see anyone else hurt," the commandant called out. "We beg you all to cooperate. This is wartime. We regret that this is the train you must take, but there was no other available. Please bear with us and make the most of an unfortunate circumstance."

The man regained consciousness, and his wife and children helped him to sit up. As he shook off the effects of the blow, the commandant addressed him. "Shall we cooperate now, sir?" For a brief moment, the man thought to continue his defiance, but his family's distress restrained him. Instead, he bowed his head and reluctantly nodded.

"Good," the commandant said. "Now, in orderly fashion, let us board the train."

Ellie's heart sank when he saw the man struggle to his feet, then move toward the train with his family. He numbly watched as the man and his family were boosted up into one of the cattle cars.

As the commandant nodded with satisfaction, the entire throng now went forward to be thrust up into the cattle cars.

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Ellie and his mother wound their way through the abandoned luggage on the platform. Though he had left his, Ellie noticed that his mother continued to carry hers toward the train. Despite his pleas, she stubbornly refused to abandon her bag.

As they neared the car they were to board, Ellie wondered how they were to all fit inside; it was already ridiculously overcrowded. Yet, the soldiers continued to push people up into the car. The soldiers ignored the pleas of the men, women, and children. One of the soldiers indicated to Ellie's mother that she should drop her bag. She shook her head. The soldier attempted to pry it from her grasp, but she would not let go of it.

"Are we deaf, madam?" the commandant asked.

"Shall we not be allowed even this?" his mother replied.

"There are no exceptions," the commandant insisted.

Ellie gently peeled his mother's fingers from the suitcase handle one by one. She let him, but she leveled a hateful glare at the commandant. Ellie ushered his mother toward the cattle car and whispered, "Please," to her. Then they were pushed up into the car.

"Nazi pigs!" his mother cursed.

Ellie begged her to control herself. With tenderness and urgency, he placed his hand over his mother's mouth in order to silence her. In her bitter frenzy, she bit his hand, and Ellie cried out in pain from the bite. When his mother realized what she had done, she hugged her son and begged his forgiveness.

All up and down the train, the great doors on the cattle cars banged shut, and the soldiers snapped locks onto them.

"What if there is an emergency? How will we ever be able to open the doors?" someone dared to call out to the soldiers.

"This is for your own safety. We do not want anyone to fall out and hurt themselves," the passengers were told.

When all the doors had been locked shut, the commandant signaled to the engineer in the locomotive. The unhappy train jerked away from the station.

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Ellie looked around himself. There was no place for anyone to sit. They were packed in too tightly for them to be able to do anything except stand against one another. It was unbearably hot, being packed so closely together on such a warm summer day.

Ellie took his mother's hand in his and caressed it, but he could not relax her. Nobody could believe that this was happening to them, that they were being treated like this—men, women, and children packed into cattle cars like animals.



Late on the afternoon of the next day, Ellie leaned against the wall of the cattle car. It seemed like he had stood there an eternity. He wondered if they would ever get to their new home, afraid what they would find when they got there, but desperate for this ordeal to end. Hot, sticky air blew on his face as he stared out the cracks. He turned to his mother. Her head drooped as she dozed next to him on her tired feet. He carefully supported her weight. Then he noticed that the train had slowed again, as it had a number of times before, but each time it had only pulled onto sidings to allow other trains to pass. The children whimpered and complained. There was nothing their parents could do.

Through a crack, Ellie saw that they had pulled onto a side-track along which ran a high wire fence topped with swirling rolls of barbed wire. Beyond the fence, he saw large wooden buildings—some sort of barracks, he thought.

It was then that terrible stench first assaulted his nose. Everyone reacted to it now. Someone suggested that it smelled like a slaughterhouse does when fat is melted down and burned.

The train squeaked to a stop next to a depot. In the middle of it were two oversized doors, which were swung open. “Welcome Jews,” a huge sign over the doors read.

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Soldiers came out through the doors toward the train. They held their noses and laughed. The soldiers' levity ironically heartened Ellie.

The order was shouted to unlock the doors. A general cheer of relief rippled up and down the cattle cars. At last, the ordeal appeared to be over. No one had been allowed out of the cattle cars since they had boarded—not to eat, not to stretch, not to go to the bathroom, not for anything. When the soldiers now ordered them to disembark, there was a surreal euphoria.

Ellie was one of the first to tumble out. He stumbled on his legs, wobbly and stiff from having stood so long without being able to sit down. He turned back to help his mother down, almost too weak to be of any assistance to her. She leaned against his shoulder, exhausted by their ordeal, but elated that it was over. She managed a smile of relief as they were herded by the soldiers through the depot doors.

Once through the doors, they discovered that actually there was no depot—the depot was only a false facade, not a real building. Ellie and his mother exchanged nervous, perplexed glances as they were directed toward a large brick building without windows. Inside, they found that it was like a stable or a barn; only shower spigots lined the length of both walls. Ellie and his mother were shoved along toward a raised platform at the far end of the room. On the platform stood several army officers who smiled as they looked over the new arrivals.

Ellie looked to his mother questioningly. She reassuringly patted his arm.

When they had all been herded into the room, the door was closed behind them. There was a collective, terrified shudder at the sound of the door clanging shut. The children whimpered and cried while their parents scolded and cajoled, fearful that their children's complaints might be interpreted as a lack of cooperation on their parts.

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An aristocratic man stepped forward on the platform. For a moment, he surveyed the Jews cowered before him. Ellie was very close to the platform and could very clearly see the man's face. The look in his eyes made Ellie's skin crawl.

"Welcome to your new home," the man said, his voice booming with sickening heartiness. "I am Colonel Schumacher. It is my duty to ensure that everything to do with your resettlement goes smoothly. I would personally like to thank you all for your much-appreciated continued cooperation. We realize that you are all tired and hungry, and, of course, in need of bathing.

"Therefore, we shall finish our business here as quickly as possible so that you may all take a shower and refresh yourselves. But first we must ask for volunteers. The sooner we have our volunteers, the sooner we will be able to end this little ordeal."

The colonel glanced back at his cohorts, who nodded at him appreciatively.

"What we require right now are strong and able-bodied men familiar with the various aspects of building construction," the colonel said congenially.

"What about our families?" a voice called out.

The colonel thoughtfully tapped his lips. "Be assured, they will be taken care of, and you will be joining them later." The colonel spoke with cynical literalness.

The colonel nodded at the door next to the platform, and it was swung open by the soldiers near it. The late afternoon sun gushed into the windowless room.

"All those who wish to volunteer, please step forward," the colonel directed.

At that moment, having suffered what they had, volunteering seemed rather attractive. The sunlight seemed to beckon them. Several scurried toward the door, the several who were without immediate family there.

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The soldiers at the door scrutinized those that came forward. They forcefully blocked a scrawny middle-aged man's exit.

"Not you," they said, shoving him back into the room. Crushed and broken, the man reluctantly returned to his place in the throng.

Ellie's mother pushed him toward the door, urging him to go through it, but he refused.

"Mother, I know nothing about construction," he protested. "I will not leave you."

"Are there anymore?" the colonel called out.

No more came forward.

"Very well," the colonel said, "I believe we have our quota from this group. Now, for the sake of personal hygiene, you are all requested to please take your clothes off and pass them up here. After everyone has showered, fresh clothes will be issued and a good meal will follow. Does that not sound good to everyone?"

Naturally it did. They were all starved and stinking, desperate to be clean and fed, to be done with this nightmare; yet, were they really expected to disrobe and shower in front of each other? No one moved to undress.

The colonel nodded his head toward an old man who stood with his arms crossed, refusing to undress. The guards fell upon the old man and beat him to the ground with their rifle butts. Then they dragged his shattered body out the door. A bloody trail smeared across the brick floor.

An awful hush filled the dimly lit chamber.

"Is there anyone else who would prefer not to cooperate?" the colonel inquired. Everyone began to undress at once, as it was apparent what resistance would incur; their only hope to escape this nightmare, they knew, was by cooperating.

Ellie trembled in revulsion. He averted his eyes so that he would not see his mother in her nakedness. He stared up into the colonel's eyes with a hatred too deep for so young a heart.

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The colonel ignored Ellie's gaze and stared instead at his mother's nakedness, perversely enjoying himself and taunting the boy with his smile.

Without looking to the right or the left, Ellie received the clothes being passed up from behind him and his mother. With embarrassment and distaste, he tossed them in a pile before the colonel on the platform.

"You there," the colonel barked at Ellie. "Pick those clothes up. Now! The soldiers will show you where to take them."

Ellie hesitated. He wanted to turn to his mother, but could not for her nakedness. His mother pushed him forward toward the heap of clothes.

"Go, dear Ellie. Do what they say. It is the only hope," she said in a whisper.

Still, he hesitated, but when she pushed him forward again, he went and gathered the clothes up in his arms. The soldiers once again opened up the door and led Ellie, naked, through it. They showed him to a wagon already piled high with clothes and indicated that he should toss his load onto it. Then, out of modesty, he faced the soldiers in a partial crouch. They mockingly grinned at him. With their guns, they pointed back at the door. It required more than a dozen trips for Ellie to move all the clothes to the wagon.

When he returned to the door with the soldiers after the last load, the colonel met him and barred his way back in.

"My mother," Ellie protested.

The colonel gazed into Ellie's terrified eyes and smiled. With his hand, he ordered the soldiers to close the door.

"Turn on the showers," he commanded, not moving his eyes from Ellie's.

For an eternity, they stood there, just outside the door. Then they began, muffled at first then reaching a crescendo—the screams of terror that would stay with Ellie for the rest of his days upon this earth. Ellie collapsed to his knees and wept,

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his hands held out to the colonel in supplication. The colonel smirked at him with satisfaction, then motioned to the soldiers. They hoisted Ellie to his feet by both arms, but Ellie was unable to walk on his paralyzed legs, so they dragged him along.

“Come, Jew boy, we have work to do,” the colonel said, abandoning all pretense.



The pathetic skeleton men jumped up and down. They wildly hugged and kissed each other. Staring up at the ceiling, Ellie sullenly listened to their celebration from his bunk. He had lain there and stared up at the ceiling all morning. Ever since the guards had failed to come and take them to work, he had lain there, unable to move.

While the others joyously celebrated this unprecedented sign, he lay there. Indeed, he heard the war's terrible roar nearby like everyone else did, but it was too much to hope. In this hell, it was too much to do anything, really, except to survive. He was prepared for this hell to go on and on as it had, day upon day. How could such a thing ever end? What could ever follow such a hell?

The skeleton men were shouting. “We are going to be liberated! We are going to be liberated! They have come to liberate us at long last!” But it did not register in Ellie's heart that way. He was not sure he could ever be liberated from such a hell.

Liberated? To what? Ellie was not sure that liberation was possible on this damned planet. How could he feel safe and free ever again in such a world? After this? How could he ever feel clean again? How could he ever know peace of mind again in such a world? How could he ever be happy again in such a world?

“Come, Ellie,” Jacob said, attempting to stir him from his bunk. Ellie did not react to the older man's gentle touch.

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“Come, Ellie,” Jacob urged him again. “Our liberators are here. Come. See from the window for yourself.”

Still there was not a flicker of response in Ellie’s eyes. He continued to stare up at the ceiling in a trance.

Jacob understood. He understood only too well. He tenderly squeezed Ellie’s shoulder and kissed him on the forehead.

Ellie, motionless, neither wept nor was joyful. Nothing. He was seemingly devoid of emotion.

Jacob sadly returned to the window and looked out toward the fence at the camp’s perimeter. The skeleton men cheered as the tanks with stars on them roared by, angrily ripping up ribbons of earth in their passage. They jumped up and down and urged the tanks on with their wisps of arms.

Some of them tried to break down the door, but it was no use. They were weaker than little children. So they frantically turned their attention to the steel mesh that covered the windows. With the greatest of efforts, pounding at it with everything they could muster, they smashed through it. For a moment, they stood together at the shattered window. They half-expected the Nazis to return and punish them for what they had done. It did not seem possible that the gates of hell could swing open for them. They exultantly hugged each other. Tears of joy gushed from their bulging corpse eyes.

Ellie turned on his bunk and watched them dance in front of the broken window. He jumped down to the floor. The jolt sent an ache through every bone in his body. He pushed through the stick men and pulled himself up on the sill. He tottered there a moment. The others reached for him to steady him.

“Be careful,” they cautioned Ellie, but he launched himself out through the window into space.

With a sickeningly feathery thump, he embedded in the early spring mud. They called down to him, afraid he had shattered his emaciated limbs. At first he lay there in too much pain to budge, but he willed himself to stand up the same way he

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had willed himself the entire terrible time. They cheered for him from the window as he staggered toward the fence.

“Dear God, mother,” Ellie said, weeping as he began to run toward the fence, wobbling on his brittle legs. As he ran, he looked neither to the right nor to the left, only at the fence and beyond. He did not want to see the smokestacks or the brick reception building. Never again did he want to see this place. Not now. Not ever again. He did not want to remember how hell looked or, dear God, how it smelled. He fixed his eyes far away, beyond the horizon, away from this earth. He reached the fence and collapsed against it, clutching it to support himself.

“Dear God, mother,” he said again. He wept, his body shaking from the emotional earthquake within.

He felt a hand upon his back and crumpled to the ground. Jacob knelt over him.

“Ellie, Ellie, everything is okay now. We have made it.” Despite Jacob’s reassurance, Ellie sobbed uncontrollably.

“Mother, mother,” Ellie cried out, grasping the front of Jacob’s striped cotton shirt.

“Ellie. It’s me, Jacob. We are freed, Ellie. It’s all over now,” he whispered.

The tenderness in Jacob’s voice finally soothed Ellie. His eyes cleared and he gazed up at Jacob.

“We’ve made it, Ellie. The Lord has answered our prayers,” Jacob said joyfully.

“Mother, my mother.” Ellie looked past Jacob’s shoulder into the cold blue sky.

Jacob bit his lower lip. He mournfully bowed his head and nodded in memory of his own family members who had perished here in this awful place.

A GI saw the two of them and approached tentatively.

“My dear God,” he murmured, shocked and sickened by their skeletal appearance. “Bring the wire cutter. Hurry!” he

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shouted to his fellow soldiers. “We’ll get you out of there in no time. Hang on,” he said to Ellie and Jacob. “Hurry!” he shouted again to the other soldiers.

When they arrived with the wire cutter, they snipped through the fence. The first GI rushed through the hole and knelt with Jacob next to Ellie. “My dear God,” he mumbled to himself. “It’s over now. You’re free,” he said, reaching out to touch them reassuringly.

“Never again,” Ellie moaned.

His voice tore the GI’s heart into pieces.

“We’ve come to help,” the GI said. “It’s over. You are free now. Everything’s okay. The Nazis are beaten.” Tears dribbled down the soldier’s scruffy cheeks.

More skeleton men came now and struggled through the hole that had been cut in the fence. They swarmed around the GIs. They hugged and kissed them. They joyfully patted their liberators’ backs.

“Never again, mother,” Ellie whispered.

The GI motioned for his buddies to come and help. He took off his coat and covered Ellie with it.

“Tell him that it is okay now,” the GI said to Jacob, as if Jacob could make Ellie understand what he could not.

“He knows,” Jacob said.

The GI nodded grimly. He gently nudged Jacob aside and picked up Ellie in his arms. He could not believe how light Ellie was. He was nothing but a flesh-covered sack of bones. He carried Ellie to a nearby jeep and carefully set him down in the front seat.

Some other soldiers herded a German they had captured in the forest toward the jeep. They brutally kicked him to impel him along. Cursing and swearing at him, they drove him through the trees up to the jeep.

Ellie averted his eyes. He did not want to look at the monster. Not even out of the corner of his eye. Never again.

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“Look at what you have done,” one of the GIs said. He held the Nazi by his hair and forced him to look at Ellie. “Look at what you have done, you barbaric pig!”

The GI smashed the Nazi in the back of his head with his rifle butt. “Enough,” his sergeant said, restraining him. “He’s got work to do.”

Ellie pulled the coat tighter around himself. He shivered, no longer oblivious to the cold.



The survivors stood at the rail of the small freighter as it rode the gentle Mediterranean swells. A dazzling sun shimmered on the sea of tears. They all stared at the ship that steamed toward them. They knew that it was the English frigate returning. While the others nervously watched its approach, Ellie gazed at the beach only a few hundred yards away where Palestine—Zion—lay.

“What if the English attempt to board?” Eban worried.

“We must go ashore tonight,” Ellie said, watching the small waves break upon the shore, so close, yet so far away.

“Will they not be waiting for us on the beach? And even if we are lucky enough to reach shore, none of us have the proper papers.”

Ellie turned and fixed his gaze on Eban. Eban felt ashamed of himself for his doubts and fears.

“Would you rather cooperate with the English and go back over there?” Ellie pointed across the Mediterranean toward Europe. “Have we not learned our lesson yet? Did we learn nothing from the Egyptians or the Babylonians or the pogroms in every land? Did the Nazis not show to us where our only real home can ever be? It is here, by God. It is here. Nowhere else. It is here—Israel, the Promised Land that the Lord God gave to us. It was stolen from us.” Ellie focused on the beach again, feeling much older than his eighteen years, almost ancient.

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“But there is no Israel, Ellie,” Jacob said. “This is Palestine. We are not welcome here either.”

“This is Israel, and I say never again. Never again to the trail of tears we Jews have wandered since ancient times. We have come back to the land that the Lord God gave to us—the land that was stolen from us by the Roman monsters. This is our land, the Promised Land. We may be welcome no place on this God forsaken world, but this is our home, Israel.” Ellie pointed to the beach.

“The frigate is almost upon us,” Eban said.

“What shall we do if they board and force us back to Europe as they threatened yesterday?” Joachim asked Ellie.

“Let’s arm ourselves with the guns in the ship’s locker.”

“Are we being realistic?” Jacob interjected. “It is a seductive dream, Ellie. Surely, after what we have all been through, we all yearn for it as much as you do. But is it an impossible dream? Will we only find more misery here?”

Ellie squeezed the railing. His knuckles turned white. “Even if it is impossible, where else do we have to go? Jacob, how could you call such a place as Europe home ever again? I know now, standing here on this rotten little freighter, that there can be no other way for me to ever know peace of mind again upon this hellish earth.”

“Your dream is our dream,” Jacob said, covering Ellie’s hands on the railing with his own.

They all joined hands as the frigate pulled up alongside the freighter. “Ahoy! This is the frigate HMS Enforcer. Can you hear me?” The survivors nodded acknowledgment.

“Will you kindly note that this is our second warning to you?” the captain called across from the frigate.

“We are not animals!” Ellie shouted back.

The captain grimly nodded. He did not enjoy this dirty task. “We understand and totally sympathize with you, but we have no choice in the matter,” the captain shouted back.

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“We take no pleasure in this. But, by international agreement, a quota has been placed on immigration to Palestine. You all retain citizenship in the nations where you were born. The international signatories must regretfully request that you turn this boat around and return to your points of origin. From your native countries, you will be able to emigrate as the opportunity legally arises. You have twenty-four hours to set sail. If you are still here at this same time tomorrow, we will be compelled to board and force you back to the port of your origin. Do you understand?”

“Will you reason with us?” Ellie shouted across to the frigate.

“What did he say?” the captain asked the sailor who stood next to him.

“He says he wants to know if we will reason with them. I suppose he means negotiate, sir,” the sailor replied.

“Reason with them? There is nothing to be negotiated. Damn, I hate this bloody business,” the captain said. “Please understand that this is not a decision we make personally,” he called out to the survivors. “Nor do we execute our orders without a great deal of personal remorse. There can be no negotiations. We have no such authority. Our hearts and prayers go with you. We thank you for your understanding cooperation. Safe passage and best of luck.”

“That settles it,” Ellie declared. “Let us go ashore tonight before it is too late. There is no reasoning with these people.”



After midnight that night, Ellie stood in the darkness and stared over at the shore.

“Ellie?” Jacob whispered.

Ellie was too absorbed in his thoughts to hear him. There was a long silence as Jacob waited for Ellie to come back to him. Finally, Ellie realized that Jacob was standing next to him.

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“Do you think we can do this thing as rational and civilized men?” Jacob wondered aloud. Ellie turned to Jacob. The cynicism in Ellie’s eyes answered his question. Jacob reached out and grasped Ellie by both arms, hugging him to his breast.

“Ellie, my poor dear Ellie. I wish that we could erase our whole tragic human history and start over. But we cannot. None of us will ever be able to forget what we have suffered. I could not possibly ask you to forget what you will never be able to. But, for me, please keep the hope in your heart. We don’t have to be the same savage barbarians toward them that they have been toward us. By the Lord’s wisdom, we can be more. You do—you will—believe that with me, please?”

“Do you really believe that reason can ever prevail in human affairs?”

“Yes. I really do believe that,” Jacob said, imploring Ellie with his eyes.

“How can you after what we have suffered?” Ellie pulled himself from Jacob’s grasp.



As they paddled to shore, frantic joy surged through them, just as it had when they were liberated from the death camp. But when they were very close to shore, two English soldiers walked across the beach toward them. Ellie jumped out of the raft and strode through the surf toward them. No man could have denied the look in Ellie’s eyes.

“I’m not the one to be stopping you poor devils,” one of the soldiers murmured. “Just please take the rafts behind the dunes and bury ’em, will ya?”

Jacob shook the soldier’s hand and hugged and kissed them both. In turn, the others did the same, except Ellie. After they had buried their rafts behind the dunes, the survivors joined hands in a circle.

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“We have to split up now,” Ellie said. “Our chances of evading the authorities will be better that way. One week from today, we will gather to discuss how we will reclaim our nation from this world.”

They all nodded in agreement. “Where will we meet?” Eban asked.

“Where all Jews meet,” Ellie replied. “In Jerusalem. At the Wailing Wall.”