

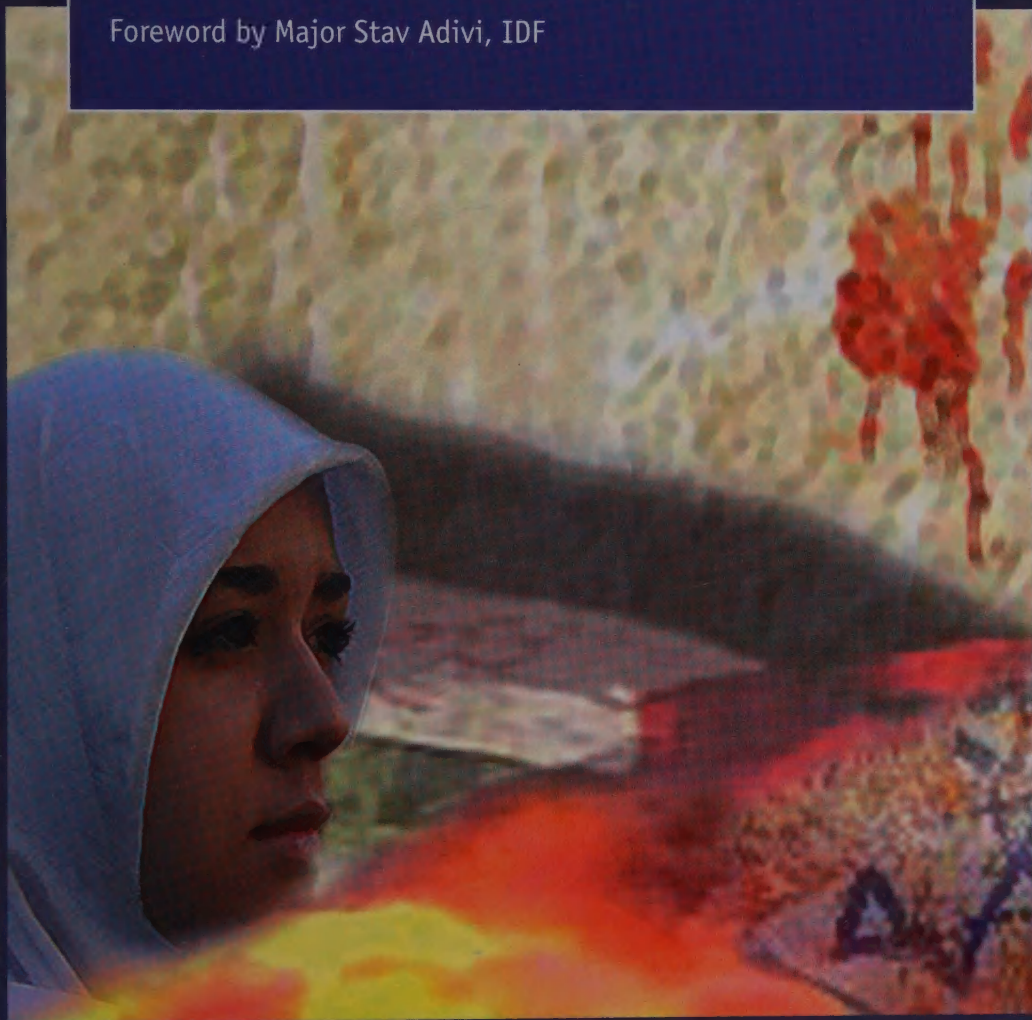
TRANSGRESSIONS - CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

An Unordinary Death

...The Life of a Palestinian

Khalilah Christina Sabra

Foreword by Major Stav Adivi, IDF



SensePublishers

An Unordinary Death

...The life of a Palestinian

TRANSGRESSIONS: CULTURAL STUDIES AND EDUCATION

Series Editors

Shirley Steinberg, *McGill University, Montreal, Canada*

Joe Kincheloe, *McGill University, Montreal, Canada*

Editorial Board

Heinz-Hermann Kruger, *Halle University, Germany*

Norman Denzin, *University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana, USA*

Roger Slee, *McGill University, Canada*

Rhonda Hammer, *University of California Los Angeles, USA*

Christine Quail, *SUNY, Oneonta*

Scope

Cultural studies provides an analytical toolbox for both making sense of educational practice and extending the insights of educational professionals into their labors. In this context *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* provides a collection of books in the domain that specify this assertion. Crafted for an audience of teachers, teacher educators, scholars and students of cultural studies and others interested in cultural studies and pedagogy, the series documents both the possibilities of and the controversies surrounding the intersection of cultural studies and education. The editors and the authors of this series do not assume that the interaction of cultural studies and education devalues other types of knowledge and analytical forms. Rather the intersection of these knowledge disciplines offers a rejuvenating, optimistic, and positive perspective on education and educational institutions. Some might describe its contribution as democratic, emancipatory, and transformative. The editors and authors maintain that cultural studies helps free educators from sterile, monolithic analyses that have for too long undermined efforts to think of educational practices by providing other words, new languages, and fresh metaphors. Operating in an interdisciplinary cosmos, *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* is dedicated to exploring the ways cultural studies enhances the study and practice of education. With this in mind the series focuses in a non-exclusive way on popular culture as well as other dimensions of cultural studies including social theory, social justice and positionality, cultural dimensions of technological innovation, new media and media literacy, new forms of oppression emerging in an electronic hyperreality, and postcolonial global concerns. With these concerns in mind cultural studies scholars often argue that the realm of popular culture is the most powerful educational force in contemporary culture. Indeed, in the twenty-first century this pedagogical dynamic is sweeping through the entire world. Educators, they believe, must understand these emerging realities in order to gain an important voice in the pedagogical conversation.

Without an understanding of cultural pedagogy's (education that takes place outside of formal schooling) role in the shaping of individual identity--youth identity in particular--the role educators play in the lives of their students will continue to fade. Why do so many of our students feel that life is incomprehensible and devoid of meaning? What does it mean, teachers wonder, when young people are unable to describe their moods, their affective affiliation to the society around them. Meanings provided young people by mainstream institutions often do little to help them deal with their affective complexity, their difficulty negotiating the rift between meaning and affect. School knowledge and educational expectations seem as anachronistic as a ditto machine, not that learning ways of rational thought and making sense of the world are unimportant.

But school knowledge and educational expectations often have little to offer students about making sense of the way they feel, the way their affective lives are shaped. In no way do we argue that analysis of the production of youth in an electronic mediated world demands some "touchy-feely" educational superficiality. What is needed in this context is a rigorous analysis of the interrelationship between pedagogy, popular culture, meaning making, and youth subjectivity. In an era marked by youth depression, violence, and suicide such insights become extremely important, even life saving. Pessimism about the future is the common sense of many contemporary youth with its concomitant feeling that no one can make a difference.

If affective production can be shaped to reflect these perspectives, then it can be reshaped to lay the groundwork for optimism, passionate commitment, and transformative educational and political activity. In these ways cultural studies adds a dimension to the work of education unfilled by any other sub-discipline. This is what *Transgressions: Cultural Studies and Education* seeks to produce—literature on these issues that makes a difference. It seeks to publish studies that help those who work with young people, those individuals involved in the disciplines that study children and youth, and young people themselves improve their lives in these bizarre times.

Volume 1

An Unordinary Death...the Life of a Palestinian

Khalilah Christina Sabra

Paperback ISBN: 90-77874-36-4 Hardback ISBN: 90-77874-37-2

Volume 2

Lyrical Minded

The Critical Pedagogy of Hip-Hop Artist KRS-ONE

Priya Parmar

City University of New York, USA

Paperback ISBN: 90-77874-50-X Hardback ISBN: 9077874-64-X

An Unordinary Death

...The life of a Palestinian

Khalilah Christina Sabra

Foreword by
Major Stav Adivi, IDF



SENSE PUBLISHERS
ROTTERDAM / TAIPEI

A C.I.P. record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Paperback ISBN: 90-77874-36-4

Hardback ISBN: 90-77874-37-2

Published by: Sense Publishers,

P.O. Box 21858, 3001 AW

Rotterdam, The Netherlands

Printed on acid-free paper

Cover:

Photo credit: Sarah Baddour and Taani El-Emam

All Rights Reserved © 2006 Sense Publishers

No part of this work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, microfilming, recording or otherwise, without written permission from the Publisher, with the exception of any material supplied specifically for the purpose of being entered and executed on a computer system, for exclusive use by the purchaser of the work.

CONTENT

Foreword	
<i>Major Stav Adivi</i>	xiii
An unordinary death...The life of a Palestinian	
<i>Khalilah Sabra</i>	1
Afterword	215
About the Author	219

To my father, Johnny Cousin, who taught me to be who I am, and to Abdullah Azzam, who taught me to be what I should become.

May it be Your will, Lord, our God and God of our forefathers, and foremothers that you will lead us toward peace, walk us through peace and help us reach our desired destination for life, gladness and peace. May you rescue us from every foe that we may encounter along the way. May you send blessing to all the work of our hands and grant us grace, kindness and mercy in Your eyes and in the eye of all who see us ...

The Traveler's Prayer

STAV ADIVI

FOREWORD

I am an Israeli native. Throughout my childhood, I lived on the border between east and west Jerusalem. I was born and raised with values that enlisted me in the service of my country and my people, and further cultivated the Jewish values of morals, justice, and peace. Due to culture, rearing, and religion, I served faithfully in the Israeli Defense Forces as a regular, and in the reserve service for more than twenty-seven years. I offered my service as an officer, and ended up as a major in the reserves.

Ironically, because of those same values, I later joined the "Courage to Refuse" movement and signed the combatant's letter declaring my refusal to participate in the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian people in the territories of the West Bank and Gaza. It had occurred to me that I was a part of a process that stripped them of the most basic humanitarian dignities and ignored their right to be heard.

Spending several years of my military service in the occupied Palestinian areas, I could no longer deny that what we as soldiers were commanded to do was morally wrong, and that every Israeli, every Jew, and every person with moral values throughout the world needed to do whatever necessary to rectify the unjust actions my beloved Israel was enforcing on the Palestinian people.

Because of the brutal occupation, and the suppression of economic and social rights to the Palestinians, the anguished inhabitants of Gaza and the West Bank were truly becoming a dying people. As an Israeli, I waited for some sign of peace and hope, but political charades and false predictions convinced me to map another course of action. The go-slow motions of diplomacy did not match the fast, rhythmic oppression of this particular group of people.

As a result, I joined the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) and became an active member in the Israeli Community of Human Rights Activists. It was the only ethical reaction to a government, who long ago, defined every act of refusal from a Palestinian as an act of aggression. The act of saying no was equal to a crime, which led me to wonder: how does a human being agree when his town and village are blocked from all sides? How does he submit to something tantamount to imprisonment? The Palestinians certainly knew that this was no accidental result, and so did every Israeli of conscience. It was at this stage in my journey I decided to attempt to carefully alleviate some of this misfortune rather than contribute to it.

For years, we have listened while the Israeli government and its supporters talk a good game of espousing democratic values and promoting peace with their Arab neighbor, but the un-convicted man in custody in a prison for an undetermined time, or the young boy detained for the sole purpose of being humiliated at a

military checkpoint and forced to wait under the heat of the menacing sun for hours at a time, will not have his dismay dispelled by fake sentiments of the very political leaders that have arranged his oppression. He will know who to blame for the brutal and malignant consequences of his situation, because the truth is, check points, road blocks, land confiscations, house demolitions, and plant destruction are undeniable indicators of how you feel about a people. There is no humanitarian motive worked into these kinds of behaviors, not when the interests of the Zionist leadership are not compatible with the needs and desires of the Palestinian people. Repression serves the Israeli geographical dominance and has somehow managed to win an ethical exemption from the world court of opinion. How else is a government allowed to require a permit for almost every movement a Palestinian makes? It is not serving its declared purpose to provide safety and security to the people of Israel; on the contrary, I realized that with these actions, we are humiliating the Palestinians, many of whom have become desperate and hopeless. And out of that hopelessness, we are generating most of the violent resistance against Israelis, including the horrible repulsive unexcused phenomena of suicide bombers.

When the masses, in increasing number, began to protest against their depressed status, and when they began to actively dissent and make demands which challenged their conditions and the Israeli government's actions, the leaders responded by attacking their already limited freedom. The government felt that their demands exceeded their ability and willingness to respond by actions geared towards total equality. These demands and the unwillingness and inability of the dominant society to meet these demands created stress, strain, and eventually mayhem that did not benefit either the Palestinians or the Israelis.

In order to perpetuate this disproportion, it is essential that the government does not admit the evil that they govern by. Much of that hardship and suppression is the social and economic bedrock of its material advantage.

To intensify the grotesque nature of the trap, the government of Ariel Sharon erected a wall, misleadingly called a "fence." The sizeable structure stretches through the West Bank on Palestinian land, leaving Palestinians on the wrong side cut off from their land, extended families, and way of life. The International Court of Justice in The Hague issued an judgment on the legal consequences of Israel's construction of a wall in the occupied Palestinian territories. The court made clear that the construction of the wall was illegal.

The separation wall that the Israeli government is said to be building for security reasons stands twenty-five feet high. This wall will affect approximately 90,700 Palestinian residents of 32 villages in the Qalqilya area and will isolate and thus effectively confiscate 11,755 acres of land and will destroy another 1,937 acres. Six of the villages, with approximately 1,000 residents, will be completely trapped between the wall and the 1967 green line, dividing them from the West Bank and successfully annexing them to Israel without being granted citizenship or legal rights. Land, which is the base of the economic lifeline of this area, is being taken away as its people watch.

Creating a ghetto does more than psychologically oppress and displace a people - it makes them expendable. It only follows that basic services are denied and the area becomes characterized by broken skeletal structures that are inhabited by poor people who have nowhere else to go. Ghettos were systematically created in the past, as Jews will testify. It was used as a tool to marginalize their communities and create areas where Jews were forced to live in pre-WWII Germany, establishing two tiers of society, one for the oppressors and one for the oppressed.

The construction of the wall in Palestine was designed to quarter and enclose entire groups of people considered unwanted and despised by the powers that control their fate.

Similarly, a ghetto means that the basic freedom of movement is denied from an entire people. But it also means that you will be made to feel that you have a hundred pound burden on your back and that the gradual attrition of accepted suffering and separation will eat away any and all of your expectation and willingness to go on. Because if you cannot go to work, where is your ability to provide for your family? If you cannot go to school, where is your right to education? If you cannot go to the doctor, where is your right to a cure for diseases and basic health services?

If you cannot bring your produce to the markets, how will people get basic food and how will you survive?

The Palestinians bleed, they die, and hunger for a homeland, but their voices have yet to be really heard. For years they have asked questions such as: When will I be given what I am due? When will I cease to be an object of discussion? When will I be accorded the dignity of being a human being?

The point of the ghetto is to disfigure their spirits. Absurdly, only Palestinians are required to obtain permits. According to Civil Administration directives, Jews can freely move about, even if they are not residents of Israel. By contrast, Palestinians wanting to obtain a permit face a bureaucratic nightmare. The government typically denies a large percentage of farmers their source of income and refuses to compensate them for their losses. Even farmers with permits may wait hours to cross because the gates are closed.

Since October 2003, Israel has implemented a new system of permits, through which it severely limits Palestinians' access to their farmland positioned west of the barrier. This system intentionally discriminates between Palestinians and Jews and violates Israel's obligations pursuant to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to respect the right of residents of the Occupied Territories to freedom of movement (Section 12) and not to discriminate against them (Section 2). Israel rejects any compensation to Palestinians who are refused access to their lands for their loss of earnings. In failing to do so, Israel breaches the Fourth Geneva Convention (Section 39), pursuant to which the occupying state must guarantee the residents livelihood in instances in which they are prevented from earning a livelihood on security grounds.

There cannot be any denial of the fact that this divider is a disfigurement of sorts, an unsightly symbol of bigotry, intolerance and disconnection, a space for

Palestinians to live and die within, an area for Jews to ignore when they are heading for the lives they are privileged to be exempted from.

The creation of a system evolves out of incredible logic and gives a further even more immoral advantage. It aids and isolates military response. Building within a targeted area can be destroyed and only certain children run screaming from the shock and horror of missiles.

Discrimination, feeling alone, isolated with no support, no education, academic problems including illiteracy, occupational problems including unemployment, and housing issues such as inadequate and unsafe homes are a result of displacement and oppression. With these social problems comes psychological trauma and symptoms.

Can I deny what I saw before my eyes?

Ghettos, check points and all other "security" measures are the most powerful generator of the suicide bomber's dreaded response, and after the lessons of the past I wonder why is there a continuance the occupation, mass hurt, political plundering, and all the other faces evil are still there? WE ARE CREATING OUR OWN ENEMY, HOW FOOLISH CAN WE BE?

As an Israeli, I knew the right thing to do was not to cooperate, not to collaborate with occupation; and as a human being, with my own personal sense of ethics, I knew the right thing to do was to not sit and wait for the international community to work through political means without the direct involvement of myself. I am not alone, but stand with others, who say that political pressure is not enough to end the occupation and that we need to call for an international anti-apartheid-like reaction campaign.

When I look back, I realize that fantasies of the future are not equal to ethical human ambitions and a man's duty to sacrifice for the sake of others. They are not equal one sounding his voice against the subjugation of a desperate people.

The Israeli Peace Movement has many voices there is now another voice:

This voice is heard in *An Unordinary Death*, a fictional work that is a symbol of the real-life experiences of Palestinian people as they dwell in the trauma of occupation, individually and collectively. It is a fictional look into the lives of the Palestinians. It elicits the message of injustice that gives rise to the frustrations and turmoil in the ghettos controlled by Israel. *An Unordinary Death* is also a warning that if there is not an earnest effort to remedy to insufferable social conditions of the Palestinians, there will be more slaughter and more bloodshed, not fiction, but cold hard reality that will destroy more lives. Within the pages alone are storybook characters that are a figment of the writer's mind, but realities that have to face the blood and violence rooted in what is known as the Holy Land. It calls to the God given to reflect.

An Unordinary Death may be fiction, but it is fact that all the years spent in social and political limbo with continuous fighting and economic deprivation, have brought this particular cluster of angry people to a chronic state of anxiety and aggression, and others to despair and hopelessness. Overcrowding, poor healthcare, lack of facilities for basic hygiene, continuous hunger, and other deprivations worsen this horrible situation.

With the enormous tensions and danger surrounding the continued occupation, and the absence of a solution that guarantees peace and a legitimate homeland for the Palestinian people, we will all continue to feel the weight of the Palestinians' burden. The emotional and psychological contradictions are all chronicled within the words of *An Unordinary Death*.

Having confused the worldwide community through official contradictions about the right and wrongs of the issue, and having polarized and divided one ethnic group from the other, the Israeli government has tried to intimidate the voices of dissent that it feels it has isolated. If Israel will continue on its current path— a path that is leading away from the prospect of a viable Palestinian society— and the peace that only such a society can bring, it will be a path that will not offer a possibility of return to a viable, safe homeland, but it will ruin the return of humanity in that region.

Elements of my community will label our actions and such outspoken feelings as anti-Israeli. They will say that "refusniks" and other "peaceniks" are driven by anti-Semitic or anti-Israeli sentiments and groups and are a tool to de-legitimize the existence of the state of Israel. Others will dismiss us as "self-hating Jews." None of this is true.

Being a Jew or a citizen of Israel does not mean being subjected to the instrument of mass persuasion and it does not mean making peace with the ethical imperfections of its leaders. I, like other refusniks, am strongly committed to Israel and to the security of its people. We believe that Jewish national self-determination is an inviolable right. Yet we believe both as a matter of ethics and a matter of rational self-interest and survival, that Jewish national sovereignty cannot be secure if it is won at the expense of the Palestinian people and at the expense of their equal rights to self-determination. From a place of humiliation and hopelessness, that we have created, the demon of suicide bombers has risen in the hearts of the Palestinians—and we [Israelis] have also become demons in the process.

As a Jew and as a loyal Israeli, I am driven by a great sense of responsibility for the well-being of my people and my country. My goal is to help Israeli societies flourish, and to restore its ability to build on the unique Jewish-Hebrew culture that has developed in Israel in the last 100 years. Israel is not currently able to do that, due to the energies expended to maintain the unnecessary occupation of the Palestinians.

If Israel cannot—on its own— end this occupation, it is the obligation of the international community and of every human being with a sense of justice to do everything he or she can do to force an end to this violent affair, using all legitimate, non-violent forms of both internal and external pressure. The need for peace rises out of the history of colonization— the economic and cultural exploitation of a selected group. An honest determination to relinquish exploitation would prevent further acts of desperation that results in the mass harm and violence. Schemes, short of this determination, merely attempt to contain the Palestinians and provide a covering for extending their oppression, tightening control, and generally furthering the aims of those who do not want them there in

the first place. These schemes will fail to achieve possibility of a real and lasting peace between the Israeli and the Arabs.

All humanitarians must struggle for a coalition that will impart the truth of the matter that what is good for the Palestinians is good for the entire masses of Israel; when the bottom is raised up to a higher level, everything above is brought to a greater height. Surely if we learned nothing more from the uprising, it is that humanity is denied to Palestinians, Israeli will suffer along with them. This is the point of *An Unordinary Death, the Life of a Palestinian*.

I was honored by the author's proposal that I write this opening. We both believe a lasting solution calls for a meeting of the minds and a collaboration of hearts. I know that the collective effort of people of many faiths, struggling together, will allow harmony to overcome resistance and terror, and with it will come a real hope for peace between all the people in the Holy Land, Israelis and Palestinians. I urge to read and nurture within the message of this book.

Peace, Salam, Shalom.

Stav Adivi*

* Stav Adivi is a board member of ICAHD-Israel and active in ICAHD-USA. As a major in the IDF reserves he was one of the highest-ranking officers who signed the Combatants Letter of "Courage to Refuse."

Stav travels through the United States and Canada with his up-to-date ICAHD presentation, "Israel-Palestine: Facts on the Ground and Future Possibilities." He can be reached at stav@icahd.org.



CHRISTINA SABRA

AN UNORDINARY DEATH

The Life of a Palestinian

On the afternoon of March 29, 2002, Ayah Iklas entered a supermarket in Jerusalem and set off the explosives strapped to her body. Until the last moment of her life she prayed that her final act would not only be acceptable to God, but also somehow make a difference in the lives of her people.

She'd been given twenty-four hours to decide how she would conclude the sixteen years she had spent on this earth. It began with a tap at the door. It was a child who conveyed to her the words that made her heart race as if it were going to burst. He said, "Salam min Al-Jana." The Arabic greeting from paradise was a coded notification that she had been selected to carry out the next operation. It was a notification that she had only one day left to live.

Within this remaining time she would not be allowed to say goodbye nor show any indication of what she was about to do. The action of a suicide bomber demanded secrecy, in order to avoid compromising the operation. No parent or any loved one was allowed to know. For they might out of desperation, alert other family members, or at worst the authorities.

The night before her final sacrifice, she lay awake in her bed feeling a small sense of consolation in that there would be one less mouth to feed. Ayah pondered what the life of her family would be like without her. It was comforting to think that there would be more for the others to share. She was the daughter of a street vendor, who barely made ten dollars a week, far too little to keep his children adequately fed. She rolled over from her stomach to her back and threw the blanket aside. From her mattress she peered beyond the broken roof of the poverty-stricken room and in spite of the cold and the air that flowed between the cracks, her anxiety made her feel warm and her face sweated itself damp. Ayah passed her hand over her forehead. There were beads of perspiration there. It would have been difficult to ascend to a more intense level of anxiety, given what she was about to do, making her present state of mind quite reasonable. So Ayah sank into her thoughts, zigzagging from one feeling to another. Her thoughts were in a whirl. "I need more time.Can I do it...Will they catch me...Will I feel my death? All of these feelings flashed through her head.

Although there are many people who do take pleasure in inflicting pain on others, Ayah was not one of them. On the contrary, she was earnest and gentle. But

for the last couple of years she had been smoldering with an intense awareness of her own deprivation. Israeli occupation had left her feeling socially invalid. Only one month before, she'd sat among a gathering of students who lent support to the Al-Aqsa Brigade organization; a girl named Jenna Hayat was among them. Most of them were not a part of its official membership, but assisted in many of its neighborhood social programs. Ayah was a full member, and Al-Aqsa was her retreat when her mind grew dispirited and on edge. In the group's their conflict resolution meetings she found friends who were compliant, friends who listened patiently to her views as she churned out her disgust for the forces that allied themselves against the Palestinians. In that politically filtered room there was consolation for a girl fury-stricken by hostility. In the media they were labeled immature dupes, un-ripened minds dangerously susceptible to inflammatory rhetoric and the promise of paradise, uncontested. In contrast, she thought herself surrounded by perceptive, articulate and war savvy combatants, who, like she, were worn down and drawn back by years of a force-fed catastrophe.

Ayah was fidgety and seemed agitated as they viewed a video lecture of Chairman Arafat. She turned, and out of nowhere, remarked, "They walk over us like we are stepping stones and Arafat himself doesn't believe that the Israelis intend to ever treat us any differently." Some of those who sat close looked away, uncomfortable with even the slightest public criticism of Arafat. Some listened hesitantly to her, but Jenna looked directly at her and really thought about what she was saying.

"We are expected to live on hope while they are living on money that is supposed to be for the people," continued Ayah. Everyone knew that she was speaking of the Palestinian Authority. "Arafat spends most of his days justifying the Palestinians' right to breathe and pleasing his Zionist masters while rerouting the crumbs off the diplomatic tables that is meant for people who are hungry."

It seemed evident to Ayah, as she felt it must now be for many Palestinians, that the rules that prescribe patience and sacrifice were explicitly different for the leaders of the Palestinian Authority. There was never a shortage of food, water, or electricity in the villas that they built for themselves, nor was there any discomfort to be felt as they were driven around in their Mercedes Benzes. Jenna did not know precisely how the others felt, but it did not take much to convince her of the correctness of Ayah's position. There was one, however, within their circle that did become quite defensive. Everyone there had made a commitment to do what they could to lend support to Al-Aqsa Brigade and shared in its goals, but this did not mean that there was not unrest and controversy among some of its supporters. One was a college student named Eyad could not help but being stunned and unhappy to see the irritable eagerness with which Ayah spoke of their leader. The more she talked, the more her eyes blazed, the more determinedly she refuted the decisions of the leadership, and the more disturbed and hurt became the expression on her face. He quickly came to Arafat's defense, "Ayah, you forget yourself. You should show some respect for what the Chairman Arafat and for the other leaders in the Authority, for what they have had to sacrifice, and for what they may one day accomplish on all of our behalf." "Our behalf or Arafat's own?" she shouted. "We

would have a real answer to that if he were willing to risk everything for us. The only change I see is the number of servants he has and all the reported money in his bank accounts. He does his playacting on CNN and we are no more than stage props!"

Ayah continued her reply, "If you really believed that Arafat is some kind of messiah, then why are you here? Why are you supporting Al-Aqsa?"

"Please," he said. "I don't want to argue with you, but be extremely careful in what you say, and understand that a cleverer person would know that anything you say is overheard and may be misinterpreted. Not everybody may agree with your way of thinking, and some may deem it to be a betrayal."

She answered immediately and, as always, confidently. "My life is in the hands of God, and I've already learned, from a long time ago, not to fear ordinary men—especially those who ride around in fancy cars. Really, Eyad, I don't see why you don't get it! This war isn't just about giving the Jews a place to live. This war is an economic device. Look past the rhetoric and sympathy card these Israelis have played and you will find that there is a real pot of gold at the end of a rainbow and it's reserved for only them. The world hates the fact that Arabs are sitting on all that oil. Palestine is an avenue to it all. The Americans sure as hell know this. You know that their support of the Israelis is not purely humanitarian! It is political. It is self serving." Ayah believed what she was saying, and she was making Jenna believe it, too.

"Arafat is still our leader and right now he is just about our only hope," Eyad remarked.

"Leader, that was a long time ago." He's nothing more than a dictator now and a traitor that has fallen in love with his own legend. Save your tribute for someone who might deserve it. Anyway, have you ever heard the saying 'He who lives on hope dies of starvation?' Come on Eyad, wake up!" Without going further she got up, swung her chair aside and circled the room.

Remembering Ayah as a dedicated, loyal, fair-minded and supportive girl, always committed to the chairman, Eyad was completely at a loss to understand the basis for her change of heart and did not approve of it. What he disliked more than anything was that Ayah, a respected and active member of the Arafat's coalition, should now be publicly questioning their authenticity. Why was she doing this? Eyad did not like it one bit, but feeling that Ayah was discouraged and miserable, he was sorry for her. Signs of sorrow, of an emotional unbalance could be perceived on her young, striking face, and without even detecting that people were looking at her from across the room, she went on heatedly clarifying her views.

As Ayah spoke, the girls around her, including Jenna, leaned forward to hear every utterance expressed by this young, hard spoken, gregarious girl who expressed herself cuttingly. Even before they heard all of her words, most of them had already begun to see their world as Ayah saw it, caught up in a long spell of betrayal and bad luck. It was after Yasser Arafat became the Palestinian's official leader, Ayah believed, the attraction of becoming suicide bombers began to truly have its pull on her generation. Yasser Arafat had failed miserably. An old, weary and broken armchair revolutionary would not deliver liberation to them. By

blasting themselves all over the streets, they'd discovered that their bodies provided an underestimated and viable weapon. It was one type of assault that put fear into the hearts of a people who could not mask their contempt for Palestinians because they simply refused to give up. Al-Aqsa was not Arafat's Al-Fatah; they recruited the young who were more comfortable with dying at an early age than aging with occupation. Al-Aqsa was creating urgency in even the most passive, causing them to react to their basic instinct of survival, which would, in due course, dissolve into a violent episode of physical destruction, out of which would pour, hopefully, self-determination.

Ayah had already decided for herself. If she were forced to be defined by the rules of Israelis, forced to be a traitor to her own dreams and ambitions; if they controlled her life, then her death would be strictly *her* own undertaking.

The purpose of meeting that evening was to persuade the Al-Aqsa support wing to participate in a march in Hebron, the following day. A lot of university students would be going, even the local schoolchildren, on behalf of Fatah, would attend.

"You'll do nothing but waste your time," Ayah said. "That demonstration will not do anything, nor will it change the fact that Arafat is losing his power. All the cameras in the world cannot make him what he isn't anymore. The Israelis have exiled him from negotiations, bombed his helicopter and kept him hostage in his compound. I don't know about the rest of you, but personally I don't believe that he can do for us what he can't do for himself. All the demonstrating in the world isn't going to change that."

"You've said enough."

Ayah, her eyes avoiding Eyad, began buttoning up her sweater. "People like you hurt us more than help," roared Ayah. Eyad frowned, seemed about to make some reply, but did not say anything. "You're a coward!"

Eyad lifted his eyes and then stood up. All the blood, which he felt boiling within him rushed to his face and eyes. He could hardly contain himself. He reached out to grab Ayah's arm, but latched onto her purse instead.

"Keep your hands away from me!" she shouted so loudly that the veins stood out in her forehead.

Eyad retreated, letting go of it, but he looked directly and doggedly at Ayah with as much rage, as if Ayah were his real enemy.

"You are nothing more than a stupid child! What are you, sixteen? You haven't been around here long enough to criticize anybody. What do you know?"

"What? What? How dare you criticize me about my age!" I am Palestinian, aren't I? I have lived here all of my life, haven't I?

"It's your way." Eyad shot back. You always make a public spectacle of yourself."

"I'm not to blame if I express my opinions in the presence of other people. Perhaps it is better that I say these things in front of everybody."

Jenna sat across the way, patting her cheek in a glum manner, listening to the conversation, with no desire to be noticed.

"Why should I expect anything from you?" Eyad remarked severely. "You are too arrogant and opinionated. That is a bad combination. You don't think things

over before you say them. You just blurt things out in front of everybody and anybody. And when somebody tries to point out that you might be wrong or be acting inappropriately, you get high and mighty and behave like you have been mortally wounded." Eyad's voice began to tremble. "You haven't been around the resistance nearly as long as most of us. You have not seen what we have seen and you are still very young. You are here today but may be gone tomorrow, yet the things you have said may have an effect, and you don't seem to care. But some of us do care!" Then Eyad turned and walked away.

Ayah's face, turning red, looked at one member, then at another, and another.

The family of this young and outspoken girl once revered Yasser Arafat and believed in his ability to lead his people. But when he returned from exile and began running the Palestinian Authority, he positioned his old comrades from Tunis and ignored the locals who'd actively participated in the Intifadah. Their strategies were outdated and they'd become the kind of leaders unable to bring about the kind of change necessary to appease a people tormented by what went beyond a case of fate. Instead, they were nothing more than incompetent, aged men, more useful to themselves than to anyone else. They spent their evenings in lavishly furnished villas reminiscing, and plotting about how to maintain their positions given to them by the Israeli government. In their self-serving eyes there was already a peace agreement in place; it was the one that allowed them the lives they now enjoyed. When the cameras rolled, they'd speak publicly of the pain and needs of their people, but less and less did their own lives personally reflect such a condition. It wasn't long after setting up residency, that the old Fatah warriors found contentment in creating an economy that made them the primary beneficiaries, instead of the widows and orphans of the West Bank. It was not long before poor families like Ayah's resented the denial of equal opportunities for economic self-promotion that Arafat's comrades enjoyed.

Occupation had changed Ayah, and many other young Palestinians. Without knowing it they had develop into contenders for death.

Her sleep was not sound.

In her dreams Ayah replayed scenes of violence. She was a child who watched and showed her hatred for her enemies by standing on the street every day, looking into the faces of the military with a cold, smoldering look of cynical resentment in her eyes. She was remarkably sophisticated about the art of civil disobedience and the permanence of death even though she was very much still a child. She knew that picking up a stone did not equal a forceful reaction and may very well have resulted in her death, but still she picked up that rock and tossed it towards a person with a more destructive weapon. It was an act that achieved very little, but it was an act that allowed even a child an avenue to vent rage.

She woke up a few hours later from a broken sleep that had not invigorated her in the least; rather she arose irritated and looked around the room with contempt. Her eyes and her mind craved for some consolation. Nothing she'd learn from Al-Aqsa readied her for this.

"It's alright to feel scared, to feel uneasy." They had said. "Allow yourself to feel uncomfortable then cast it aside. You have a God-given right to protect what is

yours, even if you die in the process. God does not expect any less and He will reward you even more!”

It’s alright? How uneasy? How scared? She wanted to ask someone at this very moment but as she looked around the room she felt no one there but her and her conscience. Anyway, someone would be coming for her in just a little while. It was too late to sow seeds of panic.

“And what if I am wrong?” she whimpered after a moment’s reflection. “What if this is just an insane act driven by my own hatred, and I will rot in a hell worse than anything I have experienced here?” Nevertheless she knew that it would be impossible to take back her decision, and that in any case she would not take it back. Ultimately, she dismissed her misgivings with a shrug, refusing to become a slave to despair, and warned herself not to even come close to falling victim to a coward’s illusion. It was far too late to lose sight of the endgame.

Indeed from the time she was fourteen, old enough to poke around into her world and figure out what were the possibilities for hope and contentment, Ayah had not been optimistic. Once she believed that, one way or another, she would be one of those who survived this ordeal. Now she knew it wasn’t so. All she had to do was to look at the lives of her neighbors, people like her. All were poor. All were Palestinian. Many experienced hunger on a regular basis. Some had health troubles. Most had lost relatives in the ongoing war with the Israelis. They all lived in the pitiful conditions of the refugee camps. They were Arabs whose lives were too painful to live, and for the other Arabs in the Middle East, too painful to watch. It was a life where one could only develop a deep discouragement and burning discontent about the rules that molded conditions of life under occupation.

These were rules, Ayah believed, that she would never have a chance of getting out from under, as long as she waited for others to come and set her free. After all, the odds were not the only thing against people like her; it seemed as if the entire world were. Life just kept getting turned around, a rotation of timeless hopes that never stopped.

Things all of a sudden changing, where the Palestinian people could live in peace, breath comfortably, laugh and smile, or ever hope to be equal to an Israeli, was an unlikely scenario. The worse thing was that there was nothing unusual about any of these feelings. They were normal and ordinary desires. What was extraordinary about them is that they were forbidden to her. They were forbidden because she was Palestinian.

All of her life she’d heard the echoes of whimsical leaders: “We should negotiate for peace now; if we fail then we will take extreme measures. Not today, but tomorrow certainly. Just let us accomplish this, and later on...perhaps.”

This scenario they envisioned would never arrive. The ‘hoped-for’ occasions on which these men placed their dreams were built on nothing but pretense. This kind of pretense, having been done well, became a habit, and then that habit in time became the whole style and strategy with which their leaders dealt with the problems of their people. They’d chip a little here and a little there off of the truth, and eventually they tried to convince the Palestinians that they were responsible for their own ruin.

Ayah sought to reassure herself saying, "I am doing this in order that one day we will all be free and that others will follow with similar deeds as a result of Al-Aqsa's inspiration," and her momentary weakness passed.

She sat up and reached over for the Quran resting on the side table. The book was quivering in her hands. As she read, tears welled up in her eyes. She gazed intensely at the words and whispered the verse aloud, "And why should you not fight for Allah's cause: for the cause of those who, being weak, are ill-treated and oppressed? They are helpless men, women, and children who pray, "O our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors! Raise for us, out of Your Grace, someone to protect and help us!"

As a product of war and occupation she, more than most ordinary sixteen year olds, understood that if you fear death, you will not by fear escape death; it will find you wherever you are. Why should she not face it boldly when she believed duty called?

She lay back on the bed thinking about happier times. As a child she'd had recurring fantasies of going to the village where her grandfather Omar was born and to the fields around the house where as a boy he played. Although she'd never actually been there, she felt she had through having the stories passed on to her. After the war of 1948 the Jews entered the village and everything changed. The dreams of her grandfather became a nightmare.

Omar had been a citizen of a particular geography on this earth. He spoke of the homeland religiously; he was proud of his heritage. From the time that Ayah was able to sit quietly and listen to his stories, he'd tell her in detail about the life lost to him. She spent her formative years marveling at the beloved old man who recited a story every evening before the setting of the sun. His eyes were the key to her legacy. He was a simple peasant farmer. He grew mint, tomatoes, cucumbers and all kinds of fruits. He worked his fields along with his five brothers, and he and his kin had little time or interest in politics. His family lived in splendid isolation. So the essence of his recollection concerned childhood memories of family life and always of the land.

From the time Omar was a small boy, he rose up everyday before sun up. He'd finish his morning prayers and set out for the fields. A simple boy, he measured the seasons by the ripened olives on the tree and the harvesting of the wheat. Work was intense in a land where man and nature vied for control. By midday he and his older brothers returned with sacks of grain, fruits, and cartons of almonds from the grove. His mother would prepare the grain and make the bread in a clay oven that sat outside of the house. There was never a lot of money to be spent, but the kitchen would be well stocked. One single feature of the afternoon family meal was the abundance of a large variety of foods. They were a happy family and appreciative of what they had.

Disturbances between the Jews and the Arabs began to escalate all throughout Palestine. The Arabs suspected that the Jews hoped that they would just go away, but when too many seemed determined to stay, the Jews had to do more than just argue. The 'more' turned out to be spontaneous attacks on Palestinian villagers. Trouble grew in the village closest to the family farm. In Dir Yassin, Jewish forces

massacred almost 300 villagers and destroyed their homes. Ayah's grandfather had been the youngest boy in the village, fourteen years old, and he confessed that he had been afraid. Uneducated and unsophisticated in worldly affairs, he did not understand what was going on, nor did his father Maher. How could they see the reality? One could not see reality when it was hidden from sight, when it is beyond one's understanding. Maher's family settled on the immediate problems. They were in some ways inaccessible and had not suffered for a single one of the problems that existed in the city. The Iklas family could naively look ahead, because they neither saw nor predictable anything terrible, since life was concealed beyond their valley.

The one thing they did understand was that the farm was their home, and they had no intention of leaving it. Maher was born there, his mother and father lived there, and his grandfather, without the land life had no real importance. Taking it away was equal to taking away their souls.

Many others, however, chose to flee as the fighting became more intense.

One day the foreigners came directly to Maher's farm as he was picking almonds from the trees. A bullet hit him in the back of his head. He fell to the ground and died instantly. Two of his sons ran toward the men who held the rifles. Although they were without weapons, they too were shot dead. The killers delayed the grieving wife and mother from any attempt to reach their bodies. They surrounded her and the rest of her children. She did everything not to completely lose her head, and feared to do more than utter a loud gasp. Omar tried to go forward.

"No, no," she called to her son. But her Omar did not hear word she said, he did not hear the urgency in her voice and he continued to go. She reached and grabbed his collar. Omar withdrew with a look of nausea and without turning towards her, muttered, "Help them momma!"

She saw one man raise his fist towards her son and she pulled Omar to her body and raised her hand pleadingly.

The last of Maher's family stood there painfully silent while others stood talking near to them. Omar's mother listened to their voices but did not look to their faces. Her face was pale and grieved. She quite undoubtedly saw nothing and no one except the bodies of her husband and her two sons. Her hand convulsively clasped her mouth and she held her breath. Omar looked upon the same sight. His face twisted with passion, pain, and his whole body trembled. In that hour and at that tender age, he had experienced the worst kind of tragedy, a tragedy that was irreparable and for which he could not make any sense.

The armed extremist's who directed their guns to her head told her that she had one day to leave. She fled with the rest of her family; it was the only thing she could do.

There was no ballot, no referendum, and no private census of Palestinian residents. They simply awakened one morning to learn that Palestine had vanished without a trace. There was no way to reverse the resolution in which they were denied any remedy or complaint if they refused to accept the basic premise that

Palestine had ceased to exist and strategically disappeared into the consecrated State of Israel.

The lives they had lived turned into unspeakable misery. With their hands they had built a great metropolis of beauty and Islamic culture, and now they could not be sure of a roof over their heads. With their hands they had plowed the earth and they had created olive gardens and farms of plenty and now they did not have food to eat. With their hands they had erected mosques that illustrated their beliefs and heritage and now curfews forbade their attendance. A Palestinian now was almost conquered prey, a caged object, and a bound and manacled captive in the land which first gave him birth.

Many Palestinians left like sheep, compliant and driven out. Some went to live in America and Europe, scattered, destined to live among strangers. Others packed up and moved to Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. "Palestine is gone," they said. "We've got to start over." Ayah's grandfather had found this difficult to do. He had wondered how could a man start over when he looked behind him at the country he knew he'd come from and all he saw was a sign that said "Israel."

Now when Ayah recalled the tense and dismal moods in which she passed those hours of family history, she could not eradicate the sadness she felt when her grandfather conveyed to her his years of anguish. When her grandfather spoke of these times his eyes became huge and terrible; they shifted back and forth, filled with of hatred and contempt and Ayah did all she could to avoid looking into them. She watched as his age took its course. Near the end of his days he barely walked and he needed assistance. His eyes did not see, but his tears continued to flow. His ears did not hear but they did not deafen the sounds of violence that engaged his memories.

Ayah realized the position in which those vivid memories now placed her. For it was the anguish, committed to memory, and the look of shame that resided inside the eyes of her grandfather until his death that conveyed the hurt of occupation. He died ashamed because he could not resurrect for his children what was their birthright, however meager that small farm was. As a result Omar died a man without hope, and without ever going home. He left Ayah the only things he could bequeath to his granddaughter: tears and sorrows. They weighed heavily upon her, and sometimes she felt as if she were being crushed by them. Yet even now through these stories he instilled in her a love of the home she never knew and a passion to reclaim it. His narratives represented the history of the Palestinian people she had feared buried forever. Now, almost three years after the death of her grandfather and nearly seventeen years of age, to Ayah the memories of her childhood seemed part requiem, part nightmare. It had never been easy for her to face the sobs of a man constantly drawn back to history, his family and their failure to survive. For as long as she buried her own tears, Ayah could comfort her grandfather as he shed his, perhaps the most difficult part of all however was holding in the anger, holding it firmly pressed against her heart. She could not address those she held responsible about the wrongdoing committed against them. She could not hold them accountable. Not yet. She'd abandoned the prayer in which she once implored that the same political powers who gave the Zionist

rights, and voided theirs at the same time, would have a change of heart, look beyond their irrational self-interest and give back what was not theirs to take.

This early hope had been a child's dream, and now she knew that such dreams do not come true. The present was a testimony to that. In reality the so-called "Palestinian Problem" was not really a search for a diplomatic solution, but the grounds for a battlefield on which to wage war and do away with a political predicament. Doing away with this "predicament" usually meant sending tanks that were able to maximize human fatalities within seconds. That is how the Israelis dealt with the predicament. By the age of sixteen Ayah had seen her grandfather wilt away like a plant uprooted. She'd seen the body of her little brother shrouded and laid in the earth after he was shot by a soldier, and no one was made to pay for his death. Ayah had attended at least twenty funerals of Palestinians under the age of twenty-five, and she had every right to suppose that she had seen some of the most terrible things the world had to offer a young girl. The cruel lessons accrued and forced her to admit that there was nothing worse than to be a Palestinian without rights to a homeland or a viable future.

Thus, the prospect of dying did not strike her as being an unpleasant transition because her whole life had not been one of celebration; it had been a life of unending anger and frustration. Still the thought of her body being blown to bits made her shudder, and she cried. To die by such a brutal desecration of her human body made her gag. She never thought of herself as such a crusader nor did she see herself as a killer. Ayah told herself that the Israelis were killing her neighbors, destroying her communities and leaving them destitute. She'd prayed to Allah for guidance and the guidance she believed she'd received was to execute Israelis. She knew that killing was usually wrong and that her actions would be against the laws of man and against every instinct she had as a human being. But she had to do it because she was convinced that this is what God asked of her. Did He not say in the Quran that death is preferable to oppression? Had not the Israelis destroyed Palestinian lives for the survival of their own? Wasn't it true that for every Israeli death there were three Palestinian deaths? The only question was, is she strong enough to do it? She told herself that the law of God must triumph over the laws of man. Killing was not a crime when it was God's will, a common belief not only in Islamic law also in Christian law. Exodus 12-21 it notes: "God, who by his providence gives and maintains life, and by His law protects it. A willful murderer shall be taken even from God's altar. He that smites a man, so that he dies, shall be surely put to death."

Having listened to the theoretic persuasions of Imams and having spent many nights in midnight prayer, exhausted from her own sorrowful appeals, she was still steered to the call of the vengeful reaper of her subconscious when he sounded his command to wreak havoc. Her world had now become narrowly defined, one where there was no room for compromise or maneuvering. It had become an all or nothing way station where extremes played outside all known limits. Like an actor under the guidance of a director, she would play her part with precision. There would be no dress rehearsals, no retakes.

She was so weary after ten hours of concentrated unease and ominous anticipation that she longed to rest, if only for a few moments, in some other world. Exhaustion made her lie there for a long while. From time to time she would wake up, and in such moments reluctantly noticed that it was far into the night. The ticking of the clock had never seemed so forceful; however, it did not hasten her to get up. At last she heard movement in the streets and knew that she needed to say the early morning prayers. She was resting on her back, still in a panic from her awareness of what would become the events of the day. Suddenly through the monotonous noise of silence she distinctly heard sounds. That grew steadily louder. The call for prayer rose piercingly from the minarets of the neighborhood mosques. It was the recitation she had heard every morning before the sun rose. It stirred her now.

"Oh! The men are going to pray at the mosque," she thought, "it must be near five o'clock," and at once she jumped up, as though someone had snatched her from the bed.

Quickly she rushed to wash herself saying, "Thank God there is running water," as tap water in the Arab territories was periodic and rationed. She could not count how many times she'd been caught with soap still all over her body and had agitated at the inability to rinse. There was always a cup and a twenty-gallon container of stored water for emergencies. In the winter the stored water was cold, offering no comfort except for the rinse. Patience was not one of Ayah's dominant characteristics, and the unavailability of shower water made her as angry as a person flogged, especially when she was forced to resort to what was cold and stored.

She moved hastily around the bathroom, too many unimportant details packed into her mind. Brush her teeth? What should she wear? What does a suicide bomber put on?

She got out from the shower and took a quick look into the mirror. Her eyes were puffy and her skin looked dry. She frowned with disapproval. Ayah never really liked how she looked. She always wished that she were prettier.

Ayah heard her father, Shadi, moving around in the kitchen. She decided to wait and strained to hear the morning sound of him having his breakfast. It would be the last time. After a few minutes she heard dishes being placed inside the sink. It was then she got up the nerve to leave her room. As she stood she began to tremble; whether from the cold or unease she did not know.

Shrouding herself with a robe, Ayah went to the kitchen. On the table lay a tray of cheese and cucumbers, some slices of pita bread and a bowl of olives. The pot of tea smelling of fresh mint was still warm. Shadi ate early before beginning his work routine, which included going through road blocks and check points, spending his day under the sun and surveillance of the soldiers, returning home everyday only to collapse in bed for a few hours before the next day followed. This is what a man had to do to gather a couple of dollars. It was exceedingly unequal to the humiliation he suffered just to put food on the table. Soldiers often made even the older men walk on their hands and knees as they jeered and laughed at them, and there were times they were forced to mimic animal voices. Refugees in their

own land, they would move past checkpoints, between rifles, pistols and the tanks of the forces of compliance, yet they were compliant. Some were intimidated by the dark show of suspicion and power; all this just to be able to do the jobs that the Israelis did not enjoy. The workday of the Palestinian passed slowly due to the kinds of labor they had access to and their tasks were worsened when there was a rise in the desert heat. Some went into the major towns and cities to clean, some were set to build or dig roads. Others went to collect garbage, and that was considered the hardest of all jobs because they knew that they were especially selected for it. All were expected to do a specific amount of work and feared doing less because they were so easily replaceable by other hungry Palestinians. There was no other consideration. These workers wanted to be able to return home with wages that would at least make a life plausible for their families. For many money was a kind of freedom that could be felt even though the amount was meager; it was still a measurable treasure for someone who spent his life poor. When they felt the money in their pockets it gave them a little consolation. In any case, they knew their place and they returned at the end of the day having been used as a convenience. They were materials, natural resources to be drawn on. And they accepted this treatment because they had no other choice.

Periodically there would be a shooting just because someone moved without permission, perhaps out of alarm, out of lawlessness, or because Sharon had told them "to cause losses."

Right in front of her eyes Shadi had become an old man. He looked tired and pathetic to her. Every time he dragged himself home, he'd strike the deepest chord of sympathy in her. He had the undeniable aura of frustration that he couldn't seem to cast off. Still, he never complained much. He was a man of endurance. In spite of his history, he was a man of calm. Talking about life's troubles did not seem to amount to much. It didn't make any difference. He chose not to speak of them and her mother no longer wanted to listen. What good did it do to chat about a dilemma in the presence of the dilemma? Avoiding certain issues became sort of the rule of law in their house with everyone, except for Ayah.

Now she relaxed in her father's chair; leaning upon her elbow, she began to sip her tea. She ate a little, and afterward wiped her mouth slowly with a towel. All of a sudden she began to smile. She had heard that in America, a man, scheduled for execution, is given a final meal of his choice. The death row inmate can have almost anything he desires, whether it is pizza or a big piece of steak. Now she sat before a plate of cheese and olives. Although she was not equating herself with the behavior of a death row inmate, the end result would be the same.

She walked over to the sink, washed her hands, and dried them with a dish towel. She'd eaten very little yet wasn't hungry anymore.

After leaving the kitchen, she passed the room of her mother who was reading by the flickering light of a candle. The room was customarily dark. With no window it was impossible to catch much light. Her mother had not heard her and did not notice her passing by. Ayah preferred it that way. She did not want to engage her in conversation and sit close. That would be too hard.

"I will miss her," she thought.

Returning to her own room, she said to herself, "What next?" What was she to do with the rest of her life, all eight hours of it? She felt edgy again. There was no way to settle down now, because today was to be her defining moment. There was a tingly sensation running down her back. Instantly she began to put everything in its proper place. Even in her concluding moments, her instincts leaned toward the orderly. First, she made her bed. Next, she stacked her books neatly, folded her clothes or put them on hangers. Her few personal collectibles she stored inside a shoe box. After organizing the room she balked at herself. She figured that as soon as she was identified that her house might be shelled but more likely destroyed. Ayah could willingly ignore this fact when she heard the call of God summoning her. "I am answering your call" her whole heart responded with surrender and resoluteness.

Just as she was finished dressing there was a soft knock at the door. She turned slowly, gingerly paused, and then walked to the door. "Yes." The same little boy who'd come the day before returned. He wiggled his little fingers as if to wave at her covertly. He was breathing rapidly as if he had been running. Ayah looked into his face. He had huge dark eyes that looked even bigger in the thinness of his innocent face. There was real sadness in those eyes, the bleeding away of something pure. One day, like with so many other children, a defiant gaze that harbors the burning look of revolution would replace that sadness.

He told her that she must come. Ayah asked him to wait one moment while she walked through her house for one last time and took a last inventory of the things that had attended her childhood. She turned towards the doorway and saw the child waiting.

"He is beautiful," she thought to herself. She bent over to kiss him on his cheek. Looking at him, her spirit and intensity were revived. Her mind was decisive and clear.

"You are the reason we do this." She said. He looked at her, confused.

Just before exiting the door she remembered that she was leaving everyone she loved best in this world. She had to admit to herself that in spite of having constantly prayed to be endowed with a strong inner desire whereby she looked forward to meeting God, she had not completely succeeded in experiencing that state. It's just that she would simply miss those who had loved her and those she had loved. She asked God that they be entrusted to his care and that they keep her near in their hearts. Having supplicated for this, she closed the door and followed the child outside.

"What's your name?" Ayah asked.

"Jihad." He replied, looking up Abu Shaker Road. "This way," he said.

He pointed down past the gasoline station at the end of the block. Her eyes followed his hand.

"Are you sure?" Ayah questioned.

Jihad said nothing. He just sighed, reached for her hand and tugged her off in the station's direction. Ayah quickened her step to keep up with the boy.

The street was already busy. The sun was bright and shone in her eyes, so that it hurt her to look out of them. At exactly eight thirty a beige van passed Ayah as she

stood on the corner. When it returned again, she knew that they were there for her. A young man in his early twenties exited the front passenger seat and settled in the rear, leaving the place she was suppose to sit. They drove for about thirty minutes but it seemed longer. As they traveled through the streets circumstances of her short disorderly life came rushing into her mind. Insignificant incidents never thought of until now; acquaintances forgotten, now remembered; words spoken and scarcely heeded at the time, now meaningful.

At one point Jihad noticed that Ayah was staring out of the window.

"Ayah?"

"Yes?" she replied.

"What are you looking at?"

"I'm looking at angels," she said.

"No, what are you really looking at?"

"Well," she told him when she realized that he was not going to let her trick him. "I was thinking about my mother. I miss her."

"But didn't you just leave her?" He asked in his innocent way.

"Yes, I did."

He could see the gloom in her eyes. He looked at her for a long, long time.

Finally, the car came to a halt in front of a housing complex. A woman took a couple of impulsive steps towards it. The door was opened and the lady took the boy's hand. He looked at Ayah and waved goodbye.

Khalid Amin met her inside of the building. She recognized him from one of the training exercises that all potential bombers must undergo. During these exercises they are taught how to disguise themselves, in dress as well as mannerisms. They experimented with various costumes. One might wear a skullcap or a wig with ringlets down the side, whatever it took to create the deception. It might have even been a nun's habit. It made no difference because the only thing that mattered was providing the martyr a chance to strike. They were fitted for vests and taught about the explosives that will fill them. They learned how to move, sit, and turn in such a way as to not detonate twenty-five pounds of explosives prematurely, and trained to make last minute tactical decisions.

Every member of the brigade was given a cyanide capsule to carry around their neck, which could be consumed upon capture, in order not to divulge the workings of the organization. If a person were to be surrounded by security forces, then he would be obligated to secure his own death rather than risk captivity and an interrogation that might force a betrayal.

Inside and under the light Khalid saw Ayah's fatigued face. He knew that this look was commonplace, but it did not eliminate his guilt or the sorrow he felt over the loss of life. He had not chosen her himself. In the past anyone under the age of eighteen was automatically rejected. He thought that she was simply too young. Others, whose authority outweighed his own, disagreed. Ayah was far different than most girls her age. She was strong-willed, dependable and devoted to Al-Aqsa. In the past she had run errands on its behalf, delivered messages and supplies, and assisted in operations. Her youth and look of innocence made her an unlikely suspect.

Youth was not an enormous factor in the selection process for martyrdom, for the vast majority of those who would die for the cause were young students. They were bright and intelligent and if allowed life, could become doctors or engineers. Khalid knew this, and having a daughter her age made him feel increasingly uncomfortable.

Ayah was also very clever and had the potential to be anything she liked. Science was her passion, and after school she'd spend additional hours working or helping others in the chemistry lab. After receiving permission from her teacher to use the laboratory on Saturdays, she'd shut herself up most of the day, to the annoyance of her mother, who felt that Ayah should be learning to cook and clean in preparation to one day become some man's wife. She was an excellent daughter, however, and was never neglectful in the care of her siblings. Her parents assumed she'd marry after high school graduation. In all honesty they never envisioned their daughter attending a college or university. Their lack of vision was due to the conditions of the lives around them and the lack of prospects in the community. Such feelings of pessimism and discouragement were common. Ayah understood this even more than her parents and her sense of pessimism was even better founded because she knew she wasn't getting the same in class as the group of students in another section of the country. The science labs in Ayah's school were 20 to 30 years outdated. Just looking into the lab one could see its miserable condition. The lab stations in the room had empty holes where pipes were once connected. There was no running water in there. The biology lab had no laboratory tables. Students worked on broken down desks and dissecting kits were few. Chemical supplies were practically unavailable to a Palestinian student because the Israeli government deemed them to be a security risk. Ayah's second home, the chemistry lab, was the only one fairly equipped. There were ten lab tables with gas jets and water. The only problem was that there were not enough teachers to oversee all the students carefully. Students like Ayah doubled as a student and a lab assistant. As a result the administration could not make proper use of the lab. As it was, they had to study mainly from the textbook. She knew more about the schools that served the Israelis than many Israelis themselves. Ayah knew well enough that Israeli children did not spend several semesters in technical skills courses instead of college preparatory mathematics and English literature. She'd come to recognize the procedures of privilege that are sutured together to accommodate one group of people while they are denied to another. But her true anger was aroused by her knowledge that as time went by students of her national descent would be made to appear to have deserved only one kind of role in life. She knew who would be going to the fancy American and European universities and she was grossly resentful about being denied the same opportunities. As gifted as Ayah was, she knew that her gifts were lost to war, poverty and turmoil and the harm done by knowing that she was written off by those who govern. Most students like her had no sense of feeling included. They had no feeling of belonging to the State of Israel or any other state. It had left a permanent sadness in Ayah's heart. She had to deal with these feelings her entire life. They'd hear people on television saying, 'What's the matter with the Palestinians?' Don't they care

about their children's education?" But it wasn't her parents fault that she did not have all that she was entitled to and that the children of Israelis received their own share as well as the share of the Palestinians. When she was a child she did not understand the political force of life. Her parents had done all that they could. It was not their fault that this nationwide crisis would never be resolved in any of their lifetimes. All they ever heard were stories about terrorism, the Israeli's right to self-defense, and crimes of the Palestinians. She wondered when they would show the crimes committed by a government that put her people into the situation in which they now existed. Ayah use to ask her mother and father from a very young age, "Why is it this way?" But she did not ask the question as if she were waiting for an answer. Children, like her, reached the heart of the hypocrisies much more quickly than their parents and social analysts could explain.

Ayah slowly ascended the staircase, halting on each step. Her legs felt as if cement filled her veins. It could not be denied that when she entered the room, she trembled somewhat, but acting in the spirit of a freedom fighter and exhibiting the calm of the truly committed, she directed herself confidently toward the chair presented to her. Ayah sat and glanced to her right and then to her left, then to the right again, like a child waiting to cross the intersection. But there was no evading the unease in Khalid's eyes.

Khalid became emotional. He wanted to take her hand, to hug her as he would his own. He did not, however, because of religious principles. She was not his daughter, nor a close relation, and even in this particular situation it would not have been permissible.

Her eyes were downcast, but every few seconds she'd give him a few quick sidelong look through her soft eyes. He could not ignore her childish appearance of her round face, which included a small scattering of blemishes, not unlike most girls her age.

Suddenly he did an about face.

"Can I speak to you privately for a moment?"

Ayah raised her eyebrows inquiringly as he pointed toward the corner of the room. When they reached the spot he said, "There is still time for reconsideration. There are others, you know, that are quite willing to take your place. No one will think less of you, and you can continue to do the task that you have been doing on our behalf all along. Later, when you are older..."

She went on and on with a list of reasons why she should renege. She, however, was so resolute that his words for the most part became a stream of empty sounds. His pity began to annoy her.

What could possibly induce her to change her mind, fear of death? What did she possibly have to live for? For what should she strive, to live in order to merely exist? There was only one cruel end-point to living as she had and that was dying as she intended. Why should she or anyone else continue to live as if they were waiting for a life and imprisoned while doing so? After all, a prison does not need to be made of steel and bars to be an actual prison.

She had already died a thousand times, to one degree or another, under occupation, every time she went hungry or listened to her brother cry because he

wanted more food, every time a soldier searched her in a lewd manner, every time she saw a neighbor or innocent child buried.

e watched her face as she rejected his suggestion. Was it boldness, hopelessness or dedication? He had no way of knowing.

Please, do not feel sorry for me. I have already faced terrible things. My age makes no difference. Whether I am sixteen or twenty-five years old, nobody should live the way that we do. I am a child of my generation and this is what we have to do in order to change the situation of those who will come after us. My age really isn't a big deal. It's all of us, the young and the old, who are caught up in this, and we have to figure out what we're going to do in the midst of it, and what our role is in relationship to it, and that is why I chose to be a suicide bomber, and I hope that there are others who are going to come after me and do what I'm going to do today- even if they are my age."

He shook his head.

She looked at him reassuringly. "I came here on my own. Nobody forced me." Khalid could not dissuade her. He was all but convinced that she was not intimidated by her chosen position. Far from intimidation, she appeared aroused with commitment. He clasped his hands, worked his lips into a meaningless smile and said, "Let us begin."

Then he noticed something, while the camera equipment was being arranged Ayah was handed a cup of tea to drink. When she sipped, Khalid saw Ayah's hands shaking and he knew that she was not nearly as strong as her declarations were. When she glanced at him over the rim of her teacup, he saw that her eyes were teary.

Khalid did not see anything different in Ayah than he'd seen in so many of the young martyrs that had sat in the same chair before him. Strangely enough most were common. In certain ways, you could say that they weren't necessarily the best nor the bravest, the most admirable or remarkable of human beings- but only ordinary. What they had become was, to a considerable degree, crafted by circumstance.

Prior to the mission each bomber makes a public statement. The purpose of this statement is to tie up loose ends, to say the goodbyes to family members that could not be said before and to justify their reasons for committing the acts that they are about to do.

His outstretched arm gestured her to sit.

As he told her that it was time to make her video, his voice began to crack. "You can go ahead and make your will. Do not be nervous or afraid."

That advice seemed to her curious and absurd. Still, she managed to keep her resolve very well under such pressure.

Ayah shook her head in the affirmative. But a look of annoyance passed over her face at the mention of the word "will." There was something misguiding about that word. What does a girl like her have to will to anybody? Her so-called estate amounted to only a ring, a few pictures of her family and a gold bracelet she found in the marketplace last year. She looked over at Khalid and said, "You mean my feelings?"

He shyly smiled and looked down at the floor and said, "Yes Ayah, your feelings. Say whatever is in your heart."

Before placing herself in front of the camera, she stopped for a moment to take a deep breath to pull it together, so as to present herself as ■ self-assured, grown woman.

"My name is Ayah Iklas, daughter of Mahmood Iklas and Hanan Hannouti of Ramallah. I am a soldier of Al-Aqsa Brigade. I have decided to sacrifice my life today for the cause of God and for the cause of my people. I want everyone to know that I was not an evil person. I was not born naturally inclined to harm other people. It has been a careful and slowly nourished impulse, shaped by the circumstances of my life. For sixteen years I have lived in a perpetual nightmare where everything I have known, loved, touched or hope to be has been ruined and disfigured. Even in my innocence, I would have had to be totally ignorant to believe that this is the result of some accident. I know that it has been a planned and a conscious objective of an inequitable and cruel government that never felt its obligation to do Palestinians any justice."

There were tears in her eyes, but she refused to brush them away. She let them fall.

"There is no way, I know, by which I can lead a totally just life within such an unjust nation, so I have chosen to die. However, I do so with genuine anguish that I was forced to live as I did and die, as I will.

Following my death there will undoubtedly be an Israeli incursion into areas occupied by Palestinians as revenge for my actions. Ariel Sharon will call a press conference and begin with this exhausted statement, "The refugee camps are filled with vicious terrorists who wish to destabilize the government of Israel." What he will not tell you, because he refuses to acknowledge it himself, is that the refugee camps are also filled with starving children, hopeless men and weeping women; they are full of illiterate orphans in Nablus, homeless families in Jenin and crippled people in Hebron. Sharon, consistent with his own racist, hard-line stance, has always refused to deal with their torment, their hunger or their hopelessness, but he would have to deal with the consequences of such torment, which might eventually lead to a bomb exploding inside a café across the street from his home, in the privileged, sheltered and segregated street in Tel Aviv.

For those of you Israelis who are weak and feel powerless to change the direction of your government, there is something that you can do. When you pray to your God, I want you to ask him to help those who are less privileged than you, because you took everything away from them. You took from them indirectly if not directly. I want you to close your eyes and think of those who live in the West Bank and Gaza, within the hot and crowded refugee camps of Jenin and Khan Younis. Think about the children who go to sleep hungry and do not have warm clothes in the winter. I want you to feel remorse about the babies who have been blown away by your missiles or dismembered by your high tech weapons. The chances are that most of you will never know any of our children nor witness their tears. You will never observe the horror in their eyes when they see blood flowing from some part of their bodies and do not know why. And chances are that they

will never know that you felt a little ashamed about the lives that they were forced to live. Never mind. There is something you can do. You can teach your children that it wrong to take or even accept what does not belong to them and to feel genuine concern about people who are oppressed and who are your victims.

To the Americans, I wish to say that you live in an open and sometimes compassionate country, but which can also be murderous and aggressive. I know that some of your politicians will have you believe that we hate you, but we don't. We only hate what you allow to be done to our people, what you allow your weapons of mass destruction to do to our homes and to the people that we love. We hate that your ears remain deaf when it comes to the voices of our dying. Worst of all, we hate the way that you've divorced yourselves from the ideals that you espouse from the behavior that you demonstrate when you give Sharon the military hardware he uses to kill us, even as we sleep. A long time ago we used to petition your leaders for some merciful intervention, but they refused us. Instead they answered our pleas by giving the Israelis even more sophisticated artillery, knowing that these weapons made for war would be used on civilians. Do you not see that you bear some of the responsibility for our man-made hell? When we asked for intervention, we were not asking you to help us; we were asking you to save our lives! You did the opposite!

Yet, the majority of you believe that the United States is a "peace loving" country. Your president says it. Your constitution provides for it. Your people pledge themselves to it and feel at ease with the idea that this is true. So why did America sell weapons to a government that used them to kill off a selected part of its population and step on every part of our human decency?

I will tell you why. You did it to protect your interest; so you made our country a fortress for the Israelis. For their protection you gave them your experts who pore over satellites twenty-four hours a day, looking to destroy the resistance. Just because your government decided to commit itself to the Israelis, it didn't mean you had to shut up and salute. Doesn't your constitution provide for your freedom of speech? Is there no public scrutiny over missiles falling on babies' heads?

Still you have not stopped us, even though both the American and Israeli governments thought that they had their feet solidly on our Palestinian necks.

We are responding by allowing ourselves to die. It is the only war weapon we have left. This way we increase the odds in our favor. Many Americans think that we are violently insane, that we are cold and inhuman, and we don't hate violence as much as the Israelis. Perhaps we have not done well in explaining what we do. Too busy dying, I guess."

Ayah cleared her throat.

"Lastly, I want Israelis and American, alike, to understand that I am not a terrorist, as you both will come to define me, and that my mission is not to just kill Israelis, although it is part of the equation. I want my final act to carry a message to those who are responsible. I want the world to know that death is preferable to domination. For no human being should be forced to live without freedom and dignity and be treated like animals. You, altogether, must be aware that for every one of us you kill, we will leave behind children who will grow even stronger and

determined than those who preceded them, and they will risk their lives for our struggle. If the Israeli people are unwilling to stop their expansion and the oppression of the Palestinian people, they must be willing to soak their hands in the blood where we soak our own. The fight for our civil rights is worth a life- even if that life is one of our own. No doubt the Israelis believe that what they plead for, via mass media, is best. But let me remind you, the best is often the enemy of what is good, and most of all, what is fair.

I only ask the American people- not the government or the politicians, but just the ordinary people- one last favor. I ask you to sever ties, to step away from the benefits that your birth affords you, to look at our world in a different way and understand our dreams, not from the news articles about the Palestinians but from the Palestinians themselves. If you cannot understand our action, then I hope you never do, for to understand, you would have had to go through what we have gone through, and I could not have wished that on anyone.

These last words are to my family: First to you mama, I want to say that I love you, and I know that what I have done will break your heart, and you will think that somehow someone convinced me to do what I did. No, mama, I acted on my own free will. I did this because of you and all the other Palestinian women who live in pain and fear, and who, like you, have had to clean the blood of those they love off their walls and then bury their children and husbands. You were never the same after baby Hamza died. He was only three years old and the soldier who killed him walked away without even looking back. I saw you clean his blood off of our doorway. Well, you know what, mama? I was never the same and I have known for a long time that it is better to die on my feet than to live enslaved on my knees. Still I am aware of the sadness that all of my family will experience upon my departure from this life. I do not have the least doubt about the tremendous attachment you all have for me, especially, you, father. Just remember that no one can live one second more or die one second before the time designated for him by God. Whatever may be the cause, when the time of death arrives, none can delay it, and we are drawn to it by the will of God. I know that as you hear my words you are all grieving because of the feeling that our relationship has been severed. You are thinking that the pleasure we shared sitting together and speaking to one another has come to an end. But what God has ended today will be given back to us in paradise, and I will be waiting for you there."

Finally Ayah was ready. Her attire was carefully arranged to conceal twenty pounds of explosives and seven pounds of nails and metal. She was amazed at how normal she appeared. The baggy shirt and pants that had been selected for her make her look like a typical teenager, an American tourist. She was wearing a brown wig and for the first time in her life she was wearing makeup and had her nails polished. She looked at her reflection in a mirror and hardly recognized herself.

Khalid made a phone call and after several minutes passed there was knocking at the door. Someone entered. He was an older, gentle-looking man. His face was clean-shaven and his hair was pulled back into a ponytail, uncharacteristic of an Arab man. He was also wearing a Star of David around his neck. He could have

been any Jewish girl's grandfather. His face was elderly and gentle. That day he would pretend to be Ayah's, and would accompany her on her final journey to her target. On the way to Jerusalem he went over details of the operation and told her the precise moment she was to detonate. He had accompanied many on missions and belonged to a separate unit that had the job of finding particular targets for suicide attacks.

The old man smiled and said hello. He introduced himself as Abu Ammar. She half-heartedly smiled to acknowledge his presence, and then she quickly turned away. For a very brief moment she felt like a prop in a film. Then she slid into what seemed like a deep consciousness, and thought, when the sun set, he would be alive, and she would be dead. And although she felt no resentment, she could not help but feeling miserable.

As the car proceeded into the city Ayah tugged at her shirt absentmindedly but when she felt the belt she shivered. She slid her hand to the side and all at once became afraid.

A full hour later and there is was Jerusalem. Not the place from which the world was founded, not the place where prophets erected temples out of homage to God, and not the place in which a dome is a symbol of its religious intensity. This was another Jerusalem, the one with soldiers claspings the latest assault machine guns against their chest, the place where all night prayer will not protect it outright warfare, the place where Herod's traditions appears to hold sway more than the teachings of God's messengers.

When they arrived at their destination Abu Ammar parked in a space by a recreational area across from a hotel. He left to survey the neighborhood and told Ayah that he would give her about twenty minutes alone. Once he was gone, she sat there and watched the people go by. She glanced towards the hotel. She saw what appeared to be businessmen, perhaps even diplomats, some with wives and children, gathered around the doorway. They looked very smart, very skilled; perhaps one was a scientist or a computer genius that had studied at one of the prestigious universities in America. Perhaps they were some of the men who control, govern and possess a large part of the world. Maybe they had built skyscrapers or technology corporations. They might have controlled much of the world's resources and made business decisions that could make or break a country. It may have felt to them that they had inherited the control of the earth, but there is nothing that they could do about the rights of Palestinians. There they stood in their fashionable attire. They were attractive people, graceful and unconcerned. Mothers clasped the hands of their children who were reacting to the vendors they saw on the street and wanted to run toward the pigeons they saw in the park. All, remarkably, were able to ignore the filthy feet and extended hands of the beggars, even a child recoiled away from one of the homeless drifters whose palm was doing the pleading.

Abu Ammar returned almost precisely at the time he said he would. "You know the way." Indeed she did, not only had Ayah traveled the area extensively since she was a child but every member of the suicide brigade must study the geography of the cities that are primarily inhabited by Israelis. Nothing is left for chance.

"When you cross the park, think good thoughts, not unhappy ones. A sad face will call attention to you, and you don't want to do that. I will be ahead of you, do not rush but keep me within your eyesight. The shortest way is through the mall beyond the park."

There was consolation in his countenance and encouragement in his eyes.

"Are you ready for this?" he asked.

"You don't get to be ready for something like this," she replied.

"It is time. May God be with you, Ayah."

He exited the car and moved on. She followed him, through the pathways and past the smell of trees that lined the walkway. On she went hurrying past a bunch of boys playing soccer on the grass, she reminded herself to slow down. Just as she entered the mall two men almost overran her as she passed through the sliding doors. One was smoking a cigar. The smell overwhelmed her for a moment. They were speaking Hebrew, which seemed to her to be directly at her back. It frightened her a bit, but when she slowed they continued on. She paused for a moment, pretending to look at a display in a store window, all of her pulses throbbing in agitation. A feeling of dread came over her. "In the name of God, the most merciful," she prayed, and was at once relieved by her perception that she was not alone and that there was a sympathetic lord who had heard her and would not abandon her, even in death. Ayah gave a deep sign and proceeded.

She came to the supermarket, at last. Abu Ammar did not stop until he was at a considerable distance. Suddenly about a hundred thoughts volleyed in her head. There she was standing so near to the target. There was no time to reflect on anything. She looked fixedly at the door and ventured within. Inside, she felt sharply calm. What was interesting to her was that she thought she would feel more afraid than she was. But mostly she felt a sense of relief and empowerment. In the past she was the prey. They were the hunters. The rules of engagement were changed at that instant and she was about to trap her prey.

Once inside, for some reason, she did not immediately detonate. She did not follow procedure. Instead, she carefully undid the hooks of her blouse, gripped the bomb belt, stripped it off her stomach and tossed it while detonating.

A moment later a bitter blast swept through the store. The explosion was deafening. It blew the glass out of the windows and the doors off the hinges. The sidewall of the market exploded outward. Such was the force that bodies were thrown way beyond the doorway, way into the streets. Over the chaos and the groans there was the horrible sound of someone choking on blood. In that moment it was their world that went into panic, and it was their world that fell into pieces. Panic traveled through the area like an epidemic. Time and people, glass and ground all seemed hurled together in the dust. In the aftermath, the blast was finally silent. Bloodied figures were staggering about the debris. Some rested immobile, transfixed by the nearness of their own death. One woman lay flat beyond the curb howling and sobbing, incoherently, making it impossible to make out what she was screaming. The storekeeper survived and roared in a complete rage. Within the carnage his wailing and cursing grew more and more piercing. People were running in crowds from the surrounding stores, down the staircases

from nearby buildings. Terror gripped the hearts of every passerby. From the wreckage of loose concrete and metal stood a tall young woman with blood oozing from her hairline. She rose on unsteady legs. She stood still for a moment, gawking about, her confused expression slowly altering to a look of understanding. Then she began to scream, "David? David? Where is my son David," ignoring whimpers and raised hands around her. She steadied herself, glanced down and saw a small child pinned beneath a metal plank, only his head and left leg were free. He began to cry. He was alive and that was all she needed to know. The woman breathed a heavy sigh and bent low to lift the metal off her child. Within minutes they both had disappeared within clouds of smoke. The uproar continued for hours as firefighters and ambulance attendants converged on the scene. Crowds gathered, one by one, they approached the unsightly view. Some began raising their voices and calling out names. A young girl, who had been inside the store when it exploded, was brought out and placed on stretcher. One could not tell whether she was unconscious or dead, but her eyes were wide open. She was covered with blood. It was flowing from her head and face; her face was crushed, mutilated and disfigured. Ayah's body rested among the rubble, her figure divided in half. Still she could feel a shiver. It was not the pain that one imagines. She could not distinguish this dying from falling into a deep sleep. However she knew that she was dying and she was ready. There was darkness ahead with a tiny light. Her heartbeat slowed as she headed towards the light. Ayah was finally free and nothing held her anymore.

The first emergency vehicles began to arrive but the smoke obscured the bloodbath. The paramedics pulled over and jumped out into the fumes. One of them gasped. The driver saw a man at the side of the road just beyond his vehicle, struggling to raise himself up on his elbows. The man was shaky and looked to be about eighty years old.

"Don't move sir!" the paramedic shouted, as he ran to the back of the vehicle to get hold of a stretcher.

The old man did not appear to have any external injuries except for a deep gash across his cheek but given his age the paramedic did not want to take any chances. "You seem alright," the second attendant said as he helped the man sit up. The man trembled and coughed. "I think I'm okay," he mumbled.

"Sir, I am going to have to leave you for a few minutes while I check on others who may have life threatening injuries. It's better if you sit still for awhile; at least until we are sure that you are alright." The man nodded.

As the paramedic walked away he heard the old man murmuring, "When is this going to stop?"

The paramedic crossed, the street coming closer to the center of the impact. By then at least twenty emergency medical vehicles had arrived. On the side of the marketplace there was a stairwell, where something caught his eye. It was some kind of cloth, bloodied and shredded. He scrambled down for a closer look, and saw that it was an arm still encased in the sleeve of a sports jacket. A sweat bubbled on his face. For a second he was unable to move. The paramedic had to compose himself to pick it up, and then he slid it inside an insulated, cold

container. He could not help but wonder whether the man who'd lost it was still alive. He took a quick look around to see if there was a body to lay claim to it. Helicopters circled overhead through the thick mist. A girl, not unlike Ayah in age, brought out from the side of the grocery store was only half there; her body was missing from the waist down. Blood spilled onto the pavement as the emergency workers lowered what was left of the corpse into a transport vehicle. The paramedic, with the amputated arm still in tow, felt cold, realizing he was close to shock. The smell of blood filled his head.

Later eyewitnesses would agree that Ayah looked like any innocent teenager. Her youth and appearance alerted no one to the possibility of danger. Blue-eyed and ash blond, she appeared to be European. Some said she was smiling, gliding across the avenue clad in blue jeans and black sneakers; in any case she appeared nowhere near lethal. An investigator asked one lady, "What made you notice her?" "The camera, she had a camera! She looked like a tourist."

The very next morning the Israeli soldiers kicked down the door of Ayah's house and entered. Her mother was clearing the breakfast dishes. She started to yell before she was pushed down to the floor under what seemed like a hundred rifles pointing at her head. There were at least forty soldiers in all. One man started shouting at her, about her daughter and what she had done. She looked bewildered, totally baffled about why soldiers with guns should be standing inside her home and asking about her daughter. The more he looked at the old woman, the more he fixed his eyes on her expression, the more he realized that she knew nothing at all. He realized that she had absolutely no idea that pieces of her child could be found in a morgue in Jerusalem. "So you don't know? What the hell is wrong with you people that you have no idea what's going on, that you don't even know what your daughter has done?"

She rubbed her face. She had to think. The only thing she did know is that he must be talking about Ayah. She was the only one unaccounted for in the house. Her mother had gone to sleep early the night before and did not realize her daughter had not returned home.

"I have not heard anything about my daughter. Will you please tell me where she is and what she has done?" She did not look up directly at the soldier as she spoke but deliberately looked away so that he could not see the fear in her eyes. The Israeli soldiers were bogeymen she carefully avoided eye contact with.

She was silent when he told her about the explosion, except for the sound of her heavy breathing. She just remained there on all fours, in the same way her body landed after being pushed, listening and nodding. Her face went gray as each detailed was delivered, ".... she entered a supermarket...detonated explosives...killed twelve people along with herself."

Ayah's father spun towards his wife and she could see his disbelief. He gripped the edge of the table to hold himself in place. He stood like that for several moments and then looked around as if he were wondering who would catch him after he'd fallen down. Again he turned his gaze to meet his wife's. He wanted to speak but it was as if his voice had vanished. His wife got up and ran towards Ayah's room, and just shouted her name, "Ayah!" hoping that she would somehow appear,

in spite of the soldier's assertion that she was dead, but no voice shouted back at her. If Ayah had been there, her mother would have insisted that such a terrible thing, from her, was incomprehensible, and thinking it possible would be enough to tear her apart, that she would not have the strength to bear such a thing happening. Behind the closed blinds, the darkness incased by walls, amid the scent of personal belongings, she knew that her daughter was not there, and she feared. She feared that nothing now could ever come to any good, and that she must lay everything that was left of her child into a coffin.

At that point her whole body began to shake and wringing her hands, she began sobbing in a way she had never sobbed before.

Jeeps pulled up alongside the house. About a dozen more soldiers came inside and searched. They turned everything upside down, although they were almost certain that there would be nothing to find. Every piece of furniture inside of the house was either broken or turned upside down by the time they had finished. Ayah's mother took no special notice of the noise or destruction. Now she sat apart, quietly weeping, gazing persistently beyond the movements of strangers as she rocked back and forth. She wondered why she had not seen this coming. Both of them thought Ayah was attending school working earnestly. It was not unusual for her to sit with friends for hours after school. Sometimes she slept over. They had no phone in the house, so that made it impossible for her to call in. Anyway she was a good girl, not prone to doing anything harmful to anyone, or so they thought. But now, here was a man standing before them with a gun, suggesting that a horrific element of violence was somehow associated with their daughter. Their daughter was not only dead but she was a suicide bomber! And they, her parents, had never even contemplated such an act was possible by a child of their own. From midmorning until evening, they now knew that Ayah's dismembered body had remained among the rubble and glass of the supermarket she blew up. They ate their lunch and took an afternoon nap, as they typically did, totally unaware of their daughter's horrible state.

Shadi imagined her body being scraped up, hauled away to a coroner's office, unseen and unavailable to all who loved her.

There was no way to pinpoint one single thing that had driven her daughter to such a nefarious defiance of Israeli control. She had been raised to be a traditional Arab girl. She never had to be chastised in the home nor was she ever reprimanded for conduct unbecoming at school. Ayah never gave her parents a moment's worry. Yet, after leading a blameless life, she was dead. She had self-destructed herself into bits of mortal matter, along with twelve other people she did not know. To her mother it was unfathomable. How could she have not seen her own daughter falling over the edge?

Once the house was emptied, neighbors came to comfort the grieving mother. One came with a video. She had some idea of what it might contain, but it was not until the very moment that she saw her daughter's image and heard her daughter's words that she really accepted that her daughter had done the deed and she was dead. The instant she saw it the reality of her daughter's demise sent a blade of pain to her heart. Ayah's mother thrust herself away from the television. Pushing

away from her husband's reach she fell into the wall, sliding to the floor. Her head dropped back and she let out an agonizing yell. The shock of it all, the horror, and the pain forced her to bury head into her hands. Helpless, her husband kept his distance. Shadi fell to his own knees, crying out his daughter's name, again and again. He knew there was nothing he could do to comfort his wife or himself. The eye of every one present was wet with tears.

That night they were notified that they had twenty-four hours to get out of their house. Like the homes of other suicide bombers, Ayah's would have to be demolished. The demolition of houses of terrorists was meant to send a message to suicide bombers and their accomplices that anyone who participated in rebel activity will pay a price for their actions.

As he read the notice Shadi ran his nervous hand through his gray hair. He fell heavily into a chair. They when he had finished reading he turned questioningly and unsteadily towards his brother-in-law, "We suffered to build this house and now it will be torn down. Where will we go? What can we do?" His brother-in-law, seeing the agony in which he had plunged seized him firmly by the shoulders and said, "As long as I have a home, so shall your family."

The sun had barely risen and the streets were energized with movement. Residents from all over Ramallah were in front of the house of Ayah Iklas. The people lined the streets in preparation for the funeral procession. When the body exited the house neighbors vied for a position close to the coffin for what was considered worthy reasons- to pay homage to a freedom fighter, to borrow from what they swore to as courage, to walk alongside the humble sacrifice done in their name- but also because nothing validated their human worth more than Ayah's demonstration of loyalty.

Because Palestinians are emotionally unrestrained when it comes to praising a fallen comrade, the crowds responded to Ayah's burial march instinctively. At least a thousand followed the pine box shrouded with their flag. Others stood on their balconies and cheered. Some shouted from their windows and cheered. Children waved their fist and called out her name. Some imagined, looking at the spectacle of death, the possibility of being shrouded in their own burial cloth.

By the time the procession made its way to the graveyard, the news organizations were already there. Something newsworthy had occurred; Palestine's first female suicide bomber was being laid to rest.

After the last prayer was said the people began to disperse. One by one they drifted away, and each and every one of them probably wondering, when the next martyr would be buried.

Ayah was amid the earth her actions were not soon to be forgotten. Not a week passed in the months that followed in which one leader or another did not sermonize about her tender offering.

Jenna did not know, precisely, how the other supporters of the Brigade felt about the passing of Ayah, except for pride and respect. She just knew that she felt sad and uncomfortable. She knew that she wasn't sad because of the gross spectacle of her death, nor was she sad because Ayah was so young. She was sad because she knew that there would have to be more. She knew that whether or not

a suicide bomber came from Al-Aqsa, Hamas or Al-Jihad, he might just as well be a dead man walking. What could any of them possibly have to look forward to? Though they were, mostly, all bright young students leading academic lives, their lives would more than likely lead nowhere. They were of a generation of warriors that could not dare speak to one another of their hopes and dreams for the years ahead because their years were spoken for. Resistance was the only noble profession. Establishing a career or creating a family was useless to a man under siege. Their days were naturally numbered and they knew it.

She wished she knew for certain how she felt about the entire question of suicide bombing. She could not understand it and tried to dismiss such an action as crazy, morbid, and unsound. It was a modern dilemma that she sympathized with and at the same time could not really make peace with. But the thought- not just the thought but it seemed, the necessity of it itself- kept coming back in her mind and challenging her.

The world searched, as Jenna once did, for some way to understand why a person would commit such an act, and part of it wondered how someone could be so heartless. To this world Jenna would later wish to offer an invitation, for even just a short stay, into their lives. She knew they would come away deeply shaken. Jenna would want others to venture to know the world of grief and helplessness from which their own people had been mercifully excluded. She'd wish them to come to their refugee camps and see their children. Jenna knew they would come away stunned and dismayed. She thought that the murderers and rapists who occupy American prisons could almost be envied when their quality of life was compared to Palestinian children. Yet these children were innocent. They had done nothing wrong. They had committed no crime at all. They were too young to have offended anybody.

After seeing the way the Israelis live, any normal, objective person would ask, why are the Palestinian children left in such impoverishment and squalor? Is it just an accident? Is it just some strange social mishap?

Even if one were able to explain away curfews and lock downs in the Arab communities that eliminated the possibility of work outside the territories; explain away all civil liberties being suspended, search and seizure operations instituted, people arrested without cause; explain away the systematic demolition of Palestinian homes and destruction of roads, the cutting off of electricity, water, and telephones of whole communities; explain away the issuing color-coded ID cards bearing photographs of an individual and the district in which he lived, special license plates for Palestinians, prevention of medical care to the wounded, government sanctioned assassinations where suspected terrorists are isolated and destroyed without benefit of trial and conviction, as one explains you are outrage and disgust for suicide bombings, how would one explain why they should undergo emotional and moral suicide, then be content to look upon the murder of their brothers and sisters and sedate their rage? And how would one explain why religion and ethnicity are the distinctions by which Palestinians are denied legal protection and virtually every other necessity of survival?

Jenna wondered if all these things or just part of them had lead Ayah to that Jerusalem supermarket.

Only a year later Jenna would ask herself, "Why should we not respond by redefining the terms of our survival and the conditions of our existence?"

Normally the drive to live appears to be in every human being, but to say that man cannot help wanting to live regardless of his circumstance is untrue. The choice for the suicide bomber is not between life and death; his real choice is that between a good life and an oppressed one. What the Israeli government fails to realize is that the Palestinian is not a blank piece of paper on which it can write its policy. He cannot be programmed to rigid conformity. Thus, he cannot be given a world, which he must accept, and to which he must adjust; he is not a dilemma to be worked on and solved. He is a human being charged with feelings, socially ordered in specific ways that, while struggling for some adaptation, responds in specific and understandable ways to external conditions. If a man could adjust himself to external conditions by design, by altering his own nature and precluding history, we would not see the pandemonium that exists today. Human evolution has embedded certain indestructible qualities of his nature, which force him never to cease his search for circumstances accustomed to his inherent needs.

As for being heartless, she had come to feel only that to give up their lives in such a way required a strong heart, not that one be heartless, especially when one's action would be interpreted as pathological. No matter how much the bomber was trained or how much he was spiritually prepared, only courage could take him to his task. And there were many kinds of courage, but the prospective martyr's courage was driven by faith. It was a faith that he or she would no longer be forced to live within an Israeli political quarantine that forces a Palestinian to places he does not want to go and to a life he does not want to live, a faith that does not allow her people to grow up without a casement of soldiers, electric fences, and all the visible signs of those who mimic Ariel Sharon's and Benjamin Netanyahu's tactics and behaviors. They and the rest of the world might call them "suicide bombers" even though it was by no means an accurate or sufficient definition of what they do. From where or whom it evolved she did not know. What she did know is that it was not an identification chosen from their own understanding, but a concept twisted to allow the Israeli government to lie and appear guilt free. It is a term that made the soldiers of Al-Aqsa and all other groups of resistance appear cold-blooded, mindless, and bizarre. Further, it is a term that she believed did none of them any justice and created a perceptual bias. Although they are indeed bombers, they are not suicidal. Suicide is the intentional taking of one's own life, the destruction of one's own interest and prospects.

Ayah's actions ignited a landslide of news and commentaries. Jenna thought that it was probably because she was female, and to many, still just a child.

"If the Palestinians exercised patience and were more rational," said a news commentator on the BBC, "they might very well have a peace plan in place allowing them their own functional and sovereign state someday, perhaps within a few years."

Jenna kept thinking, "Someday? But we are alive today! Life is not a dress rehearsal and I am alive right now. Tomorrow it may be too late."

Many political observers held the same point of view as the BBC commentator and argued that most of the sufferings that the Palestinians underwent were to be blamed on their own behaviors and that martyrdom missions were nothing more than suicide with a barbaric twist.

For hours after listening to his assessment Jenna kept thinking about what he said. She thought about his criticism of this girl he'd never met and she wondered if he'd felt any pity for her at all. Jenna thought that it stood to reason that when a girl only sixteen wants to die it is because she has no real life to live. What else could it be? If you are not one of the rich Arabs and you are Palestinian, you know that it is going to be hard and chances are it's not going to get any better. When you have no dream, you have nothing to hold on to.

Jenna slept badly the night following Ayah's death. The thought of bodies being blown apart and bloodied brought back nightmares of her father's death.

A voice over her head forced Jenna back into consciousness. It was a relief to wake up. She had been screaming in her sleep and the tears had glued her eyes shut. She could barely see clearly enough to make out her mother who stood above her calling her name.

"Jenna, you were having a nightmare. What's wrong?"

"Nothing, momma, just a bad dream I guess."

Jenna found herself becoming increasingly depressed in the weeks that followed.

Seeking an antidote to her melancholy, she started volunteering at Al-Amal Mission, an Islamic charity that provided poor people with food and ran a daycare for children in the neighborhood.

To get there she had to pass an Israeli checkpoint. Sometimes when villagers crossed they'd hear the soldiers call out "Hey dead man," and would look at them with sarcastic smiles. It was more than just their spite and hatred that enraged the villagers that were forced to cross, Jenna thought; was the fact that these men were not only pointing guns in their direction, but they were laughing at their lives. Still she'd trudge pass it every weekend; Jenna felt that she needed to be doing something.

Some of the people who came to the relief center were homeless and slept in its basement with nothing more than a blanket provided by the staff. Many of them knew hunger several times a week. Jenna came to know a woman named Amani, who was twenty-four years old and already had four children. Her husband had been in detention for several weeks and she had nothing at all to live on. She had only spoken to him once and on that day he ordered her not to return to the prison. He could not stand for her or his children to see him in that place, a dark unsightly place filled with such agony felt only by the other young men who shared his hell hole, deprived of their freedom. Behind Israeli bars, a place between the dirty, wasted with creatures, whom he was confined, he was overcome with a feeling of shame, and was repulsed at having those he loved view his pitiful situation, seeing him sickly, ragged and foul smelling.

Amani and her children became regulars at the center. They would arrive early hoping not to be left out. The same beige scarf regularly surrounded her pale face, which wore an unchanging expression of anxiety as if chiseled in stone. Amani would come through the door with her young family to hear the morning greetings from the social workers there, but she barely returned one herself and looked at no one directly. She would sit alongside her hungry children on a mat on the floor in old wrinkled clothing with her long arms clasped around her thin frame, watching them hastily consume the food allotted them.

One morning she fed her children their breakfast, but when she tried to eat herself, she threw up all over the floor. She was obviously weak. Jenna gave her a cup of tea and asked her if she would like to speak with a doctor. When she said that she was pregnant and planning an abortion, Jenna felt shy to comment or criticize. But the look on Jenna's face told Amani that Jenna did not agree. Amani looked embarrassed and said, "I can't even feed what I have. Do you want me to bring another baby into this kind of life?"

Jenna said, "No, but..." then she paused. She could listen to her questions but she could not give her any answers. Jenna told herself to shut up because she had absolutely nothing to offer this lady but a smile of compassion, and she was acutely aware of her desperation. Later that very day Amani's eldest daughter of seven years came and sat down next to Jenna in the playroom. She kept looking over at a shelf of storybooks. There was so much shyness in her face, that Jenna asked her if she would like her to read to her. She nodded. Jenna opened a book and read. She showed her picture of a beautiful house situated in the center of a grove of apple trees. After they completed the story they ate cake together. The little girl reopened the book and pointed to the picture, "I'd like to have a house like this someday." Jenna said to her, "You will!", even as she stared at this child and thought to herself, "What are the odds?"

Many children came to the center without their parents, who were ashamed that they could not feed them. They were like most other children, except that they were hungrier. They got sick more often. Things frightened them like gunfire and missiles. They cried and when Jenna went to hold them they'd tell her that they had no father or that he had been gone a long time. They'd say how much they loved their mothers and that they wished the Israelis would just go away. Some just asked her if she had any candy.

Their words were painful to hear and their faces were more painful to watch. The faces of some of the children who were extremely malnourished cause Jenna to be taken aback. Their eyes were hollow and they looked starved. Seeing them panic for food made her feel ashamed that she always had something to eat. She thought it hard to believe that a country that boast of becoming the only real democracy in the Middle East would allow some of its children to be treated like this!

There was one little boy, in particular, who was grossly thin, but whenever he was given his food he ate only a portion of it and fed the rest to his little sister. Jenna ordered him to eat all of his food on several occasions. He'd reply, "InshaAllah, meaning God willing. He told her that God would give him lots of

food in paradise and that it was okay if he were hungry sometimes. He explained to Jenna where paradise was and shyly took her by the hand, one day, guiding her outdoors. He pointed his finger to the sky. "It's there, Right past the clouds!" And nothing could stop this child from describing all he knew to be there. He knew exactly who got to go there and what it was like after you arrived.

"My brother is already there. He went there when he was only two."

"How?" Jenna asked

"He had a fever and the doctor could not help him. My mother just kept rocking him until he died. I cried a lot but she told me not to be sad because he has the angels to play with until I come."

In that particular moment in her life, if Jenna were to have asked herself while she passed out sandwiches, "What do I think about these hungry children?", she would have answered, what she would have believed and what she hoped and lived with was that everything was going to improve, that change was somehow on the way and that next year would not be the same as the one before.

Six months later however, as she stood behind the table of the line handing out food to those small extended hands, she knew that her thoughts in those previous months were the thoughts of an unbalanced naïve woman, a woman divorced from reality. There had been no basis for her optimism. The same children who had come to eat before were coming again, only now more hopeless and hungrier.

The truth of the matter was that things did not get better. They grew worse.

Jenna was becoming another person, someone she did not recognize, even if she didn't know it. She started thinking that maybe people like her fight too hard to beat the odds and people like Ayah walk nearer to the truth.

They were often short-handed at the relief center. The daycare section was always in need of help. Most of the parents who were afforded the opportunity to work did not have the ability to pay someone to care for their younger children. When the administrator asked its volunteers to seek help from among their neighbors, an old friend came to Jenna's mind.

Mariam was an eighteen-year-old girl who lived four buildings down from Jenna. She was a couple of years younger and as far back as Jenna could remember Mariam followed her like a shadow when they were kids. After Jenna's best friend became a girl named Dina, Mariam started hanging around other girls. Still, they would visit from time to time. Jenna had known her to be a responsible girl and thought that if she had the time she might be willing to help. She called her and arranged a visit. Jenna arrived at Mariam's house to find most of her family there to greet her. She was treated like a traveler who had returned to the village, with greetings and hugs from Mariam's mother, Safa and older sisters. Jenna was embarrassed. After the formalities they parted and Mariam and Jenna were left alone. She followed Mariam as she walked into her kitchen. Mariam reached into a cabinet for teacups, and she took down a plate and filled it with cookies. She was no longer the awkward little kid that trailed behind Jenna whenever she saw her going to the store. She'd grown up and was now a beautiful young lady who had her mother's eyes and her gentle smile, too. She passed Jenna the plate of cookies and she began to devour them. Jenna ate more out of nervousness than hunger. It

had been such a long time since they'd sat together. She was left feeling a little ashamed. Worse, Jenna had come not as a friend but as a recruiter. It seemed so self-serving, even if it was on behalf of the relief center. Mariam and Jenna lived right down the street from each other, but rarely took the time to inquire about each other's lives. There were times when Jenna's mother told her that Mariam had come but she was not there. Jenna never returned the visit. Yet she found herself sitting there asking for her help. When Mariam told her that she was working in a hotel in Tel Aviv, Jenna was not surprised. Like most families in the neighborhood, Mariam's family did what they could to create a life-sustaining existence. The Palestinians that took on work as domestics in the major cities recognized the limits of employment prospects the Israeli society was willing to give them. They also knew the limited prospects that their own society could offer them with regards to making provisions for their families. They knew it wasn't the same but where was the choice? Fate is twisted out of particulars. Every morning she would make the journey into the city and spend the day mopping floors and cleaning in the kitchen of the hotel's restaurant. Sometimes she would waitress at tables. No one in the family wanted her to go that far to work. She, too, was petrified at the thought of working outside of everything that was familiar to her. She was afraid of taking orders from Israelis who might not treat her well if she made some sort of a mistake. On the first day she cleaned tables in the main dining area; nervous, her hands visibly shook. After the first couple of weeks she grew into the routine and to her surprise the people there were very cordial. No one bullied or taunted her. For Mariam it was kind of an accomplishment. It was an opportunity for her to contribute money toward the care of her family. Her father was no longer alive and her brothers were often without work. From her day to day experience at the hotel, Mariam gained a close-up sense of what Israeli lives were like. Naturally, she came to know some of the regular customers fairly well. She learned through observation about the specific elements of life that cultivated entitlement, sociability and opportunity, those particular ones that left Israelis with an inconspicuous recognition of their own advantage. It made her feel wanting; she was not an unmoving passive rock. She could see and understand these things and she wished that her family could live this way and have some of the same things. Everyday she saw how well they dressed and how well they ate. Jenna asked her if she resented the opportunities had by the Israelis she served coffee to and cleaned up behind.

"We must learn to accept certain things," she said. "We all know the way things are."

It bothered Jenna that Mariam could bury her indignation in such a way. She found her to be too cautious and too complacent. She didn't want Mariam to be that way. She didn't want her to seem so compliant. At least she could show some degree of outrage! Jenna rejected her entire way of thinking and did not fail to tell her so.

"I don't accept that they have more and that we have less. I want to be able to sit where they sit and eat where they eat! I couldn't live with myself if I began to feel as you do. How could I attempt to just go along with conditions that I loathe and

show civility to the very people who dishonor me? I know that you face these people almost everyday, Mariam, and perhaps, in order to protect yourself from their sneers, you lie to yourself. But not for my own sake will I ever lie to myself, even if I have to starve!"

With optimism and naïveté, Mariam simply said, "Peace will come someday. You'll see. It will get better."

"You can't be serious! Peace will come? When? Someday? Oh yeah, but not today. But we are suppose to accept that right? Don't you see, Mariam, that's part of the problem? Everybody thinks we should forget the past and start over again, a fresh start. But that's wrong. What we have to do is remind ourselves not to forget what the Israelis are, what they do, and what they did! They think history starts fresh from the beginning every day, every minute, and that time begins with whatever they propose right then. That's how they trick us. We have to stop falling for it and stand up to it, and say at least to ourselves that nothing has changed, and that what they did to us is still with us! Jenna raised her hand and pointed to her chest. "Still right here in our hearts, until they have real regret."

Mariam shrugged and told Jenna she hoped that one day she would understand.

Mariam died only four months after that visit. Jenna could still remember the place where they sat, the time of day and the tea that they drank- it was spiced with cinnamon and sage- on the morning they had that conversation. She also remembered Mariam's intense tone of acceptance and profound sadness when she said, "We must learn to accept certain things."

One evening Mariam had been asked if she could remain and work some additional hours. The main dining hall had been reserved for a company dinner and there was an unexpected shortage of help. She agreed, in part because she needed the money, but most of all because she was new and afraid of jeopardizing her position. About nine thirty that evening she finished, but she did not reach Ramallah until well after eleven o'clock. Her house was about a half of a mile from the bus route, and an Israeli checkpoint was somewhere in between. Rain had started to fall as she crossed the street and passed a group of apartments that were mostly burnt-out shells; the lots between them were piled with garbage bags. By that time of night there was hardly anyone out on foot. She heard the cry of an alley cat but she felt no fear. Mariam was not afraid of animals. What she feared were human being in the dark of the night. She thought she heard whispers. She was a little panicky and for that reason she began to pick up her pace. Mariam sensed danger and trouble around her, and held on to a hope that somehow she could avoid it walking quickly and not looking towards it. She nervously continued home, but then silently in the persistent rain two dark shapes loomed before her. The sound of an Israeli tongue she was able to hear with clarity. Three shadowy figures detained her before she came upon the station. Mariam stood before them with lowered eyes. She was questioned about violating the curfew. She looked in each direction and saw that the street was virtually empty. Mariam looked in front of her and saw the eerie specter of the lights from her own neighborhood and prayed that these men would just let her pass. Because she was alone and they sensed her panic, they began to harass her. She started to

run...faster and faster. She tripped on a rock and her body gave way under the pain in her ankle. Mariam lay flat in the dirt, afraid to move, eyes pressed shut. A voice in her head kept saying, "If you move, they will kill you." A paralysis of complete horror came into every fiber of her body. She put her head on the dirt and tears filled her eyes. They were now standing above her. A stinging pain ran up her arm as a military boot fell heavily on her motionless hand. One of the soldiers grabbed her up by her scarf and she began to scream as they both touched her. She released a high-pitched call for help. They covered her mouth and she began to cry. They pulled her inside the shed and raped her. When they finished, one of them took off his belt and hit her with it several times. There were welts on her legs, her arms and her back. At one point during the assault she was hit with the belt across her face and her lip was completely split open. She fell unconscious as the footsteps of the soldiers began to die away. When she did not come home, her brothers went searching. The night was blackened by the absence of stars. They could see very little and began to call out the name of their sister. Then they heard a sound of a wounded prey. The sound grew closer and then they came upon a row of trashcans and saw something. It was Mariam! They found her bloodied body lying nearly unconscious about a hundred meters from the checkpoint. They carried Mariam home, and her mother washed her body, trying to remove all the visual traces of the night's turmoil and rub out all signs of that life-changing event.

Other than medicate her and dress Mariam's wounds, there was little else the neighborhood physician could do for her. For the first few days her body shook and she screamed out and slashed about in her bed. Her tormentors had ripped away her untainted approval of a world overseen by a merciful God who simply tested those who believed in Him but nevertheless loved her and hated all forms of violation. They had defiled her innocence and idea of decency. She was simpleminded. Since she came from a family that deeply loved her, Mariam innocently thought everyone she met would give in to her basic good nature. Her thinking was naïve.

Her mother could only stand by and weep, unable to offer any meaningful consolation.

Mariam fell apart, broke down and disintegrated emotionally. She sobbed hard with the piercing memory of the attackers in her body. In her sleep the ground would divide and they would ascend from the muddy earth and rape her again and again. Her rape was an assault against her body and her mind. It hovered over her like a shadow incapable of detaching itself. Her body healed but her mind sustained injuries beyond reparation. Violence invaded her brain like an irreversible tumor. One night Mariam's mother awoke from a nightmare of her own. For some reason she hastily got up and flipped on the light switch. She looked at her daughter who was awake and sitting up in the bed. She saw a telling look in her eyes; she saw madness.

Night after night her mother listened to Mariam's fierce uncontained weeping, the torturous destruction of her mind that exploded into insanity. She'd lay her daughter across her lap and rocked her as if she were a baby.

In the days that followed the attack Mariam remained in her home. Most of the time she lay motionless in bed, staring as if she were viewing something directly in

front of her. It was like she was seeing something that no one else could see. Members of her family tried to pray for her, they read to her, they talked to her- all in attempts to bring her back to some level of reality. It appeared to be of no use, and they eventually began to think that maybe it was better to leave her alone, wherever she'd gone within herself. She went from one level of psychosis to another. The person that now existed behind Mariam's face was not the cheery, young girl that they once knew. Her mother would peer into her eyes and wonder just how deep she was locked within herself. She wondered how deep could one actually go.

Then more nightmares came that were worse than her silence. She'd dream of snake hissing around her body. Her mother had never heard anyone put a wail into a whisper. "Snake," she kept saying. She'd kick her legs believing that it was ascending up her body. It would continue to rise, and wait there. She'd try to hit it off her body but it would wrap itself around her neck as soon as she tired. When she was too afraid to move, it would squeeze itself there, she'd hold her scream. When she could no longer breath a savage shriek would raise from her throat, "Get it off! Get it off!"

Her mother awoke one night, with a strange feeling and went to check on her daughter. She saw no light at the bottom of the bathroom door. She knocked. Mariam did not make a sound. She slowly opened the door and whispered her name. Stepping inside, a knot like feeling expanded in her stomach. She walked inside, flicking the light switch on the wall. She blinked at the horrific sight of her daughter hanging from a steel pipe. A chair lay kicked over on its side. Her breath left her. She leaped to her side, grabbing her around her leg and lifting to take her weight off the rope, praying to hear her breathe. Her mother's mouth became twisted with shock and pain, distorted by the realization that her daughter was dead. She almost passed out from the effort to control her shock.

"No" Safa shouted in a chilling plea. "Why my Mariam? Please God, why my Mariam?"

Mariam's brother, Ali, ran into the room and hastily helped his mother remove the body from the steel pipe. The mother's first fear was now a reality. There was no pulse, no sign of life. Mariam's tongue hung out and her eyes were the eyes of the dead unleashed. Mariam was gone. Her mother hunched down beside her dead child and still shook her daughter and pulled her arms, trying to resuscitate her by mouth, thrusting her own breath down Mariam's throat as she begged Allah not to let this be.

"Mariam! Mariam! Mariam! She screamed. When Ali pulled his mother and tried to pry her away from the body, she tossed him off as he scrambled to grab different parts of her.

"Mamma," Ali begged, "Let me have her!"

"Leave her alone!" she screamed. Tears fell down Ali's face and as he backed away from the place Safa continued shake her daughter, shivering. With the help of a neighbor, Ali was finally able to wrestle his mother away from the body. Safa turned and looked straight and long into Ali's eyes, "Is my daughter really gone?"

Mariam died. Perhaps after being among the living she'd decided that the dead are not always bad company.

When Jenna, with a mind of little understanding, thought of suicide she thought of a Mariam Fadi, who in a moment of desperation took it upon herself to end her own life.

Her death was shocking to Jenna and it was wholly unexpected. For many weeks it did not seem real. It was so sad and unfair. She was the kind of young woman who was inclined to characterize decisive insults into misunderstandings. In the end her own naïveté cost her everything. When Jenna came home from school that awful day, her mother told her that Mariam had died. The funeral would be that evening. Jenna asked about the cause of her death but for some reason it remained unknown to her mother and the rest of the people in the neighborhood. Eventually Jenna found out how she died. Rape is not something any family wishes to make public. Mariam's abuse was concealed. Many knew about the beating but very few knew about the rape. After she died the true events leading to her death were made public. Her family no longer wanted anything hidden. They wanted everyone to know what had happened to her. The story made its way into a neighborhood newspaper. The article, on the front page suddenly took her mother by surprise. "*Palestinian girl commits suicide*". Salsan gasped after reading the name. She covered the page with her hands. Jenna saw her mother in shock and reached for the paper. "...Following a brutal beating and rape the month before...mental breakdown.... hung herself in the early morning hours."

Jenna's body became suddenly frozen. The words bolded and plunged into her eyes. She rocked herself back and forth, mumbling "*Oh my God, oh my God!*"

Jenna pulled herself away from the table and headed for her room, laboriously holding herself erect. In her disarrayed mind, she saw herself putting her feet, one in front of the other, on the cement floor, moving herself forward. Her body felt not anything at all.

Salsan immediately put on her sweater and left for the Fadi house. What she found there was a woman beyond being an object of pain, but a thing tormented. In the sight of someone who had suffered just as she, Mariam's mother thought only of her daughter, or rather what she had become before she decided to end a life that mimicked hell. She suddenly remembered her head slumped to one side with her mouth hanging open, as if to breathe the last breath. Having been aroused by the silence, she regained possession of herself and turned calmly to Salsan.

"What do I do?" Mariam's mother asked.

Salsan knew what to tell her. She'd experience enough grief in her own life to make her an expert on how to survive. She moved herself closer and peering into her face with a pitiable expression, took her by the hand.

"You go on," she said. "You ask God to give you the strength to do what Mariam couldn't. You ask Him to give you the means to survive.

"You know that I have felt what you are feeling. When my husband and my niece were murdered, I searched for a way to make some sense out of what happened to them. I sat trying to make sense out of something so senseless. Then one day I realized that there is no excuse for what happened to them and looking

for one wasn't going to bring them back. I looked around and I was the only parent my children had left. That meant I had to be strong. Somebody was going to have to raise those kids. That person was me so I had to leave God to deal with those at fault."

"But what about the way she died?" Safa cried. "Do you think God will forgive my daughter? You know what our religion says about people who kill themselves. They will rot in hell, feeling the pain of their suicide over and over again!"

She was now beside herself with grief.

"No!" Salsan said as she held her friend firmly. "Your daughter was not the person in that bathroom that night. Your daughter was a sweet and innocent girl, one of the finest I've ever known. She was so innocent that she believed that most people would rather help than harm another person. That Mariam left you the night those men hurt her. So why would God punish Mariam? Why would God add to what she has already suffered?"

"You must be right. It must be so!" Now Safa was breaking down her words, choking out in intervals between sobs.

She tilted her head in the direction of the bathroom where Mariam died. Salsan looked to the old woman who was unearthly pale, but still striking in age and sorrow. She waited for her speak again and when she did, she looked directly into her face. Her gaze was so strong and sorrowful. Salsan looked down sometimes hoping to avoid showing the pity that crowded her eyes. Safa went back to the day Mariam hung herself. "There was something different that evening. It was too quiet. Mariam did not twist and turn in her bed. She seemed calm. Still, I kept looking in on her. I felt that there was something strange, something wrong, even though everything was so quiet.

Even as she lay there dead, we couldn't believe it. She was alive and now she was gone, just like that. I mother cannot believe that she will live to see her child in such a way, she does not envision her child dead. Even now my mind tells me that there has been some mistake even though my hearts knows something else.

"I'm so very sorry"

"She only wanted to work so that she could help out and save a little money. Mariam was so smart. She loved to learn. In high school, she never missed a day unless classes were cancelled and she graduated second in her class. She thought that so might take a few classes at the university with the extra money and get a better job later on.

Across from they were sitting was a diploma hanging on the wall. Safa looked at it and shook her head. "It all seems so pointless now."

"No Safa! It was not pointless at all, not Mariam's diploma or the way she lived her life. Each day she lived, every good deed she did was a testimony to God, and what a wonderful girl she was.

As soon as Salsan spoke these words she questioned her own faith. Had she said these words with absolute conviction or was it only a mere recitation of an enforced belief? Looking back on her own life she wondered, too many times, if God was merciful why had her husband been taken in such a horrible way? What

about Hanna? Why had she, herself, been sentenced to such unbearable loneliness?"

She always regretted such thoughts. They were mere bouts of weakness and she always asked God to forgive her.

Then in a faithful voice that seems to come out of a wholly different place from where Safa's heart had pined moments before. With conviction she proclaimed, "God doesn't give us a burden greater than we can bear. He knew Mariam had suffered too much. That's why he took her. In the end her life was consumed with hate and torture. In paradise she will find the merciful peace she deserved. That's what my Mariam deserved, a peaceful and beautiful place."

The spell cast by her voice and the piercing look within her eyes subdued Salsan's inclination to speak any more about sorrow.

Salsan stayed for a few more hours. Safa made coffee and they spent the rest of the evening talking about ordinary things that were totally unrelated to death and the problems of the Palestinians. Sometimes only silence consumed the minutes. When one did not speak of pain and death, there was not, often much to speak of. For a while they looked at the television. There was a program being aired on inner city life in New York. Part of the presentation was directed on the situation of the homeless. Homeless shelters in the Bronx shelters were under heavy criticism for forcing families to sleep overnight on the floors of their centers, a problem that continued and increased. They listened with dismay about the story of the tragic death of a 16-year-old boy in a homeless shelter in Harlem. His story provoked anger as well as sadness among millions of Americans who'd heard of his story. The young man named Jason, who had been diagnosed as suffering from schizophrenia. He killed himself on Monday, August 5 by swallowing every pill he could find in his family's room at the Dawn Hotel, where they had been staying for the past week.

This suicide was far more than a senseless tragedy, however. The circumstances showed that it had been triggered by a horrendous combination of bureaucratic insensitivity and disdain on the part of the political authorities for the poorest division of the working class. Moreover, the procedures that led to Jason's death were themselves the product of a more fundamental crisis of the profit system. Jason's depression and anxiety first materialized a few years ago, when he was in the seventh grade. Their father, Eric Wilson, was raising him and his 10-year-old sister Lani. Mr. Wilson, now 48, had been diagnosed with leukemia in 1996, and had gone through complicated treatment, including a bone marrow transplant two years ago.

The young man's psychiatric problems, surfacing soon after his father's illness, significantly worsened in that past year, after the family was evicted from its home in Brooklyn and began shuttling between various relatives. This led to their entry into New York's coldhearted and broken-down shelter system. Mr. Wilson and his two children went to the city's Emergency Assistance Unit seeking emergency help.

For nearly the past decade, all of the city's shelter entry points have been consolidated into this one location in the Bronx. Despite court orders insisting that

authorities end the practice of forcing families to sleep overnight on the floors of this center, it has continued and increased in recent months, as growing unemployment has produced growing homelessness.

This is the situation that confronted the Wilson family on July 25. They had to wait for many hours to be seen, and were finally transported by bus to a Bronx shelter at 4 o'clock the next morning. By 6 am, they had been sent back to the Emergency Assistance Unit (EAU) to reapply on the new day of July 26.

They were among hundreds who had to wait at the EAU. Fire protection regulations limit the number inside the unit to 330, and no one is allowed to spend the night at this location. According to the city's own records, however, 966 people waited at the EAU on August 5, and this number included 139 families, with 196 children, who stayed overnight and tried to sleep on floors or benches.

Mr. Wilson and his two children wound up spending two days and one night at the EAU, before they were sent to the Harlem shelter hotel where they were housed for the next 10 days. Their mistreatment at the hands of the shelter system was far from over, however. The Wilson's stay at the shelter was "conditional," while the city's Department of Homeless Services investigated whether they were actually homeless.

Meanwhile, Mr. Wilson applied for food stamps at a welfare center on July 30. He had been incapable of working since his bone marrow transplant. The food stamp request was turned down, however, with the notation by a caseworker, "Eligibility could not be determined without additional documentation." The authorities insisted that Mr. Wilson produce his children's birth certificates as well as evidence that he had legal custody. These papers had been lost when they were turned out from their home.

On the night of August 4, a Sunday, the family had to report to the EAU, where they were given a deadline of 5:30 p.m. the following day to produce the necessary documents or else lose their current shelter, inadequate as it was, and return to the degrading conditions at the Bronx EAU.

On August 5, the family rushed from one office to another, seeking replacements of the Social Security cards for the children and court records showing that Mr. Wilson had been granted guardianship of Jason and Lani nine years earlier. The records could not be retrieved until the following day. According to his father, "Jason panicked. He said, 'Dad, what we going to do?'"

The Legal Aid Society called the Department of Homeless Services to see to it that the family received an extension of time to stay at the Harlem shelter hotel, but Jason, obviously overwrought and driven over the edge, was found by his father at 4 p.m. surrounded by empty medicine bottles. An angry and grief-stricken Eric Wilson later said, "My son committed suicide because we were being threatened with being sent back to the EAU.... Jason was terrified of going back there. It's a revolting place. It's humiliating and dehumanizing."

Salsan and Safa could not believe what they were hearing and what they were seeing. It was not what they expected to see in the streets of America. This was not what they expected from such a rich and powerful country that allowed millions of dollars to aid the economy of Israel

The news commentator said that no family should have to face these conditions. In the Wilson's situation, court orders that call for a swift shelter placement for "medically fragile" families were also disregarded. The administrators charged with caring for the homeless cannot claim ignorance of the circumstances. The screening form filled out when the Wilson family went to the EAU on July 25 noted Jason's medical history. Several letters from physicians at the Payne Whitney Clinic were attached to the records, including one from a doctor who warned that the boy's health was worsening because of "environmental instability, including threats of homelessness and poverty."

The final assault on this family came when it took 38 minutes for an ambulance to arrive at the hotel. Records show that Mr. Wilson called the 911 emergency phone number frantically at 4:13 p.m. At first the call was given a low priority, but another call two minutes later spelling out the emergency did not lead to any upgrading. The ambulance did not arrive until 4:51. By that time Mr. Wilson had managed to get another ambulance, which took Jason to Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center, arriving at 4:45. By then it was too late.

Salsan wondered, "If this is all the help that America can offer its own what possible chance do the Palestinians have for any real assistance?" She shook her head searching for some reason to understand why a society as rich and generous would leave a boy like Jason in this kind of poverty. In a country as plentiful as America, why was all of its wealth not more widely shared? Was it some kind of mistake?

Neither said anything but both, understandably, wondered about the fate of this child and their own children if they'd had the chance of a kind and plentiful life. How might their lives have been different if they have become the designated inheritors of a chosen nation?

Finally, Salsan got up. She put on her sweater and then Safa took her hands. "We have had our troubles. But it was not our fault. We are good people." It seemed important to convey this feeling to Salsan before she left.

Salsan opened the door. "I am only a few minutes away. I can come anytime you want." She promised Safa, her hands cupping her face; her eyes fastened unwavering on the old woman's eyes. "Just call me!" Salsan urged.

"I will be fine."

"You will. I know you will, but you need to know that you are not alone."

"But I am alone." Safa said bitterly.

"No you are not! You have your sons and all of your friends. Most of all you have God, and He doesn't leave us. Not for one second."

To add to this grieving mother's pain was the fact that her eldest son, Ali had sworn revenge. From the day his sister died he had a haunted look in his eye and spoke of nothing but making those soldiers pay. It became the only aim for him. Unbeknown to his mother, he'd already borrowed an automatic weapon from a friend. Salsan did not know what to say, how to look, how to even move. The talk of a revenge killing took her back in time. It took her back to a moment when the settling of scores harmed her family more than it had done any good. It took her back to a time when her behavior was instinctual but not rational.

When Salsan returned home, she seemed somber and said very little. She sat with a bowed head, not wanting to speak. She could not even talk to Jenna. Salsan laid herself down on the sofa with closed eyes, but the muscles of her forehead twitched every now and then, as one thinking deeply and solemnly. Jenna felt it better to leave her mother alone, and Salsan longed to be alone with her thoughts, as she was being forced to connect to a still irreconciled part of her past.

Less than a month later, Anwar, a friend of Ali's drove his automobile slowly to the checkpoint near the place of Mariam's attack. It was dark and only minutes before curfew. As expected Anwar was ordered to exit his car and then he was frisked. Also, as expected, he was ordered to unlock the trunk. The soldiers followed him to the back of the vehicle. He pretended to obey, but his thought was only to see their blood spilled. When the trunk was unlocked Anwar stepped back. As the rear hood popped up so did Ali, unleashing bullets into the head and chest of both soldiers. As they lay on the ground he fired another bullet into each one, got into the car and sped away. Ali stood above the bodies and breathed in deeply. People came outside and saw those men lying on the ground covered with blood; most returned to their homes and did nothing at all. It took about a half of an hour for an ambulance to come. For the few moments they endured, they too sounded like wounded prey.

Mariam's death was classified a suicide, "the intentional taking of one's life." Nevertheless, most of those who became acquainted with the circumstances surrounding her death came to know that it was not a case of suicide at all, including Jenna. The true definition of suicide was the act or an instance of taking one's own life voluntarily and intentionally, especially by a person of years of discretion and of sound mind. The newspaper article made it obvious for everyone to understand that Mariam Fadi did not intentionally take her own life. There was nothing voluntary about her insanity; there was nothing voluntary about her hanging. It was clearly a case of assault and rape that took away the soundness of this innocent girl's mind.

Jenna found herself overwhelmed with grief for her friend. Her own situation in life gave her little disturbance compared to Mariam's and she looked to herself with reproach on this account. For sure Jenna bewailed her own situation and the ruin of losing those she loved, but the violation of the body was also the rape of a soul. It sickened everything within her. Her reflections of the past came back to haunt her with a vengeance, sights horrid and detestable. Abhorrence to the place she live and what must be endured weighed on her, and within this place in time she was changing. Under the influences of sorrow for Mariam, for herself, for a life to pitiful to endure, she acquired a hardened heart and a wretched spirit that seem to find an impassable shelter within the confines of her soul. Her history, her faith, her powerlessness-all told her that she must turn to god for His mercy and His guidance, but she found herself unable to speak a word to Him. Several nights later, in anger and in desperation, in a burst of tears she shouted, "Oh God, for what purpose were we born?"

Classifying the cause of Mariam's death as a suicide seemed insulting to Jenna and the people of Ramallah now that the circumstances her surrounding her death

were out in the open. It did not give fair weight to the events that led up to her demise. Suicide negated her being a victim and that is how her rapist's would have it. You see, to believe Mariam to be a victim is to believe as well that there is a victimizer. It forces one to acknowledge the fact that this Palestinian girl was oppressed, and that there must be an oppressor and that the things that are happening to young women like Mariam are not just tragic and accidental, but purposely committed by the participants in a system that derives satisfaction from unmitigated violence, and who stand to benefit from their behavior. These were the ideas that were expressed in the daily commentaries that came in every Arab neighborhood newspaper.

The Arab cable news network stated similar views and went even further. "The recognition that this behavior is purposely formulated creates a danger in the conscience of Western society and their diplomats. The Americans and the British will no longer be able to pretend that they do not see dead babies, mothers made homeless by bulldozers, and untried, but executed bodies of young men in the streets. They will be forced to acknowledge that one group of people are allowed due process while another group of people are not. Ariel Sharon's grandchildren will have to recognize that their grandfather's hands are saturated with the blood of innocent human beings. They will know the price of pain that their tranquility, their advantage and their economic muscle is built upon. And the world will nod in agreement that the state of Israel is nourished with injustice and erected on misery. The dangers that these proclamations convey is not allowed, but sequestered from the Western consciousness. The party line is: One thing has nothing to do with the other."

This was the period that marked the end of a age of naiveté for Jenna and the beginning of a new perception in her mind. The concept of justice seemed a far distance from reality. The reality remained, as always, in being Palestinian.

In the end of fall, just as winter drew near, a whole series of events brought changes to her life, although few were for the better.

Jenna never expected to become a member of a radical organization. She was religious but not an extremist. She wanted change, but she never considered herself revolutionary. However, she understood early on that those of her generation were being drawn into the resistance movement, which has the force of a strong tide. Without warning they found themselves suddenly submerged, unable to be released from its current.

As a young girl, she'd watch the little children pick through the rubble for their toys after the Israeli demolition crews finished their task. She'd see soldiers run after kids who threw rocks. Her brothers and sisters were never allowed to throw rocks or make any gestures whatsoever at the military personnel. Jenna's mother kept a watchful eye over all of them, and she was obsessive in her stern warning. In the end, her warnings were heeded by everyone but by the oldest Sammy, and Jenna, the youngest. Salsan was a mother who made sure that Jenna studied hard and learned English well, hoping that, in the event Jenna survived her childhood, she would become a teacher or perhaps a writer, or even an advocate for social

justice. Salsan's ideas about education, like all her other ideas, were very set and specific. She was diligent because the responsibility was hers alone, so she taught her children to listen when they were spoken to, she spanked them when any of them told lies, and she educated her children in the religious fundamentals that allowed them to have faith in God. Regardless, Jenna would become, by a grotesque sequence of Israeli injustices, one component in a vicious political machine that patterned and polished her to act. It was a machine that would eventually force her against the wishes of her mother, who loved her unconditionally, but preferred that she compromise her integrity and steer clear from opposition and response. As much as her mother tried to shield her, Jenna would have had to been confined to a vegetative state not to react to the external environment in which she was reared.

In a single-parent household, poor and situated inside a political volcano, their lives were naturally tense and troubled. Despite all of the hours Jenna spent on movies, cartoons and stories with happy endings, she recognized clearly that the dreams that fired her imagination were hopelessly beyond her reach- so beyond her reach that she felt ashamed and foolish for even wishing. Inside her home, particularly around her mother, she pretended to pass time in a cheerful disposition, appearing secure and content. Her mother was everything to her and she never wanted to hurt her. However, beyond the door of her home Jenna could be cold and indifferent with some people. She did not like showing her true feelings and would rather appear self-involved than open her guarded heart to anyone. It was as though she alternated between two characters, each carefully scripted.

Jenna wasn't always this way, but things happen. No matter how much a mother or a father tries to categorize a child's life, to a large extent the child is still at the mercy of outside elements. A lot of Jenna's pain, her frustration, and her social disconnection came from beyond the door, outside that safe haven called home. Things just aren't sterile and unspoiled outside, where so much of life occurs when your mother isn't looking. She was often even irritated at her own developing sense of independence fostered by occasion and incident. As an emerging young woman she could choose to ask or demand, submit or refuse; marked by all sorts of willfulness, impulses, and traits, as if she were independent. But she had not really lost her dependency or her fragility. She was not truly ready to accept the cares that, until then, were overseen by her mother's guidance and authority. What perplexed her was that all around her was this world that was consistently coercing her to be in negation of all Salsan's maternal efforts. Once she began interacting with the world presented to her, she became subjected to the forces that be. Each incident or experience became a link in a chain that would eventually determine who she was. As little as one link in that chain could alter everything.

For Jenna it was a whole series of links, revoltingly connected. One of them was attached permanently to the morning Israeli demolition crews entered the village of Beit Eil and began bulldozing homes. Her best friend Dina Hammadi lived in one the houses scheduled to be taken down. When the soldiers gave the order to vacate or be leveled along with the building, Dina, her parents and one of her brothers came out and stood beyond the door. Dina's youngest brother, Kamal, had been

sent away. A member of the demolition crew approached the father, Abu Malik, and told him that he had received an order to vacate the premises and his family would have to leave immediately. On route to his bulldozer he turned and looked back at the four who stood there, hand in hand, and said, "Please just move. We have an order to take down the house. Nobody needs to get hurt. Just take your family and go away." Abu Malik began to shout, spewing all his anger. He could be heard all the way down the road. A huge crowd had already gathered.

Dina and Jenna had spent several hours together the day before. She sat in Dina's home along with her mother. They pleaded with the family to pack their things and comply with the order. Abu Malik was adamant about not leaving. He said that his wife and the children were free to go wherever they wanted to, but he was not about to just leave the house that he was born in. Jenna sat across from her friend as Abu Malik echoed that words that reflected all of their sentiments. Dina turned to her father confidently and nodded in agreement. Jenna knew enough about her stubbornness to realize that she too would stand there in defiance with her Abu Malik, unwilling to walk away.

Even at the age of twelve Dina was much more concerned with the social conditions and the political atmosphere than Jenna or any of their other playmates. She never spoke of escaping it or minimizing the affect of being an imposition in the presence of the Israelis; she was the kind who always wanted to fight back. Her father always compared her to his eldest son, Zechariah, who Abu Malik said was born with the spirit to fight. It was this spirit that actually led to the friendship between their two families, a relationship that began at an airport in Tel Aviv when Jenna was only twelve. Her brother, Sammy, and Dina's brother, Zechariah, were both scheduled to board the same plane, on route to Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion had provided many Palestinians the opportunity to join other Muslims from all over the world in the participation of a common cause, which was jihad, a struggle to rid a Muslim land of a transgressor. It also was a chance for the kind of military training that would eventually prove useful in their own homeland once they returned.

Dina's brother was noticed by recruiters for the Afghani war because of his participation and dedication to the Intifadah in the mid-eighties. Were one to follow him, one would see those who worked alongside of Zechariah cared for him a lot. They loved his spirit and his willingness to sacrifice anything. His personality was a combination of charisma, dedication, and kindness, which made him an admired young man. His friends simply called him Zakki. Intrepid, resolute and accustomed to self-command, he was held involuntarily in high esteem. From an early age Zakki was submissive to the cause, which stemmed from his principles and from respect of duty. When he spoke, it went to every open space in the heart, and he was not ashamed to be intense and weep with passion. To his comrades he was remarkable. By way of his words, he expressed their feelings of betrayal and isolation and for this they loved him. Those who suggested to him that the Palestinians were in need of peace more than resistance, he'd tell them that Palestine and all Islamic lands must be freed from all foreign domination, that this is the natural right belonging to the Muslim people and that only an oppressor or

exploiter would deny it. He said that armed struggle was the only avenue to the establishment of a true Islamic state in Palestine and elsewhere. As long as this did not emerge, the Muslims in totality were committing a sin and were responsible before God for their failure to establish one.

Zakki becoming a soldier seemed to be a case of natural selection. Dina had his same backbone. Jenna's own brother, Sammy, was somewhat different. As concerned as he was about the plight of his people, he was never encouraged by the behavior of the confrontation coalitions. Sammy was an ordinary guy who wanted an ordinary life. His personal goals included a wife and many children. It did not include a war in a land he knew very little about. Jenna's brother was going to Afghanistan because he had to. Sammy had to leave because he took revenge for the deaths of his father and his fiancée. Had he'd stayed, he more than likely would have been arrested, tortured and executed by the Israeli police. This was a chance Jenna's mother was unwilling to take, and thus a quick decision was made out of fear for his life.

Sammy and his fiancée had been born in the same year and from that time it was their parents' wish that they marry when they grew up. Her name, Hanna, meant happiness, and her disposition made her name seem appropriate. She had always been a generous person who could have never harmed anyone, readily blaming herself when others were at fault. Sammy used to tell her that she was too soft, too apologetic. He attributed this behavior not to the lack of will, but to the respect she had for the feelings of others. Sammy felt very lucky to have been blessed with someone whose feelings and disposition so closely mirrored his own. As a cousin, he was raised around Hanna, and there could be very little hidden in her personality. Even during turmoil in the occupied territories, their engagement was a wonderful distraction, and they were both excited about relocating to America after their wedding. Sammy would study chemical engineering, and Hanna would make them a new home.

Lately, however the resistance movement proved to be overwhelming. Young men were being arrested, shot, or beaten in the streets. The resistance mandated the constant attending of funerals.

Sammy found Hanna disheartened on the evening everything would change. He asked her why was she so sad. She didn't respond but just stood there listening to the sound of gunfire from the balcony. It was as if she could feel her fate. Moments later she said, "Every time one of us goes out of the door I wonder if it is going to be for the last time. I just wish that this could all be over." Sammy tried to reassure, her but he could see that her mood that evening was not likely to change.

They joined the rest of the family for tea. He tried to distract his fiancée with talk of America and what their first home together would be like. Later on Sammy had to leave, as he worked on the late shift at a local factory.

He went on his way and found the street quiet and still; there were few people in sight. With all of the violence, the occupants of the city rarely ventured out late at night. The fear of detention by Israeli soldiers set them on edge and robbed them of their sense of calm.

When he returned home he saw the house in a complete state of disarray; glass and blood covered the floor. There was light from the back bedroom accompanied by chilling sobs. He followed the cries, and found his grandfather being comforted by their neighbors. He knew something terrible must have happened.

"Where have you been?" his grandfather cried with tears running down his face. The old man clutched his chest sobbing as Sammy tried to hold him still. His breathing was labored enough for Sammy to become fearful.

"What's wrong Grandfather? What happened?"

"It is bad, Sammy!" the old man wailed. "Your father is dead, Sammy. They killed my son!" he screamed.

Unable to fathom those words, Sammy ran room to room calling out for his father. He went in vain. Everyone in the room stared at him in wretchedness.

He returned to his grandfather shaken, "What happened to my father?"

Now his grandfather was breaking down, his words choking out in intervals between sobs.

"It was Benjamin. He came here drunk with men with guns. He shot him in his head!"

Out of sadness, out of frustration, and out of hope, Sammy began to hit his fist up against the wall again and again until his grandfather walked over and held him. They stood there together and wept. Moments later Sammy asked about Salsan, "Where is Momma?"

His grandfather faced him reluctantly and answered, "She's at the hospital." Sammy became crazy, "Why is she at the hospital? Was she hurt too?"

"No," he answered, "she was not hurt."

When his grandfather turned his face aside and buried it inside his hands, Sammy knew that there was something being concealed, something his grandfather could not easily disclose.

"Tell me now! Why is my mother at the hospital? Just say it grandfather! If my mother is hurt, I must know now!"

"It was Hanna," he cried, gripping Sammy's collar with his frail hands. "She was shot too. I don't know Sammy; it looked really bad."

Sammy went running out of the door. He legs would not carry him as fast as he wished to go. The whole way there he just kept praying that he would find her alive.

The events of that night were the result of an outstanding bitterness rooted in a time before Sammy and Hanna were barely out of their cribs. Jenna's father, Bassam, was the owner of a bakery in Jerusalem. For years he baked bread and made Middle Eastern desserts. One day he was told that he could no longer have a business there. His permit to conduct business was revoked, and ownership of the shop taken away. He protested but there was no court that would rule in his favor. A man named Benjamin now claimed a right to the life he'd created for himself.

Benjamin offered Jenna's father employment. Who was better qualified? He could not refuse and grudgingly stayed on because he had a wife and children to support. For years they were civil to each other although they never liked each

other. How could a bond of friendship be forged between two individuals whom fate had declared as enemies before they had even met?

The Intafada began to increase the strain on an already fragile and detested relationship. Benjamin criticized Bassam about petty things and became insulting, sometimes flying into a rage over nothing at all. Bassam held his tongue and ignored Benjamin's remarks.

The day finally came when he could no longer ignore his comments. Benjamin had been pressuring Bassam to work more hours with no increase in pay. Bassam told him that the long hours he already worked, along with the bus ride into the city, allowed him very little time to spend with his family. Benjamin responded by saying that he'd done him a favor by allowing him to remain there and work. He even accused him of stealing items from the bakery. Bassam was insulted by the accusation and told him that he could go to hell and take the job with him. He collected all that he was entitled by laws to take, which were an apron and a prayer rug. He slammed the door behind him so hard that the glass cracked. Benjamin came running behind him screaming obscenities and demanding that he pay for the door. Jenna's father responded, "It's my door, I built it with my hands. It's you that should be paying me."

"Soon we shall be rid of all you filthy people," Benjamin retorted.

Jenna's father shook his head and kept on walking down the street. Benjamin returned to the store and closed it for the day. He drove to a bar around the corner from his home. It was where his son worked and his soldier friends congregated. There he found sympathetic ears and attitudes that did not differ from his own. In spent his entire afternoon drinking and complaining about Bassam and the Palestinians, in general. In his drunken stupor Benjamin could not speak without lying. He went on and on about his ungrateful employee who he allowed to work for him even though he stole.

The men became incited. Benjamin bragged that the next time he saw Bassam; he would make him regret being in this world. Someone suggested that they drive out to his home and teach the guy a lesson. Benjamin did not need much coaxing. In a matter of minutes two Israeli army reservists, Benjamin, and his son were inside the car on their way to Ramallah.

Hanna was in the kitchen cleaning the dishes before returning to her own home for the evening. Bassam's family sat in the living room talking about the possibility of opening a produce and bakery shop near home. Salsan thought that it would be a very good idea. With a shop near to home, she could make herself available to help him. All of a sudden there was a loud noise, and the front door shook. Bassam's youngest son Ahmad ran to open the door, failing to heed his father's warning to wait. Benjamin and the other men came storming inside brandishing weapons and shouting threats and obscenities.

Benjamin grabbed Bassam's son first. His eyes were hard and red with craze, the muscles tightening around his mouth and neck. He pushed the barrel of the gun up under Ahmed's chin and pulled the hammer back. His mother's legs became soft. Salsan thought she'd fall down. She held herself up against a table. She began to quietly weep.

"Please, please leave him alone. He is only a child!"

In that horrible second Jenna thought her brother was going to die.

Benjamin thumbed the hammer back and edged the pistol from under Ahmad's face. He rested the gun in his hand at the side of his body. Acting on the instinct of a fearless young girl, Jenna leaped in his direction but her mother held onto her shoulder.

The other three men held the family at bay with pistols and knives as Benjamin walked around the living room. "In all these years I've never seen how you live. This is not too bad." He walked over to a bookshelf and ran his fingers across one of the shelves. "Clean, very clean," he remarked. "Like my mother's house. You could eat off her floor." His son nodded in agreement.

An angry reaction from Jenna's father at this intoxicated spectacle was tempered only by the weapons held in the hands of his enemies and the fear in the eyes of his children.

Benjamin cursed Bassam. He told him that he was ungrateful and called him a filthy thief. Then Bassam looked at him straight in the eye and denounced what he was saying. "You are the filthy thief and more than this, you are a liar. You bake bread in my oven and you hold the keys to my store, a store you never had any right to, and you call me a thief?"

Benjamin went insane and began throwing things on the floor. He picked up a gold plated, framed picture of Jenna's grandmother and smashed it into the floor. He stomped on it and then bent over to retrieve the picture and tore it into pieces.

Jenna's mother faded into the background, but her dad who could no longer stand in place. Angered to the point of tears, he lurched forward. Benjamin attacked him with a piece of the broken glass, cutting his cheek with one of the jagged edges. The blood oozed from his face as he clutched his cheek.

"You simple pig," Benjamin muttered. "Now it is a picture that brings you to tears, soon it will be the death of your children."

One of Benjamin's companions was in the kitchen nervously holding a gun to Hanna's head. Bassam leaped toward Benjamin, grabbed his neck, and with the force of all his pent up rage, began choking the intruder. Two of Benjamin's men jumped to his defense. They grabbed Bassam and pinned him down on his knees as they twisted his arms behind his back. Benjamin stood back up on his feet. He drew his weapon again. With all the fear of a cornered mouse, Jenna watched with powerlessness as Benjamin shot her father. The bullets rang out in rapid succession. Bassam slumped over on the floor. His wife was gasped as blood flowed around her husband's neck. His brains could be seen from the back of his head. Almost simultaneously a dish dropped and a single voice screamed in human and persistent horror. Hanna's scream filled the space; Benjamin instantaneously turned his weapon toward the young woman and fired another shot. She too was shot in the head.

Salsan vaulted over to her husband, but there was no sign of life. Bassam was dead, and Hanna lay unconscious on the floor. When the voices of neighbors began to sound in the hallways Benjamin fled and was quickly followed by his companions. He and his partners in crime broke from the front door altogether.

Ahmed began to scream, "Baba", in a loud horrific voice and Jenna began to cry. Salsan ran to them and gathered both to her body so that they could not see their father.

Several neighbors came running up the stairs. One of them warned that if Hanna did not go to the hospital immediately she would die. Another neighbor took off his sweater and covered Bassam's face, not wanting the children to continue looking at what would haunt them for the rest of their lives. Hanna's head was wrapped and she was gently carried to the car, and transported to the hospital.

After two hours a neurologist entered the waiting room with the admissions nurse, who pointed to Hanna's mother. As he walked over to her, she already sensed that the news would not be good. Although they were able to stop the bleeding, the bullet remained lodged into her brain. He went on to say that as soon as the surgeon arrived the operation would proceed. She asked the doctor if he could do it himself, but he apologized and told her that he was not qualified to perform such a complicated task. Hearing this, her heart sank as neighbor's eased her into the chair beneath her. She looked around the room at other mothers seeking care for their children, old men, infants shaky with fever, and men with different parts of their bodies wrapped in gauze. They were all poor, all worn-out, and all Palestinian. One half hour and one flat line later the surgeon arrived just as Hanna's mother was about to collapse with despair. For the moment she had reason to hope.

Sammy arrived at the hospital, located the room, and pushed open the door. A doctor tried to stop him, but he pushed him away. A nurse, Hanna's mother, and Salsan stood by her bed. They all stepped backwards, making way for him.

"Oh my God, this cannot be!" he said in almost a whisper. He stood next to Hanna, struggling with the grief that grew inside of him. He bent over to press his lips against her hand. Sammy trembled as he touched her. Since she'd grown from a young child to a woman he had never touched her; he had never felt the softness of her small hand. He could only wonder if their marital happiness, so carefully planned and so patiently awaited, was who to be destroyed by a maniac's bullet.

All of a sudden he stumbled backward, leaving her hand. All the tenderness that he felt at that moment suddenly vanished and was replaced by anger at what had been done to her. He looked toward his aunt and swore to make the person who did it pay.

Sammy's mother listened to his words and did not attempt to dissuade him from what he intended to do. She knew his thoughts, and they shared the same feeling.

"God's will be done," she said with a sigh. She drew her son near to her, reached into her pocket, and handed him a key. They both only stood in silence; there was no need to speak. Each understood the other's desire. Something had loosened around the fringes of Salsan's mind after the murder of her husband, and watching Hanna's body turn slowly into a corpse did not bring her back to reason, only to the settling of scores.

Sammy walked out of the room stood in the hallway, tears filled his eyes, and the sounds of hospital gurneys and personnel froze. In this brief passage of time he became aware of the disconnection between the surgeons and heart monitors and

his hopes and dreams. He wanted to fall on his knees and pray to God, to beg him to restore his life to what it was the day before, to implore and show him his tears like those of a powerless child who pleads for a parent's pity; to ask for forgiveness of every wrong he ever said or might have done, and bargain for every mercy God might be willing to show him.

Sammy returned home a couple of hours before dawn. He staggered into the living room exhausted by circumstance and grief. On the coffee table sat a family photo album. He flipped open a page as he sat on the couch. The smiles and happiness that filled the page seemed something that existed in another lifetime.

Sammy sat there thinking and thinking. He thought about never seeing his father again and not being able to say goodbye. He thought about Hanna and the bloodied bandage wrapped around her head. And then about his mother and the look she had on her face, the look of something damaged. All of a sudden great sobs broke out of him like a broken dam. He clasped his hands to his face and wept so fiercely that tears streamed down his arms. He fell apart like a limb broken from a tree. It was not just his sorrow he was venting, it was the anguish of a man who lived his life as a caged bird, unable to fly but safely sustained until the cage door is abruptly unlocked and he is forced out into the uncharted and unkind elements of nature.

Deliberation did not calm his rage nor make him coherent. In a rush he washed his face and changed his clothes. His only pressing need was to find Benjamin. He left his home and took a taxi from the Ramallah to the bakery. His heart began to beat violently as he got closer and closer to his destination, his bitterness growing more intense. On his way through the streets all he could imagine were the bullets tearing through his father's and Hanna's heads. Every time he stepped forward he felt the tip of the knife prick against his thigh.

It was still very early, and there was no one around. Sammy crossed the street and peered into the window. There was no one inside. He went around to the back and unlocked the door. He entered the shop and waited, not thinking of being afraid, but only of his tragedy, only of the events that would change his life forever. As he pushed open the door he prayed to Allah, the God of justice, to grant him his revenge.

Half of an hour passed, Benjamin did not arrive. Then he heard a key turn in the lock of the front door; he heard the bell that hung on the door chime, and then the lock being turned again. He watched as Benjamin hung his sweater, moistened his lips with his own saliva, sat down at his desk and ran his hands through his coarse gray hair. Benjamin looked relaxed and unburdened, not at all like a man who had just a few hours earlier murdered Sammy's father in cold blood and left a young girl near death. Benjamin rose from his desk and walked toward the side of the store where the oven was. Sammy watched him for a while, delaying what he knew he must do. He knew that he could not remain passive any longer and worry himself over already answered questions. He knew that he must do the deed, do it quickly, and do it at once.

Danger and the fear of it made him feel like something sharp was cutting into his stomach. But that thought quickly passed when he remembered his fiancée lying in a hospital with a bullet in her skull. He took a deep breath through his nose

and his anger grew like a wild fire. Suddenly he became overwhelmingly determined.

This man who had never committed an act of violence in all of his life reached into his pocket and felt the knife. He held it. It felt heavy in his hands. "This kind of death," he thought to himself, "is for those who have earned it."

Sammy approached Benjamin noiselessly as he sat on a stool measuring ingredients. It reminded him of when he was a child, when he had helped his father, who used to sit on the very same stool and mix flour with oil.

He paused for just a second and wondered if he was about to become a murderer like the man a few feet away, but then he realized that he couldn't be compared, and that it was not him who had created this situation. Sammy was only going to defend his family and extract the justice that he knew that Israeli society would never give him. How could he be liable? The State alone was responsible for the degradation of all his senses. For the very first time in his life, Sammy realized that decisions about wrong or right can be entirely beside the point. Justice necessitates certain circumstances. His father was murdered in cold blood and he had to act.

Hesitating no longer, he reached the object of his hatred and drew the knife, raising it into position before he was even aware of his own movement. Benjamin turned in time to see his fate. Sammy pushed the knife into his back and withdrew it. The vile figure shivered like a leaf as he fell. He did not utter a word. Sammy bent over and grabbed him by the back of his hair, pulling his head back, and then whipped the knife around his neck, severing his jugular vein. Sammy let go of his hair and dropped the face into the pool of blood, feeling the life go out of him, like dirty water that empties from a bathtub when the plug is pulled. Sammy stood up and kicked the body over and looked down into his victim's face; his eyes were vicious and shiny like cat's eyes.

He cleaned the bloody knife off on Benjamin's shirt and returned it to his jacket. For a few moments Sammy remained. He just stood there looking at his victim. Sammy suddenly remembered coming to work with his father when he was still a boy. He remembered Benjamin being cold and unfriendly, never speaking to him. When Benjamin passed Sammy would say, "Good morning." Benjamin only grunted in response. Finally he realized he needed to move, to get out of there. He walked back to the rear door and exited. He threw the knife into a dumpster near the bus station.

Sammy had now slain, his heart had given birth to a killer's instinct, and the blood of Benjamin now stained everything about him being a compassionate and measured man.

As he rode down the streets of Jerusalem he realized then, more than ever, how insurmountable the huge gulf that existed between the two different peoples that inhabited the land actually was.

Sammy arrived at home a couple of hours later. His face was pale; his eyes glowed as he paced back and forth. His sister, Aaliyah, asked him where he had been. He said that he'd been to the hospital. She told him that he'd left the hospital before dawn. Sammy stared at Aaliyah without seeming to see her. When she asked him how was Hannah, he said that she was okay. Not only did she know that

this was nowhere near the truth, but his tone did not correspond with his expression. It seemed so strange to her, his face was not sad, it was not desperate, it was deranged. It was as if something had been sullied in his nature. He seemed powerless to speak.

"Sammy, talk to me!" She waited for an answer, but Sammy still did not speak coherently.

Jenna entered the room with a bowl of soup and a loaf of bread and placed it in front of Sammy. He trembled as he ate, straining to ward off the memories of the morning. His sister laid a blanket around him, but he didn't look at her. He lowered his head and ate his soup and bread without benefit of taste, picking up each morsel with his fingers but he did not know what he was touching. If anyone had asked him what it was he was eating, he would have answered, in good faith, that he did not know.

Murder and revenge do not encourage an appetite. The more he ate, the more the foods in his mouth seemed to congeal into a rubber ball. Sammy swallowed, forcing it down his throat.

Aaliyah saw blood on his shirt and could not let the matter rest, even with Sammy's persistent silence.

"Momma said you left a few hours ago." Her face was unable to conceal her fear.

Sammy looked up at her and saw her eyeing his bloodstained shirt.

"Sammy, what have you done?" Her tone was becoming more alarmed.

He leaned back on the couch and sobbed, "I don't know, I just walked. I don't believe that Papa is gone and Hannah may die too!"

Aaliyah started to cry as she fell next to him in despair.

"We'll be okay," he promised. He leaned over and reached out to grab her hand in his. She saw blood on his palm. She stepped back. Aaliyah's hand flew to her chest. If she hadn't been already sitting down, she would have collapsed. Her face went white and her body began to tremble. Sammy's eyes narrowed.

"There is something you're not telling me, Sammy! Tell me!"

"Benjamin's dead."

Aaliyah jumped. Her hands flew up against her face and she was breathing rapidly.

After a minute she found her voice, "Oh my God! Sammy, they will kill you!" She grabbed him by his arm and began to shake him. "You've got to tell momma!" Then she released him and frantically walked back and forth across the room. After a few moments Aaliyah returned to the couch and sat close to her brother. She lowered her head and whispered now, "Nothing is going to happen to you, is it Sammy?"

And Sammy could think of nothing to say to her, or offer her any touch of comfort, because they both knew that he would be lying.

Afterwards, he got up and went to his room. He threw himself on his bed and waited for the authorities to come for him. But being arrested was only an

afterthought, the grotesque sight of Benjamin's blood oozing from his body was fixed in Sammy's mind.

When Salsan was told about Sammy's revenge she appeared unresponsive. She did not panic or show any real emotion at all, but simply walked out of the room, went into her bedroom and closed the door.

Hours passed and no one came.

In late afternoon Sammy awoke and sat up in his bed. He looked around in wonder, surprised at finding himself in that place. He made the decision to clear his mind of the morning's events as best he could. He felt no particular remorse for what he'd done. How could he? His father's entire being was now confined to a grave and his fiancée was not far from it.

Sammy was not born with the instincts of an executioner; his instincts were created out of necessity. He was always such a calm young man, always well mannered. As a Palestinian, he'd been provoked on occasion. Israeli children had often thrown rocks at a few of the work crews he had labored with, and he'd been called bad names, but he kept his head because they were only kids. There was the time that an old settler woman had spat on him as she passed. He only looked at her and shook his head. He knew that a man couldn't help who he was and could not renounce what was in his blood. He believed that men are predisposed to certain behaviors, as if imparted to them through their mother's milk. He did not aspire for much in his life and was willing to work hard for little recompense. Sammy was proud just being a Muslim and the son of a good man. The only other thing he aspired to be was a good husband and father one day- if an education could help him to achieve this dream then he was willing to leave his country and make it happen. He would have returned afterwards because what made him feel complete and centered in the world could only be found in Palestine, the place of his birth. Sammy embraced the Arab traditions of practicality and cultural isolation, characteristics unlike the ones that fueled so many others to run away. Of all of his mother's children, it was Sammy who'd chosen the most predictable path, one built around family and religion. Throughout his life, he admired the men who found refuge in the home and sanctity in the mosque. He was apolitical and kept away from extremism. It was this calamity that had made Sammy lose his presence of mind.

Salsan finally walked throughout her home. There were no viable signs of the evil that had been unleashed there. Bassam's body had been buried and the blood had meticulously been cleaned. She returned directly into her bedroom to reflect on this sordid chapter in her life. Her head started to whirl in the circle of events that had transpired in the last twenty-four hours. She sat alone at the foot of her bed holding the sides of her head trying to push back the flashes of the moments everything fell apart, but each time she struggled with what had happened she could come to only one certainty, her husband was dead and it was real, and it was final. And then there was the situation with Sammy. He'd killed Benjamin and she believed that he might die for it. She sat there thinking what she should do next.

"What happened?" she asked herself. "How did it happen to us?"

She and her family had kept steadfastly to a quiet, traditional existence. They were hardworking and practical, exactly what they were expected to be, and they behaved exactly like they were supposed to. Yet, instead of being allowed to live in peace, she'd lost Bassam and her world was on the verge of collapsing. How was she to endure this? Salsan grew mindful that she was afraid, more afraid than she had ever been in her life.

Shortly before nightfall, Salsan summoned her children together in her bedroom and extracted a promise from all of them. Young Jenna stood there along the others. Salsan made them swear never to mention Benjamin's name in the same sentence with Sammy's. In a voice fearful and uncompromising she told them that by speaking about Benjamin's death to anyone, they put their brother's life at risk. If anyone asked, they were to say that Sammy was at home during the time Benjamin had died. Their mother's reasons were clear to them. Sammy could give any excuse for his actions. It would make no difference. He would either be sent to prison for the rest of his life or he would be killed before he was even tried in an Israeli court of law. The fact that Benjamin came to their home and murdered their father in cold blood would not even factor into the equation. Salsan's children listened and they obeyed. They never broke their promise. They did not even speak about it among themselves. For the sake of their brother, they'd suppress their rage and their own right to justice in the name of their father and Hanna. They knew that it was a tremendous, but price to pay. What they did not know was that this would only be the down payment. A larger one would come and that would be Sammy himself. The son Salsan knew too well, loved too much, and held too close to her heart would have to go.

At the hospital the news was not good. Surgery did not provide for any real improvement. Three more agonizing days passed. Hanna remained in the same condition. She did not move, nor did she open her eyes. A brain scan showed no activity at all. The doctors said that she would not recover; she was in a relentless vegetative state. They explained that if she were disconnected from the life support machine, she would be unable to breathe on her own. Everyone who viewed her still body, everyone except Sammy, accepted the immediacy of her death. He could not see what the others saw; on the contrary he questioned the doctors and challenged every procedure. With Hanna's hands in his, he'd sit for hour after hour, rarely leaving her side. As the time passed he became more ill tempered with everyone and was suspicious and rude to the staff. No one, neither his aunt nor his mother, could relieve his anger or his pain. It was as if he hated everyone and everything. Hopelessness weighed down on him like a heavy steel pole pressed firmly against his chest. Sammy's mother knew that he had to see even what he refused to admit.

Hanna's mother bent over and kissed her daughter on the forehead. She had known before the doctors said anything that the girl she'd raised to be kind and sweet was gone; the only thing that remained was a shell. What she didn't know was how she would bear a life without her daughter and a brother who had never said a harsh word to her and was now resting in his grave.

Sammy's mother looked at him hunched over in a chair, and saw the wretchedness in his eyes. As if by some unspoken agreement, neither said a word, but she knew that Sammy had not accepted the doctor's assessment. She went over to him and put her arm around him. "She is gone my son, and you will miss her, just as I will miss your father but we will have them again one day, but for now we must accept that this is what God wanted. God is always with those who show patience."

At first the words left no impression on him. He refused to acknowledge that they had been said. Then his mother insisted that he stare at her. "Look at her eyes!" and refused to take no for an answer. Since Hanna first arrived at the hospital, she'd continued to gaze without changing her set, concentrated look. Even where Sammy stood over her, spoke into her eyes so that she could see him, Hanna kept staring beyond him.

He looked over at the girl who would never become his wife or bear the children they wished to have together. Nor would she be the sister who played with her siblings or read to them before they went to bed at night. Hanna would never again be any of these things. She would never laugh, hope or dream. She would only be a body planted into the earth, destined to be only a memory and nothing more.

Hanna's mother turned toward the doctor and told him to go ahead and disconnect the life support machine. Sammy pleaded for them to wait just a little longer. The sight of his adored Hanna and the presence of her death revived in his mind the feeling of dismay and the mystery, as well as the nearness and inescapability of death that he'd felt upon learning of his father's demise. Again he would have to face the loss of something pure, the loss of something good.

"I know how much you love her, but you cannot wait for someone who does not exist anymore. She is gone, Sammy."

Those words echoed painfully in his heart as the tears streamed down his face.

When it was over Sammy ran out of the room. His mother followed him. She didn't want him to be alone. He sat on the steps outside of the hospital and cried as he had never cried before. She sat down beside him and held him to her. He looked at her, still weeping and said, "Mama I loved Hanna until it hurt, but loving her has been my sweetest pain."

Hanna was buried close to her uncle. After Salsan returned with Sammy from the burial she became a recluse in her bedroom. She did not speak of the tragedy much with her children; when they spoke of their father, she only said, "Patience." But her infinitely weary expression conveyed persistent suffering. Practicing what she preached, she never said, "This is too much!" Still there were times she would close her eyes while speaking.

No one ever came to arrest Sammy, and within days he was on his way to Afghanistan to fight a war and to fight a memory. Salsan feared for her son's life. She went to the director of the mosque and explained everything. The next day the director came to their home with a proposition. He said that if Sammy was willing to assist the mujahideen in Afghanistan, then arrangements could be made for him to go almost immediately. Out of desperation his mother agreed. She knew the

dangers involved, but believed that they did not exceed the ones that awaited him in Israel if he remained.

"I don't want to leave you," Sammy pleaded. She put her arm around him.

"You can't stay here. Sooner or later the police will come here to investigate Benjamin's death."

Within one week they were on their way to the airport. Jenna's father was gone, and so was Hanna; now once again they were being forced to saying goodbye to someone they loved.

Sammy stood at the window closest to the departure gate and studied the sky that would deliver him to a strange new place. He would have no one who loved him there or any particular allegiance to any group. This made him different from most Muslims who were going there for the sole purpose of making jihad. What was the alternative? Salsan took his arm as she walked alongside of him. Sammy did not feel like much of a man that day. He hurt because he did not feel like much of a son either. As he and his mother walked in silence Sammy felt the fragile threads that held his family together. He, a man-child of the desert, was being forced to leave, banished to live among strangers. Placing one leg in front of the other, dragged by invisible chains, Sammy treaded wearily towards the gate after the announcement to depart was sounded. He was an Arab, and he was Palestinian, but like a lowly tree in a harsh winter storm, he found himself weakened and submissive. Before he boarded his plane his mother held him in her arms, stroked his face and dried his tears. Jenna was the last to walk over to him. Her sweetness touched him, as it had always done, but it was the loneliness inside her eyes that broke his heart as she approached him. Sammy took her hand and squeezed it. She returned the squeeze and said, "Hurry back, Sammy. Promise that you will hurry back." The sadness of her voice reached deep within him. He kissed her hand and raised it to his forehead, bowing with all his love for his little sister, and she began to cry.

Thus at the airport there two families said goodbye to two sons for two completely different reasons. Yet their mutual circumstance would create a friendship and a bond that would exceed some of the lives of the people that stood there that day.

Sammy tried to control his sadness as the plane soared into the night. He knew that he might never be able to return. Zakki sensed his gloominess and took a seat beside him. The kindness of his manner and the offer of friendship were gratefully received and gave him a considerable amount of comfort. From that moment they would remain friends.

Salsan would learn to follow her son's life through his letters, sporadic as they were. Sammy wrote happy letters to his mother- letters that did not truly reflect the horrors of Soviet carnage. In his letters he described sunsets along the Khyber Pass. The valleys of Salang and Khenjan were the most beautiful valleys he had ever come across, he said; they triggered a strong passion in him towards nature in general and in particular, the nature in Afghanistan.

His words gave her some consolation in the beginning.

However, his journeys were limited by the on-going war and he was restricted from doing the things he wanted to do and seeing the places he wanted to see. As the war progressed and he actively joined in the fight to liberate Afghanistan, his correspondence changed and his words became those of a drowning man. He began to describe ravaged villages and dead bodies. He described military maneuvers to blow up Russian strongholds in Kabul, night raids on other enemy positions, rescue operations to free Afghani soldiers, and ambushes on Soviet supply trails. The thing that bothered Sammy most was the destruction of human life. Killing Benjamin was not quite the same. With Benjamin it was something personal. It was atonement. When he shot in the direction of mostly young Soviet soldiers, he thought about the families who would mourn them. He thought about all the wasted lives. Many of them did not want to be there. Many of them did not know why they were there. However, all of this was not allowed to matter because the Soviets had come to invade and there were killing Muslims throughout the entire country. It was kill or be killed. But despite the righteousness of their actions there was no optimal condition for taking the life of a man.

Sammy's mother seldom wept but chose to suffer in silence, praying for the day she would be reunited with her favorite son.

Years later Abu Malik would regret not having his own son by his side to offer him guidance in what was to be the biggest and most fatal decision of his life. The government had given Abu Malik notice that his house was to be torn down. As he read the letter no one in the room moved. There was not a sound except for when Abu Malik ripped the pages of the letter. Unnerved by the silence Dina placed her arm around her father and asked him what they should do. Her father rose up from the table and walked the full length of the room with the eyes of his family upon him. The tension was unbearable. He moved with a fierce intensity and his face was blazing, glazed with the look of a raging bull. He took his fist, plowed it into the door and declared that this was his land and that he would not go!

"Why should I? My home is all I have left, all that I have to offer my children. I can't just pack up everything and walk away. All of my children were born in my bedroom, and my mother died here." Tears fell down Abu Malik's face as he spoke.

"Good heavens, Abu Malik, they will kill you!" Salsan responded.

"You seem to think that we are completely under their authority and that we are to consider every desire of theirs as a command. I won't accept it, and I'll fight anyone who comes uninvited through my door. My door!" He looked away from them white with anger.

They'd come to convince him, calm him, and persuade him that losing his home did not mean the end of his life. Their attempts were in vain, and he only became more persistent and irritable. Seeing him like this, Jenna could not sit still in her seat. His manner was usually quiet and even-tempered. It was hard to picture him raising a gun, prepared to engage in combat with a soldier.

"You know that this goes beyond just losing my home; it's about my identity and about not being treated like some animal that can be kicked aside. I've never

hurt anyone in my whole life, and I have never taken anything that did not belong to me," he said without pretense. "I have lived by these principles and I won't allow a man to violate them now. I'm staying." He gesticulated wildly as he spoke.

He'd always been an optimist. He thought that eventually there would be some sort of settlement that would allow Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side. In the past, he thought that Palestinians were wrong to remain disconnected from the Israelis, and that they needed to involve themselves in a democratic political process, which would eventually provide them with equality. Just as physical starvation leads to death, he thought that living in a vacuum of political and geographical isolation only led to economic and social isolation and the demise of the Palestinians.

Now he only felt the smallness of an aging man who could not do much to protect the rights of his family.

Jenna's mother looked at him so sadly, replying, "I don't know what to say to you. I just think that it is a foolish thing you are doing. I hope you will change your mind. You and your family always have a home in mine."

"Don't hope for it." With that he stood up, took his cane, and walked out of the door in route to the mosque.

Jenna followed Dina to her bedroom. "Are you crazy," she yelled. "Are you really going to stand up there with your father? What's wrong with you? They have tanks and guns; what do you have?"

Until that day not a quarrel had ever taken place between them.

"Please do not be mad at me," she begged. "Take my side as you have always done. I trust my father, and I want you to trust him too. He has always taken care of us, and now I can take care of him by standing by his side. Come on Jenna! Don't be scared for me. And please, don't be angry with me. You're the best friend I've ever had, and I love you."

After a strained moment of silence Jenna looked at her confident face and started to smile. To her and many others, Dina was the type of person that you instinctively believed and her optimism gave you faith.

At dinner that evening the Hayat family could not eat anything. Plate after plate went away from the table untested. After the table was cleared, Jenna's mother sat there the rest of the evening with her face buried in her hand.

By administrative order a demolition crew came to destroy the house. Twelve soldiers, eight workers, two trucks and a bulldozer were sent to guarantee the task.

Every neighbor came to view the family whose grief, at that moment, was greater than theirs. As the soldiers gathered, a woman yelled something at them from an open door. When a shot was fired into the air, she slammed the door shut. Jenna stood there on the pavement growing sick with fear. She was trembling from head to foot. "Mama, do something!"

Salsan raised her hands to heaven, "May God be with him."

The destruction crew was oblivious to Abu Malik's yelling. About a half of an hour later things began to really heat up. The crewman asked one man standing around from the neighborhood to try to persuade the family. "Tell them to be reasonable, or they are going to get hurt." The man said nothing. He may not have

agreed with Abu Malik, but he respected his decision. A soldier told the crewman to shut up.

"There is only one way to deal with these people." The soldier was a hardened and hateful man with obviously fixed values about "these people" and he was restless to bring about their destruction.

Abu Malik lost his temper, "What do you want from me, you animals? I am not going anywhere." The family stood there holding each other's hands in solidarity. Jenna saw her friend begin to tremble as her heart gave way to panic. Dina's father gave her an encouraging look, intending to reassure her and let her know, that, although she stood in the presence of an obvious threat, she must not allow herself to be overwhelmed. Abu Malik never doubted that God's mercy was with them, no matter what the outcome. And then Dina did something that even he didn't expect. She stepped forward to the middle of the porch and faced the soldiers. Everyone looked at this defiant child with admiration, almost everyone- the soldiers and the destruction crew became visibly unnerved by the public stance by a girl still very much a child. Her actions may have surprised most of the people who watched that day, but not Jenna. Dina had something that is rare among the people of the West Bank; she had a dream and that dream gave her confidence. Not the kind that waits for a miracle, but the kind of confidence that makes one battle for one's opportunities. Dina was a stern and serious soul, even though there were some things utterly childish about her. As a young girl- even a childish one Dina was capable of having ideals. As a child she was nurtured on principles and taught that they should never be compromised- ever. It did not matter to her that the Palestinians did not have a legal leg to stand on. For if they were to consider their cause of action for a legal point of view, and then they would not have the right to demand a single thing. Dina may have been young but she clearly understood that even if they had no recognizable legal rights there was such a thing as human rights: the rights of moral judgment, and the command of conscience, and even if this right of theirs was not written down in Israeli law, a moral man- that is to say- an ethical thinking man- would out of a sense of duty act on his convictions even if they were not supported by the rule of law.

The soldier grew restless and began screaming obscenities, shrieking in a way that carried terror. "God damn you! Get away from the house you old man. Get your damned woman, and get away from the house, unless you want to die!"

When the bulldozer sounded, one teenager ran up to the family and pulled Abu Malik, begging him to just follow orders. Abu Malik pushed the boy away and drew a gun from behind his back. He raised his arm up in the air. Jenna knew that it was an ill conceived, but desperate act. She and her mother stood among the crowd, and she heard Dina scream. Jenna wanted to run and pull Dina away from what she was sure would happen. Her mother and brother Ahmad held her back. Dina heard Jenna call her name again and again. She knew because their eyes met before the shots rang out. When Dina took her first bullet she turned towards her executioners and gave them a puzzled and questioning look as though she did not understand why they should be shooting at her.

After the first explosions Salsan closed her eyes so as not to see what was going to happen. She wrapped her arms tightly against her daughter. Salsan breathed heavily, and smelled spent ammunition. She wished not to look but she had to. She had to see the bloodied bodies of her friends; she had to see the frightened faces of every neighbor who witnessed the executions. After Jenna released her head from her mother's grip, she saw that the family of Abu Malik was no longer standing and she looked down at the ground and saw what the Israeli soldiers had done. Jenna was overwhelmed with terror and clung to her mother. When the soldiers demanded that the people back up into the street Salsan grabbed Jenna by the arm but found that she was unable to walk. Ahmed seized her under her arms and dragged her away screaming. The bulldozers opened their engines, barely allowing enough time to move the fallen bodies. The soldiers clumsily and hastily moved the bodies away from the property so that the work crew could fulfill the purpose for which it had come.

For Jenna it was a moment of complete fear and horror, the same kind of fear and horror that a person experiences when helplessly drowning in water. Their bodies, in almost a synchronized motion fell to the ground and the wall behind them was painted in their blood. Jenna wrestled to get free of her mother and her brother who smothered her with the weight of his body. She pushed and pushed beyond them, propelled by her anger, screaming "Dina! Dina!" with her arms stretched out. In madness she could not be controlled as she attempted to shake her body loose from their grip. "Stop! Stop!" she screamed at them. Dina was already on the ground and above her was the smoke of firepower. She was not sure what had happened or why had it happened.

Neighbors watched from a safe distance as the crew razed the house. The first wall fell and the furniture was easily crushed. Glass splattered and what was not mowed down seemed to collapse on its own. A neighbor of Abu Malik began to gasp as if she had been running a race. It was as if she too had been torn away from some precious thing, which she could not bear to lose.

"Look at what they've done! Look at what they have done!" an old man cried out. "May God curse you."

The old man shook both his fist in the air. "They come and take our homes and do what they want with us," he said. "They just come and snatch up our lives. Israel, Israel", he moaned, "May God protect us from Israel." His son pushed through the crowd and went to his father as he began to weep.

The people of the neighborhood stood there helplessly, reluctant intruders upon this reprehensible affair, eyewitness to what they did not want to see.

From a safe distance neighbors watched the crew raise the house. What was once one man's home was now a designated ruin. It was no longer a birthplace. There was no room where a man once held his bride. It was not the place where Abu Malik's mother took her last breath. There was nothing there, but an ugly scar in the earth spattered with blood.

Abu Malik's entrance into and exit from this world were marked at the same place. His first and last sounds were heard at the very same house, where the first

things looked at were the last things seen; yet he had been warned away. He had been told that he had never, ever belonged there.

The fact was, that up to the last moment, Jenna never really expected such an end. Despite her youth and having been reared in a world of hostility, despite being accustomed to seeing such violence and accustomed to seeing death, seeing this happen to Dina made it even more maddening, nightmarish and wicked. Within moments an ambulance arrived. Only one body was rushed to the nearest medical facility. En route to the hospital Dina moved her lips, but no voice came from them, not even one sound.

All were immediately pronounced dead at the hospital, except for Dina. She died a little later. The doctor said that her aorta was shredded and that there was no way to save her. She had lost so much blood; there was nothing they could do for her.

Jenna heart seemed to stand completely still. "Murderers," her mother said suddenly in a whispered, yet very clear and distinct voice. Afterward there was a long silence. Jenna felt detached from reality. Everything faded into the background, voices moving in and out of focus. Her legs felt so weak; she thought that she'd fall. All Jenna could think of was Dina. Images of her reeled without order, one moment of child's play following the other. The images followed each other whirling around like a tornado...Dina dancing... Dina singing... Dina swinging herself around in a circle...Rifle sounds cracking in the sky... Dina falling... Dina dripping in blood... Dina dying.

Jenna asked to see her. The doctor warned her mother that it might not be such a good idea, but Jenna insisted, so her mother relented. Inside Dina lay on top of the hospital bed. She was covered to her neck with a sheet. Jenna stood there for some minutes looking at the lifeless body. She took a step forward, rested her hand on Dina's hair. Her forehead was soft and still warm. The doctor must be wrong; that was all. Dina was not dead. She could not be dead. When Jenna lifted her hand, Dina's head rolled over towards Jenna, allowing a small amount of blood to trickle from her mouth. A chill came over Jenna, it seemed so cold in that room. Dina was dead and, still, for some reason, Jenna kept thinking that she's cold. She asked the doctor if she could please have a blanket. He asked the nurse to bring one. After she did, Jenna took the blanket and covered Dina's body. Her tears blinded her. She stood there thinking about how much she loved Dina and how kind she was. Dina had these sparkling eyes that could see right through her. She never ate her sandwich at lunch before making sure that Jenna had one. She always made Jenna laugh. Now she was gone. Why? The Israelis took Dina away from her. They took her away from all of them. Them, and them alone, she blamed for everything. Dina's grandmother arrived to find her dead. She began to sob, her hands beating against her chest. She started shaking her head and speaking to Dina as if she could persuade her to come back. A nurse tried to soothe her but she pushed her hands away and cried more loudly. "Why couldn't they just leave them alone? How could they have done this? She was a child!"

Jenna ran out of the room. She ran past an old woman with a thermometer sticking out of her mouth, six times older than Dina would ever be.

That night was one of the worst she would ever live through. Her mother gave her something to help her sleep but it did not anesthetize the fear; as soon as she nodded off her body jerked itself awake. She saw a candle lit on a nightstand next to her and realized that she was in her mother's bed. It gave her a small comfort, as she lay motionless in the dull light of the room. She did not want to think. It would not change anything. All was done. She willed her mind to drop her into sleep; she willed her heart to let her die. Jenna kept saying, "Dina take me with you."

All through the darkness of night she awakened to fear again and again; her eyes wet and her mouth dry. In those terror filled moments, ushered by drug-induced hallucinations, she did not know if it were happening all over again. Or worse, if evil had tipped back the hands of time and it was happening still. Frozen with fright, she scrambled out of the room and paced rapidly without direction. Her mother was awakened and ran after her. Jenna began to scream. Salsan grabbed her daughter, took her to the bathroom and splashed water into her face, hoping to awaken her from the nightmare because she knew that there were worse ones to come and she did not want her daughter commit them to memory. A foolish hope, however, because this is the nature of hell, it cannot be suppressed; it is unyielding and unalterable.

Part of Jenna passed away with Dina that day, and for weeks she did not respond to anyone. She rarely spoke to anyone at all. First weeks, then months went by before Jenna began to feel that something heavy was not weighing down on her heart. Then summer came. It was the time that she and Dina would have spent almost every waking hour together, like summers before. They'd play soccer in the field close to home. They'd skip out on their chores. Jenna would hear her mother calling her back and warning her to finish the housework. Dina would tell Jenna not to make her mother angry. Jenna would assure her that everything was all right.

It was, and that was because Jenna's mother knew how special their friendship was and how much fun they had together. Sometimes the girls would go to Dina's cousin's house. He grew olives and bananas in a huge garden an hour out of town. They would pick a bag each. It was a beautiful place and was so peaceful. The mountain air brought with it an infusion of joy for two girls who temporarily found harmony in their little place on the planet. In the village below, neighbors spoke about the resistance movement, Zionism, and, of course, the land. Inside the olive garden they told each other their deepest secrets. Dina told Jenna that she wanted to be a politician. Jenna confided that it was her dream to be a famous writer. Dina let her know that it would never happen if she didn't believe in herself. Jenna asked her friend how she knew what she felt inside. Dina said that she always knew what Jenna felt. Jenna asked her how. "I don't know," she replied, amazed at herself, "I just do."

All of a sudden a smile appeared on Dina's face. "What's so funny?" Jenna asked.

"Well, I was just thinking that we might become famous together. I'll make history and you'll write my biography."

There was no best friend before her, and Jenna desired none; indeed their relationship went beyond friendship because Dina was a guiding force that

constantly reminded Jenna she was worthy and that she had something of value to give others. Jenna had no doubt that she had something to give, but she didn't quite know what it was, or how. She was just another ordinary Arab girl whose mother struggled to make ends meet. Who she was or how she came to be did not differ from most of the others' lives around her. They shared a common pain and all sounded the same voice of conflict. Certainly the death of Dina now added a different dimension to her identity. Whatever part of her that once hoped for harmony and tranquility now demanded vengeance and retribution. It was a voice that might lie dormant for a while but one that would eventually be heard. Somehow Jenna knew this, even then, and it made her afraid of what she might do.

Now Jenna was alive and Dina wasn't.

Dina and her family were buried the morning following their deaths. It was drizzling, but the light rain stopped in time for the funeral. Jenna stood at the place that was reserved for what was left of a family: one grandmother and a little boy, four years old. He just stood there biting his fingernails. When the wooden coffins passed and were placed in full view, he stopped biting. His thin figure stood motionless and stunned, realizing that he was now alone.

He turned and stared at those brown boxes all alike. Reality sunk in. All of a sudden he rose, walked up to them and knelt down. After a minute he got up and returned. He bit his lip and looked at his grandmother, "Do they have to go into the ground?" he asked in a frightened voice.

She moved her head up and down as her eyes teared. Earlier she'd explained to him what happened at a funeral, but Jenna didn't think he really understood until that moment. He wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. "But I don't want them to. I want my mother." Then he began to cry.

Jenna closed her eyes and slowly shook her head. How had it all come to this?

They all died and left a little boy wondering why he had to live without them.

These were the deepest moments of desecration that would hold Jenna forever in obligation and bondage to the nightmares she would bring to bear from a life in occupation. From that day on she lamented the loss of harmony, and the hopelessness of an existence plagued with violence. Jenna was frequently badgered with a feeling of being buried alive that produced shivers through to her heart and made her blood run cold. When these thoughts surfaced, hope and faith became words without any truth to them. They became mere expressions contrived by men to make other stupid men optimistic.

When she prayed just after sunset, she felt connected to God and the glorious earth. In the dark of the night, when she buried herself in the furthest corner of her room and covered her ears to stifle the sounds of a vicious force field, she was revealing her association with the buried alive. Yet it was her being a Palestinian Muslim that essentially and resolutely kept her spirit alive. Her culture and religion were the foundation that created whatever substance she brought to light as a young woman coming into her own. Unfortunately it was the same foundation that made her people a political liability with a fatal destination.

As Palestinians, they were instinctive, not always strategic. They could not overpower their adversaries but they could shock them with the imaginativeness of their revenge. Jenna was beginning to learn the *raison d'être* of Palestinian vengeance, and the lesson began right there at Dina's deathbed. Jenna's friend was trustful, believing there was something good to be found in most people. She believed in Jenna when others thought her to be idealistic and foolish. Her best friend did not deserve to die like that. No one did.

Jenna's childhood would be forever changed and her life disfigured and different, like a piece of fruit picked from the tree before it had ripened. She longed to grab her friend's hand, run through the olive garden one more time. That would not happen because of a set of inexcusable, merciless reasons. Dina had sworn that everything would be all right, but nothing would ever be all right.

When she finally returned to their special place, her visit there had no meaning. The land had lost its vitality and luxuriant beauty, at least in her mind. It was a lonely place, empty and forsaken. Deep down and within, Jenna believed that she bore some responsibility in her friend's death, as did every Palestinian who stood there and watched that day. Their silence and submission, their pitiable quietness, declared their fragility and their collective weakness. She, like all the others, hovered near, but did nothing to prevent their bodies from being leveled to the ground like the house that stood behind them. The death of her friend haunted her more because she watched her die. In the time that followed she did everything she could to stop hearing the fire, to stop smelling the smoke, to stop watching Dina grab her stomach before she fell to the ground.

In the weeks that followed Salsan tried desperately to contact Zakki in Afghanistan, but found it nearly impossible. Staying in touch with his family was usually left up to him. Every few months he'd call to say that he was well and relay to Salsan a message from Sammy. Both of them wrote home regularly, but there was never a return address. There was war there, so everyone understood. Zakki did try on several occasions to call his parents home, but he found the line disconnected, unaware that his home or his parents no longer existed. It was well over a year before Zakki felt compelled to return home, and then it was for reasons that none of them expected.

Their joy from his return was short-lived when they found out that his purpose for returning was to bring Salsan news concerning the death of her son. Jenna was in her room when Zakki arrived. When Ahmed informed his sister about Zakki's reason for coming she was devastated. Jenna could not bring herself to come inside the room where her mother sat. She stood down the hallway and listened as Zakki described an event that she was unsure her mother could handle. When Salsan asked how her son had died, he said that he would prefer to tell her how he'd lived, but Salsan was insistent. Zakki went on to explain that Sammy was killed when he stepped on a land mine, one of thousands planted into the ground by Soviet soldiers. Zakki swore that Sammy was killed instantly and that he had not suffered. It was a very small comfort for a woman who had already lost far too much. Zakki, then, told Salsan about the things Sammy had accomplished there, about how many lives he'd saved. He called him a hero. Jenna listened as Salsan cried as grief and

intense anxiety took possession of her. Shaking from head to toe, she remained rooted to that place. Despite the sincerity of Zakki's words and his intentions to give her some kind of comfort, Jenna felt an urge to run over to him, cover his mouth with her hand and silence his voice. Her mother didn't need a hero; she needed her son. After all was said and done, Sammy was still dead, and he had died in the mountains of Afghanistan. He had died far away from home, far away from the arms of the mother who loved him, and from a family who never wanted him to leave in the first place. Minutes later she got up and walked out of the front door seemingly unaware of everything. She walked the street like a stranger to whom everything seemed unfamiliar. People brushed up against her as she passed, but she felt nothing. She walked aimlessly. When she reached a corner, she just stood there gazing into traffic.

How well she remembered it all. Jenna remembered the evenings that had passed happily in the presence of all her family. She was around the people she loved, and they were good to each other. They found such pleasure in each other's presence, that if she had known that such a life must come to an end, she would not have preferred a better one. And there was an additional blessing in a life fraught with turmoil on the outside- the Hayat family never squabbled with each other. When Jenna returned home, her mother sat where she had sat before. Her arms were crossed and her head was bent over, but she had ceased crying. Jenna went up to Salsan and sat down by her side. Salsan turned towards her daughter and gave her a look- a kind of look of defeat. Jenna took her by the hand and said something she would not remember later. Her own mind was in a perpetual haze. She wanted to say something that would give comfort but her voice kept shutting off and becoming inaudible, until she found herself at a loss of words and was reduced to tears. Salsan then burst into her own sobs.

Although she believed in the reward for martyrdom, she knew that she would never stop mourning the end of Sammy's life because he was so young, so pure and because she loved him so much. Jenna wondered why God had decided to take him away. More losses than gains seemed to come into their lives and she felt that she was slowly being buried by it all.

"I caused Sammy's death." Salsan cried out with a tremble from her visions of the irreversible past.

Jenna assured her mother that there was indeed someone to blame, but it most assuredly was not her.

From that moment on her resentment for the Israeli government and the people who supported their claims ripened, taking a firm root in her soul. Weakness and denial had previously blinded her insight. Blinding her to what she should have seen from the very beginning; the lives of all those she loved had been disposed of in a manner that did not dignify the way they lived. At length her eyes were finally opened and she understood it all. Was it a chance accident that Sammy died? Was it a fatal day commanded by destiny? No; neither chance nor destiny were there when Sammy was killed. Israel was, with its long and imposing hand, the hand that would have never delivered justice to her brother. For the next few days she lived as in a quagmire, with no response, no escape. Everything was, as it were, in a state

of suspension. Jenna only knew that her life had been snapped in two, and that she had only one desire: to act, to act. Nothing else would do in her mind.

Salsan had not seen her son for so many years and now he would not be coming back. This was one of the bitterest moments of Salsan's life and she blamed no one but herself for the death of Sammy. Memories of her son, sweet and painful, rose one after another and she wished that there were a way to go back in time and change the very moment she gave Sammy permission to avenge her husband's death. Her behavior was instinctive but not rational. Had she not handed Sammy the key to the bakery he would not have had to flee. Had she not allowed her anger and her pain to overcome her senses, Sammy would have never gone to Afghanistan. This came from a woman who loved her son, there came be no doubt about that; she recalled with intensity how protective she always had been of him, but when fired with hate she compromised everything she ever learned about endurance. And it was that decision that unthinkingly broke the seal of care guarded by reason between a mother and child. She would remain tormented by her lapse in judgment for the rest of her life.

The shock and sadness surrounding her brother's death made Jenna want to break away from her entrapment in Ramallah. Ahmed took her back to the olive gardens past the city. Jenna sat between the trees and thought about all that had been lost. She imagined for a while that Dina, Sammy, Abu Malik, and all the others were still there. She pretended that they had to fake their deaths for some purpose unknown to her, and once she would open up her eyes, she would find all of them right there, smiling at her, glad to finally be home.

After a period of mourning Zakki returned to Salsan's home. This time Jenna accompanied her mother into the room. She walked in almost hidden behind Salsan, shy but amiable when she greeted him.

Zakki remembered Jenna as a young girl with long black hair. She had not begun wearing the scarf. She had taken a seat next to his sister and began getting acquainted with her, she seemed aloof and childlike. That was how he saw her years before, so consequently when an entirely different Jenna came into the room he was surprised and his face could not conceal his astonishment. She had become a woman and her Islamic headdress did not taper her beauty. Their eyes met and there was a moment of recognition.

They had never really known each other, for they had only met briefly and as strangers, but the look that now passed between the two of them felt familiar, as if they had known each other, as if they understood each other. After this glance, all strangeness and discomfort disappeared. In Jenna's mind this was no stranger but someone very special, someone kind, strong and attentive.

Jenna sat silent most of the time but she did offer him tea. When he spoke of Sammy, she looked intensely at him, making him nervous and making him stumble in the middle of his stories.

In the weeks that followed Zakki's return, he became close to Jenna's mother and began to confide in her. He spent several hours a day in Salsan's home.

"Now that I am back in Palestine I feel like I should stay," he noted, voicing the dilemma he felt, but didn't anticipate coming so soon after his return. "I just don't

know where I will be able to accomplish more. I've made a life for myself in Afghanistan, and a part of me misses it."

Salsan told him to take his time, but that he should remember that his grandmother is there in Palestine with his brother, and that she could use his help with a little boy who has no father.

"You are right," Zakki replied.

"You know your parents missed you, but they were so proud of you. Your father called you a lion and said that you were more than any father could hope for."

She smiled and dabbed the corner of her apron at Zakki's eyes, which had begun to fill with tears.

He saw Jenna as she walked down the hall past the kitchen. Jenna heard him tell her mother that she was grown up now. He told her that Jenna was not the young girl he saw playing at the airport. Salsan reminded him that a lot of things happen as years go by.

After seeing Jenna on a regular basis, Zakki had to confess to himself that he was attracted to her, but that he must do all he could to abandon his feeling; bringing her or any woman into a liaison with his life was not a good idea. Zakki determined in his mind to limit his visits to the Hayat house and to avoid Jenna altogether; in spite of his resolution he went again the very next day.

Jenna once caught Zakki looking at her. It was the kind of look a man gives a woman when he thinks she is pretty. Jenna was not the kind used to being noticed and she became shy seeing him notice her. Zakki lowered his gaze out of embarrassment.

One day Salsan asked him why he had not married. Zakki said that it had never seemed like the right thing to do. He had seen so many men in the war die, leaving their wives and children alone to fend for themselves. He would never want his wife to be drawn into such a situation where it was likely that she would become a widow.

"I would love to have my own home and a family, but I don't see that happening for a man like myself. Not a man that has dedicated his life to going from one war to another."

This was not an easy decision, knowing that there would be no one waiting for him anywhere, that he would probably wander from place to place, from one assignment to another, a stranger to most others and maybe a stranger to even himself.

He faltered for a moment as the memories of Afghanistan came painfully back to him.

"Children fill the refugee camps there or just go to the border towns of Pakistan and beg. They do this because they have no father or mother to take care of them. Sammy was on his way to purchase rice for a couple of orphanages when he was killed. He was pulling a huge cart by hand when everything around him exploded." Salsan was weeping now, and took a handkerchief from her apron to wipe away her tears.

"So I have learned to bury the thought of having a normal life. Believe me, it is better that way."

A long silence fell between them.

Jenna's mother changed the subject, struggling hard not to completely break down.

When they began to speak, they made a pitiable attempt at insignificant conversation, but the heavy sadness remained within the room.

Zakki got up to leave, but before he could, Salsan walked over and wrapped her arms around him as if he were Sammy. He stood there woodenly for a moment, unfamiliar with an affection that he had only known from his mother.

When she released him, his cheeks were streaked with tears.

"I love you auntie," he said, and then he turned and was gone.

Jenna stood at the window and watched as he trudged down the busy street. She could not help but be glad that he was staying. She was sad, though, that his life and his cause had swallowed him up so completely. She also realized that Zakki's fate was not so different from many other young Palestinian men who shared his situation. Their lot in life was largely determined by the ways of their world, by the tragedy of their experience. Zakki was the rule, not the exception. Once when he was a young boy of only twelve, his mother had sent him to get bread, along with his little sister. The ovens where the bread was baked rested on a corner inhabited by Israeli police. He'd gone there before many times and never had any trouble at all. When Zakki tried to walk past a group of three officers, he was stopped.

"Going for bread?" one of them asked him.

"Yes," Zakki timidly replied.

With a sarcastic smile the officer had looked toward his companions, "Is that so?"

Zakki had known immediately that this disgusting person, made indecent by his hate, was about to do something mean. He had known that he wanted to bother him in some kind of way because that was how people like them got their enjoyment. Zakki tried to move on into the store, but the man placed his arm in front of him, blocking his way. He said, "Before you go into the store, you have to do just one thing."

Zakki looked bewildered, unsure of what was about to happen. "What do you want me to do?"

"Well," the officer said, "you have to get down on your knees and kiss my foot."

Zakki just stood there, glaring at the man, not knowing how to respond. There were other kids around, most of them too afraid to directly give notice of the way this child was being humiliated. A group of Muslim women, already inside the store, looked out the corner of their eyes. They, too, pretended not to see, but everyone knew exactly what was going on.

The soldiers separated Zakki from his sister by standing between them. She began to cry. Then Zakki really got scared. "You want me to kiss your foot?" he asked.

"Yes, on your knees, and then you can take your sister into that store and buy your bread. You see it really isn't that difficult after all." The other two soldiers roared with laughter at the expectation of the event.

Zakki was filled with shame as he bent down to kiss that bastard's foot, but his sister was afraid, so he knew he had to do it.

After he finished those soldiers squealed with delight.

As Zakki got up he started thinking that if he only had a bomb, then he would wreak havoc on those men, and their smiles would explode right off their faces. They would be dead and would not be humiliating him, frightening his little sister, and giving him a goddamn foot to kiss.

He took his sister's hand and walked away. He knew that one day, if God willed him to become a man that he would never allow himself to be treated again in such a way. He also knew that one day he would take his revenge. For the first time in his life Zakki felt ashamed. He was gut wrenchingly angry. He sensed a tightness inside his chest that felt like a fist around his heart that kept on squeezing it.

After hearing this story, Jenna knew that this was a defining moment in Zakki's life. It was this day that determined the kind of man Zakki had come to be. While some children have the advantage of dreaming about whether or not they will become a doctor, lawyer, or fireman when they grow up, kids like Zakki dreamt of becoming revolutionaries and suicide bombers. Had the world, decades ago, demanded equality of treatment and required that children, at a very early age, would not be forced to bury every shred of pride, perhaps they would not come to dream such dreams.

As for Zakki he became tough, daring and self-assured, and above all he became fearless. Dangers held no reservations for him, or at least it was not obvious. Once, he threw a lit firecracker at an Israeli guard post. When the soldiers came barreling out, he and a neighborhood friend threw rocks and ran off. Whenever he did something dangerous or forbidden, he did so to see if he could. There was no hidden motive; he was just developing into a man with a mission, like so many others.

Every person is forced to come to the same level as all the others when it comes to the opposition. Sooner or later, a person is going to have to give in.

Political indoctrination, for most Palestinian children, is a birth-to-adulthood exercise of pedagogic progression. A psychological injection is given when they are barely able to articulate, and through adolescence, blood surges out in steady pulsation. Finally, when they come of age, they graduate from throwing stones and go to combat and suicide bombings. They have become well schooled in the art of defiance and revenge. There is no risk that they will disturb those of the generation before them because they have inherited their ways from them. Resistance is their inheritance. It goes from one generation to another because no one wishes to understand the personal sorrow of a Palestinian child who believes that he has no choice, but must keep faith with the culture and the collective conscience, who must be able to become accustomed to the concept of "freedom fighter" that has been established as the model among their peers. It comes as part of the course for a child of this kind that he will be placed in a political cast by the members of their society, and worse, by the enemies who wish to expel him, however masked by their pretense of peace.

Undeniably, in view of the pressure these children take from the situation in which they are reared, as well as what they experience from the Israeli musclemen who control their lives, it is not unremarkable that many will strap explosives around their waists in the end.

The child who has an undisclosed dream or individual desire for a life of impartiality will still have to fight for pure survival in the face of tradition, conscience, alliances, and enemies. He will at best be sent to prison if he reacts like Gandhi or the American Martin Luther King, but if he reacts like Ernesto "Che" Guevara or Malcolm X, he will be shot dead, sent to an early grave. There is simply no room for neutrality, peace, or pacification. There is only room for "bite or be bitten."

Zakki seemed to often come and go. Jenna's younger brother Ahmed liked to tag along with him whenever he was free from his studies. Over the course of a year, Zakki became a permanent fixture in their home. He had breakfast more often at Salsan's table than his own. She enjoyed his company. Sometimes Zakki would take Ahmed and Jenna along with him to political demonstrations. Jenna always felt so shy around him, so she said very little. Sometimes she'd glance over at him and see him looking her way, but because she knew very little about opposite sex, she did not know how to make sense of it. Jenna only knew that it unnerved him when he knew that she'd seen him. He would quickly look away and become exceedingly embarrassed at having been caught. Ahmed noticed and teased her, but she pretended not to know or care. What was the point? Everyone knew that Zakki was committed to the resistance. That is where he lived his life, and that was where it would probably end.

Zakki agreed to let Ahmed and Jenna come to a protest in Jerusalem. It was to be Jenna's first in a major city. She got up very early and for hours she was in a state of complete excitement. Salsan allowed the both of them to go if Zakki promised to keep them out of trouble. It was not long after their arrival that the demonstration began to get violent. Rocks were being thrown at the soldiers and they were responding with rubber bullets. Zakki saw Jenna throw a stone and shouted at her to go to the car. She refused. He stopped and glared at her with a puzzled expression. He looked at her intently, as if he were seeing this side of her for the very first time. When he snapped out of it, he went over to Ahmed and insisted that he make his sister leave. Ahmed knew better than that. It was only when Zakki reminded Jenna of his promise to her mother to keep her safe that she decided to go. Being forced to leave did not go over well with her and she refused to utter a word on the trip back home.

In the days that followed Zakki came to their house with less frequency; when he did, Jenna stayed inside her room. As much as she tried to avoid him, their paths crossed. He began to see her at a number of rallies that she'd ventured to on her own. Finally, he told her that if she insisted on attending, to at least allow him to direct her towards the good groups. In his attempt to watch over her, Zakki enlisted Jenna to assist him on some of his own projects.

One day he came and asked her to type a notice, which was to be distributed at a meeting at the Arab University, Beir Zait. After he left, Ahmed warned Jenna about her relationship with Zakki. She told him that there was no relationship, and she reminded him that she was a Muslim woman. He said, "Be that as it may, you are still a normal woman, and it is not abnormal to grow to care about someone like Zakki. He is a good guy, but you don't know everything about him." He went on to tell her that Zakki did not just participate in the movement; he was not just some foot soldier. He said that he was one of the leaders in Al-Aqsa.

"Do you know what that means, Jenna? That means he is a dead man! It means that he will never be any woman's husband!"

It was then that he told her Marwan Khalil had inquired about her, and had requested that they be formally introduced. Marwan ran his family's business in old Jerusalem. They sold computers and cell phones, which were shipped to them from a brother in Europe. This would be considered a plus among any women because it offered some assurance that she would live better than many other people. Jenna, however, did not care. She'd never taken any notice of Marwan other than the fact that he'd been a student in a history class that she had taken at the university last summer. Jenna told Ahmed that had she noticed any interest from Marwan, she would have surely dropped the class. "Grow up, Jenna," was his only response.

Jenna did not actually become agitated with her brother until she discovered that he had made her mother aware of Marwan's proposal. She knew that it was only a matter of time before Salsan would be applying the pressure, and that she would be inviting Marwan and his family over for tea.

This was not what she wanted. Unlike her sisters' view about what should be done and what a Muslim woman should strive for, she had her own preferences, and those preferences were becoming increasingly incompatible with her mother's. Jenna's mother wanted to make her children into what she wanted them to be, and that is what she couldn't be- someone who defied the powers that be. Her intention was to give them the best of her, but she often gave them the worst of her- the part that lived on the sidelines and accepted everything as fate. Jenna did not agree, but she always understood. Salsan was born into a world of tragedy, and she just didn't know how to do it any other way.

The more her mother encouraged her to consider marriage, the more political demonstrations she attended. Before long she had formed associations with members of Al-Aqsa and Hamas through their social aid efforts. Although neither recruited her at that time, she enjoyed a limited amount of participation with them and other Palestinian-run human rights organizations. Not all were Islamic, but they provided resources for the poor that were otherwise unattainable. Zakki was recruiting Palestinian-run students to participate with a group of Jewish students called "Jews for Justice". He asked her to attend a meeting. She was reluctant at first, as she lived in a sterile box insulated by her own people. With the exception of a shopkeeper, here and there, or an officer shouting at her to move on, her interactions with Jewish people were extremely limited. Until then, she had existed in a social quarantine that had remained unbroken in any significant way. Her

attendance at the Arab University had broadened her experience but it did not make it as vast as she would have liked. What it did do was make her pause and look more critically at the world. There she spoke among Arab Christians and Arab Muslims from a variety of places, and she heard them speak, and thereby her understanding of people was increased. There she enjoyed her time immensely.

Her escape from the regularity of her village seemed like a liberation of spirit. Each day she participated in philosophical discussions and learned about the lives of interesting people somewhere else. Her instructors introduced her to the written words of social thinkers she had not heard of before who seemed to have no connection to the world in which she lived. Eventually they became companions of sorts: their words, their ideas, were taken up and in a variety of ways. Now she went into Jerusalem for off-campus seminars, to view museums and make purchases for school. Although she seldom came into any personal contact with any Israeli, there was one. He was an elderly gentleman by the name of Eli Goldstein. He owned a used bookstore. Jenna could not afford to purchase new books. He discounted the old and when she could not afford the old, he'd offer to loan her many of them. How could someone like him intimidate her? He was always kind and animated. He had a new joke every time she came.

No wonder that her mother thought she was losing a bit of control over her, even though she was happy to have her daughter attending courses and expanding her view of the world. It was just that "yes" and "no" wasn't so easy to impose on Jenna anymore. Moreover at school Jenna listened to her classmates, as well as her teachers, people her age, who said things, unlike what her mother said, and for that reason made it all the more interesting. This was a time in which she was becoming a woman formulating ideas of her own, but not without apprehension.

She told Zakki that she was not sure that she would feel comfortable working with this group, and that she knew very little about them.

"That's the point, Jenna. You are too sheltered. You hardly know anything about the outside world, and you are probably wondering what you will experience by interacting with these people. Maybe you are even afraid that they might somehow change you."

"You are wrong! I know who I am! I am a Palestinian trying to make jihad on behalf of my people," to which he responded, "Don't you know that education is a part of jihad? By educating people to our cause and our ideas, we gain their understanding and their support, Jenna. If you don't think so, then you are being naïve."

He was about to go on when Ahmed announced that it was time for the students to board the bus. Zakki reached into his backpack and brought out some information about "Jews for Justice". He told her to read it on the bus. His outstretched hand was trembling with nervousness as he handed her the papers.

"The lion trembles," she remarked sarcastically.

In their literature, Jews for Justice defined themselves as a group of Israelis refusing to give blind obedience to Zionist traditions that are protected and

propagated by well-fabricated lies that inhibit their growth as historical conditions change.

They called upon Jews to acknowledge that there is both good and evil in the land, and they encouraged other Jews to work tirelessly to root out the latter. They warned their people of the danger of sheltered nationalism and patriotic dogmatism. They wished to remind them that it ought to be apparent by this time, that they will never enjoy a lasting peace if they continue to make the Palestinians victims of their missiles and automatic weapons. Further they encouraged all young Israelis to develop an ethical sensitivity to the needs and aspirations of all human beings, including the Arabs. They summoned all of its citizens to no longer place their conscience second and their patriotic standards first.

Jenna wanted to show Zakki that she could be as sophisticated as he was, and that she would not be intimidated by the outside world. As a result, she pushed herself to work alongside her newfound associates and assist with their program. Uneasiness clung to her. At times she felt like a tourist in a foreign country who had to learn an entirely new culture. In the beginning there were bouts of sudden resentment and she wondered, why was she there?

The presence of Jenna and other young Palestinians at Jews for Justice was just one of the new complexities of political relationships evolving in a place where everyone had a working purpose.

From the onset Jenna noticed that Jews for Justice were organized. Inside their offices they had computers, copy machines, file cabinets, and plenty of desks.

There were business cards, telephones, fax machines and more. The students would sit at their computers and send messages to various organizations and sympathizers they'd already enlisted all over the world, to gain support for de-occupation. There were usually at least twenty-five people in the headquarters at any given time. Some spent time documenting human rights abuses, some monitored opinion polls, and others organized and calendared demonstrations, while several organized the food bank.

Jenna could not fail to be impressed. They were all well educated and capable. She'd hear them on the phone speaking in French, English, and Italian on their overseas phone calls.

She didn't think they had perfected any game plan for creating a perfect and just society, and maybe they hadn't even put together a workable alternative. All she did know was that they were there, inside that place, showing a lot of courage within a very tough political system that was almost entirely self-contained.

As a Palestinian, she was of course, more impatient for results than any of these Jews for Justice. When an American named Claire said, optimistically, that one day the Palestinian people would have the same civil rights as any Israeli citizen, Jenna looked at her unnerved and said, "But I am alive today." Then she sarcastically added, "If your people wait too long, then my life will be over." She began to apologize, and Jenna began to regret the accusatory nature of her comment, mostly because this blue eyed, enthusiastic Jewish girl, who walked had away from a full scholarship at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, had come to Israel because

she wanted to make a difference in the lives of those similar to Jenna's and because she came as an ally, not as an enemy.

Jenna was every bit as inexperienced and adolescent as Zakki thought she was. Cynical, she could not allow that any of "the Children of Israel" would really risk any part of their lives just to enhance hers. So, for a very long time she viewed their efforts with reservation and skepticism. It was with this very same skepticism she scrutinized a young adventurous student organizer by the name of Isaac Levy.

Jenna met Isaac at a strategy meeting for future demonstrations. Although it was not uncommon for liberal Jewish organizations to coordinate projects with some of the Palestinian organizations, and Al-Aqsa members often participated in order to monitor the activities and influence their movements, Jenna was a little more than surprised when Isaac began to be involved directly in the Al-Aqsa support wing and she protested. She was told that he could be trusted, that he was committed and always honest with them. In the past he'd participated in very serious projects, obtaining important documents on Al-Aqsa's behalf and collecting shipments from the airports that would be scrutinized if any Arab attempted to gather them. He put himself at considerable risk; more importantly Isaac could be in places that Palestinians could not, and he had become very important to the support wing.

When they were introduced, Isaac reached out to shake Jenna's hand. She instinctively recoiled, not just because she customarily did not shake the hands of men, but because Isaac was a Jew. In her limited experience, she had never touch the hand of a Jew, she never had any social interaction with one, and besides, she couldn't help question his real intentions for wanting to help them.

Isaac retreated and stood there staring mutely before he eventually walked away. "Jenna," said an unmistakable voice behind her. It was Zakki. "Give him a chance. He really is a good man and has more than proven his solidarity with our causes."

She pretended to ignore the unsolicited advice. Zakki threw his hands into the air and he, too, walked away, only shaking his head in disapproval.

Later that evening she regretted having rushed to judgment and asked him point blank, "What makes you different from the rest of your people, and what brings you to our side?" An undertone of quiet hostility crept into her voice; the more she tried to suppress it, the more her stomach tightened. She did not want to make him an outright enemy. She forced herself to at best appear more open-minded.

"It is not that I'm taking sides exactly, I'm just doing what I think is right."

Isaac said that he knew that most Israelis considered Palestinians their enemies, but he saw them as people trying to survive in a world that did not want them, one in which they were displaced, one that wanted to squash the very life from their souls if it could. Isaac said that he was just one of a several Jews willing to work towards making that not happen. "I don't believe that the Palestinians will win anything for themselves by themselves. Somewhere down the road, they will be forced to make some kind of an alliance with Jews who support their right to an

independent Palestinian state or a democracy in which their rights are identical to Israelis. Right now your people seem rather powerless. Don't you think so?" "I don't know." She delayed. "Maybe you're right."

This is not exactly what she thought, but she could not articulate her opinion at that moment. His attention was on her now and her inexperience made her nervous. His staring at her brought out every reserve she had; it made her unable to think, to put together a response. She looked blankly back at him.

"Come and participate in a few of our activities. Your friend Zakki is here quite often and you'll be comfortable once you get use to everyone," Isaac said, hoping to offer her some kind of comfort.

Jenna felt that, but she remained still, helplessly waiting for an idea. She avoided looking at him directly for fear of him being able to see right through her, looking instead at the brown wooden desk that anchored itself behind him.

This idealistic young Jew spoke sincerely, gazing intently into her eyes, though Jenna could not help from looking slightly to one side. In spite of his words she knew that only time would completely erase all elements of distrust. Before Isaac, Jenna had no direct or personal experience with Jewish people. There was no inner measuring rod to help her discern his sincerity and passion. Her natural instincts cautioned restraint regardless of the validation given to him by others.

"Well..." Isaac said, "I'll be seeing you."

He turned away, and Jenna walked mindlessly out of the room. She had never felt more stupid and unsophisticated. She wished herself, at that moment, to be back inside her house sitting next to her mother, where things were predictable. Time, observation, hard work, and a little trust provided the opportunity for maturity and growth. During this period Jenna learned a lot and she learned to handle herself like a woman. Zakki was always there to answer questions and to nurture the art of civil disobedience within her, not on a radical scale but on a level on which she felt that she could make a difference. Zakki hovered like any patient teacher who tries to ensure that his student gets it right. Zakki was as a rule businesslike, more forthcoming with men than with any of the women who volunteered in the office. Most saw this prudent behavior as completely in accordance with his religious convictions. Yet Jenna saw something different in him. With other women he was professional and direct, with her there was ease. She was left without any doubt that he was fond of her. Zakki looked out for her. When they attended demonstrations, she did not have to be near to him to know that he was somehow watching out for her, making sure that she was out of harm's way. And though Jenna never gave him any indication that he was special to her, the barrier of modesty that kept other men at a distance was a bit relaxed between him and her. Without being able to explain it, Zakki had become her confidante and she felt oddly close to this man. They talked about life, religion and family matters, and she trusted him more than any other man.

Jenna was handling some correspondence one-day. "How's the work going?" Zakki asked.

"Well, it would be going a little better if it were quieter around here."

"Well, this is one less voice you'll be hearing here for awhile. I'll be away for a couple of weeks."

"Where are you going?"

"Lebanon."

He could see that she looked worried. "I'm only going to pick up a few materials and deliver some funds."

"Is it dangerous?" She asked.

"Not at all."

Jenna felt relieved.

"While I'm gone I want you to work with Isaac's group, at the office only."

Zakki held his hand up as he saw her stiffen.

"I knew you wouldn't want to, but Isaac knows what he is doing, so trust him. Nobody is an island here and you've got to learn to cooperate. Please don't be stubborn. You know that part of the reason you are here is because I promised your mother that I would watch out for you, so I know that you will cooperate by working with him here."

"Okay!" she said to him as well as to herself. She was trying to be a woman, after all. The last thing she wanted to appear to be was a spoiled brat. She wanted to show him that she was up to any task. However, Jenna did not realize that his leaving would have such an affect on her. She did not want to show any kind of caring and turned away. But the instant she turned, the thought came to her that he would be leaving, and even though it would be for a short time, she would miss him.

"Why do I care that he is going? Why should it bother me?" Jenna asked herself. She could not help turning back around and glancing cautiously at Zakki, unable to avoid his eyes, she simply wished him to have a safe trip. His kind eyes returned her look and with a tender smile, Zakki said, "Goodbye Jenna."

Within a few months Isaac's dedication became obvious to Jenna. She saw him contributing daily in one way or another. He was energetic and unswerving in everything to which he committed himself.

A part of Jenna envied Isaac. She envied his freedom to step out with full indignation of his beliefs, armed with a passion that he could express without being immediately gunned down in the streets. Jenna was jealous that he could rally a crowd of people and bring magnetism to every speech. Isaac's sense of commitment was a wakeup call to her ineptness. Her mother with false hopes and instinctive self-preservation had tamed her. She was living her life in her college textbooks, Al Jazeera News Network, and a few reactionary hours at the city food distribution center. "I'm not a revolutionary," she'd tell herself. "I have obligations," she'd tell herself. So much for her big jihad, because there was Isaac and he was living proof that she was not a woman of principles, she was not woman of conviction, and she was not a woman of action. Jenna had the spirit of a traitor. She was exactly the kind of person she'd criticized for sitting on the sidelines and not doing enough. She was the kind of person that she despised. She

obeyed curfews and she never ever threw any stones. She was the daughter of Salsan Hayat who'd taught her the art of conciliation and obeisance to higher authority. Jenna knew that by adopting militancy she would not only change the quality of her life but most likely the quantity. That scared her.

Jenna would faithfully appear at the office regularly carrying the documents she worked on in an old sack. Papers were always wrinkled and disheveled. Isaac offered her a brand new binder with dividers. It was a gift. He saw it at the checkout stand at the university bookstore and thought of her. The next day he approached her desk and placed the binder in front of her.

"This is for you."

"No thank you." She said rather coldly.

Isaac was embarrassed by her rudeness and indifference, and walked hurriedly away. Everyone noticed how callously Jenna had responded to Isaac's show of kindness, as well as that Isaac had looked at her with puzzlement, trying to understand how and why anyone would react in such a way to a simple gift being given.

Jenna was immediately ashamed of herself.

"Wait, wait" She called out to him. Isaac stopped deferentially and turned in her direction.

"I'm sorry. That was really unkind of me and I don't know why I chose to behave so badly towards you. You have all tried to make me feel so comfortable here, but it is hard for me," She offered.

Isaac walked back over to her desk.

"Look Jenna, I know that you come here because Zakki wants you to. But if you feel really bad doing so then it is okay. No one is going to say or do anything if you don't want to come back."

"No, I respect the work everyone here is doing and I am happy to be apart of it. But for me it is a question of life or death, and that makes you and me different in almost every way. We also have different lives, religions, and ideas-everything! I know that you want to help me and help my people and that's why I respect all of you here. But you can always just walk away."

Isaac could sympathize with what she was feeling but he also saw it differently.

"That's where you are wrong. Actually you are wrong on two accounts. First, I just can't walk away. The same feelings that brought me here, keep me here. Second, we are not completely different, because whether or not you are ready to admit it, we share the same ethics and our values are not so different. You do not have to be a Palestinian to care about the Palestinians and to be willing to struggle along with them. I know that what they are up against must certainly hurt you more. But when it comes to hating what is going on here, and when it comes to doing just about anything to change it- we are equal. Nobody is under any illusions here. We both know that change will not come before more people die. In all likelihood that body count will be higher among Palestinians than Israelis, but once you joined a movement to change things everyone is equally at risk.

Jenna listened carefully and wanted to be able to put all her misgivings about Isaac and the rest of the Jews there to rest. Isaac saw that.

"Look," he said, "This isn't about pity here. I have felt compassion for people in bad situations, but this is not the same thing. What we feel here goes beyond a mere sentiment of feeling sorry for somebody and wanting to help. For me there is a kind of rage that makes me pursue what I believe is right, and do whatever is necessary to change things in this country. You see, when I saw that everything my people inherited was at the expense of yours, I made up my mind that this would not do. I also knew that the peace treaties offered up were not going to balance out everything and give you guys equal rights. Do you understand what I am trying to say here? If you don't right away, then that's okay. I didn't arrive at these feelings so easily and in the beginning I didn't even understand. I struggle with them and with the hurt I might be causing everyone close to me. But being here and doing what I am doing was the only conclusion I could come to."

Jenna nodded. After a moment of contemplation she looked up, blinking to conceal her tears. Finally she thanked him for the binder.

What had made Isaac different? She learned it was nothing more than a series of circumstances.

Jenna thought that it is almost a rule that when you want to make it easy for one person on one side to oppress or destroy living beings on the other side, you have to make him look at his opponent as a non-person or something less than human. Once this is accomplished, little or no room at all is left for compassion. If you just cut your adversary off emotionally, then cruelty can ascend to practically any level.

In this light, settlers are effectively prepared to be convenient robots for Israeli elections, untroubled land grabbers who do not blink when another man's house is taken away and bulldozed, leaving his children homeless. In this light, Israeli soldiers are trained not to consider the factual and appalling character of death, and become the ideal men to press the button that releases missiles on civilian homes in the West Bank. They will not hesitate to shoot in a crowd of children or point the trigger of assassination toward a "suspected" militant.

Disassociation starts when they, as children, are impressionable and vulnerable. It continues until they are volatile and intolerant. Without purposeful interference or circumstance, whatever pain Jenna's people feel is exiled from the Israeli conscience.

With Isaac the catalyst was circumstance. One summer he tutored mathematics to Arab students attending a program through the university. It was there that he was introduced to a different world from which he, until that time, had been mercifully excluded.

Every Tuesday and Thursday at 9 o'clock in the morning, Yunus had been scheduled to arrive at the math lab for help in his weakest subject. Isaac was going to earn semester credits for his efforts and Yunus would, perhaps, pass the class he had failed before.

For young Yunus it was a truly intimidating experience. The university halls seemed enormous and cold. He journeyed toward his point of destination until he

reached the towering, old-fashioned door, with its windows of glass. The letters stuck to the thick glass with adhesive backing, spelling out MATH LAB. Yunus tried the door, but it strong and unyielding. Even when he turned the door handle, it did not give. He pressed harder the next time, and it opened. Yunus stepped inside. The door shut sharply behind him.

Yunus found himself in a room inhabited by only a couple of other people. There were several tables, each with a table lamp, and plenty of chairs. From the middle of the room, a young man stood up and directed him towards the doorway. As he began to approach, Yunus became increasingly nervous.

When they first met Yunus could not help but look firmly at the ground; a common focal point when a well dressed Israeli authority figure sits beyond the eyes of a shy and embarrassed Palestinian village boy.

"Well," Isaac said, "you must be Yunus."

Yunus still focused on the floor, but he did not really seem fearful, just a bit hesitant.

Isaac did not at first understand why the child looked that way. He couldn't tell whether it was the look of simply being unfamiliar with his new teacher, or whether he was setting himself up for the humiliation he knew would surface once Isaac realized how far behind he was in mathematics.

He looked into his face. It was balanced about halfway between brightness and something like the unclear sense of apprehension. If you observed him for awhile and were in an idealistic frame of mind you might decide it was the face of a child who was somewhat shy, almost cheerful, and pretending to be fearless.

Yunus' eyes, a forceful and light brown, rayed into every direction they gazed. They slowly gazed at Isaac now.

Yunus, composed and polite, asked, "Are you Mr. Levi?"

Isaac laughed, "Well, just called me Isaac. Mr. Levi is my father."

Yunus was instantly charmed. He had been taught by life's lessons to distrust an Israeli, but immediately he sensed that Isaac was different.

Isaac put his arm around him and walked him over to a table. He pushed a bunch of books aside and offered him a chair.

"Sit down, sit down."

Yunus sat but could not take his eyes off him.

"So, you're having a little trouble with math?"

Yunus shrugged and replied. "It's hard for me."

Isaac grinned, then. "You look like a smart kid to me. All you need to do is practice a few of my own techniques and you'll be a math scholar in no time."

Yunus' eyes were fixed upon Isaac thoughtfully and from that point on he felt reassured and relaxed.

Isaac opened the book, leaned back in his chair and began both the lesson and what would become a close and bonding relationship.

At end of the session Yunus was sure that he knew more than what he came in knowing. And Isaac was not at all what he'd expected; and he was friendly. When the bell on the university clock signaled the end of the hour, Yunus became aware

of more people entering the room. His nervousness resurfaced and he became inclined to leave. However, for a moment, he was taken aback. The others who entered were intent upon their business. They didn't seem to even notice him. One, who did, only smiled. They didn't seem a bit repelled. Still, as he passed to leave, Yunus carefully turned away.

Isaac never intended to do anything more than teach this child. He didn't join up to like him, and the last thing he expected to do was care about him. On a number of mornings Isaac would check Yunus' notebook to see if he had been practicing his mathematics at home. He usually found more drawings than equations. One of the most appealing things about this boy was the delight he took in his sketching. Some of his pictures told exactly what was on his mind. He drew lovely pictures of stars and rainbows that reached into the heavens. Beyond the heavens were golden castles with angels circling about with their hands extended, as if offering an invitation to paradise. Yunus told Isaac that this was where they go when they die. One did not have to go very far to see that his drawings were of a place he repeatedly dreamed of, a place where he could exist with happiness, free from the tribulations of his real life.

Isaac enjoyed the hours he spent with his student and he was amazed at his contentment in the face of his situation in life. He had a charming way of making friends with almost everyone he came across. When they went for walks together Yunus could strike a conversation with entire strangers. Eventually this habit began to extend to everyone and not just Arabs. Yunus had admitted that this was not always the case. Prior to meeting Isaac he was much more guarded, afraid of what an Israeli might say to him.

One hot summer day, right after their tutoring session, Isaac invited Yunus over to his house.

"Is this weather hot enough for you," Isaac asked.

"Too hot," Yunus replied.

"Would you like to come over to my house for a cold drink?"

"Yes," Yunus eagerly replied.

As they turned the corner they saw Isaac's brother Elias returning from Yeshiva school. So they all went up together, where Yunus shyly stood in the middle of the family room looking at all the books and toys that belonged to the children of the household. Isaac took off his yarmulke and sat it on the shelf close to the door. He went into the kitchen to get sodas for the boys but kept talking through an open doorway to Yunus, who was having so much fun with Elias that he didn't hear a word Isaac said. The boys were playing with remote control cars. Isaac watched as they laughed and cars buzzed across the room, bouncing off the walls. Elias was slightly older and he assumed, without Isaac's suggestion, the part of an older brother to Yunus. His kindness to Yunus was quite obvious, for Elias recognized clearly- with his wisdom and thoughtful nature- that this was a person that did not have the same things he did.

After a little while Isaac's father returned home from work. He heard the laughter of children from the other room. Isaac's laughter seemed the loudest of all. Out of curiosity he went to find the source of all the amusement.

Solomon had never seen Yunus before although his reputation had preceded him. Isaac spoke of him constantly. He knew immediately who this child was. Isaac introduced his guest and felt delighted at being able to finally make the introduction. To his surprise his father was less than gracious. He did not go far enough to appear impolite but it was clear, that he was not at ease with the presence of Elias' new acquaintance.

Solomon Levi was a man who would have fought vigorously any man that even insinuated he might somehow be a bigot, and would be stunned by any accusation of prejudice. In the past he had spoken at length about the dire situation of the Arabs of the West Bank and all of the bigotries they were exposed to. Still he never denounced separation, nor de-occupation. He was, Isaac used to feel, one the most duplicitous persons he had ever known. Isaac believed that a man should not be recognized for his words but for his deeds and although his father could be a malevolent man, he was seldom so when it came to Palestinian causes. Isaac's personal beliefs were not lessened by the fact that this was his father, and he still loved him very much. He'd always worked hard, and given many signs of warmth and fondness, and showed deep feelings for children. However, these acts of humanity were typically reserved for his own family and Jews in general. Solomon was precisely the kind of person whom an outside observer would immediately describe as a "good man". It was this fact- his capacity for garnishing himself with respect- that heightened Isaac's agitation when his father displayed unfair behavior and ideas befitting a racist.

When Solomon saw Yunus, Isaac could see that he was not simply surprised, but that he was not pleased. He smiled at the children but motioned to Isaac to come into the next room. "What's he doing here?"

"I brought him here for a soda, Papa."

Isaac was astonished at his father's reaction and his obvious discomfort.

"Well, I'm not sure that was a good idea," Solomon conveyed, with a hint of agitation.

Isaac told him, that for his own part, he thought that it was a very good idea, and that there was nothing wrong with Yunus coming to visit. Solomon saw Isaac's shame and disappointment at his behavior towards the boy and he immediately began to explain that his apprehension was not directed at Yunus "in particular". He did not feel comfortable with Isaac bringing any Palestinian child home, but said, "Who knows what people might think."

They stood there facing each other in the room. The boys continued to play. To Isaac, it was a normal and pleasant situation and he saw no justification for anyone to be offended.

Solomon looked out at the two boys. "When I look at them I do not see Israeli or Palestinian."

Isaac paid close attention to his words and reflected on what he was saying. He said, 'I do not see Israeli or Palestinian.' Isaac, however, saw no validity in his

statement at all. He knew very well that his father saw Israeli much more clearly than he saw Palestinian. What Solomon saw was one well-fed child eating chips and racing cars. He did not see Yunus. He did not see Yunus' clothes that were too small for his body, or his shoes too tattered to be worn on his feet.

"It makes no difference to me, Isaac, Israeli or Palestinian, there are all from the same God."

Only a few months before, Isaac and his father had spoken about the increase of interracial marriage between Arabs and Jews in Israel. Solomon told Isaac about the years he'd spent attending college in Europe and how he'd attended parties with several Arab girls but would have never felt right dating any one of them. "I just couldn't see myself becoming infatuated with someone from a completely different background."

"What if I fell in love with a Palestinian girl, Papa?"

Solomon looked down and paused for moment before he spoke.

"If you married a Palestinian, I have to admit that I would be very upset. And what about your children? We inherit our religion through the blood of our mothers! Your children would not really be considered Jews."

Isaac had not fallen in love with a Palestinian girl, nor did he have that in mind but he still, nonetheless, found his father's response quite prejudiced. Hearing it he wondered what these kinds of feelings meant in terms of equality and racial tolerance. The fact that his father had drawn a line between where a relationship should begin and stop between a Jew and a Palestinian bothered him and made him feel distant from the father whom he loved so dearly.

After several math sessions, several chats, several lunches, and a new pair of Nike shoes, the odd couple became linked together. One day after a game of soccer on the university field, Yunus fell to the ground. Then he got up and stumbled into the public bathroom. He lay there on the ground curled in a ball. Isaac had not known that Yunus was epileptic. Although his sickness had been diagnosed, Yunus was rarely ever treated because his family did not have enough money to pay for the kinds of health services he needed to alleviate his problem. When they were able to pay for a prescription, the dose was often divided in half, compromising the drug's effectiveness. On that day it failed him altogether.

Isaac ran to the boy. He found him huddled against a stonewall. He was sitting on the ground, his face buried in his arms, which were resting on drawn up knees. Yunus asked Isaac to hold his head within his arms because he knew that he was about to have a seizure. At first Isaac did not understand anything Yunus was saying. It was as if he were speaking some unknown language. Yunus continued to make his plea, but nothing but gibberish came out. Finally Isaac got the message. He sat next to Yunus on the cold cement floor and placed his head to his own chest with one arm and held him tightly with the other. Within moments the uncontrolled movements took over Yunus' body. Yunus shook so violently that Isaac was barely able to protect his body from being banged into the cement wall. His eyes rolled

upwards and his tongue inwards. It lasted no more than forty seconds, but for Isaac it seemed as if it would never end.

When the ordeal was over, Isaac carried Yunus back to the study hall and eased him onto the couch without ever letting him go. He held him in his arms, watched him sleep, and realized how very little he truly knew about the suffering of others, others like Yunus.

When Yunus awoke, Isaac helped him up and as he washed the dirt from the park off his face, Yunus smiled at him ashamedly. Isaac knew he was watching him, watching for a sign of mercy. Isaac took the boy over to the student health center. One of the doctors gave Yunus an injection and a prescription. He asked Yunus why he had not been taking medication for his condition regularly. Yunus explained that they could not afford to. Isaac stood there looking and listening, trying not to become teary-eyed but his heart shone through his eyes, and in his eyes you saw the unmistakable look of sadness that told you that he was a good man; a man that would no longer disassociate himself and keep his feelings exiled.

Isaac escorted Yunus all the way home in a taxi. As they sat in the back of the cab, the boy looked to his teacher and said, "When summer is over, will we still be friends?" Isaac said, "always", holding his hand and purposely not admitting that sometimes life separates. Looking up he noticed the cynical eyes of the cab driver peering at him in the rear view mirror.

Prior to actually arriving at the intended destination, the taxi stopped short of a few blocks. The driver explained that there were two checkpoints ahead and that it would simply be too time consuming for him to go any further. Isaac paid the man and he and Yunus exited.

"Come," said Yunus, "I'll show you where I live."

Yunus put his hand in Isaac's with ease, as if he was a brother, and they plodded along together, Isaac accommodating his pace to the exhausted child's. Isaac observed that every now and then Yunus stole an inquiring look at his face, as if to make sure he would not turn back.

As Isaac and Yunus were walking down, the street ten-year-old Dema and her seven-year-old brother joined them. They were curious about Yunus' friend. Dema's brother was a handsome, smiling little boy, but Isaac could not help noticing that he was troublingly thin. As they continued, three other children came along. One was Anas, who was whispering a constant flow of words that Isaac could barely understand. Isaac was surprised by the interest of the children who knew that he was not Palestinian and who wondered why he was with Yunus. He was amused by the attention.

As Isaac walked, alongside the children, up the street, a Palestinian woman eyed him uneasily. Aimless young men in sullen groups were gathered on every corner. He passed a demolished home with a framed picture of a young Arab man, balanced on a large block of cement. He died in a confrontation with soldiers. Later the home of his family was demolished, the penance for his participation.

As they continued down the road a military vehicle screeches by with its sirens ear-piercing. After the vehicle passes, he saw little children throw stones into the street. Yunus looked at him but Isaac tried to appear not to be uneasy about what he has seen.

Finally as they approached Yunus' home, the boy ran on before Isaac a short distance and remained on the step until Isaac joined him.

When he knocked on the door there was a noise as if some person was moving around inside.

Isaac could not help but be anxious.

The door opened and an old man with gray hair, crouched over by age, received them. As he turned the key in the lock, he surveyed Isaac with some astonishment that did not diminish as he looked from him to the boy. After they went inside, Yunus addressed him as his grandfather and told him about his seizure.

"May God have mercy on you, my boy," said the old man while patting Yunus on the head. "I didn't know what could have happened when you did not return on time. You can't imagine all the things that came to my mind!"

"I was okay, grandfather. Isaac was with me."

The old man kissed him and then turned to Isaac and begged him to come all the way in. Isaac did so. The door was closed and locked. Preceding Isaac with candlelight, the old man led him to a very small sitting room.

"You must be tired, Sir," said the old man as he placed a chair near the fire. "How can I thank you?"

"By taking more care of your grandson. He was so ill today."

Isaac could tell immediately that the Yunus' grandfather was affronted.

"I do. I care for him as much as I can!" said the old man in a harsh voice.

He said this with such obvious astonishment that Isaac was bewildered at what answer to make.

"I don't think you understand what might happen if Yunus doesn't take his medication-" Isaac began.

"I do understand," cried the old man interrupting him. "I know better than anyone of my grandson's situation."

Isaac waited for him to speak again, but the old man rested his chin upon his hand and shaking his head fixed his eyes upon the fire.

They sat there in silence. Several moments later Yunus returned and his face was flushed with the hurriedness he had made to rejoin them. He busied himself preparing a meal and tea.

The old man continued to sit and took the opportunity of observing Isaac more closely.

Isaac was surprised to see that everything was being done by Yunus and that there appeared to be no other person present, except a small girl about five years of age.

Isaac took the opportunity to remark how fortunate it must be to have someone as helpful as Yunus about the house. "Most boys his age know very little about household chores."

"Well, he does what he must and without the slightest bit of annoyance. Anyway children like Yunus know very few amusements and are accustomed to working hard. Even the smallest pleasures of childhood must be bought and paid for."

"But pardon me for asking- you must have someone to assist you. Where are Yunus' parents?"

The answer told him something, all of a sudden, that he did not know about Yunus before, and something that made the little boy's coyness understandable and his manner very much distinct.

"Yunus is not my son, Sir," returned the old man. "His father was, and he is dead. His mother died giving birth to his sister. When I looked around I was all that they had, and so we live as you see." With warmth and trembling lips he went told all of the story and Isaac listened attentively. He told of all the things that had happened to his family and even though his story was quite common, it moved Isaac very much. All the while the old man sat across looking at him with timid curiosity.

At this juncture the conversation ceased, and the old man motioned for Isaac to approach the table for what Yunus had so carefully prepared.

They ate a simple dish of meat, potatoes and bread, followed by tea spiced with cinnamon. Isaac dared not refuse the hospitality.

"Ah," said the old man, turning to Isaac with a sigh as if the last conversation had not ended, "You don't know what you say when you tell me that I must care for him more."

"Let me apologize. Please don't give too much weight to a remark made in state of emotional distress."

"No," returned the old man thoughtfully. "It's okay. Come here, Yunus."

The boy hastened from his chair, and put his arm around his grandfather's neck.

"One day Yunus will be a professor or perhaps a scientist," said the old man patting the boy's cheek, "and he will have a big house of his own."

"I am happy in this house with you, grandfather," said the boy.

It was almost ten o'clock, and Isaac rose to go, which alerted the man to his own schedule.

"I have not thanked you enough, Sir, for what you did for my grandson, but I do thank you wholeheartedly, and so does Yunus. I would not want you to go away thinking that I was thoughtless about your kindness and care."

"I am sure that you are," Isaac replied, gently placing his hand upon the old man's shoulder. I am convinced of that from what I have seen. But," he added, "May I ask you a question?"

"Of course," replied the old man, "What is it?"

"With Yunus and a child as young as his sister, is there no one to help you care for them? Have they no other relatives?"

"No," he returned looking anxiously in Isaac's face. "No, and they are satisfied with only me."

"I am sure that you do all that you can, but for a man of your age, I wonder if that is too much."

"Sir," rejoined the old man after a moment of silence, "it is true that I cannot care for the children like any mother could or a man younger in age. It is also true that Yunus must often care for me as if I were the child and he were the grown person, I am sure you may have noticed. But as long as I live, these children will be my greatest concern."

Seeing that he was in a state of agitation and edginess, Isaac put on his jacket with the intention of saying no more. He was surprised to see the little girl standing patiently with a coat in her arms.

"That is not mine, sweetie," said Isaac.

"No," replied the child timidly, "It is my grandfather's."

"I don't think he is going out tonight," said Isaac.

"Oh, yes he is," said the child with a smile.

"And what about you and Yunus?" he asked.

"We stay here because we have to sleep."

Isaac looked in bewilderment towards the old man, but he was busy arranging his belongings. From him Isaac looked back to the two children. Alone! In that dark old place they called a home, and for the whole of the night.

Neither she nor Yunus showed any awareness of Isaac's disbelief, but readily helped the old man with his coat and shoulder bag and walked towards the door. Finding that he did not follow as they expected, they looked back with a mild look of confusion and waited for him. The old man showed by his face that he clearly understood the reason for Isaac's hesitation, but he only sighed to him with the leaning of the head to pass out of the room before him, and did not say a word. Isaac had no recourse but to comply.

When they reached the door, the children said goodnight and hugged their grandfather.

"You have had a long day, Yunus," he said in a low voice. "You need your rest, so go straight to sleep. Early in the morning I will come straight home."

With this the door was shut. It was clear that the old man did not wish to leave. He paused a moment while it was quietly closed and fastened from the inside, and, content that it was done, walked on as fast as he could down the street. At the block's end he stopped, and regarded Isaac with a disturbed expression, then hurried away. He was soon beyond Isaac's sight.

Isaac remained unmovable at the spot, unwilling to leave it, thinking of all the possible troubles children that age might encounter when left alone. He looked contemplatively into the street, which was sad and gloomy. He passed and repassed the home, and stopped and listened at the door; all was quiet.

After about an hour Isaac walked to where there was an available cab and went home.

That night Isaac tossed and twisted in his bed, unable to sleep, unable to lock away the scene of a child choking on his own tongue. He could not keep from thinking about those two children being left alone. What if Yunus had another

seizure? He sat there and cried because no one, not now in this day and time, should have to live that way. He cried because it changed all his assumptions about living in what was suppose to be a merciful and democratic society. It struck him as being extraordinarily unjust that he, his brothers and his three sisters, through circumstances of birth, should have comfortable lives and a reasonable expectation of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." It seemed unjust because he knew that Yunus and his sister were in every way the equals of his brothers, his sisters and himself, yet he knew very well that these two children would, only by a rare miracle, be able to break out of the entrapment of being Palestinian. The only way that he might know them in later years would be if they were to do his cleaning, clear the table in the restaurant where he ate or trim the trees in the park where his children played.

Like any other night, he showered, prayed, and turned out the light before he slept. Unlike any other night he would, henceforth, be a different man.

Lying there, whether waking or in his sleep the same images remained: poverty, isolation and seperation- the things that should be farthest removed from any child. After debating for nearly a week, Isaac decided to revisit the house of Yunus, determined this time to present himself as more of a friend than an advocate of the old man's grandson. First he stood idly across the street, and then he turned and walked slowly up the road and then down again to the corner. Isaac behaved with the kind of hesitation natural to a man who is aware that the visit he is about to make is unanticipated and may not be welcomed. Unable to continue in this manner he conquered his indecisiveness and crossed the avenue.

From the voices inside he was able to conclude that Yunus and his grandfather were together. There was a lot of laughter, which suddenly ceased upon his knock on the door. Yunus instantly opened it, and asked him to come inside. Upon entering, the old man advanced hastily towards Isaac and said, in a quite cheerful tone, that he was glad to see that he had come.

Yunus had caught a pigeon and they were overjoyed. He and his sister were running about the house with the bird, apparently rejoicing at his appearance there. Isaac took the opportunity to speak privately with the elderly gentleman.

"I very much would like to help you and your family, if you will let me. I'd like to provide you with a small allowance every month for additional medication and food for the children. Even though you work very hard, I know that you are not able to make ends meet. This will help."

He took a wad of cash out of his coat pocket and placed it upon the table.

"I don't want you to think of this as some kind of mere charity. I've come to care about Yunus as if he were part of my family. If someone in my family were ill, I would do whatever I could to help. Let me do the same thing for Yunus. We will all feel so much better knowing that he has his medication and a little extra food to eat."

The old man sat perfectly quiet, looking intently at Isaac and then over to Yunus, reverting back and forth.

"What are you suggesting?" exclaimed the old man, turning with a look of amazement at Isaac.

"You may as well drop the subject, young man, Yunus is my responsibility!"

"Didn't you hear me say that I care very much for your grandson?"

"You mean to be kind," returned the old man.

"This is not just a kindness and Yunus is not just my little friend. He's like a little brother to me!" answered Isaac. "I won't end the matter until you have agreed."

Yunus' grandfather knew very well that he was a frail man who lived in a very poor place and that a more fortunate life was very unlikely. He further knew that if Yunus were properly medicated he would no longer see his grandson's thin young body plagued with the pain and agony of seizures.

Necessity adapted him to the idea and forced him to give in to Isaac's desire with a tear of gratitude trickling down his wrinkled face.

He said no more, but taking the money, turned away with a slow, hesitant step and pressed his hand upon his forehead like a weary and dejected man. Yunus' grandfather was a person of pride who held a sense of responsibility. He could not help but feel some inward qualms. He felt ashamed at accepting Isaac's offer of assistance, but there was no room for refusal.

The old man lifted his eyes, looked at Isaac, and said with an awkward smile, "I am extremely obligated to you."

Hearing this, Isaac took the old man's hand and nodded to him respectfully, wanting only to show him the admiration he deserved and his own good intentions. He was very much relieved that no offense had been taken by his proposal. The old man's feelings were quite the opposite. The plain, forthright kindness of this Jewish boy, the affection and sincerity of his speech, the generosity that was marked upon his every act, gave the old man a confidence in Isaac, one that he'd never had for any Israeli.

Yunus and his sister joined them before long, bringing the pigeon to the table. They sat by their grandfather. It was enjoyable to see the children in their excited condition, throwing bits of bread into the little cage. The old man laughed, and as Isaac fixed his eyes upon him, he could not help thinking that as he grew older and weaker, what would become of these orphaned children. What if the old man died, what would their fate be then?

Later they all sat at the table. The old man spoke as he prepared dinner. He picked out tiny pebbles amid a small bowl of lentils. When that was done, he washed them several times. Afterwards, he chopped onions, crushed garlic, and with olive oil and a few spices he assembled everything in one pot. "Please young man, share our meal with us."

At first Isaac felt shy, but at the old man's urging and the smell of the porridge, he changed his mind about refusing. He shared the meal and began speaking about his own family affairs and spoke on a number of subjects that might interest an old man. There was ease and understanding between the both of them, and Isaac felt right at home. He could not help being in good spirits over the affection he felt for Yunus' grandfather. When the sun set the old man stood up from the table, excused himself and went to say his prayers.

Before it became late, Isaac retraced his steps back to the door. The old man told him that he would never forget his kindness to them. He wrapped his arms around Isaac and then held his cheeks within his hands. Afterwards Isaac departed. The sweetness of that moment lost some of its splendor afterward as Isaac rode out of the poor and despicable neighborhood where he was reminded of the probabilities that challenge the lives of children there, and of the way discrimination gradually destroys their innocence.

As Isaac became more involved in political activities, his father, Solomon, became more troubled and did not attempt to conceal it. Despite his obvious concern and annoyance, he spoke to his son with patience. "Listen Isaac, why don't you put more time into your studies and apply for a government internship? You will be in a position to meet people with connections and make more of a difference. It is a more practical choice, don't you agree Isaac?"

"What I choose to do and how I choose to act is entirely up to the current practices of the government," he answered.

Isaac was publicly a member of the group Jews for Justice. This was an organization that was composed of Jewish membership only, although its bylaws allowed for non-Jewish support. It was only one of the forces advocating policy changes in Israel and an adjustment of status for all of the Arabs living here. Their zeal, passion, and almost frightening loyalty to their cause made the government take notice and deal harshly with them. The fact that they were all Jews was of very little consequence. Isaac's father was well aware of this and preferred his son not to directly involve himself with the group's activities. For the most part it was too late. Isaac and anti-occupation demonstrations were inseparable. In the morning he would attend some of his classes, but in the afternoon he was in the streets. He wrote political commentaries for the liberal college newspaper and staged protest rallies on the steps of the Israeli parliament. Isaac's affront to authority and his combined passion and tireless energy helped to rally support among university students.

Salomon's warnings to his son became more numerous and more stern. One evening Solomon decided to put his foot down. "Isaac, the problems affecting those people are not your business for now."

"Papa, it would not be my business if I did not know about these things. If I did not know that the Palestinians drink, cook, and bathe from polluted tap water, and that some of their children are severely malnourished. I've seen little kids, Papa, with their navels distended. In my friend's home, four of his little brothers and sisters sleep on one small cot, one that you would not even like to walk on. I came home the other day and realized that our sofa is worth more than they make in one year, and what mother paid for that lamp over there next to it is enough to feed all of them for months."

"I've worked for everything we have, Isaac, and I should not have to apologize for the life that I have. We have our world, and they have theirs and, maybe, everything in theirs isn't fair. There is not a whole lot we can do about it!" responded Solomon like any other ineffective, liberal, nice guy.

Isaac responded, "You see that's the point, Papa. I do not see it as two worlds. I see it as just one in which we have claimed most everything of value for ourselves. It's the way the Germans started out with us. They wanted everything for themselves to the point that they did not want anyone else around to claim anything and the rest is history!"

"Isaac!" Solomon screamed. "Now you are comparing us with those people?" Isaac turned away from his father, but his father took him by the arm. "No Isaac. I'm sorry but you're going to have to listen to me! I have something I want to say to you, and before you walk away from me I want you to listen." "What makes you think I don't know everything you're going to say?" He responded.

"Because I don't know what I'm going to say to you from one moment to the next! I don't know how to reason with you anymore. It really scares me. For reasons unknown to me, you've decided to put a huge concrete wall between us, and I get this feeling that nothing will ever be the same again. I know that you don't see eye to eye with any thing I've said to you in the last couple of months, maybe in the last two years. Sometimes I even find myself telling you things that I don't even agree with, but I do that to protect you. For God's sake Isaac, if I see you heading for trouble aren't I suppose to do whatever I can to try to stop you? I know that you're not a child anymore. You're a man now and you should be making your own decisions."

"Then why don't you let me make them?" Isaac interrupted.

"Because you're twenty one years old and you're not doing any of the normal things someone your age should be doing. You frequent dangerous areas where there is nothing but trouble and violence, and everything with you is political. I don't know how often you attend class these days. Isaac, this is not making decisions, this is ignoring priorities and screwing up your life in the process."

"What right do you have to tell me what to do with my life?" Isaac shot back.

"That's easy, Isaac. I'm your father. I also know a little more about this world than you do, no matter how much you disagree. I've been around a lot longer than you have and I'm sure of one thing. Everything you do now can easily come back to haunt you later. I just pray that you will accept a few of the benefits of my own experience. Believe it or not, I am not trying to control your every move. You act as if I'm some bigot that enjoys seeing other people suffer or that I'm some Zionist redneck ready to win at all costs. Well, I'm neither! I'm just a father that would move heaven and earth to see that his family was safe and taken care of."

"I don't know what you want from me! All I know is what I believe and what I can't ignore. Sometimes it means that I am going to be doing things that might not make you happy."

Finally after Isaac had said all that he could and more than his father thought he should, he got up to leave the room. Both had become so emotional. Trembling and in tears he turned towards his father and screamed, "This can't go on!"

Isaac was a different kind of Jew than his father. He refused to look at the world through Solomon's eyes because his vision was obscured by history and tradition. Isaac's own vision was of a world where a Jew and a Palestinian shared its benefits equally.

Isaac's mother, who'd been listening from the kitchen, reached out for Isaac as he passed. She was desperate to have him understand: "Isaac, if you only knew how worried your father is about you. He doesn't want you to get yourself so involved in other people's problems. I see him so stressed and my heart goes out to him. I can't tell you."

"So don't," Isaac wanted to say, turning to release himself from his mother's grip.

Isaac took a swift, gasping breath, fixing his eyes away from his mother with a look of utter fury. Then he was gone, his feet hammering down each stair, followed by the shattering of the front door.

After Isaac was gone, his mother went and sat down next to her husband.

Solomon looked at his wife. "I'm worried about him. He is getting way too involved. He doesn't concentrate on his studies at all. There are no parties and he doesn't even date anymore. It's just demonstration after demonstration, boycott after boycott. When we try to talk to him, either he says nothing at all, or he jumps on the defensive, ranting and raving like someone obsessed. "

"It's just a phase he's going through," Anna said.

"Life would be too easy if that were so," Solomon responded, looking at his wife miserably. "I don't know. I really think he needs some professional help." Anna reached out and touched his arm.

She was not as concerned as Solomon. She believed that all young men go through either a stage of rebellion or the taking of a stand. "The problem is that Isaac means well. He sees those people in a bad situation and he wants to help. I just don't know why in wanting to help, he must bring so many problems to himself." Solomon didn't answer. The fact was, he did not have an answer and he knew that if he dwelled on the matter further, he would only alarm his wife.

When Isaac returned that evening, his father insisted that he see a psychiatrist, a friend of the family who lived nearby. Isaac only agreed to go to please his father and to show him that the power of his convictions could not be diluted on the couch of a shrink. He wanted his father to see that his behavior was not neurotic, but the result of a normal man simply being humane.

Before he slept, Isaac's mother had a word with him. The room was dark. He was lying face down on the bed, as if he wanted to avoid looking into her face. She reached over to the nightstand and snapped on the light.

"I want to talk to you."

"I want to sleep, mother." His voice was hushed into the pillow. "I'm tired."

"Give me just a couple of minutes."

She pushed some of the blankets aside and sat beside him on the bed. "The constant fighting between you and your father cannot go on, Isaac. For God's Sake, he is your father. You treat him like some shopkeeper that you've had a disagreement with, not the man who has cared for you all of your life! Where is the respect?"

"I do respect him. I'm sorry mamma, I don't know how things got out of hand."

"Things don't Isaac. You do."

"For once I wish you could see beyond his side."

Isaac rolled onto his back, still refusing to look at his mother in her face. "I'm not trying to start a fight with Papa, but he doesn't try to understand anything I say. He's arguing with me; I'm not arguing with him. He has the right to believe whatever he wants, but that doesn't mean I have to change my thinking in order to prove that I respect him. I don't mean to hurt him; you will tell him won't you? Tell him that I don't mean to hurt him."

"Why don't you tell him?"

"No! Please don't ask me to, because."

"Why not, Isaac?"

"He wouldn't believe me anyway!"

Unexpectedly he sat up in the bed, folding his arms together and shaking his head. His eyes were wet and his nose started to run. His mother gave him a tissue to wipe his face.

"Because it won't get us anywhere!"

"What are you saying?"

"It won't change anything. It won't change what I do in the movement or my feelings about the Palestinians. It won't change his feeling about me."

"He's just trying to look after you."

"No, mama. He's trying to change the way I think, and so are you."

"Try Isaac! Why can't you try?"

He shook his head, "I can't. Things aren't as black and white as you and Papa think they are."

Her eyes glared at her son's face then looked away. She got up from the bed. Isaac could tell that she had not been given the assurances she came for. He could feel her disappointment.

She stood by the bedroom window, thinking of the year before, when everything was so simple, when there was no drama in the Levi household. They were always happy and they never quarreled.

"You are going to have to change, Isaac, somehow. We can't live like this." Her voice was hard and decisive- without negotiation.

Finally she left and she could feel that he was waiting for her to leave. The door was shut tightly, sealing inside the anger and the silence.

After spending several hours with Isaac, the doctor reported to Isaac's father that Isaac believed personal intervention is a responsibility and that his primary

motivation was not to rebel against his parents or religion in any sort of way. Isaac was driven to help those he believed had been unfairly restricted in society and to set a precedent for other young Jews who also see conditions of injustice. The doctor added that he thought Isaac was unable to recognize the danger he was putting himself in. "There is not much you can do. Isaac is a citizen of Israel. Given this fact, there is no way to sedate his life and blind him to the current political and social situation he is in. Even if you were to send him away, he would find a way to participate elsewhere because he sees it as a duty."

It was not as Isaac's father had hoped for. He had hoped, that through psychotherapy, Isaac would learn to reconcile the differences between his own life and the lives of the Palestinians, people whom he had come to know. Therapy was supposed to alleviate his sense of guilt, or at least enough of it so that he could continue to live in an upper-class neighborhood and vacation in Europe every year. Isaac was supposed to become, in terms of his society, "a well-adjusted individual," able to reside in peace with the existence of an imbalance of advantage that in the present seemed intolerable to him.

Duty would eventually call on Isaac again. The very next week Jews For Justice organized what was supposed to be a peaceful demonstration. Solomon tried to persuade Isaac not to go as he knew the Jews For Justice was working wholeheartedly for change, and had recently been linked to more radical groups. He feared his son's loyalty was becoming muddled in the question of how far to go in making that change, and how far to go in undermining the government's policies. So many of its members believed that any means were justified if it led to attaining the end goal. Solomon was afraid that Isaac was capable of being swept into its current and feared he lacked the ability to restrain himself.

"Don't worry, father. The demonstration will be peaceful," Isaac promised.

"You expect me to believe that when I think that you don't even believe it?"

"Can't you just look at it from my perspective just once? Maybe then you would understand!"

Father and son had gone over each other's biases time and time again. For some reason Isaac retained some delusional optimism that his very traditional and law abiding father might one day come to adopt his own liberal views.

"You know where I stand," answered Solomon. "It is you that should be questioning your allegiances."

He said it with the certainty and sarcasm of a man who had no plan of changing a world that granted him the privileged life he lived.

Isaac chose to ignore his father's warning and walked out of the door. Turning back toward his father, he added half-heartedly and jovially, "You are welcome to join us."

The demonstration opened that evening as usual. "Peace now!" droned on and "End occupation!" followed. What Solomon did not know was that Isaac himself would be speaking and that his words would go way beyond moderate. Isaac leaned on the podium and labeled the government "fascist," a term sensitive to

many Israelis who'd lived in the concentration camps of Germany. He stood there advocating the dismantling of current policies of the State of Israel.

"Aggression is initiated by those who dominate, who take advantage of, who fail to identify others as persons- not by those who are demoralized, disadvantaged, and unrecognized. It is not the hated who initiate disaffection, but those who hate, because their compassion is reserved for only their own kind. It is not the powerless, subjected to terror, who initiate terror, but the aggressor, who with his command constructs a solid condition that produces the "discarded." It is not the tyrannized who initiate authoritarianism, but the tyrants. It is not the detested who initiate hate, but those who detest. It is not those whose self-worth is denied them who negate importance of others, but those who have denied others their human rights. Those who have become pathetic under the stranglehold of the strong do not apply power, but the strong who have weakened them. Every day we hear the political commentators describe the Palestinians as a people who have nothing to lose. This would imply that everything has been taken. The logical questions that should follow are, "Where did it all go? How did they lose everything? Lastly, who took it?"

"So when the world would like the residents of the Occupied Territories to believe that things will change, I tend to believe that it is taking much too long, and that these things have been changing for over fifty years while Palestinian people still live in "houses" that amount to no more than metal cubes and have toilets that are no more than a hole in the ground. The sluggishness of change is always adequate in the eyes of those who are only doing the watching. It is the comfortable people, by and large, who make resolutions in that society. It is only the people that those resolutions are going to affect who are expected to wait. Heading the list of stagnation is Ariel Sharon, who has never supported a Palestinian State in any meaningful sense of the word, and has avoided any negotiation for years. He represents a culture of political domination that is not interested in abiding by international law, which requires it to withdraw from all the occupied Palestinian territories. For thirty-five years, the Palestinian people have been living under a brutal military siege and military occupation, and Israel has never shown any interest in ending that occupation. It is fundamentally more interested in land than in peace. Israel knows all too well that strict application of international law would vastly improve the situation of the Palestinian population, who are left to wonder why their legal rights are not enforced. The United Nations' adoptions of hundreds of resolutions are meaningless to them if they are not enforced. Sharon wishes to manipulate the world into believing that any criticism of himself or Israel is anti-Semitism, even if this criticism comes from the United Nations. However, the international community as a whole must open its eyes and realize that opposing occupation is not anti-Semitism. To cry out against missiles descending on the heads of Palestinian children, the demolition of Palestinian homes, the destruction of field and orchards, and closures that make every Palestinian village a prison camp is not anti-Semitism. However, it is anti-Sharon. For Sharon, there exists only one right: the Israelis' right to live in peace over the right of the Palestinian to survive. He is a man with whom this disproportion is not

accidental, but well noted, gratefully accepted, and most happily received. By allowing the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, he is seeking to transform everything around him into an object of domination. By mowing down their homes, confiscating their land, and assassinating their people, he has reduced the Palestinians to the status of objects at his disposal. His vision of an end justifies the means. The only foreseeable end for Sharon is the complete annihilation of the Palestinian people.

"Let us not deceive ourselves about who the prime minister is. He is a first rate politician, more than a first rate politician. Hell, he is a magic man! He put all his lies into his bag of tricks and pulled out exactly what he wanted you to see. Like any good magician, he was hoping you wouldn't see what he was hiding behind his back. He was hoping that you wouldn't catch him hiding the bodies of Palestinian children, trying to make murdered people disappear. He used worldwide compassion for Jews to excuse his hate crimes and most of the time it worked and America was there to assist him in furthering his illusion.

The question is, will the rest of the world allow this illusion to work? Palestinian people have been dying for years. That's not an illusion. That's real. Sharon would have you ignore reality. That way he does not have to deal with the truth and he can continue to stack up bodies and you can continue to put your compassion over international law.

"We must begin to ask ourselves, what do Jews really think about justice and fair play? They must also be willing to ask the Israeli government to ask itself the same, especially when they use the power of our weapons to kill off protesters who protect their own people, torture civilians during interrogations, and attack foreign journalists in an attempt to suppress their stories. In view of our tradition as a democratic nation, which once fought a horrible state of oppression of its own, it seems to me that it would be on firm ground in soliciting an explanation."

"The only way to address the violence is to understand why the violence is happening. That is the one thing that all Israelis have failed to do. The Jewish settlements that are erected every year on top of the olive gardens that used to belong to Arab families are funded with misery, nourished with injustice, and erected on top of despair. No one from the United Nations is standing outside with his voice raised, shaking his fist, and asking every man and woman who comes and goes, eats and sleeps there, just how much pain and how many lives it required in order for them to have a home there. Nobody asks. No one likes to ask questions of this kind. Few even wish to answer them."

Soldiers grimaced at the applause his statements drew.

After he descended from the podium and took his place alongside the marchers, policemen surrounded him within moments.

"On the ground," the officer shouted. "Get on the ground!"

“Go to hell!” Isaac screamed.

Two other officers approached and before he knew it they had taken hold of him, one on each side. Isaac was slammed up against a wall and handcuffed. Other protesters came and crowded around. Officers began shoving them back. They responded with shoving of their own. Massive fighting broke out, and a police bus was dispatched for the sixty-three demonstrators who were taken into custody. When revelers began throwing rocks and bottles through into the crowd, police in riot gear were dispatched. Three were hospitalized. Teenagers kicked the windows out of a city bus. The police were pelted with rocks and bottles. Everything went out of control.

A news cameraman got most of it on tape as a small riot broke out. What he did not get was Isaac being punched in the ribs and kicked in the groin causing pain intense enough to drop him to the ground. Isaac lay face down on the pavement unconscious. When he did regain consciousness, he found himself being extracted out of a police cruiser and led into the jail.

Several hours later Isaac saw his father standing in front of his cell, and he immediately began to explain. Solomon held up his hand to stop him. “I will not discuss it here.” He said.

He appeared to stand there expressionless, yet at the same moment there was a rush of hate in his heart that no father should ever have for his son. All of a sudden Solomon turned and then came back with the full force of his hand and backhanded Isaac in the face. Isaac felt shock more than pain. He couldn’t remember a time his father had ever hit him. He never remembered a time his father’s face brimmed with such anger.

Solomon could find no way to reason with Isaac’s behavior. Why was not his family more important to him? “Isaac.” He often said, “Family is the rope which every man, woman and child must hold on to.

Isaac had grown up like many first born, indulged and adored. He wanted to be a lawyer, even when he was little. He’d always been a good Jewish boy, obedient and kind to his parents. How he’d come to break the rules perplexed his father. Isaac had come to choose enemies as friends when all his father wanted him to say is, “I choose you. I choose our family.”

Once they were home, Anna burst into the foyer. She was furious. “What were you thinking, Isaac? We saw you on television speaking out against our leaders, against our country, even our right to be here! What were you thinking? Our phone hasn’t stopped ringing since. And it isn’t just from our neighbors; there are hate calls.”

He noticed tears start in her eyes, and then roll down her face.

"I'm your mother, but right now I feel like I don't even know you. When I saw you on television and heard everything you said, I thought this cannot be my son!" At that point she cried in agitation, and before long she was weeping hysterically.

Isaac stood there, at first dumbstruck, then he began to defend his actions. "All of my life, momma, you've taught me that all of our people have an obligation to stand up for those who are helpless, but now when those people are Palestinian who are laying claim on land that we wish to live on, I should turn a blind eye? Our leaders give our soldiers a license to kill without hesitation, and most of the time without provocation, for no other reason than race, religion, and land. I'm supposed to ignore it? Isn't that the same reason Hitler killed Jews?"

"So now you are comparing us to Hitler?"

"No, momma, I am only saying that their blood and their bones are just as precious as ours, and until this government recognizes that fact, I must continue doing what I am doing!"

At that point it was his father who came and stood face-to-face with his son. Two men: one rebelling against what he saw as injustice in the world, the other full of loyalty and allegiance to a state called Israel, and unwilling to accept his son's defiance any longer.

"What is it about your people you hate so much?"

"That not true Papa. I love my people and I love being a Jew. But I also know the past. I know that our people were killed and made homeless for no other reason except they were Jews. Now we are doing the same thing to the Palestinians. We are killing them off and making them homeless for no reason except that they are Palestinian. If they were Jews we would welcome them and give them a part of this land, but because they are not, we have destroyed their lives or we have kicked them out with no right of return. No, Papa! I don't fight on their behalf because I hate my own people. I fight because I love my people and I want us to be who we were supposed to be. I may not be a Zionist, but I am a Jew!"

Solomon gazed at his son, unable to fathom a basis for his reasoning. Isaac could see that there was a storm rising in his father's heart but he would not allow himself to back down.

"What would you have us do, Isaac? Surrender to these terrorists? Have you any idea what the consequences of that would be? Maybe you would be singing a different tune if a suicide bomber struck closer to your own home," added Solomon in a tone angrier than Isaac had ever heard. "When a man sees his own loved one's body blown to pieces, his perspective changes."

"That may be," conceded Isaac, not really wanting to continue fighting with his parents any further. "But that still does not mean the Palestinians should not openly and defiantly resist their situation!"

His voice mirrored his stance, but his eyes were marked with misery.

"You've said, Papa, that Ariel Sharon condones excessive methods of violence. Isn't it possible?"

"Shut up Isaac. I'm sick of it!" Solomon snapped, feeling himself unable to stomach another debate. "All you have accomplished is breaking the law and getting yourself arrested."

"The law? Whose law? Oh, you mean Sharon's law?" Isaac said.

"No, I mean the existing law! I mean the one that got you arrested!"

"Even if those laws are unfair, huh, Papa?"

"That's right Isaac. A law can be changed, but you do not have the right to break it."

"But don't you see, that is what we are trying to do. First we have to get the government to listen. You just do get it. Have you ever been to the Gaza or West Bank? It's terrible! They don't come close to living as we do."

Solomon was silent for a long time before he responded. "I don't give a damn about what you are trying to do. I just know what you've done, and that is caused your family insult and humiliation. I can also tell you what you need to do, and that is to step out of your fairy-tale world, because there just aren't any happy endings in this life. Someone must lose in order for the other guys to win. Frankly, Isaac, I'd prefer to win. If your political correctness doesn't allow you to deal with that, and it doesn't leave you feeling that you're on the side of being right, then that's just too bad!"

At first Isaac only stared. His father's word seemed foreign to him, like a foreign language that he was unable to decipher. A feeling of intense frustration came over him and there was nothing else to do but responded with anger and cynicism. "Nothing is right here. We are not living life as we should and our government is not operating according to our most basic religious laws, the ones you taught us as children. You admit that there is acute unfairness, yet you ignore the true scope of it all. Perhaps it is you that would be singing a different tune, Papa, if you saw missiles descend upon the heads of your loved ones for nothing more than having been born Palestinian and praying in a mosque. Houses of innocent people are searched or destroyed while their lives are turned inside out for no other reason than their existence being a physical inconvenience to Israelis. We send them in exile or we murder them here! I'd probably suffer the same had I not been born a Jew. I protest to make this point to our leaders. How do they respond? They answer by making more arrests, more curfews, more repression, and more funerals in the Arab territories."

Finally it was Solomon's turn to address his son. He nodded, and for some time reflected. Finally he addressed his son.

"Every time you do something, every time you go somewhere, every time you lie- even if it blows our lives apart- you do it because you think its right. To hell with the consequences! I can't trust you. Never mind that I've loved you, I can't trust you anymore."

Isaac, I want you to listen and hear my words. We have never denied you anything, even your right to disagree. We've struggled to give you the best of what

we've had. Still, we never asked anything of you except some respect and a little consideration for your family. You denied us that by your behavior today."

"No, Papa!"

"Be quiet Isaac, only I speak now!" Solomon shouted. "I won't allow you to do this to our family again. You must choose between your family and your politics. You cannot have both and be my son. If your ideas are more important then we are, then I want you to take your belongings and leave. Our connection to you will be over, and you will not be allowed to return here again." He sat down in a state of emotional exhaustion then concluded, "Think before you act; it is final."

Isaac already knew what his decision would be. "I don't have to think Papa. Don't you think that I have argued these things again and again in my head? Every time I still came to the same decision. I am sorry for whatever hurt that I've caused you, but I will go, as you have asked."

"Well then." Solomon stiffened himself in an angry way. "To hell with our feelings all together!" Abruptly he grabbed a photo album of a shelf and began ripping up every picture it held of Isaac, extracting each photo and thrusting it onto the floor and cursing him at the same time. At each point of his rebuke his face blazed with sultry and contemptuous eyes.

Isaac stood silent and pale.

A wail of anguish broke from Anna's mouth. "You will go?" She cried. "Where will you go? What will you do?" She jumped up and raced toward her son. She seized him by the arm and began to pull.

"Leave him Anna," Solomon insisted, snatching her hand, squeezing it tight within his own, gazing at her with his eyes lit like fire. "He has made his choice, and he is no longer our son."

Isaac did not take these bitter words lightly. In them he heard a feeling of permanence.

Isaac gathered some belongings and left his home, saddened and dejected. When the door shut against his back, he leaned back against it and wept. Never had he felt so fearfully alone. He wandered aimlessly the entire night until the sun began to rise. He eventually found his way to the home of an American friend he attended classes with at the university. Isaac was exhausted and breathless when he arrived.

Two days later Isaac's name was listed in the obituary column of the newspaper. Shiva, the week of mourning, began. At the temple mourning candles were lit in his memory. He had been officially declared dead in the minds of his parents.

Isaac had misread his parents' response, and his own response to theirs. As the reality of losing his family sank in, the emotional burden began to break him. The reality was that the Levy family would never invite Isaac back into their lives unless he gave up the one he had been living. In their minds, he had made a conscious decision to indulge in anti-Israeli politics, and his decision could be rescinded at any time.

Although some young Jewish activists had the ability to simply override the emotional fallout for their support of the Palestinians, for Isaac, this was an unbearable conflict. Isaac was thoughtlessly unaware that the root of his self-

assurance lay in the love and support of his family, not in just his convictions. Without them, he lacked the confidence or capacity to function in life.

Isaac was overwhelmed by the sudden turn his life had taken and by the recognition of the instability of his existence. A week before he'd had a father and a family; now he had been declared dead. He felt alone and disgraced. All sense of security had vanished.

The worst part was that Isaac did not believe that he had done anything wrong. He asked himself why his father rejecting was him. Why had he told him to never come again? Isaac had great difficulty dealing with the conflicting feelings he'd experience in the last few days, the feeling of rejection and guilt, and the feeling that he had hurt his family although he hadn't done anything wrong.

The more Isaac thought about it, the more it seemed to him that there could be some sort of peaceful resolution between him and his family.

He took out his phone, called his mother, and begged her to meet him at a café.

When they met, her first words were, "Look at you, Isaac. You look awful!"

They sat at a table next to a front window. It was past the lunch hour and the restaurant was nearly empty. As Anna sat there, he began to explain. He told her about how bad he felt and how he never expected this kind of reaction from his father. When he had finished she stared at him.

Anna threw up her hands. "What do you expect for me to do? What do you expect him to do? I'm telling you, Isaac, he can't take it anymore. He doesn't want a freedom fighter for a son. He wants his son. Jews for Justice is full of plenty of people who are able to take your place. But whenever your father talks to you about quitting there's always 'But Papa.' He's tired of it!"

"I'm just trying to live my life in my own way and Papa won't let me."

"Is that what you are doing?"

"Yes Mom, that's what I'm doing, or trying to! It's gotten really hard though. It's gotten hard and confusing. It been this was for a really long time."

She sat at the table frowning.

"You took this all too far and you put your father in a difficult position. You put me in difficult position. Whether you want to admit it or not, whether you're aware of it or not, you made your father disown you because you disowned him first. You called me here to intercede, to try to convince your father that he's wrong. I won't do it. I won't let you paint yourself a victim and paint your father some cruel monster. That's not how it is. You've got to bear some responsibility for this mess you've made. So now it's your turn Isaac. You have to be the one to choose. Other than that I don't know what to say you."

"Well, I've been thinking too, and I've thought about it very carefully. I just don't see how I can quit. I don't see how I can go into that office and say that I was wrong or that everything we do isn't worth the risk. Mama, how can I walk away from for what I believe in? Tell me how!"

"Oh Isaac," Anna said, making a mournful face. "Is it so easy to turn your back on your father and me? Do you want me to beg you?"

Isaac could not think of anything to say.

She shook her head, got up out of her chair and as she was about to walk out into the street, Isaac called out, "Mama, I love you!"

"I know," Anna said sadly.

Isaac slumped in his chair and stared into space. He felt broken.

Within minutes she had returned.

"You realize" she said, "that you're behaving like some radical defiant brat who really wants to defy their father more than support any cause!"

"That's not...."

"Shut up Isaac, don't interrupt me! Then when his family is shamed and his own brothers and sisters are hit and insulted, he says 'I never intended that to happen. I never thought that others might have to pay a price for my behavior. I never considered that if I insulted our leaders and thumbed my nose at tradition that some parents would not allow their children to associate with my sister!'

My God, Isaac I can't believe how selfish you are, just plain selfish! Your father and I have worked hard to make a good life for our family and we aren't going to sit around and watch you ruin everything. Do you hear me? Don't you realize how much it took for your father to come as far as he has? It's not that he doesn't have any feelings for other people; he just understands these things better than you do. He lived in a time when Jews were forced to live in filthy settlements. That's where he was born. His first years of life were spent in hunger. Imagine, Isaac! Six children were born to his mother; you know only three of them. The others died because they had nothing to survive on. Why should he run a huge risk because of you? If you want to destroy your own life then that's your choice, but its one you will have to make on your own. Leave me out of it. I can't help you!" Anna stalked away.

It was finally beginning to seep into him, the realization that life, as he knew it was over, that he could not be the son of Solomon Levy and Isaac too.

Isaac thought that he could avoid his feelings by plunging into his work. He would come to the offices, enter into conversations with his co-workers, in his habitual way, tilted back in his seat, eyeing all of the files with a contemplative look, bending over as usual to the person closest to him, moving correspondence over to him, swapping remarks, and then suddenly raising his eyes, holding himself upright, he would begin to announce the calendar of events for the day. Suddenly, however, in the middle of directions, the wretchedness in his mind, taking no notice of the session, seemed to speak without any real thought. He would focus on his problem for a moment, and then try to drive the thought of it away, but the hurt continued to exert itself. It seemed to overwhelm him, and he'd look devastated, the misery would enter into his eyes, and it would appear that he was asking himself: "Can this be true, has my family disowned me?"

His co-workers, taken aback and concerned, saw that Isaac, who was such an organized manager, had become distracted and confused. He would stir himself and attempt to put himself on task, complete his assignments, somehow do the job that he'd committed himself to, and return to a cold rented room sadly aware that his work could not rescue him from the sadness and depression he carried around with him.

After working an entire day at the resistance office, Isaac left about six o'clock. Most of the day he'd sat at his desk subdued. In the morning he did little else but appear bewildered and pace back and forth behind his desk. In the afternoon he'd begun gnawing on his pencil. Seemingly unaware of his actions, he put the pencil into a sharpener over and over again, looking at the point with apparent displeasure. When there was nothing left to sharpen he tossed it into the trash. Jenna walked over and said, "Here, try a pen."

It was the first time she'd ever seen him look so out of place there in the office. She looked around at everyone working so diligently. The place had become a sanctuary of sorts, unlike most other places inside the country where segregation was encouraged by conscious social policies that deepened ethnic isolation. It was unlike places where Jewish kids don't know Palestinian kids, where Palestinians don't know Jews, where they are outsiders to each other.

In that office they were a group of people from tremendously diverse backgrounds lending their voices, their ideas, and bringing their open minds to the table. Young people stayed there for hours and it was easy to see why. There was so much selflessness. Everybody left their baggage at the door and stubbornly refused to give into a biased political agenda. Their intelligence, their morality, and their allegiance just lit up the whole place.

"I'm going." Isaac muttered. He got up from his desk and walked out of the door.

From the window Jenna watched as Isaac crossed the street. From the other side he looked back up at the window. Jenna waved. He waved back and headed down the street.

He wanted to run as fast as he could. He wanted to run until he lost his breath, as if that would release something inside, only the street was crowded with people. They would stare at him, and wonder what was wrong with him. Why was he in such a hurry? So many people were on the defensive, so were many people on guard for the next attack that a man could not even run through the street without causing suspicion or drawing attention to himself.

Thirty minutes after he left, he returned. Jenna asked him why he had come back.

"I went outside and I stood on the street and thought, where should I go? I didn't know where to go," he said.

Jenna's heart sank seeing Isaac so lost. The next few days he was different, withdrawn and disenchanted. She didn't know how to put the way he looked or acted into words. He just looked broken.

Isaac collapsed into a chair, his head hung low, pressing his hands on top of a desk. He waited for a familiar feeling of pain to go away. Only it did not go. A grating unpleasant swell of memory charged over him, projecting itself. It was unbearable.

Jenna walked over to him. "You don't deserve this, you know."

"Well that's because we live with the crazy impression that we should get what we deserve. I'm not sure that it's going to happen for me."

"Why does your father have to be so cruel?" She asked.

"Wait a minute. My father is not a cruel person!"

"Well, you don't have to be a cruel person to be cruel." She said. "I just don't know any other way to describe a person who would do this to his own son."

"He just doesn't understand," Isaac answered.

"Believe me Isaac, the problem isn't that your father does not understand. The problem is that your father does not value you enough to even try. Look how far he went to prove his point."

"He's just disappointed and he feels like I let the family down," Isaac answered. "When he realized that I couldn't live the dream he wanted me to, I think it struck the deepest chord of resentment in him. When that happened, he didn't want to think of me as his son, so why be a father to me? I made him feel humiliated in two ways, public and private."

Almost desperate for a little guidance, he asked her, "You don't think I should try to reconcile with him."

"I think that you need to do what you need to do," Jenna said as their eyes met, but she turned away when she said, "As long as you don't compromise your beliefs."

"I'll talk to him. He'll come around," Isaac replied.

"Maybe you're right," She answered.

Jenna didn't believe it for one moment that Solomon would ever come around, but she didn't want to say something more that would hurt Isaac. She didn't want to make matters worse, so she decided to stop.

Jenna told him that she would pray for him.

"Thank you," he said.

"Please don't thank me. I should be thanking you. You give to me every time you're here."

"Oh, does that mean that you respect me now?"

She was a little self-conscious, "Well, yeah."

"And is that suppose to make me feel better?" Isaac asked.

Yet more self-consciously she answered, "I don't know."

"Well it does," he smiled, but it was a sad one. "You know my father once told me that you don't have to thank the people that matter."

"Now there is something that your father and I agree on."

Isaac shook his head.

Jenna turned and looked up at him to see what if any effect her words were having, and Isaac did his best to brighten. But even so, in the face of all of her consolation, the specter of his father and all that he represented with everything, was ever before him- Solomon's stance, his decree in regards to it, the apparent impossibility of doing anything but going along with his decision. His unreasonable, unshakable and unchangeable decision!

There was no solution, none whatsoever! To win one thing was to give up on another. There was no solace to be had, only a loss here or a loss there. The misery

of being alone and homeless, drifting about here and there; being forced to write his mother once she was forbidden to see him, and the thoughts of his siblings concerning him. What a bargain to put up with. He must face it and solve it somehow. He had to!

Jenna could not help but worry. She saw a different look in Isaac's face. It was an anxious and almost deranged look- a borderline between reason and unreason. He looked sick, broken and extremely despondent.

Two weeks after the death notice was placed Isaac decided to face up to his father. Despite everything that had transpired, Isaac still loved Solomon as he had always loved him. For this reason he went to the house on the Sabbath, believing that no other day would be better for a peaceful resolution.

He stood in front of his home for a moment. He looked around: the streets in front him, the shops, and the park across the street; everything was in its place, as it has always been. Troubled by his awareness, the moment was uneasy. He could not get beyond it. Yet he needed to; he needed to do something.

Isaac entered the building and walked to his father's door. His hand shook with nervousness as he attempted to insert the key into the lock. Yet with effort he took hold of himself and opened it.

There was, however, to be no understanding and no reconciliation. All the bitter feelings that ignited that night made all of Isaac's friends wish that they had done or said anything that would have stopped him from going there. Jenna tried to persuade him against it.

He went there looking wretched. His appearance was, at first sight, strange to his parents as Isaac was unshaven and looked as if he had not slept. He stared straight in front of him, as though he did not see anything. There were several seconds before anyone spoke. It was his father who broke the silence. "Why are you here?" he shrieked in a brisk, rough, unnatural voice.

"I've come to speak to you, Papa." Isaac said in a quiet, shy voice, drawing his head onto his shoulder and looking distinctly miserable.

He was greeted with nothing but scorn. The expression on his father's face was unfamiliar to him. There was something unmerciful in his eyes, a look that made Isaac feel troubled and abandoned. Anna tried to look equally as stern and determined as her husband, but he was her son, so she merely looked lost and suffering. Solomon's behavior was heartless and icy from the start and before many minutes had passed Isaac knew that such bitterness had eternally rendered his father unable to be forgiven. Solomon gave a quick glimpse over Isaac's frail looking body. "Of course", he thought, "he looks the injured party, but what about us? Him and his one-sided principles, which his friends respect so much and praise him for; the whole mess sickens me!"

As he remained there in the middle of the room his father began to blow up at him. "Why have you come back here? You should have never come back here!" Anyone who could have seen his face at that moment would have sworn to the sincerity of his words.

Isaac stood with his mouth shut tightly and a muscle began twitching on the left side of his pallid and penitent face.

Isaac's behavior, and the publicity that attended it, had put the entire family under the spotlight of humiliation.

"Our neighbors avoid us, and we avoid them out of shame. People send us hate mail and call us traitors. All because you preferred our enemies to your own people." Then he flung the mail at him as if it were validation of the crime of which he was now accused.

"Your brothers and sisters come from school in tears because their classmates call them enemies. Did you think about them at all?" He spoke to his symbolically dead son with disgust and disappointment. "You are the sum total of my regrets in this life, and I curse the day you were born, Isaac. The only thing that keeps me from killing you is my own fear of God. All I wish is to never see your face again, never to have you come to my home. From the day I placed your name in the obituaries I thought of you as dead, and I will think of you that way until God makes you so!"

"No father. I swear, I never meant..."

"Listen Isaac, listen! I can never forgive you for what you've done, for how you ruined everything between us, never!"

"Why not?" he somehow uttered, unable to hold himself back from weeping

Solomon screamed, "I can't. You chose those people and your ideas over us! When the going got rough, we didn't count. You're never going to be forgiven for that, *never*! You think of us now that you feel lonely. You think of us now that you have no one to take care of you, no home in which to lay your head, no brothers and sisters to laugh and talk with you. These are the things that have you here seeking some kind of absolution.

Isaac turned towards his father, who had sat down at that point. He could hear Solomon's loud heavy breathing, his angry face looking angrier still. Finally in an exhausted voice Solomon said, "You are nothing to me."

"But you are my father, I am your son! Nothing will ever change that."

Solomon was unmoved. From this coldness Isaac knew that his father was untouched by his humble pleading. He would have gone on, but at this impasse he knew there was nothing, no apology, no expression of regret to be accepted. His mouth tightened, as though paralyzed and his left cheek began to twitch even more rapidly.

Solomon started to speak and stopped, determined never to utter another word to his son, whose eyes were raised in disbelief; his body sat motionless. A wave of tension advanced quickly, leaving hardness and a fiery sensation in his chest.

His mother watched, and she too stood firm as Isaac put out one hand towards her, with a childlike look of sorrow in his face, looking as children do when they seek mercy for an act of naughtiness, shrinking back and forth and holding out their little hands tearfully.

Isaac's face reddened, his mouth swelled, and his eyes flooded with tears.

His mother moved further away from her son. Unable to witness his pain she shielded half of her body from his sight.

Isaac reached for his father and looked intently into his face, but his father's hateful and sickened eyes fixed directly into his own gave proof of his father's utter contempt. For his eyes refused to obscure what his heart truly felt. He stood defiant. If he had cared for his son at all, he gave no sign of it.

Isaac's mind was shattered and unhinged and he felt pressure behind his eyes. With exertion he drew air into his lungs. When Isaac tried to press his hand against his father's, Solomon recoiled with disgust.

Isaac knew that there one option alone that might change everything. He could have begged for forgiveness by renouncing all of his previous behavior. He could have promised never to involve himself or his family in politics again. But there was a struggle going between his conscience and his heart, between a desire to indulge his parents in their desires, and the consciousness that this would be wrong. There his father sat before him, his face drawn with agitation, muttering incensed profanities. What seemed like such an easy gesture to Solomon Levy, Isaac had thought about over and over, and far from being easy, it all seemed absolutely impossible to him. Disassociation seemed impossible to him because of his feeling of duty, and his regard for social justice could never allow him to acquiesce to an act of disassociation.

Isaac fell down onto the couch, bowed his head and hid his face in his hands. The life they held in common had gone into an unexpected, irreversible eclipse.

"I've always been a disappointment to you, haven't I? You've just never been able to love me, or anything I did as much as the others. Now you claim to hate me. That does not surprise me, father."

"Now, there is something we can agree on Isaac. I hate you! Without any sense of uncertainty I can honestly say I never want to see you again."

Although Isaac was not looking into his father's face, his words spoke deeply to him. He let the words sink in and he cried, so very hard he cried, and then he regained his poise. He quieted, as if his mind slowed down. He wished that they could have returned to what they had once been. He wished that his father could have loved him as he once did. He wondered why it all seemed so impossible. Isaac looked up at his father pleadingly. He focused on his eyes. The hostility he saw there made him feel deprived on oxygen.

Isaac withdrew into himself for a moment, mumbled a few words in Hebrew, and then let out a piercing moan of utter defeat. With a lifeless gaze, a clinched fist, and a heaving chest, Isaac sat, as if doomed, sensing that all eyes were turned towards him with a look of steady offense.

"Well I have always loved you, and I love you enough to give you your wish." Without uttering another word he reached mechanically towards his side, drew a gun out of his coat pocket, placed the barrel to his chest, his thumb against the trigger, and fired.

He gave out a deep sigh and died. Solomon screamed out and then cupped his hands over his mouth.

His mother stood for a few moments in shock opening her eyes wide to the setting of blood, the cushion of the chair splattered with it, leaking its overflow beyond her son's body. Suddenly she cried aloud, "Oh God!," and hiding her eyes in her hands, she fell to the floor. With painful, desperate sobs she crawled towards her son. Bewildered and frightened she could not touch him. Solomon ran to her, knelt, and tried to put his arms around her, but she just kept sobbing loudly and would not permit it.

"Leave me alone!" She screamed, as she reached to touch Isaac's face. "Do you have want you wanted! Look at my son, he'd dead!"

Now Solomon was crying. "I swear to God...I didn't...I never..."

There was no pulse. He was gone.

Solomon continued his plea, yet it was not a plea for forgiveness; only an explanation for his own actions. Anna now regretted her own actions and she looked at Isaac's body in disbelief. Not being able to stand anymore she closed her eyes, letting darkness surround her.

There lay the body of a young man who always said, "Every life is worth something." Why didn't he remember that when it came to his own?

It was only a matter of a couple hours before news of Isaac's death reached the Justice office. A young web designer named Simon answered the telephone. After a few moments he unexpectedly gasped and then put down the receiver. Everyone there knew something had happened. Simon lowered his head and barely above a whisper said, "Isaac is dead!" A couple of people ran towards him and between his sobs he began to explain. Jenna could think of nothing besides the fact that Isaac was dead. She could think of nothing to say or of anything to do. With all of her heart she wanted to believe that it was not true.

Jenna watched as they all shed tears and after a long while she said, "I am going." A girl sitting across from Jenna took her arm and walked her outside. She knew that Jenna and Isaac had become friends. Isaac's persistence had pierced her aversion. His sincerity had become more and more uncovered to her and the more she came to trust him. Isaac pursued a friendship and his kind urgings invited her into a new understanding with him. Isaac became a dear friend.

She embraced her but Jenna did not notice and for that reason did not respond. She let her gaze drift across the dark sky. When the girl asked if she was going to be alright Jenna gave no sign that she had even heard the question.

On the way home the old Arab bus was stopped by soldiers twice but she did not care. She did not notice the incessant rattling that accompanied the trip all the way back to Ramallah. She seemed conscious on only one part of her journey and that was when they passed the office of Solomon Levy. There was no one who she could hate equally at that instant. It was Solomon's fault that her friend was dead. He had failed his son, which was a betrayal at the heart of him being a father. This betrayal destroyed ended his life. She prayed for God to curse Solomon, to curse him for being able to love his own child unconditionally and to care for him regardless of anything. A father never walks away from his child. He never mistreats him and certainly does not wish him dead. "What a hypocrite." She

whispered to herself. She cursed him for his unwillingness to yield to Isaac's emotions just a little bit. And then to disown him, should anyone be surprised that Isaac would want to end it all? She thought about the last time she saw him. His loneliness seemed to squeeze him. Surely his father must have seen the same. Not that he cared. That is what began Isaac's demise. Solomon treated him as if he were dead when he was still alive. He was labeled a traitor because he refused to be a traditional Jewish boy and he denied the covenant which came with being one. Isaac had decided to be human first and Jewish second- that was his crime.

Jenna could not help feel some anger towards Isaac and blame him for not realizing his allusion for what it was. Did he really think that he could go about his normal life and fight for Palestinians too? Only in hindsight, she thought, are we able to see how ludicrous some of our ideas actually are. Right then and there she thought she felt what Isaac must have when he realized all was lost. It was the point where hopelessness overpowers all that you are.

When she finally arrived home it was very late. When her mother called out to her she could barely speak. She was far too filled with grief and was mournful for an infinity of wonderful dreams and aspirations that were lost forever.

Salsan's voice stopped. "Jenna you are so late." Her mother's voice disturbed her. She stood there in the unlit hallway. The door of Salsan's room opened into the darkness and she could see her mother slightly. Her small body wrapped in her robe, propped on her pillows with a book in her hands. A limited bit of light yielded itself towards her, tempting her entrance, but she could not bring herself to be drawn in because she knew there was every possibility that her mother would not understand her sorrow, that she would not understand her desire to throw herself on the foot of her bed and weep, "Isaac is dead!"

A coroner was called to retrieve the body. No relatives came to claim Isaac from the morgue. No relatives offered to bury him and no rabbi was asked to come. After a week, an interfaith minister from a peace support group in Bethlehem was given his remains.

Zakki gathered all of the Palestinian support team together one evening following Isaac's death. He explained in no uncertain terms that the Israelis knew well the dangers that can be let loose on the impressionable, developing young minds of those within a social order that depends on managed views, contrived taste, and predisposed perceptions. Individual conscience and ethics are simply not well suited with popular views. Zionist leaders cannot leave to chance the way open minds may respond to societal dilemmas, especially when their very existence may be on the line. Every dissident and radical reaction must be extinguished, suppressed, and locked away, and then there will be no risk of having to later confront their own offspring. If radical Jews can be drained of their chutzpah, their humanity, and real passion, then they would not have to be handled by their government, labeled traitors, or worst of all, declared dead by their families. Other "good" young Jewish boys, like Isaac Levy, would not defy the law, suspending its normal processes, openly obstructing its philosophies, and standing in conflict with the Zionist conscience. The case of Isaac Levy was the

stuff that Zionist nightmares are made of, which is why his father reacted so harshly.

Isaac was officially declared dead even as he breathed because he spoke of human rights, equality, and de-occupation; he died because he did not restrict himself to words alone, but acted according to his views.

In evidence of his conviction and in unmistakable enactment of disaffiliation, Isaac went defiantly into the streets of his own neighborhood, stood between demolition crews and Palestinian homes, and subjected himself to arrest for civil disobedience. His willingness to position himself in front of his fellow citizens and differentiate his views from their own led to his ultimate death. His critics, however, said that 'he disobeyed the law, disrespected his father and his tradition.'

Jenna believed that he was only keeping with the dictates of his own heart and his intense desire to lessen the pain of others. She believed that he also hoped that a new generation of Israelis might one day aspire to replace tradition with conviction.

She believed that Solomon Levy preferred his own child dead because once his son was dead; Isaac could not come back and tell him what he had become and criticize him for what he stood for. He could not say to Solomon that he had been wrong and that so many had been destroyed needlessly.

She believed that the only sin that Isaac committed was violating to a considerable degree what he had been taught was suitable and tolerable to one's country, one's family, and one's peers. Isaac's weakness, however, was that he desperately desired a father's love and acceptance. He still needed a sense of validation from the family and the country that gave him birth. Jenna was not sure that he even knew this about himself.

She was not sure that he really understood that those who have even a fraction of a radical viewpoint cannot hope to walk away unscathed by the people whose values and complacency they jeopardize or denounce. With all his sophistication she believed that he really did not grasp the fact that power knows where its interest lies, and so do those instruments that serve and reinforce its power. Allegiance and Jewish solidarity are the bedrock of the structure of this country. Individuals will not shake it without those same individuals suffering some very serious consequences.

Isaac was at all times content with his situation, with being the son of Solomon Levy, and living with the people around him. He was completely persuaded, by his naïve view of his world, both that it was completely possible to live as he was living and that he was not doing anything wrong in the eyes of those he loved. He was incapable of seriously thinking about the consequence of his actions and understanding that, in the eyes of his parents, he could have done something incorrect, and what might be the result. Just as the earth has its place and purpose in the universe, in the same way Isaac believed God gave him a place and purpose. He was so firmly convinced of this that he thought other people recognized *his* fact and shared his convictions.

Isaac's suicide indicated that he had not clearly acknowledged to himself just how much he was not exempt from being an invention of his heritage and of his country. Isaac was, to an extent, another item in a process of preparation, as much as any culturally nurtured human being. When he realized that he could not do the kinds of things he was doing without paying a serious price, like losing family, he fell apart emotionally.

A rabbi from Jews for Justice conducted the funeral. The Jewish dead are usually prepared for burial by a special volunteer group called the High Society. They wash the body in a respectful fashion, recite traditional prayers, and dress the body in a white shroud. Due to the circumstances surrounding Isaac's death, this responsibility was left to his friends. In accordance with Jewish law there was no open casket or viewing of the body. Normally close family members may see the remains before the burial preparation, but Isaac's family never came. In accordance with tradition, a piece of broken clay was put over his eyes and mouth. In Judaism the body is viewed as a vessel created from the earth containing the spark of the soul. When the body dies, it's as if the vessel is broken, and broken pottery is therefore put into the casket.

Before his body was lowered into the ground a cousin came and marched to the casket. He stood there with a bowed head and walked away without saying a word.

Isaac's family had essentially washed their hands of him because to them he died a criminal. Judaism regards suicide, as does most religions, as a sin. Someone who takes his own life is a murderer; it does not matter if he himself is the victim. Isaac's soul was not his own to extinguish. The spiritual consequence is that his soul has nowhere to go. It cannot return to the body because the body has been destroyed, and it cannot be let into any of the soul worlds because its time has not come. It is in a painful state of limbo.

It is rather ironic that according to Jewish tradition, Isaac would exist in death as he existed in life- in a painful state of limbo.

There had been a day when Isaac and Jenna were discussing politics, as usual, when he and she suddenly came to a point of unexpected agreement about there being a miserable costs for Israelis and Palestinians alike, both existing together in an orbit of social disaster. At that moment she saw that he really loved Israel as much as she loved Palestine, and if home is where the heart is, then this was his home too. She remembered feeling pity and shame, pity for both of them, and shame over the times that she had questioned his loyalty and the times she had been so unkind to him.

When she once asked him, why he fought with the resistance, he said "Because you don't get something for nothing," and that the whole system had to be changed before anyone would be able to deal effectively with the problems between Muslims and Jews in their country. "Our country," he said. And for a brief moment she felt that one country being for everyone could really be possible, but only if there were more people like Isaac.

With Jenna he was always polite, considerate and fair. From the beginning of their first meeting she believed he just wanted her to understand his heart and the hearts of others who supported their cause. Once he read her a verse spoken by the abolitionist Frederic Douglass that read, "Those who profess freedom yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing...they want rain without thunder and lightning. They want ocean without the awful roar of its many waters." She wondered how he could have failed to remember the things he tried to teach her.

When anyone spoke of Isaac after his death, she felt a sense of sadness she had rarely ever felt, in part because she would just miss him. He was a kind and gentle young man whose dedication had made them all feel braver and had challenged them to go further. She felt sad, also, because he would never live in the peaceful and democratic world he had so hoped to create.

Jenna could barely tolerate being at the Jews for Justice Office. She found herself depressed and uncomfortable. Isaac's desk remained untouched, a symbol of something lost. After about a month she decided that she had no interest in continuing there. She called Zakki by telephone from a corner store. Waiting for him to answer, she stared into the potholes and garbage along the road and saw how time seemed to change very little. As she traced the movements of the people, a pattern of defeat emerged on her own face. Jenna became increasingly irritated and was relieved when the line was answered.

It was Zakki's voice at the other end, "Hello."

"It's me Jenna," she said. Exasperation silenced her.

"Hello, Jenna. Are you there?"

"I need to speak with you," she said.

"Sure. Can you come by the Justice office after the noon prayer?"

"That will be fine."

She hung up the receiver and went outside and sat for almost a half of an hour focusing carefully on nothing at all. She felt that her presence at Jews for Justice had become inconsequential and she would rather not return.

When Jenna arrived she saw Zakki working in one of the rooms and her purpose for coming was to tell him of the decision she had come to.

She tapped on the glass and he signaled for her to come in.

"Sit down." He said, sensing that she had something to say. He'd known that Isaac's death had affected her.

"I can't do it," She said.

"Of course you can. Just bend your knees and let gravity do the rest."

She did not feel like being amused.

"That's not what I mean."

"I know," Zakki replied.

They were both a little uncomfortable. Zakki kept clicking his pen and that continuous snapping noise made Jenna edgy.

"I don't want to come here anymore."

"Why?" Zakki asked.

"I can't let go of what happened to Isaac. I can't get it out of my mind. Coming here just brings it back!"

Her mouth twisted with a wretchedness that stunted her ability to continue speaking. Zakki continued to stare at her as the tears came.

"It's okay. There is nothing wrong with being sad over the lost of a friend or even becoming afraid because of it. And certainly, no one is going to blame you for being angry, Isaac's death was a tragedy. I knew that he was torn up inside about the problems he had with his family but I would have never guessed that he would take his own life. He was a brilliant man but he failed to understand something very simple; you don't get something for nothing and sometimes you may have to give up everything. I had to give up everything. A lot of us have. I had to give up my grandmother and my brother because I knew that it was best for them. I could have a life with them and keep them safe. I love them just as much as Isaac loved his family, but Isaac fooled himself into believing that he could have it both ways."

When he clicked his pen again, she thought it would break. When she looked across the desk at him, she saw that he was not only sad but that he was also angry. She also saw something else.

You're prepared to die, aren't you?

"Of course I am, but not his way! There is no point of having something called justice if you aren't given any entitlement to it. I'd just rather die fighting for it." She did not say anything but at the same time Jenna was surprised at the wave of admiration she felt for him. What hurt her was the look of loneliness that he did not try to conceal. She pitied him and just thinking of his aloneness undid her. It was the aloneness of a man on an island alone, a man approaching only one obvious choice.

"Look Jenna, I've been watching you since the first demonstration. I knew then you were sincere and I also knew you were the right person to participate in our program here."

"I'm not!" She interrupted.

She got up and walked around the room in a circle, tearful and unsure of herself.

"I'm not like you, Zakki I'm not brave."

"I'm not brave, Jenna, but war makes you into something that you ordinarily would not have been. We are all the same. We are all just servants to our situation. Some of us, like Isaac, become victims to it.

The fact that you are reacting this way to what happened lets me know that my first instincts were right. The death of Isaac was a huge test and it was a loss and a tragedy to everyone who knew him and supported his ideals. I know that you never intended to become Isaac's friend. Common ideas and goodness can do that. When he died it hurt. Nevertheless you didn't let your emotions get the best of you. You came back here the next day."

"But I didn't want to," Jenna admitted.

"But you did."

"What I also did was question myself. I wondered if Isaac did the right thing by becoming part of the resistance movement. I wondered if even we were going about it the right way."

Zakki looked intently into Jenna's face, too serious to be shy.

"Jenna, none of us wanted it this way. You can go anywhere and ask any Palestinian if he ever thought that the presence of Jews here would come to this. No one could have foreseen such a situation. If they had come to us and said, 'Look, these people have nowhere to go. Please allow them a part of your mercy and a part of your land,' then we as a people could have made some kind of humanitarian concession and taken some of them in. Instead they came here by invitation of a foreign government who had no history or claim here. To them we were poor, powerless and disposable. When we refused to leave our homes and our lives willingly, they forced us out with fake documents, intimidation and, of course, weapons. We had nothing to fight back with except our anger and more recently our stones. The Israelis that have taken up where their fathers left off now see us with no weapons, no tanks, and no missiles. They also see that we are not going away. They see that in spite of their military superiority that we will continue to fight with our last breath. I know that the issue of suicide bombing has bothered you. It bothered me, too, at one point in time. But what choice do we have? We were straight jacketed by their military tactics. The suicide bomber has only this chance. He is a replica of all others of his kind. Deprived of vision, of movement, half suffocated, addicted to anguish, this powerless person can still clench his fist and make a final protest- even if it means making it at death's door. Do you know of any other way of making us heard? If anyone thinks that a peace agreement followed by a fancy ceremony is going to touch our spirits and give us something to hope for, they are wrong- not as long as we exist in hell until then peace is a misnomer. You have got to understand. Isaac understood it and he was a Jew. Peace is not part of their national agenda. Annihilation is! It is an unfortunate fact that limits our choices. Does any of this make any sense to you?"

"I guess it would have to."

The more she'd gotten to know Zakki, the more she respected him. His guidance and his confidence in her always brought her pleasure. All the traits of his character with which she became more and more familiar were deeply valued by her. Her esteem for him sometimes frightened her, but most of the time it left her lonely and disturbed. Now, Jenna got up from the chair and walked out of the door. As she walked out of the building, never before had she realized the impossibility of the Palestinian's situation and the intensity with which all Israelis would fight to keep what they held to be their own, together with the cruel, unpredictable catastrophes that governed all of their lives and demanded sort some of reaction. Never before had it appeared as evident as it did now. She saw plainly that her world demanded more from her, but what it was and exactly how much she did not know. All this stirred a feeling of uncertainty and frustration in her soul, which destroyed any possibility of hope of peace of mind. All she knew was that she wanted to do something, something extreme, something no one would forget and nothing less than destructive, but she knew that was impossible because of Salsan. Jenna could

have done almost anything, provided her mother did not suffer any harm because of it.

Solomon Levy regained no sense of honor or relief from the death of his son; on the contrary, his world began to fall apart. Yet he knew that regardless of how sorrowful he felt Isaac was still gone and he was tortured by this truth. He was tortured by the fact that he had refused to acknowledge what some thought, that he acted too hastily by repelling Isaac, by not finding some other way to make him stop. In his mind he replayed the awesome and terrifying act of his son's suicide; he wailed openly in front of his family and hurt because no one among them pitied him. Even his conscience did not pity him. No one gave him the compassion he craved for. Solomon would say to himself: "If only I'd sent him away or if I had tried to reason with him a little more." At first, Solomon convinced himself that people would naturally understand the anger that divided him from his son. They would know instinctively that he had never wanted Isaac harmed in any way, but his reasoning had the opposite affect. In the days that followed, several people close to him admonished Solomon, which saddened and alarmed him. "Was I really so unfeeling?" He asked himself. "That's outrageous! It's not true. I won't listen to their criticisms because they don't know how much I loved him. I should not blame myself."

These were easy things to say but impossible to do. The sadness consumed him, never eased up, and seemed to get increasingly worse. There was no deceiving himself; somewhere inside he knew that he had behaved with a cold disregard for his son's emotions. Those around the house quieted in his presence and rarely sat with him at all. When they did speak, it was about unimportant matters. And he and his wife equally evaded all mention of anything connected to Isaac. The continuous constraint of conversation and careful averting of anything that might lead to words about their son erected a firewall, making it painfully clear to all that they were thinking about him most of the time. Solomon was not only tortured by Isaac's death but also what appeared to be the death of his entire relations, he became estranged from his family. Although the children tried to conceal it, he saw that they blamed him for the loss of their brother. He saw that his family—particularly his wife—held him culpable. Anna had particular feelings towards his suffering and clung to them despite what he said or did. Her feelings amounted to this: "Our son was in pain and you were more concerned with your own. You wished him dead and declared him so, and now he is. I will never see my son again and for that I blame you."

Solomon knew her feelings were involuntary. Anna was Isaac's mother and she loved him dearly, perhaps even more than her other children. She had only been harsh with him, hoping that he might conform to the wishes of his father. Solomon understood that, but it did not make things easier for him. One evening, as he sat watching a news broadcast, he paused to take stock of his family. They seemed so misplaced and the silence of the room was, for once, unfamiliar to him. The relationships they once shared seemed lost in history. Solomon had come to Israel to help create a new Jewish state among the Arabs, to help preserve a way of life

that he and his wife believed in. Anna had given birth to her first two children in a kibbutz in the Gaza. It had been an exciting time in their lives and they had been happy and optimistic. When Isaac turned five, they had to Jerusalem, where he began school and Solomon opened his first business. In the beginning, living in the city had been a challenge, like a jigsaw puzzle- one piece going to the Muslims, another to the Jews, and yet another to the Christians. Each piece was supposed to fit naturally, only the last thing each piece did was fit.

After a while Solomon got up from his seat, put on his shoes without socks, and didn't bother to tie them. He roamed around the neighborhood for hours. Late into the evening he found himself standing at the bottom of the steps, looking toward the temple's door. He could go no further. He had barely made it inside before he began crying about his grief, about his terrible loneliness, and about God's will. He was about to fall to his knees but then stopped short and seemed almost trembling with resentment. "Why did you not let my son live?" he muttered, contemptuously. Why did you take my son away? How did this all come to be? All I wanted was my family to be happy again, to return to as we were, before Isaac became involved in politics. It was a simple request. Why couldn't you have, at least, given this to me?"

Solomon did not expect an answer and cried harder because he knew that there was not one that could be offered that would give him any satisfaction.

At that moment a hand was placed upon his shoulder. "Can I assist you brother?" Solomon turned to see Rabbi Kiel and he was about to walk away.

"Don't go. Please, let us sit for awhile." The kindness on the rabbi's part infuriated him. Solomon gave him a grave look, but he decided to stay because he felt that he had nowhere else to go.

Eventually the rabbi was able to elicit Solomon's entire story, and could do no more than offer him his spiritual advice.

"It is human for us to think about how unfairly the blessings and tests of this life appear to be sometimes allotted. We wonder why fate would take a child before his time. We ask what purpose did his death serve? This is human weakness and God forgives us for it. What you have to realize is, your son Isaac was a human being and human beings die. The timing is in the hands of God. Isaac was God's servant whose days were done."

Solomon knew this, but for him, with all his thoughts and feelings, it should have been different. Isaac did not die of an incurable disease. He was not the victim of an accident. Isaac died troubled, not peacefully pressed into his mother's arms but with his true spirit distant and disembodied. When Isaac gave him the last look, he found it impossible to go to him and embrace him. What kind of father was he? How dare he manifest to love his child throughout his entire life, yet will him to die at the end of it!

The rabbi took off his eyeglasses, which transformed his face, making it look even more compassionate. "The manner in which your son died is of no consequence."

"What are you saying?"

"What I am saying is, don't let your heart be plagued with the feeling of regret. It is useless for you to say: 'Oh, if I had only done this or done that...then...' You will only open up yourself to more pain. You must accept that which had to take place has taken place and, in no way could it be reversed. Destiny happened precisely in the manner, at the hour, and in the place it was supposed to. The way your son's life ended is regrettable and sad, but the cause that appeared before your eyes was only a means for the realization of God's will. Whatever may be the cause when the appointed time arrives, no man can delay it, and he will be drawn to his ultimate end. Can you understand this?"

Solomon made no reply, but signified by the motion of his head that he did understand and that he could try to accept what the rabbi was saying to him.

"Come brother, let us pray."

Solomon, again, began to weep. "I don't know what I am going to do."

"What do you really want from God?" The rabbi asked, sensing there was something more.

"I want forgiveness."

"If forgiveness is what you seek, then God will give it to you."

"God?" Solomon asked quickly and sharply before his face reddened and grew silent.

"Yes!" replied the rabbi, not certain of the kind of solution Solomon was seeking. "One of the unequal mercies of God is that he forgives without delay. All we have to do is ask."

But I'm not talking about God." Mumbling broodingly and in frustration, Solomon got to his feet and began pacing not noticing what he was doing.

"Well, if it is not from God you seek forgiveness then whom?"

"My son! It is my son whom I seek forgiveness! I wanted you to tell me how to gain the forgiveness from someone who no longer exists!"

"I'm sorry brother, but you want me to give you knowledge beyond what I know. Some understandings are left solely with God, alone, and they will remain so until we meet with him."

Suddenly Solomon stepped back, as if he were surprised.

"I thought that you could really tell me something; this is why I stayed!" He said, in a tone of irritation, and as if making every effort to control himself. The rabbi sadly looked away, unable to know what comfort he might be able to offer.

"When I was a small boy in Germany, my father taught me a biblical verse, the Jabez prayer."

"Yes, I know it," The rabbi replied.

"Then you know that Jabez called on the God of Israel saying, 'Oh God, that you might bless me indeed and enlarge my territory that your hand would be with me, and that you would keep me from evil, that I might not cause pain.' So God granted him what he requested. If only I had asked God for his guidance." Solomon clasped his hand beseechingly, with an expression of the most intense grief.

"Your tears of repentance are also flowing in accompaniment with a feeling of regret. God will not ignore it and it time, with patience, your burden will be eased," answered the rabbi in a voice betraying deep emotion.

When Solomon returned home he found Anna awake. Something was wrong. He sat and looked down and listened to the silence and sense that he was almost sixty years old and he began to cry; he cried because of the horror of everything that had happened; and because he did not want to believe that this was the life of Solomon Levy and not someone else's. He wanted much to lock up that nightmare because he knew that it had destroyed every dream he ever had; so he sat alone a while and he struggled to lock up those bitter passions into the hidden places of sanity that still existed within him. He tried to neutralize his rage; but he didn't know how to do it. Solomon just couldn't erect that wall of rational self-control anymore. Suddenly his shoulders and chest were heaving with sobs, and he began to gasp as if he were drowning, but when he dropped heavily down on his knees, as if bowing to the earth, weeping like an abandoned child, his wife could not help but pity him. He was lost to everything thing the world, and Anna knew this. Distress distorted her expression, but instead of appearing helpless his obvious repentance readied her to accept his remorse. She was still the generous woman that he had ever known, she was still his wife.

"I am so sorry." He said through his tears. "I made a mess out of everything and look at what we lost? I thought that I was entitled to hurt Isaac just because I was his father. I was too severe and now it is too late!" He rocked back and forth. "Isaac!" He cried out, "Isaac!"

Anna reached over to him, brushed his shoulder with her hand and then knelt down beside him. She looked at him with forgiveness and sympathy, not knowing what to say to him. With tears starting in her eyes, Anna embraced her husband, feeling his tears flowing, like an irrepressible torrent, down the side of her face. She knew that when a man beholds an animal dying, a revulsion comes over him because he is human, but when the dying thing is a mortal and someone cherished by those close to him, then, besides the revulsion at the destruction of life, what is felt is a emotional wound that never heals and always brings the most painful of sensations. The Levy's would never get over losing Isaac. His absence would leave emptiness inside their hearts and nothing would ever be able to fill it. Nothing! Still, Anna knew that they must find a way to go on, even though the shadow of Isaac's death would always hover around them.

The wedding of Jenna's sister crept up on her family. She was, of course, trying to very hard to ignore its coming. No sooner would her sister Layla be married, then their mother would begin laying pressure on her to follow suit. Her sister was so happy. She should have been happy too, ready to celebrate her sister's special day. However, Jenna, with her somber nature, wished to be spared from the entire event.

Jenna's mother wore a satin, navy blue skirt and blouse, the one that she had been saving for years. The one that she was supposed to wear to Sammy and

Hanna's wedding. The groom was equally elegant for the occasion. Omar stood smiling and in a constant state of blush, his hair pomaded and combed flat. Jenna was barely able to walk past him without being overpowered by the scent of too much cologne.

Omar was considered a very good catch of a husband. He'd been university educated in Britain and had worked four years in London as an engineer. As a result, he was able to return to his homeland with sizable savings, allowing him an opportunity to be married without the usual fear of being unable to provide for a family. When it was Layla he inquired about for marriage, their mother was simply overjoyed. Added to all of this, Omar was said to be a kind and religious man, gentle in nature. Salsan found these to be attributes that could not be ignored, and certainly ones that could not be refused. Her daughter would have the financial stability she had been denied as a child.

It is not uncustomary for Arab girls to marry directly after puberty. If a good spouse should become available and an engagement sought, some wed quickly from fear of missing out on a good chance. Many marry to relieve their families of their financial burden, regardless of the man's character. Others marry just to wear that white dress and to be the "belle of the ball" for one evening, not giving any real consideration to the life that follows. Fortunately, none of these scenarios applied to Jenna's sister. She'd graduated from the Arab University and worked with preschool children at a neighborhood nursery. Layla agreed to marry Omar, not because she was desperate, but because she found him to be a good man and a real attraction followed. He was not considered to be the most handsome man that came to call for her but Layla believed that looks were not the most important attribute. After a couple of months went by, they seemed content with each other's personality. They seem to be inseparable. Jenna recognized the unmistakable reality of their familiarity. Layla was aware that he had faults but she considered them part of the package and accepted them graciously. Omar and Layla were a suitable match.

At least ten women tended to her sister in her formal preparations. Layla's hair was perfumed and curled. Her nails had been painted with henna hours before. Her white wedding gown, embellished with pink roses, was gently lowered on to her body. A gold necklace, along with matching earrings and bracelet were gathered nearby. These items were part of her dowry, as gold had become a customary part of the marriage gift given by the groom. The room was filled with sounds of laughter and the chatter of women. Layla was simply overjoyed. When they did the first wedding dance, Layla did not bother to disguise her affection when he took her hand.

It was Layla, by far, who gathered the attention of every guest. She was simply beautiful in her wedding dress. Jenna ceased to focus on anything else. The female attendants that occupied the room clapped their hands, sang beautiful verses, and bestowed every kind of compliment. Jenna looked at her sister, saw her speak, but heard not a sound beyond her smile. She looked at her with mixed emotions. Layla would be starting a new life, a brand new beginning, but she would also be leaving their home. It would not be the same without her.

Salsan, Aaliyah and the rest of the women watched the ceremony with complete excitement as Omar promised to care for and respect his wife. He stuttered out of shyness. Afterwards the imam offered his prayers and beseeched God to give them patience and His blessings. Layla listened intensely to every word and was moved by them. They seemed to give her comfort and relieve any doubts or fears for what the future might hold. When the imam had finished his supplications he turned to the bride and groom with the marriage contract, and they both signed. Suddenly a feeling came over Jenna. She was beset by sadness and uncertainty, uncertainty about her own future. What if no one I could ever really care about comes to ask? What if I grow old alone?" she asked herself. "What if what I really want eludes me like it has so far and that I marry someone only to find out that I could never really care for him! That would be worse than never marrying at all." And then a strange and shameful feeling about Layla came into her mind as she watched the happy couple. She became jealous.

When the ritual of betrothal was over Layla turned to her mother. Salsan was struck by the radiance on her face. Layla's happiness communicated itself to her mother, who wanted nothing more for her. Salsan felt as cheerful and pleased as her daughter. Jenna was the first to walk over to offer her best wishes. She wanted to say something special to her, but she did not know what she should say, so she embraced her softly, and simply said, "I love you."

The celebration went on for hours with little children running around and dancing to the beat of Arab drums. Women clapped and sang songs.

In conscious imitation of her mother's joy, Jenna smiled and chatted with their guest. Later into the evening she ventured beyond the hall reserved for females to sneak a peek at the activities of the men, who were in a separate room. They sat laughing, consuming their share of one of the lambs slaughtered for the occasion. Jenna saw Zakki sitting next to her brother. His black and white checkered scarf wrapped around his neck. While the others celebrated, he sat with his back against the wall reading his Quran. She believed that loud and boisterous festivities made him feel a little out of place, but he had come at her mother's invitation, as it was one Zakki could not refuse.

Jenna looked over at her side, realizing her eldest sister, Aaliyah, had been watching her watch him. She smiled as if she'd just won a million dollars. She came over to her grinning ear to ear. Jenna was completely embarrassed and wondered how she would stomach all of the teasing that would surely follow. "Aha, you've got feelings for Zechariah."

Mortified at being discovered, she lied. She tried to walk away, but Aaliyah nearly jumped in front of her teasing, "Someone wants to be Zechariah's wife!" "Zechariah is already married, remember? He's married to holy war. That is his only wife," Jenna answered with pure irritation and with a show of bitterness. Aaliyah smiled but felt sorry for her. She knew that Zakki had an interest in her sister. She could tell whenever he looked at Jenna. There was obviously something between them even if it remained unspoken. But no matter what silence understanding they had between them, she would always be second to his

revolutionary vocation. Jenna had shown her more feelings than she had intended to by the sense of defeat in her sister's eyes. Aaliyah knew instinctively that Jenna had agreed to second place in Zakki's heart.

Jenna held no false hopes. Zakki's plans for his life were already devised by a sense of duty. Since his return to Palestine, he'd lived alone, distancing himself from his grandmother and his remaining little brother. He did not want them to have to pay a price for having an association with him and for whatever future action he might take. He inevitably grew lonely during this period of isolation. He did not truly know where the road might take him; he only knew that his family would be safer if he kept them at a distance. Now and then, in a moment of weakness, he'd pass through the neighborhood and watch his little brother playing outside the building where his grandmother lived. He'd walk over, pick him up and kiss his small face, but without any certainty that he had a right to do so. Zakki had deserted them, but this was necessary for their own protection. He knew that his brother had already been acquainted with unusual degrees of loss and sorrow in his short life, and Zakki was determined not to cause him anymore. His brother was extremely lucky to still have a grandmother who was still strong and had an immense amount of patience. Though she was sometimes weary, she was completely committed to her grandson and tried to give him the best life she could. For Zakki's little brother, this would have to be enough. Whenever Zakki saw him jumping around, kicking a soccer ball or laughing with other children, he was persuaded that life for this child was as it should be. Zakki wished that he could eternalize the sweetness of those moments. He wished that his brother could stay in his field of childhood dreams. Zakki knew that he couldn't. He had a good idea of what lay ahead and he was willing to do anything to ensure that what he feared would not happen. He wanted his brother to be as happy as he was right then. He did not want to consider what might someday be.

"Perhaps I'll ask Ahmed to have a little chat with him," she giggled not wanting any hint of sadness on what should be a happy day.

"Don't you dare!" Jenna warned before Aaliyah confessed to be only kidding.

Jenna went into the kitchen of the wedding hall. And she stood over a tray of desserts on top of one of the countertops. Salsan was washing teacups and spotted her daughter picking at uneaten sweets. "Why don't you go out and have some fun Jenna? It's your sister's wedding!"

Jenna looked away, filling her mouth with whatever was on the tray nearest to her, avoiding the sudden urge to cry.

"Soon it will be your turn. You know that Marwan is only waiting for you to agree," she smiled. Jenna just shrugged her comment off, letting her believe what she wanted to believe.

She stayed inside the food preparation area, helping her mother arrange pastries and beverages for the guests that seemed to have no intention of leaving. The two of them chatted as they went about their work. Salsan spoke of Jenna's father. Her eyes were glazed with sorrow and affection for a husband whose untimely death

had prevented him from giving another one of his daughters away in marriage. Jenna reached over and stroked her arm. Salsan smiled, but her eyes reflected the loneliness that she had continued to endure all the years following his murder. Throughout all of the tragedy and grief she had been forced to experience, her only happiness was found in her memories of the man that married her and in the rearing of the children they shared together. Losing Sammy was, perhaps, her greatest challenge but her heart was mended by the fact that he died a martyr, and that he was in heaven with Hanna.

Salsan sighed with exhaustion. In the months that followed she seemed to weaken and was often forced to stay in bed. The day Salsan awoke with a fever and found herself unable to sit up, Jenna knew that something was terribly wrong. Salsan insisted that it was nothing more than the flu and insisted that Jenna not give her any unnecessary attention. In the middle of the term, As Jenna prepared for school, she heard her mother coughing persistently. When she passed the bathroom door she saw the sink splattered with blood. She knew that it must be from her mother. Once she arrived in the classroom her mind remained with Salsan the entire day. Jenna could not think of anything else. She had an experiment to do in her chemistry lab but she could not concentrate. Her teacher asked her what was wrong and Jenna began to cry. She told her about what she had seen that morning and her teacher urged her to go home.

When Jenna returned her mother had coughed up more blood and now had a fever. She and Aaliyah took her to a small hospital in town. When they got there the clinic was so crowded that there was no place for Salsan to lie down. After three hours Aaliyah went to a nurse and pleaded for a place for her mother to lie down. The nurse, frustrated and angry, snapped at her. "Do you see how many people are in here? What am I suppose to do?" She handed Jenna a towel and a pillow and told her to make her mother as comfortable as she could. Two hours later, Salsan was put on a stretcher and a doctor came and ordered an x-ray. About an hour later, he concluded that Salsan must have some kind of allergy or a possible infection. He prescribed an antibiotic and sent her home with instructions to rest.

It was five months from the day of her sister's wedding that her mother was diagnosed with cancer.

As Layla settled into the rituals of married life, Jenna concluded the semester at the Arab University. She'd wake up in the morning and rush off to classes. She'd study in the afternoon and help with household chores. In the evening she'd attend political meetings of various Islamic groups, mostly Al-Aqsa Brigade. She found these meetings and the dialogue that accompanied them much more interesting than her classes at the university. As her mother became weaker, she decided she needed to be home more often, so instead of limiting her political activities, she contemplated attending classes only part-time. For a long while she had slowly become disenchanted with school. Their educational facilities were degrading by comparison with the Israeli institutions. The government saw Palestinian students as an imposition of mediocrity that struggled to get the upper hand over them.

Jenna believed that Israelis were content to see her people get their education in the metal prefab of a Palestinian slum, rather than in something even close to what they had erected for their own. Their classrooms were missing almost everything and textbooks were rarely affordable. Rather, they used outdated materials that had long been thrown out in Jewish schools. Some of the texts were a decade old. Many students eventually dropped out altogether, their prospects limited and their preferences restricted. Conditioned to a lifetime of bitter lessons, too many of her kind chose to walk away. They wanted no longer to see their imaginations restricted, offended, or fictionalized. Human nature allows a man to strive toward the thing he has some reason to believe he can achieve. Students who have had their education altered by the lack of materials or schools that were barely inhabitable were not likely to have the positive expectations that come from having attended a full, functional university.

One of her university professors used his personal funds to purchase supplies for the science lab. This money was supposed to be used to improve his house, which had damaged during one of the Israeli incursions.

In class, one day, he put his book down and began to speak, "I was born in Jerusalem almost sixty years ago. The anger and violence commenced from the very moment the Europeans arrived. I was a teenager when I saw my brother murdered as the Zionists sought to secure power in our land. For more than five decades I have witnessed this struggle. In the beginning it was a fight for our legal right to keep what was ours. Now it is a struggle to just survive. In almost every way it is harder now because fifty years ago you had a clear enemy to confront, the man in the yarmulke. Now our enemies include the most powerful nations on earth, and I'm not sure if we can win."

The professor ended his speech with an announcement that he was leaving and going to live with his son in America. Jenna guessed he was just too tired to continue with what had become a life-long struggle.

She withdrew from all of her classes that day. She wanted to be home to help with the cooking and cleaning, at least until her momma felt better. As she walked out of the university doors for the last time she thought, "What is the big deal? What could possibly come from her ambitions? Most Israeli kids would probably scorn any realistic aim that she might have." Jenna figured that most possibilities of life have been scaled down for a Palestinian. Even the students who did exceptionally well in mathematics or biology typically aspired to work in a clothing store or a bank. In her neighborhood, any permanent job was something to be longed for.

Jenna returned home around noon one day, to find her mother, again, coughing up blood in the sink. Only this time it was coming from everywhere, her nose and her mouth. Immediately, she called Layla and her husband, who insisted to take her mother to a hospital in Jerusalem. As the medical care there was much better than what was found in the territories.

She was given blood tests and an x-ray. About four hours later the doctor returned, not looking into their eyes. They all stood uncomfortably before him like

convicted felons waiting to be sentenced. The physician said in his professional voice, "Mrs. Hayat, you have ■ rapidly progressing cancer that has spread itself into your liver."

His words scarred their hearts but they tried to remain calm for the sake of their mother. It almost worked.

"Cancer?" said Jenna's mother as her voice sunk with the word.

The cup of tea, which was nestled inside of Jenna's hand, slid down and splashed onto the floor.

"But she... she..." began Layla in a voice that rocked with absolute shock, then she suddenly ceased. The color drained from her cheeks and the words seem wedged into her mouth. She was so shaken that she had to be lowered into a nearby chair. It was Jenna's mother who ran over to comfort Layla, as her husband also knelt close to console her.

Jenna said nothing. She was stunned. What could she say? She walked over to her mom and helplessly held her.

When they exited the hospital, the sun was still shining and people were going about with their everyday activities. Life appeared no more than ordinary moments. Time did not pause, nor did the lack of it. A woman climbed onto a bus that stopped at the curb. An old man passed with flowers in one hand and a gift in the other. A couple of young doctors laughed with each other as they made their way towards the hospital entrance. Horns honked and pigeons flew across the sky. The world did not stop because Salsan Hayat had been given a death sentence. Jenna, on the other hand, was stunned by the normalcy of the outside world. It was all so commonplace, ordinary people doing ordinary things, to her personal annoyance. With irritation, she thought only of what was to become of her mother: Why should anyone be smiling? Why should a gift of flowers be given? "Stop! Don't you know that my mother is dying?"

Until that moment the thought of cancer had never entered their minds. Their mother was growing older and quite naturally she began to slow down, but she was still very much involved in the daily functions of her children's lives. She still cooked, cleaned, and prepared their clothing everyday. Jenna thought that she was probably anemic; vitamins and a little more rest would alleviate her physical ailments. But now this man, who stood in front of them reading from a chart with professional indifference, was handing her mother a death sentence. She would never forget the look on her mother's face. She would never forget it as long as she lived.

The doctor predicted that Jenna's mother had possibly six months at best, and that near the end she would have to be hospitalized. There she could be medicated to help her deal with the intense pain that she would surely experience. Her mother vowed, right then and there, that she would never allow it. If God willed her to leave this life, then it would not be from a concrete walled intensive care unit, surrounded by strangers of equal suffering. She wanted to be home, in her own bed, surrounded by the people and the things that she loved.

On the long drive home her mother calmly began to plan her remaining days. From that moment on, almost every conversation she had was spoken as if one foot

were already in the grave. She wanted to chart her impending death, Jenna's future, and even what should be given to the grandchildren she had and those she would never see. All Jenna wanted to do was cover her ears and scream away the emotional breakdown that she felt brewing inside her heart. Parts and pieces of thought were circling in her brain, but she could not catch even one; she could not concentrate on one thing, in spite of her effort to slow down and think.

Nothing stayed secret in the neighborhood for long, not even her mother's illness. When Salsan's friends learned of her fate, they came, one by one, to console her. They all looked at her with sadness and sympathy, but Jenna was sure that every one of them was secretly relieved that it was not one of them.

Jenna was not satisfied with the doctor's diagnosis and insisted that her mother see a specialist. She told her sisters that they would raise the money they could and with the help of their husbands they were able to manage.

They took their mother to an oncologist, but he began to speak of the cost of care and about their insurance.

"Insurance?" Jenna asked

"Yes, medical insurance," he replied.

Palestinians don't have enough money to feed their children and pay for electricity, she thought. How can they afford medical insurance?

The oncologist was deliberately honest; he did not want to give them false hope. He told them that ordinarily someone in their mother's position would begin chemotherapy. In the mean time family members would be tested for a suitable bone marrow transplant. Further, he explained that no hospital would be willing to treat Salsan's disease without insurance to pay for such medical care. It was basically financially infeasible. In the event that radical treatment was not given to treat the disease, she would be medicated in order to alleviate the pain.

Jenna begged him miserably, "Can't you do something to help her? We will pay for my mother's care. I swear to God. Just give her a chance."

At that point Jenna had attached herself to the doctor's coat, yanking it back and forth as she spoke. Her eyes were pleading. Her voice was begging. "Will you please take your hands off of me?" The doctor said with a slight irritation. "I'm sorry," she offered, unaware of what she should do next.

"Sometimes you have to let go and accept. I really am very sorry," was all he had to offer.

"Accept? Accept what? Accept that my mother is going to die?" was all she could think.

She moved quickly to her mother, seized both of her hands, gripping them tight with her fingers and staring at her in disbelief. She looked towards the doctor. In that last frantic look she tried to catch some sign of hope. But there was no hope, no chance forthcoming. There was no doubt that Salsan was going to die.

Jenna got his message, and that was in her mind, that her mother was not Jewish and she was not an Israeli citizen. Although she might have been born there, and remained there all of her life, she was not entitled to the medical benefits that those

who came from Germany, Russia, and elsewhere in the world enjoyed in Israel and took for granted.

Few strategies of colonization or genocidal control are better recognizable and implicit than military brutality. Another strategy, increasingly recognizable, but far less implicit, is that of "medical brutality." Although the similarities between medical brutality and military brutality are overwhelming, there are many reasons why the fact of medical brutality as a strategy is too complicated for many people to recognize.

One reason for this complication is the revered position traditionally held by doctors and the institutions associated with them. An associated view of this sanctified position is that whatever is done by doctors is done to protect, preserve and make better the quality of life.

This was not so when it came to medical practitioners in "the Land of Milk and Honey," who preferred Israeli clientele for the simple reason that they were responding to the common motives and directions of their government. One had only to look at the health statistics in that country to be reminded of Arab genocide in ways that were not as blatant as a bullet in the back or a missile in the bedroom, but just as deadly.

The bullet in the back and the missile that is aimed at civilians are, of course, direct forms of genocide. So is the denial of health services to a group of disadvantaged people.

The medical brutality used there serves Israeli geographical expansion and manages to win a moral immunity. It simply does not count. It does not appear unlawful, brutal or unfair. Thousands of Jenna's people who die each year from the lack of proper medical care came from a politically unbiased point of view, victims of mass murder by neglect.

It is not really a medical decision, but a political decision perpetrated and advanced by those who wield the power at the direct cost to those who don't really have any.

It is not just sad. It is not just tragic. It is revolting and grotesque.

The tragedy isn't that it has created a poor and disadvantaged class of people. The tragedy is that this situation, in its social and political totality, has turned out a generation of shattered and done-in human beings who might have grown up to be doctors themselves, or maybe just ordinary bread bakers who returned to their home every evening to have dinner with their children. Instead, they have grown up to do all that is within their power to kill their designated enemy by choosing a profession calculated to destabilize the well-padded lives of the people who took their places and took their land. They have instead become suicide bombers, highly accomplished in the skill of self-destruction, but unskilled in the day-to-day existence of an ordinary life. Suicide bombing is a one shot deal, a self awarded pardon from pain. It is a lethal disconnection from human catastrophe by way of martyrdom. It is quick. It is decisive. And you don't know that its over even after its over.

Aaliyah leaped up, as if she did not know what she was doing, and clamping her hands together, walked out of the room, then promptly came back and sat down next to her mother and buried her face into her shoulder.

"Don't do this to yourself," Salsan said in despair, as she held her daughter.

They were all miserable and silent on the way home. Salsan knew she was responsible for their misery that had fallen down on top of them. She tried to dismiss it with optimistic hope. After her daughters went to their homes with their husbands, Salsan retreated to her room alone with the awareness of her frailty. Fearful of the physical pain that was sure to come. She lay still in her bed, kept awake by the sadness and thought, "I am here now, but soon I will not be." Her mood was worsened by the belief that the same thought was keeping her daughters awake. She fought the inclination to be seized by terror; instead she put her head to the floor and prayed for God's mercy and for Him not to let her spend her last days in a constant state of despair. She had to accept that she was dying. She should be able to grasp that; after all, she was accustomed to death. She, like her husband, her son, Dina, and too many neighbors and friends to count, was mortal, and, all mortals die. All mortals have an appointed time. In her time she had been the daughter of a wonderful man and a woman who loved to fold her inside of her arms. She'd been the mother to five children of her own who gave her a reason to love and live, even after the death of husband. She'd been a sister to two sisters and a brother, who all were forced to flee to Jordan more than fifteen years before, but who continued to love them as if they were right next to her. It saddened her that they would not be able to attend her funeral, nor would they ever see her grave. Palestinians had no right of return. Once they were gone they were never able to return again. She was Salsan Hayat, who had experienced a share, more than many, of love and happiness, despite the sorrows.

Jenna was only a room away, consumed by her own thoughts. She could not understand and tried to dismiss what the doctors said as being untrue, a deception, a cruel mistake. She tried to force all dark thoughts out of her mind, and to replace them with hope of a happy ending. "My mother is not going to die," she thought, "there has got to be some way." The reality kept coming back, however; she made one prayer after another in place of pessimistic thoughts. She called upon God, hoping to find support from Him. However, she remembered what she knew since childhood, that our time is decided in the womb and what God had willed was what her mother would receive, not a second later. She cried helplessly.

Salsan's children spent every day that followed with sad certainty that their mother was not going to be with them anymore.

Jenna came to believe that if you were poor and Palestinian, you had better not get sick because this was how you would die. She felt it obscene as well as unfair the way a society as advanced as that one, would choose to allow someone to wither away and die just because they were not ethnically correct. She knew then, that she would do anything she had to do to change that kind of moral depravity. She knew that she had to do anything to take revenge on a society that had denied her own mother a chance to live.

Her mother was essential to her; to do without her was unthinkable. Jenna brooded more and more over Salsan's disease, over the image of her sick, frail body. Some days were better than others. Salsan would get up in the morning with a sudden gush of energy and convince herself, if for only awhile, that she was somehow getting better. Jenna would look at her with incredulous wonder. Her mother was still the woman she was before the diagnosis; a beautiful woman with shiny hair and soft laugh lines around the mouth and eyes. No worn out look there. The slender figure that sat across from Jenna most evenings still smiled and still talked of expectations. Of course there were those other days where Salsan's willpower could not overshadow the advancing illness. On those days her daughter's pessimism was written all over her face. Salsan's eyes, on these days, were also different. Jenna could not accept it

"Jenna, don't look so discouraged. One would think you were burying me tomorrow," Salsan would say.

"No momma." But it was often the thing Jenna was thinking and the thing she dreaded most of all.

In her remaining days, her mother spoke often of what it would be like once there was peace. She praised Chairman Arafat and said that his hard work would one day pay off. Jenna always suppressed the urge to stop her.

"Poor momma," Jenna thought, she believed that if you played by the rules, that one day everything would turn out okay. Jenna wanted to tell her that there aren't any rules, and that Yasser Arafat knew this better than anyone. She just couldn't listen to her glorify the man. She found it reprehensible that this guy preached about their pain and complained about their misery, while he lived in a huge villa purchased by the monetary advantage derived from the years he pretended to represent them. She found it absolutely disgusting and foul that his children had nannies and servants that catered to their every need within their Paris mansion, alongside their mother who wrote a book about nothing, for which she was paid a million dollars. They were well fed, well-dressed, and flown in and out of Palestine by private jet when they made their complimentary visits. On the contrary, the children of the West Bank were the inheritors of gross poverty, poor education, political violence, decrepit housing, inadequate healthcare, and unemployment.

The contrast between his life and their own was bitter, and there were no identifiable connections. All of them were Palestinian but they lived in truly separate worlds. "What the hell do we have in common?" she thought.

As Salsan's illness advanced from one horrible stage to another she sometimes needed Jenna's assistance to go to the bathroom, even to clean herself properly. It embarrassed her to have her daughter do this for her. After one of these times when Jenna helped her mother with her clothing and walked her over to the bed. Salsan said in a feeble voice, "Jenna."

"Yes, Momma," she replied, as she took a place beside her.

"I'm sorry you have to do these things for me," she squeezed Jenna's hand as she adjusted her blankets. Salsan seemed so small, more like a child than a grown woman. She'd become a small part of what she was, her weight having decreased

due to her constant vomiting. Tears flooded down her cheeks and she sobbed in shame and hurt.

"Momma, I love taking care of you. You've done it for me all of my life, and I don't mind one bit taking care of you." She forced a smile of comfort on her face for the sake of her mother, but still distress sharpened its blade against Jenna's heart.

That night Jenna sat in her room and thought that so much hurt had come to her so that life was not what it should have been and that she was not the person she started out to be. A little mercy had been snatched away here and snatched away there and there was nothing left of her existence but broken pieces, unmerciful little pieces of debris. She stood up and began to beat herself about her body, and then, no longer able to restrain herself, cried like a baby. She cried about her terrible vulnerability, about the unkindness of destiny, about one day being alone.

"Oh God, why have you decided this for us? Why must you take my mother? Why do you test me so?"

She did not anticipate an answer and she cried more because she knew there would be none. She tried to remember the happy moments of her childhood, when she and her family were still together. She still had the memory of her father and Sammy at the dinner table together. They were all eating and laughing, and Hanna spoke of wedding dresses. That moment, strangely enough, now felt like it had never really belonged to, her or that the person who'd experienced it no longer existed. She felt as if she were recalling the life of another girl who, for that moment, was very happy. The person who now inhabited the body of Jenna Hayat was joyless, one whose hope for happiness had completely vanished into thin air.

From the time of her mother's diagnosis, Jenna's living being had been separated into two overwhelming realities: one that placed her in an atmosphere of despair and the other that cast her in the shadow of Salsan's impending death.

Eventually Jenna lost interest in attending school and decided to quit. She could not bring herself to focus on her studies any longer. Her head and her heart were no longer in it. Every time she opened a book to study, her mind lapsed into thoughts of her mother's condition. She promised her mother that she'd return at a later time. Jenna committed herself to her mother's care, except when she joined her friends from the Al-Aqsa Brigade. She valued her time with them, and her involvement with them gave her some sort of a goal, a sense of importance. Jenna did not truly know her own direction at that time, but she knew that she liked being with them and that the world seemed safer in their company. She also knew that her absence from the house worried her mother, but she had to go. Being with them became as much of a duty as caring for her mother.

One night she returned a little later than usual. When she opened the door her mother was sitting on the couch waiting for her. Salsan looked closely at her.

"Jenna, where have you been?"

She did not speak.

"Where do you go every evening?" Salsan asked suspiciously and sat there waiting with a look of great concern. Her once thick and beautiful hair was pulled

back to the nape of her neck and her pain filled eyes looked extraordinarily large in her withered face.

It was silent a long time. Jenna did not want to lie to her, and there was no right answer. "Anyway" she thought, "People keep secrets when other people don't want to hear the truth."

Salsan became quite nervous and her weak chest heaved with emotion. For a while she'd had some suspicions about where Jenna went and with whom she was associating. She knew that Jenna supported the resistance, but she was unsure of just how much.

"I know about some of the people you spend your time with! Let me tell you something. There is nothing about this war that you know, that I don't know and understand better. But when you've seen the sons and daughters of your friends and neighbors buried, you learn to make concessions once you get older that you thought you'd never agree to when you were younger and braver, when you said, 'Oh, I'll never take this or take that.' But time goes by and the cemeteries become full, and there is barely a place where a man can make his home, and you feed your children flour and water. Then you realize that the only way you'll ever be free is if you give up some of your anger. You may choose to fight and to be hard, but with those two things alone, you may just end up destroying yourself."

Salsan was becoming more and more emotional.

"I would be more comfortable, Jenna, if you didn't go to any more meetings."

Jenna looked at her mother with a look of defiance. "I would be more comfortable if we had no need for such meetings, Momma! I'd feel more comfortable if I thought something would change for us and things would get better. I'd feel more comfortable if I knew that you weren't going to leave me like Baba left me!"

Salsan tearfully shook her head and endured her grief.

"I want to be here to help you, but that's not possible. One of my biggest regrets is that I did not prepare you well enough for these moments when you were small. I tried to hide the bad things and even pretend that they didn't exist. I swear to you, I didn't know how to do it any differently!"

"Don't momma! Don't get yourself upset," Jenna insisted.

Salsan was upset and felt she had every right to be. "I have been her mother for twenty-two years." She thought. "When she was a small child, I knew that she when she was sick even before she did. I'd sleep with her through the night, to ease every discomfort. I'd walk her to school everyday, just to make sure she was out of harm's way. Now I'm not supposed to make sure my little girl is safe?"

There was anger in the room and Jenna could feel the voice of her mother about to slam into her. The last thing Jenna wanted to do was make her mother feel worse, so she turned towards her, holding herself tight forcing her own feelings inside.

"Listen, I want to say these things to you before I die. I want you to listen to me and let me talk!" Salsan cried, becoming more anxious and aggravated.

These words hurt like a knife. Jenna did not need to be reminded of what was to come. She tried to shut off her throat, to stifle the sound of her emotions, but she

could not and she began to cry. "I know you are dying momma. I know you are going away!"

"Then let me speak! I want to be able to tell you how I feel without you ignoring me or stopping me because you do not agree or because it makes you sad!"

It was important to Salsan to have her say. She was not going to spare Jenna's feeling by denying them. She had neither the time nor luxury of doing that anymore. In the past she'd tried to protect her children from the traumas of her own childhood, and wondered if she had adequately prepared them for the more commonplace sufferings that would occur in their own. She'd played the role of optimist well and categorized their tragedies as God's will and His way of testing their faith in Him. She wanted them to have an innocent start in a tainted world that had manhandled her people by way of the Balfour Declaration. Only when the malignant cells began to consume her life did she fear that her children might not survive the elements in her homeland.

"Okay momma, say whatever you like. I'm listening."

"I don't know where you go Jenna, or what it is that you do, but I don't have a good feeling about it. I'm afraid you're putting yourself in some kind of trouble, Jenna. I just couldn't take it if something were to happen to you." Her voice became stern and emotionally strained. "I know I'd die right that moment." Jenna's mother's heavy words sat like a stone in her stomach.

"I swear to you, momma, I'm not doing anything wrong. I go to the mosque and read sometimes. It's peaceful there. Sometimes I attend an Islamic study group. We just talk, momma!"

"Talk about what Jenna? About things you cannot change? About lives that all of your words cannot bring back?"

"What's wrong with that?" Jenna asked. "Do you think I can forget what happened to Baba and Hanna or what happened to Dina or Sammy? Don't get mad at me, momma. Please. I need to remember and try to understand it in my own way. It's not your way, I know. Your way is safer. Forgive and forget."

Salsan grabbed the sleeve of her daughter's dress.

"I never said forgive, and as far as forgetting is concerned, I remember every minute of the night your father died, every moment you had to grow up not having him with you. I remember every day when he'd come home from work after enduring the journey in from the city. There you would be, his little girl, waiting for him on the balcony. You'd yell 'Baba,' and go flying into his arms when he came through the door, as if you'd sprouted wings. He said he couldn't believe that he was the one that made you that happy."

Jenna started to cry.

"We both have grieved," Salsan said, shaking her head.

"No momma, it is not the same. You grieved over what was. I was a child who lost her father, so I had to grieve over what should have been." A sad momentary silence filled the room.

"You know sometimes it feels like I've just lost your father. The sadness I feel is so strong. Time has not been able to weaken this feeling. I'd give anything to have him back for one day, even one hour. The one thing that gives me comfort is

the reality that I will be joining him soon." Hers were words too hard to hear, but Jenna had opened the door to these feelings. "I never spoke of the past much. None of us did. Sometimes it is best not to go back to what was before."

"I know mamma," Jenna cried out with eyes that held sadness as deep as her soul. "But you have to know that everyday I think about Baba, Dina and Sammy. It's something that I can't help. It's like they are walking through my head! I remember how father looked, how handsome he was, with his long black beard with the little gray strands starting to show. And I've hated not being able to tell you that I miss him so terribly much!"

"Oh, Jenna," her mother whispered aloud. "What do you think you could have done to change any of this? You could not have done anything then and you can't do anything now!"

"See, that's the whole thing, Momma, it was years ago and it's yesterday. There is no difference! You act like I wasn't there when these things happened! I was there Momma. I was there when Baba died. I saw what that man did to him. I saw him die with his eyes wide open! I saw Dina's body fall on the ground. When you've seen these kinds of things and these things have hurt you so much, how do you forget these? How do you make the pain go away?"

Tears flooded her eyes again. She smeared them across her face with her hand. Salsan reached out to her daughter, but she was too weak to go forward.

"I was young, but not that young. I wanted to help my father, just like I wanted to help Dina, but I was afraid. I couldn't do anything to stop it."

"You were a child when you father was killed and you were still a child when Dina died. What do you think you could have done?"

"I don't know. I just know that some things never go away. Sometimes a broken person just can't heal unless he does something to make it right"

"What are you talking about? That kind of thinking is just going to get you in one of two places: the prison or the cemetery. I've spent most of my life doing whatever I could to make sure that you have other choices. Listen Jenna, some problems just don't have a solution and because you don't have a solution doesn't mean you have to destroy yourself. There is something called making the best out of a bad situation and living whatever time God gives you the best way you can. Sometimes it might turn out better than you thought it would. Can you just look at it like that, Jenna?"

Jenna could not give her an answer. She did not have one.

All of a sudden Salsan saw how all of the pieces and tiny fragments of her daughter's miserable life had become a whole. She suddenly knew that all her love and all her posturing had not insulated her from what she felt now.

Since Jenna's mother had been diagnosed with terminal cancer the painful recollections of childhood had become extremely vivid. Memories were now nothing more than the keepsakes of nightmares. Jenna could barely think about her youth without hurting. No one had shown any inclination to explain the events of her father's death to her because they thought that she was too young to understand. Her father was buried only hours before the sun had fully risen and she was not allowed to go to his funeral. In the months that followed she visited the

grave along with her mother. She'd watch as Salsan cried. Jenna once heard her little brother ask if their father's head had stopped bleeding once he was laid into the ground. It only made her mother cry more. Jenna warned him never to ask any more questions and she decided not to ask any of her own, although she and her brother had several. They were both so very young and neither understood the mysteries of death. As the months passed, she'd watch the weeds grow up around the headstone. It bothered her that her father might feel deserted and alone. For this reason she asked to go to the grave often and wondered how long it took before a soul was allowed to go to paradise. Jenna tried to imagine angels coming and escorting her father into the heavens, seeing him ascend alongside their wings. Still, nothing gave her any real sense of comfort about his passing away. The silence of her family disturbed Jenna most of all. The hush surrounding his murder should not have muted their favorite stories about her father's life. There would have been less a feeling of being lost if they would have revealed more about the happier times they had experienced with him.

It was her mother who struggled to create a life inside their home that would mask, as much as possible, the force of life outside and its ambivalence to misfortune. This was a defense mechanism nurtured in the Hayat home in order to maintain a sense of hope and a state of sanity, implemented by a mother that attempted to nurture an illusion that you were safe, even when the physical evidence around you did not warrant that conclusion. By way of a well-meaning deception Jenna became not only a dreamer, but also an optimist and she disassociated herself from the external violence. Her mother had a gift for storytelling and her selected memories became her children's memories. Jenna was able to evade the past and keep her pain at bay. She grew up in a story of make believe edited by a mother who wished away every detail of a world that might harm them. She fantasized about what could be instead of what was. But later on that illusion began to disintegrate and life was not so enduring. Jenna found very few reasons to be optimistic. On the contrary, there came many moments she hated being Palestinian, with its fierce responsibilities and its tally of endless defeats. She hated the intensity, and the obligation, and the demand of loyalty. And how she hated seeing her people interned like caged birds.

Jenna was not so hard or ungrateful to admit that her life had been better than many families who lost a parent. Having no man to support a wife and children left many destitute and homeless. Her own family never went hungry and they were able to overcome their difficulties. They were not the poorest people in the neighborhood, not even near. Their home, however, was hardly pleasing to the eye. Several homes up and down her street had been demolished. Some that stood either had no windows or a roof on top. Jenna's house, most of the time, seemed like the safest place on earth. It was like a halfway house stuck between the land of everything and nothing at all. Most people there continued to be spiritual and remained grateful to God because every day they survived seemed like a miracle. Though she valued what she had, she did not feel unappreciative for wanting more, wanting what she was entitled to. After all, it was human nature to want roots, to

need roots. She longed for a sense of belonging, for some place that was recognized as her own. She found it insufferable that millions of human being, millions of Palestinians, had been made desperate and poor, sick and ignored. Worst, their lives had been completely uprooted, spurned and erased.

Those who chose not to wander, but stay felt a sense of incarceration. In the Arab neighborhoods there was no such thing as civil rights or liberties. The Israeli uniform and the gun that accompanies it were the manifest credential of power. The reveling engines of armored tanks and the whirling sound of helicopters were, every so often, accompanied by the dissonant sound of a missile. All of these things were used as tactics to immobilize desperate men wanting to be free and force them into a state of apartheid.

Jenna had become a different woman. She was a product of an evolutionary cycle that cultivated itself on predicament and circumstance. She was approaching a point in her life when most things exasperated her and she hungered for consolation and the realms of joy granted to those who knew where and how to find them. Years before, Jenna had opted to take only a limited amount of responsibility for who she was: a Palestinian; under occupation, amid refugee camps. She'd learn to ignore her status in a land forbidden to her, where all human passions were venerated to morbid aggression and all restraint pushed to its irrepressible limits. Now that she stood to lose the last thing that mattered to her most, things were different. Her personal responsibility seemed enormous. She had some sort of mission to accomplish. Being a Palestinian was somehow different. She was not a child. Growing up had been a serious business. She, Jenna, would not want to be young again, not for anything. Not without an extreme amount of luck: a country of her own and most of all, sovereignty. In absence of these opportunities, the responsibilities seemed enormous. Overwhelming. And what about a commitment to Al-Aqsa Brigade? Wasn't she somehow duty-bound? Should she give her complete allegiance?

Nothing. Nothing that she could see was there to make her see otherwise.

Jenna accepted now, like many others, that they faced the inevitable, that there was no way to change the course of their lives. It allowed her a new found perspective. Al-Aqsa simply facilitated these newfound perspectives and Jenna did not want to pass up any chance to fulfill an obligation to her people.

"Have you listened to what I have said?"

"I've listened to everything you've said"

"Yes, but have you heard me?" Salsan persisted.

"Of course, Momma."

There was a strained silence.

After a while Jenna spoke with intentional deception. "You're right momma. We have to learn to accept things and make the best of them. It's all God's will."

Salsan calmed down, seemed consoled and warily smiled at her daughter. There were too many rooms in Jenna's mind that Salsan no longer had access to, too many dimensions to a young woman that she didn't completely understand. There was a mystery to her, a hidden asylum that was far too deep than she ever

imagined. When Salsan looked at her daughter, she saw that Jenna loved her, but in spite of this love she knew that she could not control her. It did not have the force to keep her within the shadow of a mother's boundaries. Her primary intention was not to shape her daughter to fit into her own mold, force her own notions about what was right, nor did she wish to infringe upon Jenna's conscience. What she wanted was to be able to die in peace and feel sure that Jenna was not embarking down a path of destruction. But now she saw something else there: that the life of her daughter was misleading. Jenna gave the appearance of discretion and level-headedness, but inside, what she saw was not level-headedness, but naïveté and desperation; no discretion at all, but impulsiveness.

At that point Jenna became unnerved- but at herself. She hated herself. She hated herself for giving her mother more pain than what she already had. She knew that she only wanted to believe that her daughter was safe, and accepted her words distrustfully.

"Sometimes you worry me, Jenna," Salsan moaned, pushing away her graying hair with both of her hands. She sat there looking at Jenna with wonder. But it was the anger that made Jenna feel guilty. It was that unwavering set to her chin that moved her, even when it seemed unfair and illogical, accompanied by beliefs that she did not agree with. Thus, Salsan argued inflexibly with Jenna that evening over where she went, what she talked about and with whom she was.

"Children don't understand what mothers go through until they have children of their own. To care for all of us, I have had to wrestle with fate. Fate has fought with me to keep us all alive. Jenna, you know how I have struggled just to keep clothes on our backs so that we would not go naked. When you were hungry, I would have stolen to give you food. When you were sick, I stayed up night and day. Do you know why? Because there is no chore too hard, no care too much for a child a mother loves and oh how I have loved all of you. I'm not trying to control you. The only thing I want is for you to be happy. Do you understand Jenna?"

Jenna nodded and patted her mother's hand.

They had never had any secrets between them. Jenna was not used to it.

When the moment passed, she glanced over on a side table and saw one of her mother's books.

"Let me read to you. I haven't read to you in such a long time."

Jenna picked up the book and sat next to her mother and began to turn a page. Her mother held one of Jenna's hands. Salsan's fingers were nothing but bones. Jenna's heart began to throb. She forced herself to read the words.

"It's okay, Jenna. You're tired," Salsan said softly, weak and breathless.

"I want to," she persisted, "I love reading to you."

She opened the book and began where her mother had left off. She choked with emotion and her voice, despite Jenna's efforts, failed her. With every syllable she began to cry. Her mother knew, if only in part, why she could not read to her and the more she saw this, the sadder and more troubled she became. She knew her daughter's heart and understood, only too well, how difficult it was for Jenna to betray her expectations of her and conceal anything from her. Jenna knew her mother loved her very much; this was the one thing Jenna was always sure of. At

the same time, though, she knew that she would not be around to guide her youngest girl, and that Jenna had to ultimately make her own choices.

Jenna sat there and held her mother until she slept. As much love as she had for her mother she could not help but feel a little angry with her for her interference, just because in her heart she believed that she was doing nothing wrong. Jenna believed that the loyalty that bound her to the *résistance* was not a momentary infatuation, which would pass as some other whimsical adventure passes. This was something that meant a lot to her and defined who she was. After awhile she laid her head down on a pillow and watched her mother sleep. Even in this state her mother bore pain. Jenna could hear in every breath a ceaseless moan. She only wished that her mother was strong enough to hold her in her arms the way she used to, so she could tell her about her pain, of a different kind, that followed her all her waking hours. The pain she tried to erase with sleeping pills did not sedate her from the explosions she often heard throughout the streets. She felt like she could not breathe sometimes. There was no space there. There was no quiet!

Jenna felt herself dozing, so she got up and went to her room, walking quietly so as not to wake her or her brother, Ahmed. He would be leaving to study economics in Scotland soon. This fact pleased their mother. Ahmed would be safe because he'd gotten away. He would be allowed to fulfill the dream that their brother Sammy had lost a long time ago. At first Ahmed wanted to decline the scholarship he'd been offered because of his mother's illness, but Salsan absolutely refused to allow it. Ahmed had worked hard in school and gotten good grades. He'd always been a deeply curious student who seemed to get an easy grasp on concepts and ideas. Now hard work and luck had finally had their way. Ahmed had found a way around the academic obstacles that were typically before people like him. Most of the students, no matter how hard they worked or how well they did in high school, had no chance of winning admission or a scholarship to a Western university- and Ahmed had received both! Salsan was not going to allow even her death from preventing such an opportunity.

Jenna closed her bedroom door and did not put on the light. The moon was shining through the window and she could not do anything but stare up at its light. Later she dozed and slept hard, but later awoke to hear gunfire from the street. This was not uncommon those days, so her eyelids closed shut, and her mind became transcended and lost in dreams; nevertheless somewhere in the bottomless recesses something functioned and told her bullets were being fired.

Jenna eyes opened a bit but she made no movement, turning only slightly towards the sounds. Seven shots, and then more, they would not stop. She hoped that they had not awakened her mother.

In the morning she found her mother drinking a cup of tea.

"What about food, momma, did you have anything to eat since yesterday?"

"I don't ---." Salsan began to say that she had no appetite and that she was too exhausted to eat, but Jenna was insistent and headed towards the refrigerator door. Rather than endure a voice of protest, Jenna decided on a tactic that might make her mother happy and also encourage her to eat.

"Momma, do you remember the offer of marriage Marwan made me? Well, I was thinking of accepting it!"

Jenna was willing to lie now to give Salsan something to be joyful about, to give her some comfort. But when glimpsing her, she saw her sweet truthful eyes set on her questioningly; she repeated her intentions to marry in a way that gave every word its validity. "I am only making her happy," she thought.

Her mother took a deep breath. "Jenna," she cried. Jenna did not think that Salsan had any idea of just how big her smile was. Before she knew it Salsan was laughing and Jenna was so happy because it was her that had made her feel that way.

Jenna sat down next to her and paused to see the joy in her eyes. All of a sudden Jenna was laughing too. Then unexpectedly Salsan told her daughter to hurry and bring her some cheese. "I'm so hungry."

They ate and talked the entire morning. Her mother was excited the rest of the day and full of conversation. It had been such a long time since Jenna had seen her so joyous; it was as if she didn't have a problem in the world. She looked at this woman, who from the time her children were born sought only to protect them. If Salsan could have had it her way, she would have placed all her children in a bubble just to secure their calm and contentment. All Jenna wanted to do was please her, especially now. There was no way to describe how happy she was to see her mother like this, almost like the way she was before she became ill.

It was serene and pleasant that entire day and Jenna looked tenderly at her mother, who had always longed for the sense of harmony that comes from everything being in its proper place. Ahmed blessed with the promise of a good education and Jenna finally conceding to marry. The mere promise of a happy ending placated her heart enormously.

That night Zakki came and brought them rice, meat, and Salsan's medication. Since his return to Palestine he'd repeated the custom of bringing them groceries every week. He'd barely made it past the door before Salsan announced that her youngest was going to be married to Marwan.

His eyes dropped and disappointment filled his eyes, too acute to be concealed.

"Congratulations," he muttered with an unnatural smile, flabbergasted and annoyed. He turned toward Jenna for some kind of confirmation, but she declined to speak out, and only stood there facing him with a smile. He continued to stand there silently until he became aware that her mother sensed his discomfort.

"I'm surprised. This is so unexpected."

Zakki appeared to regain his senses and was inclined to display his coolness in his response, "I hope that you will be very happy Jenna."

"Of course she will. Marwan is a very good man," her mother replied gleefully. Zakki was so baffled that he went to the couch and sat for a half of an hour, trying to comprehend the news. He was stupefied and found her decision to marry Marwan strange. Worst of all could not deny to himself how jealous he was. The thought of Jenna marrying Marwan or any other man infuriated him. But what right did he have to feel this way, he reflected. He had to admit to himself that he was unwilling to offer himself as an alternative. He didn't want it that way but he felt

helpless to do anything about it. The only way he could feel affection for Jenna was in secret.

After a while, however, the purpose of Jenna's actions became clear to him. Once analyzed, her deception could not fail but to be discovered. Zakki suddenly flared up, his voice elevated just below a shout, "Do you know what you are doing? To begin with you are telling a lie! You are purposely misleading your mother- and yourself in believing that you are doing a good thing."

Jenna pretended as if she were not becoming annoyed.

"You, marrying Marwan, is nonsense. You've never shown any interest in that man whatsoever, and I think you are only using him to make your mother feel better. That's not going to happen. She will not suddenly recover because you say that you will marry Marwan!" he snapped.

Jenna moved around the room restlessly, without looking directly at him, touching things, arranging, putting things away- doing anything not to display her guilt!

"I don't care. Maybe you are right, but my mother has cancer, and if this is the only thing that I can do to make her happy, then pretending to marry Marwan is what I'm going to do," she argued.

Zakki became more irate. "Your little hoax may very well backfire. From the expression on your mother's face, you just may end up marrying Marwan."

"Listen, Zakki, few parents nowadays have any reason to pay any regard to what their children say to them. That old fashion expectation of honesty from the young is swiftly dying out. Fortunately, I still am able to convince my mother that most of what I tell her is the truth. If pretending to marry gives her some happiness and peace before she dies, then so be it."

Suddenly she looked away not knowing where to turn. Because things were not different, Jenna was resentful with him and was looking for a reason to justify her resentment. A part of her blamed him for some of her pain. The agonizing state of being uncertain, one moment of optimism and another of disappointment, in which she lived her life in Palestine, Zakki's cause célèbre and determination, and her resignation, made her believe that warranted some of the blame. If he really cared anything about her, he would have seen how unbearable her situation was and he would have chosen her over his position in the movement. He could have continued to serve his people without offering up his life. He knew that she was near to losing her mother and that she would be all alone. If he desired they could marry, even leave Palestine, and help the resistance from the outside. Hadn't he already served the cause of Muslims in Afghanistan? Didn't the bodies of most of his family lie in a graveyard in Ramallah? Were these sacrifices not enough? She'd come to realize that she was only deceiving herself in imagining that she could ever have the life she really desired. "No, he has to have his jihad." She thought, and it was he who contributed to her dreadful position and was responsible for the dejection that he could have changed.

Zakki wanted to say more, but he was too angry to say another word and pretended to clear his throat. He toyed nervously with the button below the collar of his shirt, glancing at Jenna with the excruciating feeling of disgust for which he

rebuked himself, but which he could not rise above. All he wanted to do was purge himself of his feeling of jealousy and disappointment. After the silence became too exasperating for him, he collected his things and walked out of the door.

All Salsan Hayat ever wanted was her daughter to be married to a kind man, to a man like one she had married, and have children who would be good people. Nothing more. That she failed had less to do with her own shortcomings than with the irony of circumstance.

Jenna saw signs of the disease's progression. Her mother could not sit up for very long periods. She spent less time in the living room and could no longer visit any of her friends. She became increasingly frustrated, as she could not longer do much of anything for her family. One morning Salsan could not get out of the bed to go to the bathroom. Jenna reached down and lifted her mother by the waist. The she straightened up, hoisting her and she rose. Usually when you lift someone you wait for his or her arm to tighten around your grasp, but Salsan was unable to do so. On this day she was very weak and mostly dead weight. When they returned to the bedroom Salsan looked self-conscious. Jenna put her arm around her mother to comfort her. Salsan never wanted to be a burden to anyone. She had seen the lives of girls forced to work tirelessly caring for the needs of an elderly parent. It was often a backbreaking experience. Salsan did not think of herself, only of her daughters.

Jenna asked her mother if she ever felt sorry for herself. "Sometimes at night," She admitted. "In the quiet of the darkness I hear you or Ahmad turning in your beds and I already miss you. I feel sorry for all of the moments in your life that I won't be here to share with you, for not being able to hold your children, for every part of your life that I won't see. I cry then, but then I stop crying because I realize that death will bring me closer to your father and maybe God will let me see his smile as I lie in my grave. After that I lie in my bed and imagine the future I wish for you all."

Listening to these to these words moved her in a way that words could not portray, as she adjust the frail body in the bed and plumped up the pillows behind her back. She had the coldest realization that their time together was running out. She was losing her mother and this was becoming so dreadfully clear to her. When she turned to look at her mother, Salsan was smiling. "Do you remember the time we all drove to Gaza to visit your Uncle Adnan?"

Salsan pointed towards the dresser where a family photo album laid on top. Going over the pictures in the book had become quite common during those days. It was a desperate attempt to return to a life that existed once upon a time. Those old photographs were a way to look at life from a happier place- a place without sickness and pain, a time and place in which she wasn't about to die. In Gaza they laughed and celebrated being a family. Her Uncle Adnan slaughtered a lamb and the women cleaned and stuffed it with rice. In the hours in which it roasted the children sang songs along with their fathers. Jenna danced with Sammy as her father pounded a drum with his hands. He grabbed her hands and swung her around and around until they were both dizzy.

There were lots of kisses and handholding and it was this day that Jenna realized there was no substitute for family. In one of the photographs Adnan is kissing his Jenna's father on his cheek and Adnan is laughing with his eyes closed. "When I see these pictures, I cannot grieve over my life I was blessed with a man that warmed my heart and a wonderful family. These photos are a proof of God's mercy to me. He could have willed me to be alone, but he didn't. Even after your father was taken I was still not alone. I had someone to hold and someone to hold me. Now, even as I lay here sick, I have you to help me. So, I feel blessed. I am not sure that I could do this without you. It is my family that helps me to bear it and gives me the will to live for as long as I can."

Jenna kissed her mother's hands. When she looked up at her she had closed her eyes and a teardrop fell down the side of her cheek, but she was smiling. Jenna was always the closest to her mother. Perhaps it is because she clung to Salsan the most after her father died. Salsan's strength and patience created the environment of endearment and made a lonely girl feel solace after trauma just by being held close at her mother's side. Locked in her mother's embrace, she whispered, "Mom...Is everything going to be alright?" The death of her father had left her completely vulnerable to entities and forces she'd never even experience firsthand. Jenna was desperate to feel safe. Her mother replied, "There are tragedies impossible to prepare for. But with God, it is possible to endure. Right now we are living in a season of suffering but we will endure and stronger than we were before."

Jenna had not mastered faith. Her youth and inner struggle with the forces of destiny left her cynical besides fearful. "So God has a plan for us?" Salsan did not speak; she only stared into her daughter's eyes.

"I want you to tell me Momma, does God have a plan for us? Tell me that all of this was for some reason, Momma, and not something that just happened?"

Salsan thought a moment and then spoke "God created people based on His knowledge and decided their destiny. He determined the hour of their death, which they can never postpone. He determined mankind's destiny fifty years before creating heaven and earth. He knows what has happened and what will happen. And everything that takes place happens when He wants it to. It is Allah's will that comes to pass, not the will of people. What He wills for them occurs and what He does not will ever occur. If man is to face a hardship, he should have patience and be content so that he will be completely rewarded for doing so. As much as you think we have suffered, others have suffered more. Many a time people have been stricken with unimaginable distress, such as no one would be able to ease, but which was relieved by Allah, in one second."

Jenna looked up at her mother with her with her innocent and desperate eyes. "Why doesn't he help our people Momma?"

"Oh Jenna, some questions cannot be easily answered. When this is the case we must have faith and be content with God's will until He changes our condition." Salsan told her the story of the Prophet Job. Allah's prophet suffered from a disease for eighteen years. He was abandoned by all people except two of his friends, who were close to him and who used to visit him regularly. One of them

once told the other; Job has surely committed a sin worse than any other sin ever committed. His friend asked: Why is that? He answered: For eighteen years, God has never had mercy on him and cured him. When the second of the two men went to visit Job, he immediately repeated to him what his friend had told him. Job said, I do not know about that. However, God knows that I passed by two men who were fighting, during which they mentioned God. I went home, and prayed that they be forgiven because I hated that God should be mentioned except in a venerable context. Job used to go out to answer the call of nature. When he finished, his wife used to help him go home. One day, he was gone for a long time. Allah inspired Job saying: "Strike the ground with your foot: This is a spring of water to wash in, and within it is a cool and refreshing drink." When his wife got worried about him, she went to look for him and found him. He approached her after Allah had cured him and he looked better than he ever did. When she saw him, she asked, "May Allah bless you; have you seen God's Prophet who is inflicted with disease? I swear by Him, I have never have seen such a thing before! You resemble him when he was in good health. Job answered her I am he. In addition Job owned two threshers, one of wheat and the other of barley. Allah sent two clouds. When one of them was right above that of the wheat, it poured gold in it until it overflowed. The other poured corn on the barley until it overflowed, too.

So see, my daughter, there is a lesson to learn from the patience of Job. He suffered deeply only to be rewarded generously.

Salsan became the stabilizer, working to weave the threads of what was left of a family together. It was the heart of this mother, a deep abyss at the bottom of which she always found reassurance. When Bassam died Salsan looked into the faces of her children and thought of the work he left unfinished. Such a struggle was left for her to undertake alone. In the whole of their days their mother was the soft cushion against the otherwise harsh atmosphere of Ramallah. She talked to her children and made up for the silence left by the death of their father and the absence of Sammy. She sang to them the songs she learned as a girl and Jenna especially found delight in her mother's voice. When Salsan slept, Jenna occupied the space left by her father. She found a safe haven in the warmth of her mother's quilt.

It was important to spend as much time with her mother as time would allow. Jenna was always conscious of this fact. The swiftness of her father's death made her realize the importance of saying goodbye. The last time Jenna saw her father his body was sprawled across the floor and he was bleeding from his head. There was no chance to comfort him. There was no chance to say goodbye. The horror of the moment left her unable to hold him and to say to him how much she loved him. She would have given anything just to have one more day, one more hour, even one more moment just to speak her heart. For this reason she endeavored to make every moment count, something that she could not do with her father.

On one of Salsan's final visits to the local doctor, the family was told that there was nothing more that any treatment could do. They were told that they needed to focus on helping her through the last part of her life.

Jenna was left haunted by this advice and felt an excruciating kind of acceptance of these words. Having lost one, parent she was always fearful of losing the other. All through her childhood she had fretted over her mother's safety. If her mother were to die an untimely death, she thought, it would probably come down to a bullet or a missile attack. She never thought that it would depend on the color of her blood cells.

Ahmad had left at the end of summer. Everyone saw him off at the airport in Jerusalem, except Salsan, who was far too weak to make the journey. Jenna and her sisters watched him walk through the gate for the three o'clock departure to London; from there he would go to Edinburgh. She was miserable from the moment he walked away. Later it came to her mind that Ahmad was clever; he'd graduated at the top of his class. She reasoned that he would be starting at a British university in just a few weeks. Her brother would be able to do what none of them had ever accomplished, have a good life. Ahmad was being transported out of hell. With this in mind, she was able to let him go. Once he was there he wasted no time writing about his adventures. His letters were long, descriptive and full of enthusiasm. Ahmad knew how to lead them, by way of his narratives, to what made them happy and unafraid. They were different from the ones Sammy wrote a long time ago. All she held now was the written expression of Ahmad's happiness. He had made friends quickly and roomed with a Turkish student and another Palestinian. He'd found his classes interesting and, in addition, he loved the friendly, hospitable nature of the Scottish people. There was a mosque in Edinburgh, which he attended regularly, and he felt himself in a good place. "It doesn't matter," Salsan thought, "because as long as he is there he has a chance." Salsan was sad to lose him and she missed him so very much but she would not regret sending him away. Let him miss his family and suffer the guilt he would surely feel by going and leaving them behind, because that way he would not be drawn into something beyond his control. With this in mind she could pass the remaining days of her life contentedly, optimistically, and in the company of her daughters, who would reassure her through her physical decline. All of Ahmad's phone calls and letters that followed were always of a most wonderful nature. Towards the end Ahmad phoned every weekend. He could since that his mother was weakening. Sometimes he was unable to speak with her but he passed on school news that Jenna might relay. Other times Jenna asked him to just talk to their mother, even if she could not talk back. She asked him to speak as if he believed that she was hanging on to his every word. Perhaps she did hear and it made her feel as if she was not so far away from him and that through his voice he was touching her. "Speak to her Ahmad! Tell her what you are doing there, what you did today, about what you ate for dinner. Tell her anything! She would that no matter where you are in the world you are near to her."

When they spoke their conversations were short, Salsan seemed to tire easily. Jenna was forthcoming never about Salsan's pain. That would be too hard on

Ahmad and she knew that he'd insist to return home. What could she tell him anyway? How their mother grimaced in her sleep, constantly turning her head side to side as if the medication was having no effect? Should she tell him about the force of her gaze? How it was pitiful and beseeching?

In Salsan's final days her daughters gathered around her. It became difficult to know when she was alert. They began a mournful watch, their own lives were paced around their mother's waking moments, around her every word and smile. When they spoke with her, most of the time, Salsan only turned her head, forming her lips as though struggling to voice anything. She wanted to speak volumes but couldn't say very much. For the most part, she had drifted too far in the disease to speak. Lifting Salsan out of the bed seemed to increase her pain. Each day, together, they bathed her in her bed. They were her loving nurses, gentle and painless. Layla brought the washbasin of warm water, while Jenna carried fresh clothing and towels. Aaliyah lifted and turned Salsan's body carefully. Every so often, their eyes met over the bed as they sponged Salsan's depleted body, her colorless skin and her hollow face. They uncovered her in small parts at a time so that she did not get cold. Jenna looked at her attached and uncertain sisters and knew that not one of them had done the emotional labor needed to live the remainder of their lives without Salsan Hayat. In their own way each of them had come to know that life is about losing and attempting to do it as gracefully as possible, but this was beyond their realm of fortitude.

Jenna checked on her mother constantly. She got up in the night at midnight, again at three or four. Most nights it was easier to remain next to her even with the rasping torment of her breathing.

Late one night Salsan was lucid and moved her mouth in a gesture for Jenna to come closer. She struggled to speak.

"What is it Momma?" Jenna rubbed her arm lightly and rested close to her. "What do what to tell me?" She leaned close to Salsan's face and put her ears to her mother's lips.

"I love you." She whispered.

"I know you do."

"Something else."

"What's that Momma?"

"You were always my special girl."

Salsan closed her eyes and her lips squeezed shut as if she'd swallowed life's bitterest fruit. Jenna gently held her mother's face next to her own and felt her mother's wet tears mingled into her own.

Near the end the most important thing was to let their mother know that she was valued. They explained what she meant to them and shared memories of important moments they'd spent together. Jenna believed it helped her a lot. Her weak existence during those weeks was far too difficult than Jenna could have imagined.

She had chronic, excruciating pain in her limbs, which at times prevented her from moving or even sitting in an unsupported manner. Even during these moments Salsan never complained or anguished out loud. Jenna knew her mother was resilient and she personally bore witness to her courage over and over again, but Jenna did not know precisely how brave a woman she was until she began the chore of going away. Salsan's patience and endurance was a lesson in the art of death.

Sometimes the pain was so severe that it prevented her from sleeping, and on several occasions she fainted and subsequently regained consciousness to find her daughters waiting there. She was constantly plagued with fatigue. Her bodily functions and strength diminished over time, leaving her unable to engage in most of the activities she enjoyed. At the point at which she could no longer endure the pain, suffering, and loss of physical capabilities associated with her cancer, Salsan wanted to have medication prescribed that she could self administer to bring about relief. Unfortunately there were many occasions where no amount of medicine seemed to help. Her daughters felt hurt and powerless.

Jenna and her sisters watched the slow transition of her mother's relocation to another life, gradually retiring her lifelong vessel that lay withering, devoid of all energy. Her tears merged with her prayers as she called upon Allah to give her mother a reprieve from the desperate and agonizing sounds of her tortured breathing. As Salsan lay frail and half-conscious, Jenna put a cool cloth to her head. She could not remember her mother ever being so hot or made so delirious by the intensity of a fever. Salsan was rambling most of the time and her words seemed unstoppable. Tears rolled from Jenna's eyes as she repeated Sammy's name over and over again. In her delirium she spoke to her son in a low, deep voice, "Sammy, don't go. Sammy, don't go!" Salsan became increasingly disturbed. Jenna always responded, explaining things to her, trying to console her. Jenna looked into her mother's pale, delicate face with eyes surrounded by shadowy circles. She did not miss one word of her suffering, one tone of her grief, or one quivering muscle in her face. After awhile Salsan's face grew frozen and restrained, like a woman anesthetized. When she finally awoke, Jenna, her sensitive and spirited daughter, whom of all people in the world brought her the sweetest moments of her life, was alongside her and made her feel blessed that Allah had returned her for a few more moments. Jenna on her knees next to the bed, restrained her sobs, cautiously took her mother's hand, bent her face down to it and kissed it. "Momma", she murmured lifting her face and gazing at her.

"I love you," were the last of Salsan's words.

A voice sounded behind Jenna, "She is gone."

Jenna sat beside Salsan on her bed. Her mother wore her old blue robe and a nightcap on her head. Her face showed the ravages of her disease. She was so small and pale. She left her daughters as much of a smile as she could and an extended hand. Jenna took it with shame for all the times she tormented her with her secrets and bouts of depression. They wanted to speak to each other, but could not. For as long as Jenna could remember she'd told her mother just about everything in her

heart. Now as she sat alongside her, she was silent and could only look with eyes filled with tears at this kind and wonderful woman who took her thoughts seriously at times when it mattered and comforted her in a voice that gave her more courage, because she was her daughter. Now her mother lay there on her deathbed, the woman she loved most, had slipped away by inevitable stages from a world in which Jenna was afraid to live without her.

She accepted her mother was at the end of her strength and that it was time to pass beyond the pain.

"I love you," Jenna whispered. As Salsan lay dead Jenna placed her finger on each eyelid and gently closed her eyes. As Jenna stepped away her sister Layla ran to the bed and leaned down to kiss Salsan and saw her own tears fall on her mother's face. She grabbed her mother, and rocked the lifeless body in her arms over and over again as her tears streamed down. Aaliyah approached her sister to give comfort and to quiet her. As Jenna watched, an emotion ran through her body. A feeling she could not explain, but she felt it in the deepest part of her and it made her acquiesce. Her acquiescence was rooted in her deference to life's fragility and with the life's limitation with those whom time creates kinship within the ineffable passionate ties of kith and kin. There was their mother, the reason for all of their lives, the reason of all of their present sorrow, dead now.

Complete silence followed and reigned in the room. Even the weeping children were still. Aaliyah stood deadly pale, staring at her momma, unable to say a word. She appeared unable to believe that death had finally befallen her mother. Some minutes passed until suddenly Jenna stood up and announced that it was time for the washing of the body and she asked everyone in the room to leave except for her sisters. Everyone just kind of looked at her in dismay.

"Can't we wait just a little?" Layla asked.

"Momma is gone now," Jenna knew immediately that she'd said it much too harshly, as if admonishing her.

All of a sudden her sister ran over to her and flung her arms around Jenna's body. The wail that proceeded produced an effect on all the others in the room, except for her. They were all shaking with sobs, yet Jenna remained oddly calm.

No one is ever prepared for the death of a parent, even if that parent has a terminal illness. It is the one loss of life that terrorizes every child, regardless of age. Even the expectation of death does not make its finality of it any easier. Jenna was so very young when her father died, yet throughout all of the years she never stopped missing him. The death of her mother was deeper still. She felt as though she were in a tunnel dark and long enough to get lost in. She just wanted her mother back! As Jenna washed her body, she looked, senselessly, for some sign of life, a breath, a heartbeat, a miracle. She just wanted her back! Jenna picked the still body up into her arms and cradled her, wanting the last time to feel her hair against her cheek and smell its scent. There was nothing Jenna would not have given if only God would just give her back!

Jenna's anguish that was unbearable. She could not hold herself back any longer, and her tears finally had their way. This was the woman who had nourished her children outside the womb as she had nourished them inside, the woman whose maternal affection had defined her own existence and made her the girl she would be, a daughter whose attachment was far too close and whose love was far too deep.

It was time to telephone their brother Ahmad. Aaliyah picked up the phone. When she tried to speak another word beyond his name, no more followed. She could not have given a more detailed message that death had finally befallen his mother. The sound of her breath pierced him. Sorrow, and with it silence, held both of them. Jenna took the phone from her hand and heard the sound of her brother weeping. She had not heard him cry but only once since he was a boy, and that was when their mother was first diagnosed.

"When?" He whimpered

"A little while ago," Jenna answered.

"Did she suffer much?"

"No." She lied, trying to ease the guilt she knew he felt because he had not been there. "She didn't suffer at all; the medication took away the pain."

She began to recall the last time Ahmed saw his mother. It was the morning he left for school, the last time he would say goodbye and look into her face.

"Come Ahmed, come here and kiss your mother goodbye."

Ahmed ran over to his mother and grabbed her. She hugged him as tight as her strength would allow and then they looked at each other as her fingers pinched his cheeks. Ahmed saw all the quickness and unkindness of her disease and it almost made him breakdown. He would have gladly stayed right where he was. He would have stayed next to her, if that were what she had wanted.

"We'll be okay." Jenna said to her brother, dispirited, before she hung up the phone. Aaliyah took her hand tightly and fell against her. Jenna wanted to reassure her, to say that they would endure the sorrow together. But that would be lying. Her own loss made her feel as if she were drowning, who was she to keep anyone afloat?

His sisters wept in their own gloomy misery.

Jenna felt better after she had cried. She felt less burdened, more aware of her emotional limits, more human.

Her mother had passed away and a part of Jenna had gone with her. The warm part of Salsan's body where her heart once beat was now becoming cold. Her once colorful cheeks were now pale and lifeless. The tattered blue robe that was draped around her body now lay alongside the bed. And the daughter that depended on her for everything would be different forever because that was the day that God broke her heart.

Without any word she left the room.

Minutes later Jenna returned with a huge tub of water and towels. She asked that everyone leave the room but her sisters.

Jenna picked up the cloth from the basin of water and began to wash her mother all over once. Religion dictates that it should be done three times, so she instructed her sisters to replace the water after each washing. When they returned the third time the water was cold. For some reason the thought of washing her mother in cold water made Jenna completely unnerved. "It has to be warm!" She snapped. Aaliyah sensed her sister's instability, "Of course Jenna, it should be warm."

After the washing was completed, Jenna braided Salsan's hair and placed it behind her head. They put camphor all over her body and wrapped her in a burial shroud.

Their mother's body lay, as the dead customarily do, in an unusual heavy way, with its unyielding limbs pressed onto the hard wood of the coffin revealing, as all dead bodies, the last look of lifelessness. Salsan had changed immeasurably, her remains withered. Her bones extended beyond her flesh.

Zakki arrived after the burial preparation was completed to escort Salsan's body to the cemetery where she would be laid next to her husband. Jenna stood at the doorway and watched as he and her brother-in-law walked over to burial box, lifted it and carried it out of the room. They sat it down on the floor. Zakki stood up and turned to find Jenna standing just across the room. Seeing her about to cry, waved and began walking towards her. Before he reached she lifted her hand and pushed away her tears.

"It's going to be alright," he said. She nodded as he handed her a tissue.

Jenna glanced over at her sister, realizing that they had been standing there watching her watch Zakki. She didn't care. Jenna was comforted by his presence and his reassurances. She knew that he had loved her mother, too.

It wasn't until a group of men lifted the coffin to remove it from the house that Zakki, himself, began to cry. He stood there in front of everyone sobbing. She'd never seen him cry, and Jenna wanted to go over and embrace him. His grief was not unlike her own; he would miss this kind and gentlewoman that had come to represent the mother he had lost. She became so emotional at the sight of it all that her heart began to race. And then suddenly she knew something; it was over. God had decided and Salsan Hayat's term was up. Jenna was alone now and emotionally short-circuited. Everyone would return to his or her lives and she would be on her own. Jenna felt orphaned and forsaken. She closed her eyes and swallowed. She stood there although she felt like collapsing. When she opened her eyes she found her face flooded with tears. It was her sister Aaliyah who rushed alongside of her and began whispering something to her., but her hands flew up against her ears, stopping her. Then her eyes found Zakki in front of her.

"You have to be strong," he said. "Be strong like your mother. "Be like she would want you to be."

When all burial preparations were completed, her mother was taken to the cemetery. Jenna would not be accompanying her family on her mother's final journey. She just couldn't do it. When Jenna refused to go to the cemetery Zakki

stayed. Although he sat across the room with a few relatives that remained, she knew that he was there for her. At one point Jenna walked over and said, "Really, it is okay for you to go. You don't have to worry about me. Everything will be fine here." On reply he gave her a smile of support and then continued his conversation with her cousin who sat next to him.

Jenna was relieved that he stayed. She was grateful. His presence gave her emotions stability.

Salsan Hayat was buried in the fleeting light left by the setting sun. Her friends and neighbors lowered her body into the grave and took their turn shoveling dirt on top of it. When her family returned from the gravesite, Aaliyah gave Jenna a letter from her mother. Within the envelope was a picture of her mother and a little baby, not long after its birth.

"It's you, Jenna. Momma found it a couple of months ago but she wanted it saved for now."

Jenna opened the letter and began to read, "To my daughter Jenna. Dear Jenna, I hope our life together brought you more good memories than bad ones, and I hope you will use them to be more happy than sad. I will miss seeing you fully become a woman and finding your own place in this world. Please know that I wish that I could have been there with you through everything. I am so proud to have known you and proud that you were mine. I just don't think that my years could have included what sweetness there has been if you had never been part of them. Jenna, you were always my strongest, my smartest, and my biggest challenge, which it made me love you especially. You and all of my children have meant so much to me. That is where I got the last of my strength. Please remember, I need not be next to you in order to love you. I will carry you within me forever."

That night Salsan's daughters stayed together and cried and told their stories about their mother and her influence on their lives. Death may eliminate one's physical presence but not one's place in the hearts and minds of those left behind. There is constant communication that transcends tangible existence. Their mother, in painless sleep beneath the earth's surface, still spoke to them. They spoke of the gentle nature of the woman who stymied every grief and trauma that moved past their lives, and who by the act of simply brushing their hair, made them feel safe and comforted. Eventually saying farewell is a decree that cannot be avoided, yet the heart filled with love can never acquiesce to it. The entire life of their mother was an observance and an unshakable belief in God and in a holy book she read, word by word, every day her eyes allowed. Although the only definition for faith is faith, it did not adequately give meaning to their mother's submission.

The next day neighbors came and went. Friends from long ago came from their villages to the Hayat house, the distance of more than an hour. Some Jenna had not seen since she was a child. They, too, had grown old tired and broken, like her mother. They, too, were unable to make a compromise with time. The lines around their eyes, the wrinkles that encased their memories, and the slow pace that dominated their movements, were a testimony to their years. They were like soldiers who had seen too much combat; their faces revealed battle fatigue. Like

old relics, they represented something solitary and resilient, from an era of uncertainty when Israelis stood side by side with a proclamation in hand, bearing witness to their belief in their right to the land. The rationale was a holocaust. A period of human indecency, that for which some unknown reason, Palestinians were forced to make amends. Their lives were used to extinguish a guilt incurred by an era not of their making and they never understood why any penalty should rest with them. The holocaust was a European concoction, but no one was taking away Germany and giving it to the Jews.

For the most part, they were not who they had been, and they are not who they should have been, but they had loved their lives, as poor as they were. It was enough for them to have had God on their side, and to know that this life was only a journey. Jenna warmly greeted each and every one. For that day she would be the daughter Salsan Hayat raised her to be. She might have been shattered and fatigued, her eyes swollen and fixed, but she was going to observe the etiquette she'd been taught by the gracious woman she now mourned.

They held Jenna's hand and hugged her, as if it were going to make a difference in how she felt. She knew that they were only trying to comfort her. Um Saleem, an old lady from down the street, and not a very good friend of her mother, came with a cake. She began giving Jenna and her sisters a little speech about "every one having his time to go", then went on and on about life coming full circle. Jenna never thought she would shut up. She wanted to take her cake and choke her with it. Jenna knew that might have been a bit harsh and irrational, but their family had just buried their mother, and she didn't feel like hearing this old lady talk about "every one having his time". Finally, Um Saleem got up from her chair and took Jenna's hand and sighed, "Your mother is with God now and she'll no longer feel any pain. Be grateful for that."

"What?"

By then Jenna had managed to detach herself from the futility of the woman's words and her mind floated away. She looked at Um Saleem, waited, thinking that when her mother was in pain she never saw her come for a visit, not even one time, and now she was there with her lousy cake, telling Jenna what her mother was feeling. Jenna nodded, looked at the hand of condolence Um Saleem was offering and, hypocritically, shook it. She was consumed by the grief she wholly felt and was not inclined to tolerate the condolences of those who were truly not sorry. She was affronted by the hypocrisy of people like Um Saleem, who uttered polite but empty words, and in the empty place her mother had only just vacated. Still, Jenna reminded herself that she promised that she was going to observe every protocol, no matter what. Taking advantage of the first moment of silence, Jenna politely nodded and walked out of the room.

After her mother's death, Jenna regretted that she would never be the kind of woman her mother had been. Though Jenna adored her mother throughout her entire life and found a safe haven within her loving spirit, she never would be able to duplicate her kindness and unselfishness. She realized that she had never appreciated her enough. She knew then that part of her would have liked to have passed through life as Salsan had, as an idealist with an innocent belief that all men

have some inherent goodness within them. Her mother had died without Jenna truly being able to tell her how much she admired her natural innocence and charitable simplicity. She would have liked to live in her Arab world, praising God for the bounties that she had been given and graciously sacrificing all those that had been taken away. She would have liked to have been able to smile and talk to every neighbor and be willing to give any charity to any one of them, even if it were only a prayer. Jenna wished that she could have sensed the world as her mother did, with a heart filled only with hope and a voice flowing with praise of a life to come. She had thought herself drained of tears, but without forewarning they began again. One of her sisters reached out to offer a tissue. "It's okay," Jenna said, "I'm not going to fall apart."

After her mother's burial, sadness took over her that seemed unending, and she seemed to lose herself in the details and emotional course of losing her mother. The word "momma" itself became a heartache. That once endearing word became merciless and she could not bear to hear it. For several days, Jenna sat in her mother's house alone, not wanting to speak to anyone. She asked her sisters not to come, and they reluctantly agreed to respect her wishes. A week later she began to vomit so hard that blood came up her throat. She even began to relate her own symptoms to her dead mother's. But her own ailment was nothing more than a psychosomatic episode. She had no disease and was in need of no medication; her mind was controlled by her the loss of her mother. She looked upon her world as hopeless and whatever faith she'd held for the future died along with Salsan, there was nothing to save her from the suffocation she felt and the need to be left alone. As hard as she had previously thought the death of her mother would be, it was harder. There were no memories of a mother that were not rendered painful by death, no circumstance surrounding this particular loss that was redeemed by a single cheerful thought.

"People think that just because it happens to everybody, that losing a parent is supposed to be bearable. Well, it's not," she thought to herself. She knew that the passing away of her mother was the one misfortune for which there was no compensation. The circumstances of Salsan's death only contributed to the hurt. As time passed, Jenna endured and readied herself for the next stages of life.

Jenna assigned herself the task of discarding Salsan's things. She had not gone into her mother's room in several days. It was dark, silent and empty. For so long, she'd lived so much of her life between those bedroom walls, happy and content. Now she found them too quiet and confined and her feelings preyed upon her. Jenna sat down on the bed and cuddled her mother's pillow, finding comfort in her mother's scent. She knew that the bedding should be laundered but she would put it off as long as she could.

Jenna began by rummaging through Salsan's dresser, as it was customary to give away the usable clothing of the dead to the poor. While going through a drawer of papers she found a picture of her mother as a child. The picture was at least fifty years old, when Salsan was a small girl. Her mother was wearing a skirt and a peasant blouse, leaning up against her father who was wearing a Bedouin

robe and the traditional checkered Palestinian headscarf. Salsan held her father's hand. She was smiling up at his face. Jenna could see her mother's love for the grandfather she'd never met. Beneath that picture was another one, only this one was wrapped in old lace. She opened the material to find an old wedding picture of a beautiful young woman she knew to be her mother and a well-groomed man she knew to be her father. Seeing two people so perfectly matched and so full of life moved her deeply, that their lives had been shattered and short-lived broke her more deeply, that she never got to see them grow old together almost brought her to her knees. In their eyes there were no signs of the tragedies that would come to them in their lifetime.

In the back of the drawer there was an almost empty bottle of cologne. The bottle was old. She lifted it to her nose and inhaled. Immediately she was reminded of her father. Her mother had kept this keepsake secured all of these years. The scent reminded her of that part of her childhood when she had hung from her father's neck and he would swing her around. He would sit patiently during her little tea parties and pretend to drink from the little cups he'd purchase for her when she was a very small girl. Bassam was just the best father in so many ways. He taught her all the names of the planets, but to her he was the moon.

Her father was her companion, but their companionship that ended far too soon. If he had lived he would have been almost sixty years old. Things might have turned out differently. Sammy would not have gone to Afghanistan and her mother would have not spent so many years alone. This one man, with the force of his love and care, has been the sunlight of their entire universe and his death dimmed everything.

Almost everyone she met tried to assure her by promising that everything would be okay after time had passed, as though she was something broken that time would piece back together. She knew, however, like Salsan Hayat, that whoever she once was, that person was gone forever.

Jenna could not remember when it was she set her sights on a deadly course. She knew that the passing of her mother had certainly modified her direction. Her passing Jenna made her feel less of a connection with the living, and the home in which she resided did not seem to belong to her now so much as it did when her mother was alive. She did know that watching her mother die away had made her see that she did not want to really die herself. She just wanted to be free. Most people didn't know how much pain went into being there within that life. Once she had even taken her mother's pain medication because she wanted to feel what it was like not to feel. Jenna regretted it because when her mother needed that pill and they didn't have the money to buy more, she'd lain in bed the entire day withered up in pain.

Only two days after Salsan's death, Israeli soldiers gunned the Ramallah refugee camp looking for members of Hamas. They fired first, and inquired about the identification of the dead last. When the smoke cleared, a two year old and her mother lay dead in the street. The evening news placed the blame on Hamas,

although no one shot, killed, or arrested was ever proven to be associated with the organization. None of this surprised Jenna. Their war, she thought, with the Israelis had always been a strange one, in which rumors and misinformation had always been more important than facts. They were the ones maligned as being terrorists and murderers, when three Palestinian civilians died for every one Israeli killed. Every hour of the day Israeli soldiers were allowed to carry out their executions with absolute immunity. No one questioned why villagers were beaten or shot to death.

Jenna believed that the Israelis could deny it, if they wanted, first because that they were masters at the skill of distorting real recognition of the facts, and second because no one ever questioned them. It was they who substituted the word "eliminate" for "kill" because it appeared to involve insurgents and their legislative body bore no of culpability. The word "kill" would have generated a very "negative international reaction." The translation for "negative international reaction" was a hypocritical, political maneuver to conceal who they are, who their victims were, and what it was they really did.

When innocent Palestinians were injured or killed, Israeli jargon was expertly crafted to forge a defense for the indefensible. F-16 warplanes bombarded refugee camps from the air; Israeli shelling of villages like Younis Khan killed a dozen of civilians, including a mother and her fourteen-year-old daughter; meanwhile in the Balata refugee camp, two children were killed by the military. This was called "defense" and the excuse was offered that, "rooting out terrorist is not a sterile, surgical procedure." Armed settlers shot unarmed Palestinians, including 29 men and boys, as they prayed at the Ibrahim Mosque in Hebron; this was called "self-preservation." The government arrested civilians without cause, locked them up for years without trial, and summarily assassinated "suspected" leaders. It was called "removal of untrustworthy elements." Language of this type was essential if people needed to mislabel a slaughtering, but did not dare to scrape up the courage to look at the pictures that went along with them.

This government's misinformation served two purposes: first their agencies of death fitted comfortably in an inoffensive role as terminators and, second, intense reaction from world observers was minimized.

There was no doubt in Jenna's mind that this language was created by the same spin doctors who came up with the conception of a "Palestinian Authority". When missiles destroyed Palestinian police stations and command posts and its personnel were disarmed and arrested by Israeli Defense Forces, where was their "authority"? Their legal power and influence was a joke, nothing more than lies, a deception to manipulate the minds of her people that they actually had some say in the terms of their own survival.

Jibril, a close companion of Zakki, approached Jenna about joining the suicide unit of Al-Aqsa. She was asked to attend a meeting in the basement of a neighborhood mosque. There, Jenna was ushered into a small office where a woman and three men were waiting.

"Your name has been referred by people we trust," said one of the gentlemen. "We are well aware that you have been very active in serving our cause and the cause of God, but there is a way you can make the ultimate sacrifice for your people and at the same time, earn the best reward that God gives to any man. I think that you understand what we have in mind. Are you interested?"

"To be honest with you, I have thought about it, but before I commit myself I'd like to go home, pray, and ask God for His guidance, if that is alright."

The woman, who Jenna came to know as Naveen, stepped forward and put her arm around her, "Of course, that is exactly what you should do."

Jenna knew well enough that such an act led to consequences so horrific that at first she found it impossible to quickly come to terms with the idea. Once alone, the very thought of being a suicide bomber stirred so many feelings, reflections, and conflicting feelings in her that she did not know what it was she should do. Now that the offer had been formally made, it necessitated a firm decision.

Moreover, Jenna knew that this was a decision that only she could make. At that moment she had no intention of committing herself to anything. They may not have taken her seriously if she had, after all a decision to die required much serious contemplation. Death was an issue she'd come to analyze from different angles in the last few months. She never really expected to be one of those who went quietly in her sleep. She never expected death to come to her at an elderly age. Jenna had decided that if she had to go then it would be better to die for a cause, and quickly. A slow agonizing death like her mother's was a nightmare she would not want to relive. It was not only awful for the victim of such a fate, but for the loved ones as well who watched. A violent death, on the other hand, was over in a second and almost certainly best for the deceased. She knew her sisters would agonize, "Did she feel any pain? Why did she have to do this?" And hearing about her death on the every news channel would be beyond their comprehension. The grief, she was sure to cause them, tormented her, but the life she was living besieged her. How to be sure? Prayer had always been a pervasive part of Jenna's life, and it was not limited to the obligatory ones, five times a day. Many of her pleas to God were unplanned, happening when she was so upset that she needed to feel she had His attention. This time it was different. After pacing the floor, she fell on her knees. She had never felt so desperate, more desperate than ever before, even when she realized that her mother was going to die.

"Why do I feel so abandoned? What is it I must prove?" She cried. "I have loved you God and the only thing I ask is for your guidance. Tell me what to do! I am not asking for much, just some kind of relief from all of this. No one sees more than you how miserable my life is here- if it can be called a life. Sometimes I wonder if I have really lived- waiting for some resolution that never comes is no real existence. Please Allah, give me some direction or take me to a place where I will never have to look for what path to take ever again!"

Her confusion was the same one that had occupied the minds of the other discouraged and desperate souls in her place. On one hand she had two choices on which to base her decision: either to remain as she was, alone and without any assurances, or to be free from all her worldly grief. On the other hand, there was a

small inclination to suppose that, "For as long as a person breathes there does exist some possibility of change." Both positions battled so powerfully within her that the lack of an answer brought her to a disturbing breaking point.

"I may not be right, some might even declare me insane," she thought, "but they could not possibly understand the kind of life I have lived here and the price I would pay if I were forced to remain."

Jenna thought long about whom she had become and what she was living for. She did not know and she was driven to misery, but when she gave herself up to the idea of dying, she seemed to know what exactly she had come to be and what was her destiny. Whether others thought she would be acting rightly or wrongly she did not care. Thinking too much about other people's feelings would only prevent her from seeing what she should and should not do. She must follow her own mind. Once she did, something new began to cultivate in her soul and she reflected the things that Naveen had taught her about devotion to the Almighty.

"To live for God and not oneself means being willing to die for Him."

Naveen had made her understand that a real believer must not live for the satisfaction of his own wants or the wants of others, only God. She reasoned, "That a man who builds his life on faithfulness and his hopes on pleasing his God, builds on a firm foundation of rock that cannot be shaken. In contrast to him, is the man who builds on a shifting sand-cliff, already undermined by forces he does not see? The cliff and the foundations are shattered along with him and he is plunged into hopelessness." She further reasoned that the heart of a man lies in the seat of his desires and uncertainties, the foundation of his moral and spiritual life. "If that foundation is an undermined sand-cliff already falling apart, what sanctuary can he have? Human sacrifice is necessary," she thought, "Much pain, sorrow and suffering may be necessary, not because it they are good in themselves, but because they purify us, like the flame applied to a goldsmith's tool, which he uses to burn off the impurities."

Jenna derived comfort from the fact that her earthly relationships need not be vast or complicated.

"In a human bargain both sides give something and receive some advantage. In the divine bargain of God with man, Allah takes man's will and all that he owns and holds dear, and gives him in return everlasting happiness." She thought. "We must only offer ourselves, our complete surrender. Death is simply the separation of the soul from the body when the latter perishes. We should not be afraid of it, for it only takes us to our destiny." She hoped hers would be in paradise. Time and time again she read that the righteous will inherit the earth. Not for her, she was certain of that, but she knew that eventually justice would prevail, perhaps in the lifetime of her sisters or her sisters' children. However in the life to come every one would see the fruit of his labor here, and that she would be one of those who inherited a part of the heavens.

Jenna sat and pondered. She paced and weighed every thought in her head. After hours that went deep into the night, she came to an emotional renaissance. She did not need what she had once possessed, had once held, had once depended on—however little these gifts were. She did not need life, as it was, broken apart,

unprotected and unordered. She could exist in another dimension without it. She could emancipate herself from the idea that life must be sustained at all cost. And so, in the glowing space of the early morning light and warmth that filled her mother's room, in the scent of her mother's robe, and among the memories of days gone by, Jenna Hayat decided how it should be. Having once been told that no one can love this life and love Allah, she had decisively chosen Allah. Or so she told herself.

It was as if there was a chamber in her brain which only registered optimism. Perhaps she preferred irrational optimism to uncontrollable fear. She had never had such a longing for resolution, and she could have by only doing what they wanted. She felt solace coming over her, the solace of assent.

Of course she would do it. For her people. For Al-Aqsa. For God, whose will she was submitting to.

It was with that verdict that fell asleep from exhaustion. She didn't awake until early the next morning when awakened by her sister. Layla found her lying there surrounded by little things belonging to their mother. Jenna sat up quickly and looked to find her sister standing beside her. She'd come to invite Jenna to have breakfast with her family.

"What is it?" Jenna murmured, feeling a bit confused. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Layla replied. "I want you to come and eat at my house. Why were you sleeping on the floor?"

"I was praying and I guess I fell asleep."

"You've saved all of these things."

Jenna watched Layla's face as she eyed all of the little trinkets.

"I don't know why, but in the morning when I wake up I get this strange feeling. The feeling you get when there is something really important that you've forgotten, and then your stomach turns because you suddenly remember. For a split second everything was fine, then it hits you, she's gone and that's it."

Jenna was a little embarrassed, which was not, what Layla wanted. She understood that Jenna had a very special relationship with Salsan and that her death had taken a significant toll on her sister. She sought to give her comfort. "People just don't die in a moment. It happens little by little. As long as you can remember the sound of their voice, the way they laughed, see their clothes hanging in the closet or find their shoes by the door- they are still with you. They haven't quite left."

She reached for her mother's little book of poems and cheerfully recalled the time her mother read from it. She opened to the page that held a linen bookmark, took her finger and stroked the pattern on the old cloth.

Jenna could not help but feel shy. "I kept all these things. I was terrified that I would forget. Not Momma, but everything about her. So, I kept the special stuff, her robe, her earrings, her reading glasses, even the cup she drank her coffee from."

Jenna was glad that Layla understood.

Layla put out her hand to help Jenna up. She climbed to her feet and sat at the end of the bed. Layla sat closely beside her and peered into her face with an inquiring expression. Jenna drew away, signed deeply and began pacing the floor, adjusting this and that around the room. Layla turned her head following Jenna as she fidgeted, with expression of concern on her face. This was her sister but a part of her was unrecognizable. Jenna was distant and impenetrable. Since the death of their mother, Layla had felt the distance separating the two of them and she did not know what to do about it.

"Come. Come to my house and have breakfast with me." She insisted.

Jenna made no answer and only sighed. That sigh expressed a reluctance to go did not elude Layla and it was then she decided to speak her mind.

"You stay home most of the time and when you are not, I am not sure that you are where you are supposed to be. You are supposed to be in school, but where are your books," she said, shaking her head with an expression of disappointment on her face.

Jenna heatedly responded, "Do you want to see a schedule? Anyway, I don't want to talk about my life. I don't have to. I'm a grown woman. I am capable of looking out for myself!"

"Fine, we won't talk about your life but I'm not sure that you are capable of looking out for yourself." Layla hurried to say, noticing the look of hurt on Jenna's face. "Momma only wanted you to do things with your life."

"I will. Don't worry." said Jenna, wishing to change the subject.

Layla walked over to her sister and placed her arm around her and softly whispered, "It's okay, I miss her too."

Jenna tried to force some sort of a smile, for Layla's benefit as much as her own, and then hastily went to dress.

It had been a long while since Jenna had visited her sister's home. Layla had changed most of the house. Everything she saw walking through it gave her the impression of happiness and a comfortable living. There were new pictures on the wall, large floor pillows and a thick Turkish carpet that covered the entire living room floor. The old couch had been taken away and replaced by another one. The young couple seemed to be doing very well for themselves. The bookshelf, which held family pictures, the tea table and chairs were all new. When Layla returned to the room she had changed from her outdoor wear and now sat in front of Jenna in a simple Palestinian housedress made of silk. She seemed perfectly content, and Jenna was happy for her. It was exactly as Salsan had wanted for all of her daughters.

As soon as breakfast was over Jenna got ready to return home. Layla did not feel at ease when saying goodbye. Jenna, herself, was surprised by the awkwardness of the situation. In spite of Layla's desire to have her sister remain there, she gave no opposition and only asked that Jenna return for dinner after a couple of days. Layla had accepted Jenna's new habit of withdrawing within herself and she did not want to make her desire to be more estranged. She knew that Jenna was neither the same as before nor as she had been when her mother was alive; she had changed profoundly. For Layla, things were not the same. It was easy to see that she was a

woman happy in love with her life. She had mourned the death of her mother, but her smile, her eyes, and her every movement reflected great happiness. Seeing her this way, Jenna did not want to appear depressed and tried to speak cheerfully. It was a hard task to accomplish but she did as well as she could and was glad when the opportunity came to leave.

Layla did not want her sister to leave without giving her some comfort. "What can we do? We must go on living, Jenna. Perhaps God shall will us through a long sequence of days and drawn out evenings but we shall tolerantly bear the test that fate sends us; we will help each other and work out our problems now, and when we have aged; God willing. And, finally, when our time comes, we shall die without resistance, as Momma did. God will be merciful to us and pity us as we lie in our grave having seen that we suffered, having seen how we wept. I have no doubt that we shall find our parents together in paradise, along with our brother and we shall look back at the world we came from and rejoice from the good fortune that paradise hold for us. There is one condition though, we must have faith!"

Jenna did not find comfort in Layla's words and gazed listlessly around her. She could not look her sister in the eye. She was innocent but felt guilty and wanted to ask for forgiveness for partaking in the agonies of grief and self-pity.

Jenna spoke in an undertone. "Don't be concerned about me."

Circumstance and emotions had contributed to their drifting apart. Layla and Jenna did not talk about their mother's death. That was the way it was in their tradition. You accepted it and you didn't talk about it. It was simply God's will. The problem was that Jenna wished her sister had talked about it. Had she done so Jenna might not have felt so very alone. Furthermore, Layla's life was different. Layla was going to have a baby, but did not wish to say so until she was further along in her pregnancy. Still, she was distinctly conscious of the life in her body. She was excited about the future and embraced her world with joy. She had a husband who was thoughtful and took care of her. Layla could ignore the unpleasantness around her. The only thing that stained her life was that her mother was not there with her, but, unlike Jenna, she found numerous sources of tranquility.

By human standards, Jenna's was an unordinary life marred by war, and sometimes in a war the best victory is the one that requires no battle at all. Suicide bombing required no battle at all, only that a life committed itself to death. It is a foul liberation of sorts, she could not help feeling, but once you accept the fact that you are going to die anyway, you live your life differently. When she pushed those thoughts aside she thought only of Zakki, but she had not seen him in over a month. He was now officially listed on the Israeli Internal Defense's Most Wanted List and had been forced to go underground.

Zakki never spent more than a night in one place. His day-to-day activities were planned with great difficulty because several traitors had infiltrated the ranks. One of them was Saad Abu Omar, Zakki's childhood friend, a man in whom many had placed a great deal of trust. No one imagined that he would allow himself to be

recruited by Israeli Intelligence. For his betrayal, he was promised \$150,000 in cash and relocation. It was not a very lucrative offer, considering the breach, but it was enough to begin a new life. Because of the information Saad had provided to Israeli Intelligence, two safe houses were identified, three members of Al-Aqsa were killed and their homes were destroyed and a sixteen year old boy name Khaddor, who happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time.

Several days before, Saad had contacted Zakki and asked to meet, saying that it was an emergency. He was given directions to a new weapons storage unit, and when he turned up, he told Zakki that his grandmother was deathly ill and that he needed to be away for a few days. Zakki not only gave him permission to leave, but he also gave him a hundred dollars to help with expenses. Instead, Saad went back to the Israelis and alerted them to the location of the storage unit. The military police arrived the next day and came in shooting everyone in sight, except for young Khaddor. He was seen running out of the building, followed by four soldiers, to the house of Um Issam, a former neighbor, where he hid underneath the bed. Khaddor was not apart of Al-Aqsa or any brigade. He ran out of the building when shots were first fired. The soldiers smashed down the door and searched the house, finding the frightened nineteen year old underneath the bed. They dragged him into the living room and begin to beat him with clubs and the butts of their guns. The elderly woman, Um Issam screamed and tried to interfere but was clubbed and pushed aside. Khaddor collapsed from the initial beating and lay on the floor. One of the lieutenants, crazed with rage, lifted Khaddor over his head and slammed his body into the cement floor. Um Issam, who witnessed everything, later said that she saw blood flow from his mouth and eyes. Another soldier kicked him in his stomach. Khaddor did not react. His limp body lay motionless in a pool of blood. Within a few minutes, two additional soldiers entered the house. By this time neighbors had heard the screams and noises and had gathered at a safe distance in adjacent houses in the alley. One neighbor who understood Hebrew heard an officer use his walkie-talkie to contact another unit to report their capture and the beating. The officer then asked what he should do next. The reply came back loud and clear, "finish him off."

Khaddor was dragged out of the house and thrown onto the hood of a jeep, with his head hanging over the front and his feet straight back towards the windshield. His arms were stretched outward and tied down in a crucifixion position. The soldiers, then, began beating him again, clubbing him on the head, back, arms and legs. Scores of people witnessed the scene. Blood spurted from his mouth and nose, running down the front of the jeep. Many people believed that Khaddor was dead at this point. Finally, the jeep drove away with the boy still tied to the front. Khaddor's body was finally released to his family. One of his cousins, who was chief surgeon at Gaza's Shifa Hospital, examined the body and photographed it prior to the burial. He noted that Khaddor's back was broken, his right front skull fractured, bones in each arm and the right hand were broken, and multiple lacerations appeared on the back, stomach, face and arms. His internal injuries could not be measured; Khaddor had been mutilated.

Zakki was alive and not among the dead because he had gone out to purchase supplies. He actually witnessed the attack. As the events unfolded, he could do nothing more than stand and try to fathom what could have gone wrong. How could they have found out where the storage house was? As bullets burst he felt a surge in his legs. Zakki was visibly distressed. People running past the building were shouting, "Run! Get Down! They are shooting anyone!" He pressed his hands against his eyes and seemed to be on the point of bursting into tears. He wanted to go in there and help.

He looked around aimlessly and saw a clean-shaven soldier pointing at the building. There was something familiar about him. He looked at him as he spoke to the others surrounding him and something clicked. Even with the uniform and dark sunglasses, there was no way to hide Saad's identity from his old friend. Zakki stared at him in disbelief at first, and then with sickening comprehension. He suddenly felt an empty feeling in the pit of his stomach. It was as if all the air had been punched out of his gut. What he saw was worse than anything he could have imagined. His mouth fell open. The bag of supplies trembled in his hands. "No," he breathed. "It can't be him!"

He covered his forehead with his free hand. Zakki trembled and his knees became weak as he stared bleakly at Saad. He felt like someone had kicked out his insides. Nausea consumed him. But emotionally he was melted down, fluid like a dirty puddle. When Zakki looked at him, the deceit in his eyes, the fallen friendship, it set off a storm. "This fool! This stupid, miserable idiot! How you could see our lives, eat and sleep alongside of us and then set us up to die! There is no betrayal equal to yours. You were like a brother! I trusted you. What am I suppose to feel now? I feel your knife digging into my chest, cutting out our past and our future. Oh God, what is there left to do?"

After a few moments he recovered his senses and was horrified at the only conclusion that he could come to. He stared over at the traitor, looking with an undisguised expression of hatred on his face. Saad did not see Zakki among the crowd and assumed that he was inside.

Zakki shook his head slowly and thought of nothing more than Saad's betrayal, his mind on a roller coaster, where the highpoint was the devastating consequence of disloyalty and the low point being that he should have had the foresight to see that something like this could occur.

In the very near future he knew that he would have to give due measure between these two realities.

Saad was not a sentimental man. Even as a boy he always adjusted his alliances to what worked in his favor. His other great defect was impatience. He needed to have things when he wanted them, and that always led him to trouble. Zakki could only conclude that Saad never felt any real solidarity with Al-Aqsa and had remained with them because of his abiding desire to feel connected to something powerful.

As soon as Saad indicated a willingness to work with the organization, Zakki did everything he could to insure that Saad would be welcomed. No one worked harder to make certain he had a respectable place in his unit. Zakki knew that Saad had no real leadership capabilities but he was convinced that he would be a good soldier. This confidence was unwarranted and his instincts had clearly failed him, and now undermined his own confidence in himself as a leader.

Saad was not the only one guilty. Zakki believed himself to be partially the blame and decided he need to face what he had done. His misplaced trust choked him and he realized that whatever happened to Saad would not leave him unscathed, part of him was already shattered.

Zakki sat disbelieving that men were dead because he chose to believe in someone he should not have. All of this rolled around in Zakki's head without resolution as he waited for the opportunity to deal with the situation. There seem to be no alternative but to find Saad and kill him. There would be no way to preserve his life or protect his family from the fallout of his death, which would certainly follow. Saad was, Zakki thought, was both single-minded and desperate, that was a dangerous combination around such an explosive situation.

The ten hours he was forced to wait before he could come anywhere near the battleground seemed like forever, and when he was finally able to rejoin his commander Ahmed Khalil, he was then forced to announce who had betrayed them. Ahmed Khalil was familiar with Zakki and Saad's history. He walked over to Zakki, placed his hands on his shoulders and said, "You know what has to be done."

Zakki knew the exact meaning of these words and they fell on him like heavy stones.

Zakki took a deep breath and said what he knew Ahmed would be waiting to hear. "I will take care of everything!"

Zakki said very little to anyone else, as he became lost in his thoughts. He sat uncomfortably racking his brain about how he would confront Saad. He stayed up an entire night pacing and thinking. But no matter how much he turned over in his mind what Saad had done, he couldn't imagine the moment he would have to watch his old friend die. Part of him would die also.

Eventually, Saad made his so-called return and the news of his arrival came quickly. Two days after the assault Zakki was notified by that Saad had returned. At that moment Zakki felt his heart tighten in his chest.

He had arrived the night before. It was late and he was exhausted.

Prior to sleeping he looked over at his wife. She was only three months pregnant. It would there first child and he hope to have the baby born away from war and occupation, a life that broke his father and plagued him his entire life. He listened nervously for hours for any racing on the stairs that might mean detection and exposure.

Then sun rose and the morning appeared to be like any other. No one came and broke down the door. There was no commotion at all. The street remained calm. Old men took their morning tea next to the shops and children went for fresh bread

at the market. Car horns and radios, which typically annoyed him, gave him a sense of ease.

He shook off his fears and pretended to be carefree. About ten o'clock he went to his brother's house.

Jibril informed Zakki that Saad was at his brother's place. Zakki put a revolver into his pocket and ordered ten Al-Aqsa soldiers to follow him.

Al-Aqsa foot soldiers positioned themselves around the home of Saad's brother, Mahmood, surrounded the entire building to ensure he could not escape. Five men, including Zakki and Jibril ascended the stairs. Jibril pounded on the door. Mahmood guardedly opened. He saw the men standing there. He cringed, noting the inquisitorial look in Jibril's eye, as well as the fact that he had already drawn a revolver and was lifting it towards his direction. "Where is Saad?"

He wondered what could be happening. Why had they come for his brother? What had Saad done? At once he had a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach and was shaking, yet not wanting to appear dreadfully terrified. He breathed out slowly, grasping for time to think, confusion momentarily flashed in his eyes. He knew that this was leading to something terrible and he didn't know why.

The door began to shut. Forcefully Jibril moved closer so that Mahmood could not close it. He placed his hand against it pushing it wide open.

"I want to talk to Saad. I know he's here."

Mahmood tried to deny that he knew the whereabouts of his brother. Jibril drew his gun and put it against his head. "Maybe this will give you some idea." Zakki stood inside the doorsill.

Just then Saad came from the back room. He extended his hand but Jibril did not return the courtesy. Jibril did not move when Saad put his hand on his shoulder. He knew right then and there, that something had gone wrong. Out of fear he did not lessen the pressure on Jibril's arm but increased it. He stood there, not breathing, wondering what he should do next.

"What do you want?" he blurted as his face closed down in panic.

Saad's eyes were illuminated with permanent terror. He knew exactly why they had come. His shoulders rose and fell in a resigned shrug as his brother stepped to one side.

"What's going on?" he asked as he backed to the wall, arms folded over his chest. The fake grin on his face endeavored to demonstrate an ease he obviously did not feel.

"I suppose you don't know why we are here and why you must come with us."

At this point Jibril gripped his weapon even more firmly, and gazed at Saad in a hard and decisive way.

"What wrong?" asked Saad, weakly and innocently, his face white and drained. "Why do I have to go with you? Why have you come here?"- His voice trembling slightly as he said this.

"You have no idea why you might have to come with us, huh?"

You were seen with Israeli soldiers. You had on one of their uniforms. That's why you shaved your beard. You thought that you could betray your people and hide. You fool!"

Saad recoiled almost perceptibly and with a freezing chill moving down his spine.

"Cut the crap," Jibril shouted as he shoved a nearby chair into the wall. "You can stop the confused act right now."

Someone stirred behind him.

Saad turned and sheepishly looked at Zakki, "What's he talking about?"

Zakki found it impossible to look directly at him. Saad walked over and tried to touch him, but Zakki pulled away and turned towards the door as if Saad were an invisible man. Jibril saw the expression on Saad's face and knew that he realized that his worse nightmare had just begun.

"Why don't we bring your wife here and ask her where have you been and what have you been doing the past few days."

"No! Please, Jibril, don't do that! She doesn't know anything. She doesn't need to be apart of this. I'll go wherever you want." Sweat covered his entire face. His brother was not allowed near him and stood helpless with his eyes confused.

There the collaborator stood. At thirty years old he was the image of a defeated old man whose chances had been worn away, like a decaying body, by a long streak of dead years. If he lacked hope and trust in the future then it was because he'd seldom witnessed any of it in his past. He had seldom witnessed any real good at all. Zakki knew this but could not give him absolution. Saad, for most of his life, had been overwhelmed by the loss of expectation itself and thought his only chance of survival rested in the betrayal of his own people.

Zakki did nothing and said nothing. Saad's eyes were fearful now like any traitor's upon discovery.

Zakki turned away, but not without a twinge of pity. He could only imagine the panic that must be squeezing his former comrade's insides. The beginning of his end was near and he knew it. There was no way he would be able to walk away from this. Saad wasn't making it easier with his pretense.

He was searched prior to leaving the home of his brother. A thousand dollars was found in his pocket, an automatic pistol in his jacket, and a plane ticket to Spain. Slowly and humbly, like a man who has accepted his conviction, he allowed himself to be removed from the building without a fight. He walked past Zakki with eyes unwilling to look towards him.

After they arrived at a discreet location, Saad began to shout, "Just kill me and get it over with. I don't need the questions or the lecture!"

Jibril got right to work and hit Saad in the nose with a clenched fist that sent him into the wall. Blood rushed past his chin. Jibril pulled him up by the collar and the next blow was to Saad's eye. It was a strong blow that completely knocked him off his feet. He groaned painfully and positioned himself next to a wall.

"Get up traitor," he shouted.

Jibril kicked him in his mouth. Every man there soon had the opportunity of taking their best shot, and several of them did, but not Zakki who remained outside during the initial beating. Arms were moving in precise jabs. When Saad tried to push himself away, Jibril dragged him back. He froze seeing Jibril draw back his gun and stop in midair. "How could you do it?" Jibril shouted. "You are Palestinian! How could you help them and turn against us? Were you so greedy that they made you forget? Forget that they hate you? Forget what they've done to us? Why did you go along with them? How much did they pay you to betray your own mother?"

Jibril's eyes flashed with hot angry tears.

Saad was still in position when Zakki entered. Zakki reached up and brought his arm down. The other men in the room backed away. Blood streamed from his nose and dripped from under his face. His eyes were barely open. It was a very tense moment. Seeing Saad like this made him feel miserable and he needed to sit for a moment and think. After a few moments Zakki rebuked him harshly for his betrayal. Saad tried to explain. No matter how hard Zakki listened there was not a single thing he could do to help him. He'd signed his own death warrant by his own actions. Saad said that he knew that he deserved to die and pleaded with Zakki to go ahead and do it. Instead, Zakki walked over and sat next to him on the floor and gave him a cloth to wipe his face. He reminded him of the times they had played together as children and how his parents had watched over Saad and his brother when their mom had their baby sister, and how Zakki's father had brought them food when Saad's father could not find work. Unable to keep the edge and anger out of his voice Zakki told Saad, "You have caused the deaths of two people that would have given their lives for you." Saad listened in silence, but eventually began to sob.

"Didn't you know people would be killed and all of our work betrayed?" Zakki screeched.

"The truth is, I didn't think of those things. I couldn't after I was made an offer. I tried to make myself but I couldn't! I only wanted my children born out of this country. I couldn't stand being here anymore." Saad pitifully cried out. "I didn't want anyone's life to have to end."

"And you thought you could have what you want and your own neighbors and friends would not die?"

Zakki's shouting and his uncontrolled angry polarized the room and left Saad shaking. "I can't ignore the lives of the men you helped kill. They were good people and you knew that once they were detected that they were as good as dead. You knew that your freedom would have to be purchased with their lives!" There was a drawn out silence. Zakki felt the sweat on his forehead as he struggled not to shed tears.

I got tired Zakki. May God forgive me, I got tired. For all of my life I live the same way. That's a long time. Suddenly someone offered me the chance to change it."

He saw the horror rising in his friend's face as he stared at him.

"I started thinking that I did not have to keep living like this and that I could live my life in a different way. I wanted to wake up one morning and be somewhere else."

Zakki shook his head and beat his fist against the wall. He knew however that betrayals were becoming disturbingly typical of the complex scheming of this time. A cold shudder ran down his back when Zakki thought of what must come next. He was certain beyond all doubt that there was nothing he could do to set aside his crime, and Saad knew there was no way to help him out.

Theirs was a friendship that had spanned an entire lifetime. Saad was not really good at many things but he was good at sports. In the proceeding years everyone in the neighborhood had come to learn about Saad's speed and performance on the field. From the time they were small boys up until Zakki left for Afghanistan, they'd meet on the neighborhood field every week. As their friendship grew so did the connection between the two families. As a boy Saad regularly spent the night as a guest in Zakki's home, but Zakki rarely slept over at Saad's. Saad's family was very poor and he was ashamed for Zakki to see how little they had. Their house was basically a cement metal cube with half of the top missing. In the middle of the room there was a raggedy piece of old material that acted as a curtain, guaranteeing Saad's sisters some privacy as they dressed. A wooden plank towards the back of the house hid the hole in the ground that served as his family's toilet. The bedroom housed all eight members of his family. Sometimes a meal consisted of old bread and tea. There was not a moment that Zakki could remember when someone in that house was not sick. Saad's father Hassan was usually unemployed and, more often than not, angry. He was once a fisherman but the Israelis, citing security reasons, had made it illegal for Palestinians to fish off of the Gaza coast. This did not only mean the deferring of an income; it also meant that Saad's family would not be able to have a decent meal. Hassan took his frustrations out on his family. It was common to see Saad or one of his brothers broken-faced. Hassan was once a decent man, but he'd been reduced by poverty, to that debasing condition in which turmoil gets the upper hand over every attempt to deal with it, and even drives a man to the brutal behavior of abusing his wife and children with vindictive satisfaction. He was always sorry after he had hurt someone in the family, after passing the limit of endurance and decency. People like Hassan are always repentant when they have brought pain and tears to those they love, if there is any amount of rightness, and then they recognize that they were ten times as angry as they should have been.

Zakki's house was the one place Saad was truly happy and he saw something there that he did not see at his own home. He saw a father who truly loved his children and would never think to hurt anyone of them. He saw a father who held his children in his arms and was proud just to be close to them. Zakki would watch the envy in Saad's eyes as Abu Malik would tell the family Arab fairy tales and kiss them all goodnight before they went to sleep. The envy would disappear when it was Saad's turn to be kissed and wished a goodnight. Abu Malik always told Saad that he was a good boy and the best soccer player in all Palestine.

That was then, this was now.

Finally, Saad was asked if he had something to say. He told the men that he was desperate, and that his desperation made him weak. He begged the members not to penalize his family for his mistake. He admitted all of his guilt and plunged into the details which led up the betrayal Saad pleaded with his hands and looked convincing, although in his heart was the howling knowledge that he had plotted with the Israelis and this weakened his plea. The eyes of everyone around were cold and indifferent to his suffering, except one. And he began the sweat profusely and rubbed his face nervously. There were no looks of indulgence that he'd hope for. On the contrary the stares were so antagonistic and bitter; Saad knew any compassion was out of the question. Zakki told him to go wash himself off and pray to God for forgiveness, which he did. When he returned to the room, he was about to raise his hand in prayer when Jibril suddenly pulled out his weapon and with a cold-blooded aim shot Saad in his back. He turned and looked into Zakki's eyes. Zakki could see Saad's dark and frightened gaze. Then Jibril fired again into Saad's head and the bullet blasted fragments of his skull. When he fell dead his dark and frightened gaze remained the same. The body tilted towards Zakki. It rolled towards him spewing its contents. Zakki stared frozen but only momentarily. "Damn it, Jibril! Why the hell did you do that? He was at least entitled to make peace with his God!"

"He was a traitor!" Jibril shouted in a dispassionate voice.

Zakki's voice was desperate as he screamed out at Jibril, and then he hurled his gun as hard as he could into the wall. It discharged and everyone but Zakki hit the floor.

"You could have killed me!" Jibril shouted.

"Give me time," he answered with bitter sarcasm.

Jibril was never tolerant with betrayal and he was never one to beat around the bush. Still, it had enraged Zakki that Saad had no time to prepare himself for his conclusion, to say a prayer for redemption. It was beyond his imagination that Saad would ever die a betrayer's death. The fact that it was his own doing that leveled this path did not ease Zakki's misery. He sat there paralyzed as the blood of his friend leaked over the floor.

In the moments that followed no one said anything. Zakki got up and walked over to a window. He stared across an empty field and watched a group of boys battle each other in a soccer match, looking at them he saw himself and he saw his friend. Much had remained unchanged; there was no goal post, no sports equipment of any kind, except for a ball. Around the field was garbage. Just as when they were growing up, people dumped their trash in the field because they had no other place to put it. Trash collectors rarely came because they were rarely paid.

Now Saad lay there dead. Zakki's heart pounded heavily in his chest. He slowed his breathing with effort. He was thinking about how one action could change everything. Saad's action had placed him where fate could not befriend him, where fraternity must close its door.

Eventually, Zakki dragged his eyes away from the view, straightened his shoulders and said, "Photograph his body and bury him."

Saad's demise can only be described as foreseeable. When one seeks to betray his people or their cause, and is unwilling to respect the oaths that he has made, he must die. There is no middle ground, and he cannot be reasoned with. A person that becomes impervious to truth and honor, and then secretly enters into intrigues with the enemies, he is a menace. Did they have any alternative but to destroy that person? A traitor must know that if he thinks that his game will be successful, he is mistaken. Al-Aqsa had vowed to take all spies and all half-hearted doubters and destroy them altogether.

That was a common pledge among all the Palestinian resistance organizations that did not seem to ease Zakki's sadness once he was alone. He entered an available safe house with a key. The place was quiet and empty and he was happy to be by himself; Zakki did not want to talk. He looked down at his clothes. There was dry blood on his shirt. He quickly removed the shirt that held the blood of his friend, put the shirt into a sink in the kitchen and attempted to wash away the blood. As the water ran over the stains the water turned brown, Zakki wanted to cry but he held himself in tight control. He squeezed the water from the shirt and then hung it to dry.

Zakki saw a teapot on the stove and decided to make himself a pot of tea; he searched the cupboards for a teabag, feeling lucky because there was canned meat and crackers. As he turned to face the fire under the kettle, in his mind he saw Saad's head blown into pieces. There was a sick feeling in the pit of his stomach. Regardless of the justification, he helped to execute his own friend.

He sat at a table with his tea and his meat. His cell phone was off and he wished to see no one.

Someone came to the door. The knock was sharp and persistent but Zakki sat indifferent. He let the knocks continue. A voice sounded. It was Jibril. He hollered out from the chair to be left alone.

"I only want a minute."

With exasperation Zakki opened the door. He was barely inside before Jibril began to have his say.

"It wasn't anyone's fault but Saad's that he died."

"Died or was murdered?"

"You can call it whatever you want, but to me it is the only way we have to punish someone who does what he did! He was a traitor!"

"He was my friend!" Zakki shot back as he tried to temper the emotion in his voice.

"Was he your friend or an enemy? For all Saad knew, you could have been inside that building. He probably thought you were. Did you see him outside mourning you from the street? Did your friendship make him reconsider telling the Israelis about our weapons there? None of this is my fault or anyone else's. I may have pulled the trigger but Saad loaded the gun when he decided to open his big mouth!"

Zakki could only shake his head. He had nothing left to say.

Jibril seemed to have gotten the message. Zakki did not turn as he heard his footsteps walk away.

Zakki picked up his food off the table, walked to the refrigerator with it, and placed it inside. He continued to stand there and stare inside. He wondered where the soul of his old friend was and what would become of his own. He remembered the blood all over the floor. Zakki wished that he would not think about it.

He picked up his tea and drank the blistering fluid. It scorched his mouth when he swallowed it. There was a hot smear of pain on his lips and his tongue. He did not care very much, feeling that he was due some sort of chastisement, and feeling that this was not enough. Jibril was right; it was standard to dispose of a traitor. However, it was not normal to dispose of a friend. It was not normal to, then, order his corpse to be photographed.

He looked over at the shirt. The bloodstains were practically gone, the shirt nearly dry from the heater on which it hung. He went across the room to lie on a couch. He laid his head back and faced the ceiling. His body felt ridden with guilt and he finally could not hold himself anymore and he did not. He began to cry—"Oh God what have we come to?"

This was the life he'd elected for himself. All thoughts of ever having an ordinary friendship or an average family would always be complicated with the issues of what he did. All he had, as a result, were rare fantasies of what might have been. He had come to regard being alone as a normal state of affairs. The detachment might have completely distressed Zakki had he not felt it to be a necessary sacrifice, a noble one. He made a goal to free himself from all intimate connections, to make them appear insignificant and overvalued, especially when he compared them to the cause. He'd literally cut himself off from his little brother and his grandmother. He did it for them as much as for himself. Was he not one of the major defenders of the cause? Was he not acknowledged and respected by his peers? Did they not call him "the warrior"? Had he not led several major assaults against the Israelis? By all accounts he was amazing in technique and ability. His contemporaries credited his military competence to his mentor Yahya Ayyash, known as the Engineer. Zakki ascended in their ranks by mastering bomb making and military targeting. His work was his world and almost his entire life was centered on conflict; this interest totally absorbed him. The consciousness of his abilities, the chance to disrupt the political processes that were, the importance of every explosion, every suicide bombing, the havoc it created among his enemies, and above all his personal satisfaction of taking revenge on the system and the people that unjustly executed his own family. All this gave him cause for relinquishing the things relating to a normal life. On the whole Zakki believed that his life was as it should be—solitary and destructive.

A few weeks after Saad's death, Zakki asked to be relieved of his duties in Palestine. He enlisted to go to Syria and meet with high-ranking Hamas members on behalf of Al-Aqsa. He would attend high-level meetings and bargain with the other groups for Al-Aqsa's tactical positions. Beyond the long conference tables where Zakki sat were about two-dozen other men and three women, one of whom was reading a list of common objectives shared by all of the organizations represented that day in Damascus. Zakki leaned over to the man at his right and asked in a whisper what group was the woman from.

"The woman," replied the man with a bit of surprise, "Is from Hamas!"

Zakki could not help listening to her loud strident voice. Her charisma and youth impressed him, and he was happy that women were assuming roles usually reserved for men and that they would bring with them their ideas and the strength of their convictions.

During the lectures it became quite clear to him that individual group ideology was unimportant unless they agreed to work collectively, and that their views must be formulated to lead them down one path, or else nothing would be gained. He spent some of his time talking and exchanging greetings with acquaintances he'd met before. He observed new political players with different ideas argue about the latest political transition. When he grew weary of his room, he'd go down for a while and pay a moderate amount of attention to fiscal planning in the future. For the most, Zakki gave relatively little attention to the rest of the lectures that transpired the next few days, feeling like a deaf man watching people mouth words. Most involved the same arguments and he became terribly bored.

He was left alone for many hours. Where he reflected about his life and mulled over what he should do next. For the first time he did not feel like a soldier; he decided that he could not go on this way and decided that he must take some decisive measures. It seemed to him that the more things changed, the more they remained the same. He knew he was not alone in this thinking. In his life he'd come to know so many kinds of people and recognized this as being a common failing- staying exactly the same for as long as possible, at a standstill. It was just easier that way. If you were in agony then at least the pain was familiar, because if you decided to do something drastic then who knows what might happen, who knows what greater agonies might be waiting for you. So you played it safe and choose what you had become accustomed to, what you had trained yourself to do. Once conditioned, it didn't seem that bad, as far as this kind of failing went. You were not really hurting anybody, except maybe yourself and that didn't count. You were not killing anybody, except for an enemy and that doesn't count either. Then something did happen, something totally unexpected, something unthinkable. Something was added into the equation that you didn't bank on. Someone died that wasn't suppose to and you feel that you share some responsibility for that death even if were not supposed to.

He was tired. So tired. For years he had been extracting revenge on behalf of his people, on behalf of religion, and his spirit ached with strain. For years he'd been a combatant, performing as a 'mujahid' at the Islamic confrontation points, and now

his M-16 weighed down his hand. For Zakki, change had come. It was not the kind of change that people would become aware of unless they were looking very hard. It was untamed and unyielding. It hit Zakki like a blast. He knew that everything would be different now. He knew that this was it and that who he was now would be the person he remained. He would never have to change again; this would be his final chapter. He had done all he could do, like a man who does what he can until his true destiny is revealed.

Death would typically fill an average man with anguish because it is the inescapable reversal of his prospects. But Zakki, having been a lifelong death watcher, had never given more than a passing thought to the inevitability of his own death. How could he not be acquainted with death; it was one of the faces he had looked into all of his life. Highly experienced in the loss of life, he had consciously observed it in a hundred different ways and the thought of his own death did not terrify him. After all, there is no death when the mind is heaven bound. Life and heart had finished their job; it was time for him to go. He'd always assumed that he would not die with the typical deathbed conveniences. Two days ahead of schedule, he packed his bag and arranged to return to Palestine.

Jenna began the first of a series of meetings with only Naveen in various locations, followed by long sessions in her home. This uncompromising and philosophical woman was there to teach her lessons. They always began after the noon prayer. The subject was always human sacrifice. It was taught from experience and graduation was subject to detonation.

Most of their time together was spent for the purpose of spiritual development and for numerous discussions about commitment and sacrifice. Naveen was a small woman but she demanded big sacrifices. She said that their wish must be to show God that they loved Him and their people, more than they love themselves, and that they were pleased to offer themselves up as a sacrifice for freedom.

There was one pep talk after another and their sessions went on for several weeks, but the last one particularly remained in Jenna's mind. On this day Naveen reminded her of a speech given by the murdered Islamic scholar, Hassan Al-Banna, who had led one of the more recent Islamic movements in Egypt. In his speech he reminded Muslim freedom fighters that their mission would be understood by many people, and that day they found out about it and grasped its implications and its aims, the resistance would encounter violent antagonism and sharp hostility. They would find many hardships ahead of them, and that many obstacles would rise up against them. Only at that time would they begin to tread the path of those who fought against the same difficulties earlier in history. He warned them to prepare themselves for the necessary struggle and fight against the ignorance of people as to what constitutes true Islam. He warned that these people would stand in their way. They would even find them among some of their own religious leaders, who will regard their understanding of Islamic duty as outlandish. Imams, sheikhs, and men of authority will hate them, and every government would try to set limits on their activities and put impediments in their way. Their adversaries would use every pretext to oppose them, and to extinguish their mission. For that

end they will invoke the aid of weak governments, who would stir up around their operation- the dust of suspicion and unjust accusations, and they will try to define it with every possible defect and to display it before the people in the most repulsive possible appearance, relying on their power and authority, and fortified by their wealth and influence. Hassan Al-Banna had said, that without a doubt there would be great trials and tribulations; they would be arrested, imprisoned, transported, and persecuted, and their possessions would be confiscated, their employments suspended and their homes searched or destroyed.

Naveen made Jenna promise to remember; when they would be asked to face any obstacle and make any sacrifice, that they were working for human rights and liberation. They must remain free from personal ambition and far from seeking personal advantage. For in martyrdom, they sought nothing but God's mercy, reward, and of course, the welfare of their people. She quoted the Quran, "That is because God is the defender of those who believe, and the unbelievers have no defender." Jenna marveled at the sincerity of Naveen's words, mostly because Jenna knew that she meant everyone one them, and because Naveen, herself, was no stranger to sacrifice and pain. On several occasions Naveen had spoken of her own son's death. She had known in advance that he had decided to die by way of a suicide bombing and she had encouraged this final offering. Naveen said that the love of God and proclamation of faith must be accompanied by an act of devotion, and that there is no greater devotion than giving up one's life. She said that it is a good bargain because a man trades in all human sorrow for God's mercy, forgiveness and the reward of paradise. At first, Jenna found it confounding that a mother would encourage her own child to commit such an act. But Naveen, on the other hand, had done so, and without any other children left to care for her. She desired nothing else for him, and did not regret her loss. "The true believer," she said, "Must forget herself and struggle in the cause of what is right. My son was a true believer because this is what he did."

For the first of many times to come, Naveen challenged Jenna: Either you are so spiritually lacking that you are blind to what it is you should achieve, and as a result, be infinitely rewarded, or you would rather not give up your minimal existence because you do not believe that you could ever have more.

It was that day Jenna was left questioning, "How does someone, willingly, hand over the life she has given birth to. For a child is someone to love, to hold on to, someone to care for, and to guard with one's own life. Her own relationship with her mother put her in an emotional quagmire. "In whatever position a person might find himself, she thought, the one thing that cannot be sacrificed is one's own child." Salsan's whole life was a testimony to that.

Only then could Jenna understand her own mother's fears for her, and the mixture of sadness and relief she had felt when she lost Ahmed to a different life. It was at this moment that she could not help but feel guilty at betraying all of the love that gave rise to those fears, and she was sorry. Sorrow and sadness pushed tears into her eyes and she could not help but ask Naveen to excuse her for a little while.

When she returned she studied Narveen's eyes. She was hoping that Naveen might sense her apprehension and might allow her more time with the process.

"Naveen, I'm not sure..."

Naveen stared at her and the room was completely quiet.

Jenna paused. "Maybe..."

"What are you thinking? Naveen said carefully. "What's wrong?"

"Sometimes I'm not so sure."

Naveen responded with the fiercest stare and then she spoke severely, "To be human and exist without any rights is a waste of a body. If this body is taken then nothing is lost, but to submit to such a kind of oppression is the selling of your soul! You must understand this point my dear! You are a Palestinian. Never mind what our mothers or our fathers taught us, the lesson we now must learn is revenge."

It was as if she was looking into her mind.

"You are Palestinian first and Salsan Hayat's daughter second. Being a Palestinian creates an entire different standard. Your culture and history holds you to that standard until you can hold yourself to it and be prepared to sacrifice everything for it!

Are you with me? Are you with your people?"

Naveen spoke with a commanding authority towards Jenna, one that seem to easily overpower her own.

She told her that she hated the term "terrorist." and that terrorism was not was suicide bombing is all about. "This is a freedom fight. " She said, and she came to implore her because she was a messenger of reason. She only comes to rescue the doubtful from their confusion.

Over and over she sought to make her point clear.

"We are a Palestinians! We know what we have a right to and we will sacrifice our lives to take back what is rightfully ours. This is what suicide bombing is all about. If you want to be a refugee in your own country, then sit and wait for death as your mother did, or let the Israeli tell you when your time has come. We must show them that our lives are not cheap. We must show them that we are willing to pay the ultimate price for our dignity because we know that it will not come for free! Whatever the outcome of our mission they must see that there is no glory in the slaughtering of a few of our enemies the and wounding of many more. Our glory is in the weakening of the State of Israel.

Jenna sat there thinking about the explosions of the past, remembering the images she'd seen on the television. She saw the shock on the faces of those caught in the bloodbath. Without the prelude of the humming of artillery they were all caught off guard, traumatized as if the earth had opened under their feet.

"There is only one hope for you and me, my dear, and that is that we might be attended by the angels as we sleep in our graves. I am an old woman but I still wish. I still wish for happiness in the same way that a man craves for water in the heat on the desert."

What bothered Jenna the most was that her acquiesce was not just because she was Palestinian. It wasn't just about her people. For Jenna there was glory in

revenge. She wanted payback for everything that had been taken from her. The sum total of her life's event had changed whatever benevolent emotions she once held. That part of her spirit had died as a new one was being unleashed. Her old conscience, as sensitive and civilized, as it once was, had become slowly disintegrating and the death of her mother had erased whatever consolation she once had. Jenna's huge ache was not isolate to just one place or one event in her life, but part of a loose chain of crises, but the moment Salsan's life ended, undeniably set off a melancholic epiphany and from it evolved a revelation that through death her own life might be preserved.

Jenna was beset with the feeling that that this was the most moment in her life where her fate would be sealed. There was no opting out clause to be offered by Naveen. The commitment for which she was being prepared

Whenever their sessions were completed, Jenna would ponder over Naveen's words. She'd ponder over her decision to use her own life to make a political statement, because she believed that this was exactly what suicide bombing was, a political statement. She believed that it was a well-planned act of straight refusal and denunciation of the lives they were being forced to live. Such was to the degree that her society of people had come. They needed to make a point clear; that they could not take it anymore. Jenna did not believe that a Palestinian blows himself up only to achieve martyrdom. They bomb because it is within their power to do so. By doing so they leave a penetrating impact on their enemies. By way of revolutionary suicide they have the opportunity to leave behind a solid precedent, not only for their struggle, but also for all people who are desperate to be free. It is an action that cannot be distorted because it is exactly as it seems. It goes further than apocalyptic adventure, but becomes directly and powerfully into the act of unrelenting rebellion.

The Israelis assert that the actions of the bombers are malicious and cold-blooded. There is some real truth to these charges. But the diligence of their critics in their analysis stands in stunning contrast to their virtual denial of their own inhumanity and calculated malice. Through their power, and by way of deception, their viewpoints are presented beyond disputation. The fact that Palestine has been overrun, annexed by a foreign army, and subjected to military law is ignored.

Jenna had come to feel that any fair and impartial man would not think it unnatural for any people in a similar situation to rebel, and rebel in a way that might lead some people to be astounded. This particularly applied when the enemy was led by one such as Ariel Sharon, a man with almost limitless power to destroy their lives. She thought that conventional ways of fighting back would amount to nothing more than useless pursuits. No one knew this better than the Palestinians.

Abruptly Naveen announced that communication between she and Jenna would cease.

"Destroy my telephone number if you have it written down anywhere. When you are instructed to go to any address, memorize it. If you have anything

important that you need to discuss, call this number. I want you to memorize it as soon as I leave then destroy it."

"Okay," was all Jenna could say. Naveen continued with her final instructions. Use a pay phone, not your home phone or a cellular. Keep your pocket full of change and use it. Do not contact any member of Al-Aqsa. You are beginning a disassociation process with your friends and associates from the group except for those that we specify. Do you understand Jenna?"

"Yes, of course," she sighed.

Naveen looked sternly into Jenna's face and told her that these orders included her friend Zakki. She felt a little exposed and a little hurt but she understood that this was best for everybody concerned.

Last Naveen told Jenna that she would not be seeing her again. "Therefore, I advise you to remember all that we have talked about carefully and to give these ideas your wholehearted acceptance. Remember, you are not part of some charitable organization, nor an ideological party, nor a local association with strictly limited aims. You are a new spirit making its way into the heart of this nation, invoking our rights according to the Quran. As a martyr, you have accepted a burden that many men fear and reject out of fear. Suicide bombing is the end at which our demand is made." Then she quoted Al-Banna directly, "If someone should say that you are agents of upheaval and mayhem, say: We are agents of truth and of peace in which we believe and which we strive for. If you attack us and offer obstacles to our meaning, God has given us the right to defend ourselves."

She wrapped her arms around Jenna and rocked against her. "Jenna?" She said softly, "You know that you are not really dying."

She said she knew.

"All right then, my sweet child."

Reluctance was a natural reaction to such horrific intentions. Part of Jenna was a scared to do it. Part of her wanted to do it desperately. It was a battle between the tensions of opposites.

Several evenings later Jenna was to travel to the city to meet with a Christian Palestinian woman. She caught the bus into the city. The ride seemed longer than usual and Jenna was anxious. The entire trip, she had a vague sensation that someone was watching her. She glanced across and saw a young Arab man staring at her out of the corner of his eye. The very same man dismounted from the bus not long after she did. This unnerved her.

Jenna stopped to purchase a cup of coffee from a sidewalk cafe. She walked a block over and waited. The air was crisp and cool; she rubbed the warm cup along her cheek. Several minutes later she was still sipping her coffee when she noticed a woman in a beige sweater on the sidewalk directly across from her. The woman looked directly at her, meeting her eyes. She knew very little about the person with whom she was supposed to meet but she was sure that this was she. Before coming forward the woman waved, seemingly past Jenna. Jenna turned to look behind her down the street and saw the Arab man that had traveled on the bus. He nodded at

the woman and walked away. She came across the street and introduced herself as Rachel. They stood there for a few seconds side by side without saying a word, before she asked Jenna to take a stroll with her. Jenna breathed deeply and tried to appear calm. Rachel glanced sideways at Jenna with a strange look of curiosity and speculation, but also cynicism. Jenna got the feeling that Rachel thought she knew her and that probably they had met before, but Jenna knew that they had not, because she would have remembered. They kept walking and walking at a casual pace, as if Rachel had been tempted by the pleasant coolness of the night and had decided to linger a little while in the air. Jenna paced alongside her with a mingled sensation of curiosity and suspicion. She was not prepared for lurking about the streets and indulging in useless conversation. Thoughts surfaced. She could not help thinking that this may be some kind of a set up, a way to flush out potential bombers. Rachel looked disingenuous at first sight. Perhaps she made a living off of the Israeli Intelligence Forces.

Reasoning herself out of her fears, she reluctantly followed Rachel, but with steps more wavering and vacillating than those with which she first experienced. Finally, clear of any strangers, they backtracked and took a footpath until they approached a gate.

"This is my home," said Rachel. It was a large place with a high wall and a large garden.

She opened the door to her house and motioned Jenna to follow her upstairs. Jenna staggered inside and looked in. Once inside, Rachel stepped directly in front of her and took Jenna's purse from her hand. She opened the handbag and looked inside. There was not much in there, but a few coins and picture identification. She apologized and returned the purse. Jenna understood.

She'd heard of houses like this, she'd just never actually been in one. Jenna couldn't imagine what a family would do in such a big house. She trailed behind Rachel as she walked through a kitchen with white cabinets and spotless appliances.

She was led through a large dismal room where a crucifix hung on the wall. Down a long hallway Rachel directed her past a bedroom where two children slept inside two small beds. A man who called himself Edward coaxed Jenna inside a study room. The walls were lined with antique bookshelves, crammed with leather-bound law books. Some with scripted Arabic engravings, others in Hebrew. The tile on the floor was covered with an expensive Persian carpet. A portable heater made the temperature airless, but they didn't seem to notice. He pulled down the window blind, drew the curtains and methodically got down to business. Edward who conducted himself like a man who was used to such meetings, approached the couch across from Jenna, and took his seat. Rachel unbuttoned her sweater and tossed it across the back of the couch, then lowered herself into a seat.

Jenna was the center on which their eyes were fixed. She had the air of a person who was not quite sure how she got there, but wished with all her heart that she hadn't come.

Edward asked Jenna for her family name, her village and about her parents. Jenna told him that her father had died when she was small and that her mother was just recently deceased. He sat for a moment and looked at her- not suspiciously, not with doubt, but only with interest and wonder. He said, "You are a young, pretty girl with a decent education; why would you embark on such a journey?" Jenna told him how she felt that her purpose in life was to be a martyr. If she considered it wrong or unwise for herself personally, then she would never consider such a final ending to her life. He mused and seemed to study her every word.

"How old are you, Jenna?" Edward asked gently, while taking out his cigarettes and offering her one.

She cleared her throat. "I am almost twenty-one."

He lit his smoke and waited while she composed herself to respond.

"I don't smoke."

He was as easygoing as his wife was businesslike.

All of a sudden he got to the point, "You will be kept under surveillance that will leave you no moment of privacy. It is a necessary precaution and one of many ways to ensure your sincerity and assurance. So, if there is any hesitation, whatsoever, you must own up to it now, however cautious. This is no business for the fainthearted. That could be fatal for not only you, but others in our movement."

"I know, I know. Believe me, I get it!"

Edward's point was clear, but had it been death that Jenna was afraid of, she would not have been there in the first place. Her purpose would not be swayed by the threat of her own mortality. Not Edward or anyone could brow beat her, intimidate her, or overcome her determination. She had a strong inclination to make more of an angry reply, but was deterred by practical considerations.

"Relax, Jenna! Consider us your friends," said Rachel, losing no time to relieve Jenna of her anxieties.

Jenna looked directly into her face. She was a well-groomed lady of about forty years. Her voice was strong and impressive, and, once heard, not easily forgotten. She was an attorney by profession, specializing in civil rights litigation.

Jenna heard the sound of a child's voice and Rachel got to her feet and abruptly left the room. Jenna glimpsed at Rachel, whose face had imperceptibly softened at the sound of her child's voice.

Rachel returned to the room with tea, placed it on the table, and dropped into the seat opposite Jenna's. She rested her chin in her hand and she said without prelude, "Listen dear, if you'd like more time to assess what contributions you can make, please do so. There is no harm."

Jenna's eyes spewed resentment, but she didn't say a word. The last thing she felt she had to do was prove herself again and to Rachel that evening. Jenna was pretty tired from the intensity alone, and anyway, she found Rachel to be an odd woman, who agitated her for no real reason than the misgiving she perceived from her. Jenna had an urge to yank her right out of her chair. Who were these people to question her intentions and her decisions? Had they lived as she had lived? Had they lost as she had lost? Did they feel as empty as she felt? Suspicions were the

last thing that Jenna needed. She hung her head and took a deep breath. Then Jenna looked up and turned towards Edward. "I don't understand. Why are you questioning me?"

Tears welled up in her eyes and she brushed them away angrily with the back of her hand.

"Look I am here, aren't I? Do you think that this is easy for me? Do you think that I have not thought about what my family will go through after I am dead? I will be causing them an extraordinary amount of pain, but it is only because I believe that it is necessary." Suddenly she paused, as if something had come over her. She untwisted her face and then calm seemed to come over her as if she had been deliberating for some time. With calm and articulation she gazed straight before her and addressed Rachel and Edward.

"We are brothers, although not of the same faith, we bear the burden of the same fate. Our people are being massacred. Imagine if you were at the sea and you saw a child drowning. I don't think you would stop and ponder, for even a minute, whether or not you should save that child. You would instinctively jump in."

"Yes, but I would not be risking my life."

"You might, but that wouldn't make any difference to a merciful man. Would it?"

"No, it would not."

"So please understand, I am here because I am acting on my own instincts. If these instincts have evolved from feelings I've experienced in my life, then that is something that can't be helped."

Edward nodded as though he understood and Jenna continued.

"Our people have been put in a situation where they are forced to make themselves human sacrifices. As a Muslim, I am willing to risk everything, not just for Palestinians, but also for the good of my eternal soul. I know that a lot of people may die, but what I will do will not be for the purpose of murder, but for the price of our freedom and I only look for God's reward."

Edward sympathetically smiled, spreading his hands in a conciliatory gesture. Then his face took a compassionate but a more serious turn.

"I am not questioning your sincerity. I have to ask you these questions. It is part of the process. Also, I know that you've gone through a difficult time. The death of a parent can leave things out of proportion. It can feel like the end of the world. What I am trying to do is to make sure you are not trying to end your life because you miss your mother. If people came to believe that, it would destroy the integrity and subject our mission to criticism among our own people. We would be accused of taking advantage of a young girl who was emotionally distraught.

Jenna had not allowed herself to be recruited for a suicide mission because her mother was dead, although she had to admit to herself that it was her mother's death that had compelled her to look at the uncertainties of her life in view of her convictions. When she looked at her life history she was stricken with disgust. Jenna wanted to make the Israelis liable, more than anything, because of their lack

of attachment to the full truth. From their own experience in German they saw only their nobility and strength. Their unwillingness to see beyond the victims they'd created to the victimizers they had become, and their inability to generate any empathy for the first while continuously lamenting the past mistreatment of the second, is what infuriated her. And, yes, she wanted to destroy them. She was like so many other Palestinians, only exacting revenge could appease her.

She'd searched for a solution that ultimately led her to a bargain with God. In those moments she'd fretted she would pray and read religious passages. The more she prayed and read, the more she'd become inclined to the goal she was pursuing. Besides, she'd concluded, "every man has the means of escape in his own hands and this is mine." Once she had decided, no one could turn her from her resolve. After all, too much reflection only led to more reservations and prevented a man from seeing what he ought to. Jenna had lived, and now she was ready to die by the virtues of the beliefs she'd held all of her life. Once she had accepted this actuality, she realized that an important moment had arrived in her life and she was ready.

Rachel stood up and calmly put out one hand for the purpose of shaking Jenna's. She enclosed Jenna's hand in hers and squeezed it gently. Jenna knew that she understood.

In the course of the evening, Jenna came to learn something about her allies, who seemed to have very little reason to undertake a vendetta. After all, in spite of their Palestinian origins, they were Israeli citizens, well educated and obviously gainfully employed.

Edward explained, "For years we worked within the framework of the law. We put our faith in judges and the legal system. Two years ago I filed a complaint against a settler for farming on land that he had no legal title to. I won the case. Two days later, in front of the high school and in front of witnesses, he tried to shoot me. He shot my son instead. A nine-millimeter bullet was lodged into his brain and he still survived, but his I.Q. dropped fifty points. Now he is unable to even clean himself properly. Do you know what they did with that man? He got sixteen months in prison. Sixteen months!"

After awhile dessert was brought and the intensity of the atmosphere eased. Jenna remained a little more than an hour. Over tea they took pleasure in relaxing conversation. Jenna was surprisingly comfortable and there was not a single moment where they had to look for a topic of conversation, on the contrary, Jenna spoke of her happy childhood memories and the classes she'd found challenging at the university. She had not enough time to tell all of her stories and graciously refrained from doing so in order to hear her host speak. It had been awhile since she'd felt so at ease and even found herself unable to contain a bit of laughter. By way of their conversation Rachel found this young girl intelligent and sincere. She admired her passion, but at the same time she felt sorry for her and couldn't help wishing that there was never a need to use women at all.

About eleven o'clock Jenna alerted them to the lateness of the hour, and interrupted Edward's chatting.

It was time to go.

Jenna was all the way down the stairs and almost out of the door before she noticed how much she had sweated. The evening air alerted her to her obviously nervous state. When Edward handed her a bus token back to her home he noticed Jenna's hand shaking. He shook his head and finished with a chilling farewell, "You are a product of occupation and a victim of its processes. You should not have to pay a price for that, but you will. It is sometimes a deadly price. It makes me sad that so many young people like you are going to die such a horrible death in order that our people will one day be allowed to live free and with some dignity. I'll never forget any of the faces that walk past my door and I will not forget yours, Jenna Hayat. You are not just a body that we use for our purpose; you will be a martyr that died for people who had no more options."

He cast his eyes down and with great emotion said, "You will die, but it will be a good death."

Those were his parting words. Rachel stood alongside him. She never knew what to say at those moments. Good luck or thank you seemed inappropriate, so she gazed into her face with a look that seem to draw her near to her then she grabbed Jenna's shoulders and embraced her. Finally she said, "God bless. Jenna felt shy to say it in return. Rachel gave her a hug, and although she was often embarrassed about her feelings, she hugged her too, as tightly as she could and suddenly felt panicky and didn't want to let go. She was never good at saying goodbye so she didn't, she just let her gaze drift from them to the sky as she walked away.

Halfway home Jenna returned to a normal state of calm. She found an empty seat and collapsed into it. She let down the bus window and let the cool air rush down her face. As she rode home to her village, she ran over in her mind all that she had said and done all evening and then she sunk inside with a deep sense of loneliness that she had almost never felt before, except when she lost Dina and then her mother. In part, because Jenna didn't want to say goodbye, and because she really would miss her life on earth and in her homeland, where in spite of all of the suffering, she still felt such a strong affinity and appreciation. And Jenna felt pity for all those she would be leaving behind to continue to live in pain and panic, and who might grow up to rid their hands of useless politics, choosing to vent their rage under the impact of a bomb. Jenna thought that, sometimes, this kind of rage was the only human answer to the helplessness a person saw before him. The generation, before hers, chose to go out of the mortal world, soul broken, after years of crying out in dismay. That simply would not do anymore, especially in light of the fact that in doing so, made no difference. The world looked towards these miserable people and expected them to be docile and peacefully paced, while their lives decayed into nothingness. She wondered, couldn't the world see that what the suicide bomber did and how he ultimately acted was entirely up to the State of Israel? Didn't the world understand that no man imagines that he might blow his own body in pieces into the wind? Of course, most wouldn't. The need of self-preservation is too great. But then let an enemy spit on you, let him take your home and your dignity. Let him imprison you and beat you into submission. Let

him explode missiles on your children as they sleep and watch you scrape up their remains. Let him see you hungry and rubbing the mildew off of your bread. Let him push you to the brink of insanity and then beyond. This is what makes a suicide bomber. This is what makes a man believe that it doesn't matter what he does to his body, because at least his soul remains his own.

Three days later Jenna was summoned back to the neighborhood mosque. From there she was driven to an apartment in a refugee camp in Jenin. From outside it appeared to be nothing but a habitat for poor people. Windows were broken and covered with wooden boards and metal sheets, while the roof was partly caved in. It was the typical refugee lifestyle; an environment of ruin. From inside, it was a full functional medical facility, which included a male and female physician and a nurse. They even had a psychologist.

Jenna climbed onto the examination table and sat silent, while her eyes traveled round and round, taking in every detail of the exam room.

They did several tests, which included an orthopedic assessment. Her urine was even tested for drugs. Later it was explained to her that this was necessary to ensure that she was in complete control over her decisions and that she would be physically fit to carry out any operation that she might be assigned. Upon completion Jenna was reminded not to speak to anyone about the most recent events in her life.

As she exited, another young woman passed her. She looked as anxious as Jenna did, but Jenna decided that it was best not to assume anything about the girl's reasons for being there.

A week later Jibril arrived at her home with a package that included a fake Lebanese passport with her picture and some instructions that Jenna was supposed to memorize, then destroy.

It was finally happening, and oddly enough, Jenna was very composed. Her reaction was surprising to even herself.

There are moments you see life very clearly, the things that you have left undone. More than anything, she wished to see Zakki again.

Jenna became temporarily Aida Najjar, 21 years of age, born in Beirut. With her new identity, she'd be able to cross into Lebanon for a twelve day training session near the Bekka Valley.

Within the package of information she was given a folio with the name and address of her home there, complete with a picture of the subdivision of the city where the address was located. The actual house was marked on the map and there were photos of it and a description of the area. It included schools formally attended, and shopping centers. This information would prove valuable if she were unexpectedly questioned.

Jenna flew from Tel Aviv to Cyprus, and from Cyprus to Beirut. Her group was assembled at a hotel in the city of Tripoli, and they were taken by van to what appeared to be a boarding school for orphans in a Hezbollah controlled area called Sultan Ayyoub. Behind the facility was a group of ground level apartments,

detached from those used by the children. There was a tall concrete wall able to obscure the view of passersby. Females were assigned in pairs to one-bedroom units, and were told to maintain the identities on the passports. They were commanded not to discuss anything factual relating to their real lives, not even what city they originally came from. Their instructors told them that, although coming into contact with each other after physical training would be highly unlikely, in the interest of security they were to keep their lives private. Personally, Jenna would not have been surprised if their rooms contained listening devices so that their instructors could monitor and record their conversations, if for nothing more than to see if they were complying with their orders.

There were some conversations that were not off-limits and could be openly discussed. Most of them tended to deal with different group ideologies and analyze of the history of resistance. Many of these discussions took place in a group forum. It was obvious that these trainee's allegiances were to different groups and that everyone there was not from Al-Aqsa. Some were affiliated with Hamas; others were from Al Islamic Jihad. One could basically define their alliance as a marriage of necessity. In recent times they had coordinated their efforts in their attacks against the government. Most of the bombings were perpetrated in partnership. The resistance organizations increasingly lost faith in Yasser Arafat's abilities, and Hamas never believed he had any to begin with. For a long time Arafat had become nothing more than a political nuisance. It was a cruel and saddening conclusion that even many members of Al-Fatah had come to. The organizations came to an alliance by necessity initiated by Al-Aqsa itself.

The organization to which Jenna belonged had emerged from Arafat's Fatah faction of the PLO and, once upon a time, was fiercely loyal to the leadership. Once a secular nationalistic movement, they had learned from the error of their ways. Their religion and their politics should have never been severed. Perhaps if they had not ignored God, He wouldn't have ignored them.

The top spiritual leaders had begun to hold meetings with local commanders, who painted pictures of disputes between the competing organizations, and infighting among regional leaders. In many respects various organizations resembled the mafia families of New York, in the early 1930's, rivaling for control and respect. To make matters worse, shipments of arms and other vital military equipment often arrived incomplete or not at all: M-16's lacked ammunition, cases of grenades were unaccounted for, and wires for detonators were faulty. It was an organizational disaster. Something had to be done to wage an effective campaign against the enemy. Finally, the religious leaders persuaded them to work together, and what's more they agreed to discredit Arafat. It was more than a tactical move; it was personal. Yasser Arafat was largely held responsible for the death of Yahya Ayyash, "the Engineer."

Ayyash had become notorious after the peace agreements between the PLO and the government of Israel, when he was classified as Number One on the Israeli Wanted List. The Israeli security services had linked him to a number of suicide bombings, one of which involved the explosion of a bus in central Tel Aviv. As

with other Palestinians sought by Israeli forces, no public information or evidence was offered as to why these particular people were wanted by Israeli security.

The decision to execute Ayyash emanated from an executive order of Shimon Peres. Ayyash was a thorn in his foot, and the final decision to take him out rested with Peres. There would be no formal arrest, no public trial, and no state conviction. Assassination on the spot was the standing order. Yahya Ayyash had already been tried in absentia. A special judicial committee, consisting of intelligence personnel, high ranking military, and officials from the justice department, had heard his case. The court decided guilt on the basis of their evidence, and Peres signed an executive execution order. Israeli Intelligence tracked Yahya Ayyash but he eluded them for years.

His luck did not last. Around 8:30am on January 5th, 1996, Yahya Ayyash was killed at a house located in the Beit Lahia Housing Project, in northern Gaza Strip.

Though he didn't know it, an Israeli intelligence had drone circled overhead that morning as Ayyash reached for the cell phone in his hideout. He took the call, uttered a few words, and in an instant his hand and half of his head were blown off. Israeli intelligence agents had packed the phone with 50 grams of explosive material. It was detonated by a radio signal from the plane as soon as Ayyash was positively identified as the man speaking on the phone.

How he died was left to the Israeli Internal Security, but how he was caught was left to Yasser Arafat. Arafat saw his complicity as an invaluable show of proof to the Israeli government of just how essential he was to their goals.

Arafat's condemnation of the assassination was just posturing. Yahya Ayyash could have frustrated Israeli Internal Security for years to come if they had not received the assistance of Arafat. There is an old saying, "Oh what a tangled web we weave when we bargain to deceive." And indeed, Yasser Arafat was the spider whose house was of the web running in all directions. His Palestinian Authority acted as a tie beam to the thread that forms its body. This was the hunting body that hunted on behalf of the Israelis. The entire structure exemplified hypocrisy, deceit, and personal gain. When a prey is caught in the net, it is at once communicated to the spider, which arranges for the prey to be killed. The spider either sits in the center of the web or hides on the under-side of some crevice, but he always has a single thread connecting him with his web. The spider's web, for all its thickness, is only strong from the point of relativity. In the real world, however, it is flimsy. So was the house of Arafat, which relied on perishable resources, however temporal or strategically weak. However, in the end, the spider's most cunning architecture cannot stand against the wave of the opposition's hand, it can be broken by a thousand chance attacks.

The first course of action was that each organization swore allegiance to the cause, not to outdated principles, internal competition, and compromised leadership. You cannot liberate a people when you are at odds with each other. Solidarity became the issue, being of one mind. Insurgency training did not begin in a camp in Lebanon or Syria. It began at birth. From first breath began the methodical numbness of personal consciousness and free will- it was the same struggle, same intention, and same goal. Groups and title were eventually

insignificant. As to who would become a suicide bomber, no one really new all of their histories were similar. All had lost loved ones and land, situations they were all too familiar with. Some, however, just seemed predisposed to this kind of extinction, bound by an honor code. Their eagerness to be drawn in by events set them apart. It did not matter under whose banner they marched. Their anger and commitment was communicated under the guise of their ferocious righteousness.

Other immediate tasks were to enforce links with smaller organizations and bring them into the major resistance groups and set up support networks anew. Contact with Arafat and his parasite organization was to be discontinued. Hamas leadership, out of Syria, would provide training bases, not only to train suicide bombers, but acceptable candidates in counter surveillance, obtaining and transmitting information, counterintelligence, visual observation, electronic communication, and encrypted and invisible writing. This having been accomplished, the groups were set to work.

Besides physical training, Jenna figured that they were there to have their integrity tested. She did not have a problem with that, but she knew that she'd have to be constantly on guard.

The first evening they basically relaxed and were given exercise uniforms and equipment.

Each woman was assigned a personal coach.

Al-Aqsa's suicide unit was under pressure to train more women for their operations because the Israeli military and intelligence mainly targeted Palestinian men. Just as they were also under pressure to recruit European and American converts to Islam who were sympathetic to the oppression of their people. Allowing women to participate in jihad is an option that many traditional Islamic groups now utilized hesitantly, but do so out of necessity. This only occurred when an Islamic jurist ruled that the current political situation provided justification for their use. The jurist maintained that when an enemy assaults a Muslim territory, it becomes mandatory upon all its residents to fight. It also goes without saying, the organizers of the suicide operations recognized that women can be used often to infiltrate where men may find it impossible. Their collective goal was to teach the Israelis that even though they might have a strong and forceful army, this would not guarantee the safety of their people. Women began to volunteer in numbers and were willing to do whatever needed to be done. Some of these were women who had lost their children to bullets and missiles; some were women whose husbands lay in graves or within the brutal walls of Israeli prisons. These were women who were no longer willing to sit on the sidelines and uselessly cry because they knew that their tears served no purpose. Women who were previously well suited for only the kitchen and giving birth to a child were now being trained in sharp shooting and martial arts. Some of the most respected Islamic scholars had helped them to understand that there is no conflict with God in matters of self-defense and that their loyalty to religion is not misplaced as long as they are avenging the death of their families. Sheikh Yassin, himself, a noted scholar and spiritual guide of Hamas said, "Jihad is obligatory on men and women. There is no exemption."

Not all women who came forth were selected. They had to possess the physical and emotional ability to follow through. They had to realize that life did not enter into the equation in this war game- just death.

The first step was to have all of the recruits unwind; build trust, to treat them with honor and respect, to talk about their human rights and how they had been wronged. At the end of the introduction meeting everyone had a chance to speak and express his or her feelings.

Just after sunset Jenna's unit sat down to dinner. Inside the dining hall was a long table full of delicious food. There was leg of lamb on top of rice. There was yogurt with mint and cucumber. A large pot of warm lentil soup scented the room; alongside it sat trays of olives, cheese, and fresh fruit. It was more food than Jenna had ever seen before on one table. As she sat and ate, lifted her fork to her mouth, manipulated her knife, she wondered about those fortunate people who ate that well routinely. She began to think that maybe people must first feel in order to act, and maybe some do not act because they have never had to feel the pain of hunger. She wondered, "How do you devise a strategy to fight malnutrition, eating hundred dollar lunches or dining on catered buffets?"

After dinner they were told to go back to their rooms and advised to retire early. Having settled to do just that, she left to the room and went to bed.

At the early hour of four o'clock in the morning their activities commenced. They rose while it was still completely dark. The weather was still cool outside. The soldiers hastily ate their breakfast and drank their tea. The recruits were then organized into divisions. The martyrdom division was separated from the rest and instructed to board a minibus, but they did not know where they were going. It did not matter much to them because in every way they were comrades, of the same rank, having the same goal. None knew his actual day of reckoning, but they knew all that they would all meet their Maker in the same fashion, quick and decisive, and it induced Jenna to speculate about what was to come. Like any soldier they felt an excitement in their hearts that they were embarking on the path that many had treaded before them. After a short journey the minibus came to a halt and they disembarked in a camp, similar to the one they'd just left.

An hour later they began with obstacle courses, martial arts, calisthenics, guerilla exercises, and strength training. In the evening their activities concluded with motivational lectures.

Perhaps there was no training session more intense than the one concerning the dynamics of the bomb itself, and how to discharge the explosives. The instructor carefully laid out a detailed list of instructional guidelines in a course that maybe properly titled, "Suicide Bombing 101". Some people thought that becoming a suicide bomber was easy. You just strap yourself with explosives, find a crowd and blow yourself up, but it really took enormous planning. Working on pure emotion could make a person go out of control and get violent. That's not what Al-Aqsa wanted. They wanted the bomber to be violent but only if he were in control.

An electrical blasting cap set off the bomb. The suicide belt contained, in addition to the explosives, a battery. Two wires came out of the battery; two wires came out of the blasting cap. One battery wire was connected to one blasting cap wire; the other two were unconnected and separate until the bomber put them together (either physically touching them together or with a switch), completing the circuit.

The resultant electrical charge was carried to a thin bridge wire inside the blasting cap. The electricity heats up the bridge wire to such a fiery temperature that the primer, such as lead azide, detonated which in turn set off the TNT.

A part of Jenna did not want to know the mechanics. She didn't care about which wire went where or what switch had to be flipped. She just wanted everything terrible that had happened to the Palestinians to stop and, hopefully, her actions might make that happen. She had to force herself to listen so that when the time came she would get it right.

Two main considerations for success were these: they must look totally inconspicuous when en route to the target point; and they must take as little time as possible to detonate once there. All guilt must be eliminated because as far as the Israelis were concerned, there were no victims. "Give as good as you get", was what they were told. They were told to remove any feelings of culpability from their minds and what was most important, from their hearts. Jenna had a little trouble doing that. She did not want to be remembered as simply a piece of raw material that had been fashioned to perform, part of a division holding a systematic grudge enabling her to kill all and just about anyone. She wanted to be remembered as a young woman who couldn't accept "the way things are." She wanted everyone to know that she really tried not to be discouraged; unfortunately she did not see the human revival promised by people who had never lived her hurt, who couldn't understand that there is nothing worse than having a problem and not being able to solve it. She was a victim of hopelessness. As with a man whose boat had overturned and although he can't swim, he thrashes about trying to save his children, instinctively grabbing at them in order to save their lives, but in the process of doing so, everyone is destroyed.

Peace was only an enduring expectation that she would leave behind to those who would fill a similar place. It was only a hope because she knew she was leaving with a good sense of what was ahead for them.

All of a sudden the dialogue made her feel uneasy. She started to feel a little bit caged in.

Eli Goldstein, the bookstore owner, immediately came to her mind. He was a gentle old man who worked in his shop in the city. Where did someone like him factor into something like her life? She'd gone there several times throughout the past year to purchase used books and she could never consider him a target or an enemy, quite the contrary- he was her friend. He'd help her find exactly what she needed at a price she could afford, even if he had to go elsewhere to find it. Sometimes he'd give her free materials that he thought related to the subject matter she was studying, or just something that he felt might interest her. He insisted on

calling her "Honey" in Hebrew because of the color of her eyes. "I'd know you anywhere Honey, just by those eyes." He'd make her laugh and blush.

Eli loved to talk about his wife and laugh about all the silly romance novels she read. He spoke often about his grandchildren and that always made him smile. There was always an atmosphere of good will about him. Several months ago she'd gone to find chemistry books for her lab class. When she got there he was reading a book about Germany. She could tell that he was not himself. He seemed distracted and melancholy. She walked up to the counter and said hello. He smiled but it was not a happy one. She asked him if there was something wrong. He told her that he was remembering a time long ago, as he tapped on the book underneath his fingers.

"You lived in Germany?" she asked.

"Until I became a man," he replied. "I married there and left a couple of years later."

He smiled timidly, "You're not interested in an old man's story."

"Tell me!" Jenna insisted.

"I was a freshman at a university in Frankfurt, West Germany. I first saw the woman who would become my wife in a language class I was just beginning. She dropped her notebooks and I rushed over to assist her because I was a gentleman and I fell in love with her the first moment I saw her."

Eli began to laugh and tell her his story.

When their eyes met he could not conceal his open-faced admiration for the blushing young student.

"Ah, Sarah was my destiny. She was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen" he said.

Eli and his wife married at the youthful age of eighteen, innocent and unprepared for what awaited Jews in Nazi Germany. Once the Nazis started their campaign, Eli's father, Jacob, knew that it would get worse long before it would get better. What he didn't know was that better would never come, at least before millions were dead. The fury of Hitler's soldiers swallowed the streets. Jacob commanded Eli to take his pregnant young wife away as fast as he could. They would not survive unless they kept ahead of the German armies already torturing Jews. Their mobility had not been yet curtailed and those who had the money to leave did so.

Eli and Sarah left by train less than a month later. He never forgot the face of his father as he waved goodbye. With tears streaming down their faces they watched him through the window of the railroad car until they could no longer see him. Jacob promised that he would follow as soon as he closed his clothing factory and settled his accounts.

It was only a short time later, after their arrival in Paris that they learned of Jacob's fate. His body was found inside the factory along with the bodies of eighteen of his employees. They had all been shot execution style: in the head. The birth of Eli's first son, Moshe, brought both happiness and grief. The young couple celebrated the birth of their healthy baby boy, but they mourned the death of the grandfather who would never see him. The three of them were safe and comfortable in France because of Eli's father's insistence. While in France they

heard stories about Jews being rounded up, loaded on to trucks, driven away and never to be seen again. Some of them were neighbors and friends. Later they heard about mass graves. It was not long before the stories went beyond human comprehension; these were stories about places called Auschwitz and Treblinka.

Eli's was ashamed by his sanctuary, by the sense of security so many others of his kind did not share. One day he went to his rabbi and told him that he wanted to return to Germany and fight the murderers of his people. The rabbi counseled him that his presence there would serve no cause. He told him that a return there would be like committing suicide.

"What they are doing is beyond you, Eli. They have all of the weapons and all of the power. You have nothing; therefore there is no fight, my son. To go there would be the same as committing suicide. Do you want to die? Because you hate to live when so many you have loved have been connected to death. If you must look back on your grief, Eli, look back with your prayers for those who still remain, but then you also must look forward to your responsibility as a husband and a father. This is what your own father wished for you."

Eli and his wife clung to each other during those years of hell. Sarah bore him two more children, David and a little girl named Ruth. They promised each other that they would never allow the dark shadows of the unmerciful to haunt the lives of their children and they prayed that they would grow up blissfully unaware that such demons walked on the face of the earth.

Eli's story had saddened Jenna deeply. She, as a human being, was not without feeling. Still, inside of her, she had to ask, why did her people have to suffer so that his could be free? Why must one man's gain, become another man's loss? Her tenseness made both of them uncomfortable. She was sympathetic and grief-stricken by his story, but something nagged at her below the surface of her skin. In spite of her desire not to appear unfeeling and insensitive to his people's misfortune, she could not help but immediately inject, "Now you are all here and others have come to know the pain you once felt."

"Oh, but it is not the same."

"Isn't it?" she retorted. "Your people died; now mine are dying. Yours lost theirs houses in Germany, ours are being taken away everyday in Palestine. Your people were imprisoned, now mine are being imprisoned."

"Jenna," said Eli, with an unrealistic expectation. "Things will change. They will become better, for you, for me, and for both of our people. One day there will be peace. These are the thoughts that must occupy your mind and your heart."

"I don't think I can. I don't think I could give that much time and thought to such a fantasy."

Eli had wrinkled his forehead, good naturedly, like a man whose feelings are injured, or has been unfairly understood. But Jenna, scowling, could not accept what she considered nothing more than some optimistic illusion.

"Look at it from my side." She said with a grim expression. "Do you think that a people who have been handed everything to them as a gift are suddenly going to give half of it away, along with the power it hold for them? Why would they do such a thing? No one would do such a thing!"

It was becoming increasingly intense. Jenna felt that, but found herself unable to stop venting.

"Your government needs to make some kind of humanitarian offer, but it doesn't really intend to give up anything. It goes against their own interest."

"You are so young Jenna, but you sound like someone worn out and hardened."

"Perhaps I do. And do you know why? I can't help but feel miserable when I see my people thrown out of their own country without the right to ever return. They are forbidden because they are Palestinian instead of Israeli. Everyday the Israelis take more and more and Palestinians can't do anything about it, even though they owned, worked it and built their lives on it. Most of it's gone. Do you really think someone is going to just give some of it back?"

"Many Israelis bought the land legally, and from Palestinians."

"But even in these bargains there was unfairness and trickery. Most of these possessions were sold by Palestinians who believed that they could never come back to live here. An Israeli who has migrated here is allowed to benefit from this misfortune. He sees property that has been vacated by a Palestinian living in America or some other far away place. Most will remain there because they fear for the lives of their family and the law does not allow them to even see their land again. Eventually a broker, who will offer them a price for the estate, which is valued at much more, contacts them. The Palestinians will sell because they will convince themselves that this is the practical thing to do. It is a bargain that will not only decrease the Palestinian population but also decrease their ownership over the land, making us weaker as a whole. It will make us less likely to regain what we once had," she said spitefully.

"Well what would you have us do, Jenna? We cannot build our houses and our lives on the sea? We too must have the means to live and to survive as human beings!" He said reprovingly, but with kindness.

"No one is denying this, but still there is something despicable in what has happened and what is still happening to my people. Most Palestinians live in camps. What does that mean? A camp is not a home! A camp is a place that is meant to be something temporary, something impermanent. Added to all this, we are called refugees. What does that mean, Eli? How can we be homeless and be called refugees in the land which we hold our birthright?"

The disgrace of occupation she was suffering burned like a fiery torch positioned upon her heart, and it felt as if it were a fresh wound that had just raged itself upon her unsuspecting body.

"I know, I know" Eli began, interrupting Jenna. "All things are not fair and equal in this world and no man should be slighted unfairly for another. You are a good person Jenna, and are in every way equal to me. Believe me, my dear girl, when I say to you, that every person has the right has the right to value what belongs to him by way of birth or by what they have earned with their hands."

I know that you mean well but you know that my people will never be accepted into your world. Why do you think I live in Ramallah? Without West Bank and Gaza Israelis could not live the lives they live. If you want to keep your outcast out of sight you have to have some place to put them in and these are the kinds of

places my people live. These are the refugee camps!" She seemed desperate for him to understand.

Within a couple of moments she was poised again. She told Eli that she was so sorry about what happened to his father and that she was glad that he'd survived. Her compassion was genuine and not difficult for her to say to him. Eli had been good to her and there was no question that he considered her an equal as well as a friend. When they were together they conversed as two human beings, not Muslim, not Jew.

"You're a friend." She said with all sincerity. Eli beamed. "Yes Jenna, I am your friend." He smiled full face and resumed showing her his favorite books. She watched him now. His hands turning each page delicately, as if he were handling an expensive piece of heart. He showed her the classics he'd collected after the war. He'd managed to bring a few with him from Germany. He found difficulty lifting the heavy ones in the store. "Arthritis." He commented, "I'm an old man." The whole of his hand was dotted with age spots.

Here they were, an old Jewish man and a young Palestinian girl, unlikely acquaintance. Jenna could not deny that spending time in Eli's little bookstore, speaking of history, religion and poetry were moments of magical serenity. At times she felt that there were two hearts held inside her chest, one hidden behind the other.

"When I see you, I see my own child." He once said. She raised her eyebrows. "And I never forget you in my prayers. I always ask God to give you a good life, and a life of meaning. I see so much in you. I just know that you are going to do exceptional things."

Jenna shrugged her shoulders.

"Mark my words."

She had no idea what to say, so she simply said, "Thank you Eli."

"I mean it, Jenna. You can be part of the change in this country once you accept that you are capable of doing something. You accept and then you do it, its very simple. You can move beyond the past and create a brilliant future for yourself. I tell my children this all the time. Accept the past as the past, without denying it or discarding the lessons from it, then use it to create a motive for a better life."

Being in Eli's store felt like a purifying rinse of human benevolence. They spoke of ordinary life, the summer days of youth, and about the love of family. They spoke of Eli's favorite subjects- world peace, the human spirit and why the world seems to have so little of it at the moment. His own actions went beyond words. Here was a man who spent his lunch hour reading to toddlers at the neighborhood library. Everyone there loved him, the staff, the mothers and the children most of all, who would gather around his knee and listen to every word intensely. They all laughed when he told jokes. Sometimes he brought candy and the children would clap out of joy.

Jenna looked at Eli and knew why she enjoyed her time with him. His heart seemed to be bigger than any country and his humanity more contagious than revenge.

Outside the bookstore the world wasn't as kind. When she stood out of the street she was either treated like she was not there or as if she had the plague. No one smiled, no one spoke, and no one even nodded. She like most Palestinians had been rendered invisible. What she missed most of all was any sense of acknowledgment. It was a skill that was mastered well outside the Occupied Territories. Once she sat across from the store and waited for the bus. After she sat down, a number of people gathered and stood waiting for a ride, yet no one sat. Eli watched from his glass door. All of a sudden, to Jenna's surprise, someone came and sat next to her. "Is this seat taken?"

She knew that voice. Of course it was Eli, who came to draw her out of her discomfort and make her feel less lonely. He knew what she needed at that moment, right then and there. She wanted the same thing all people want, to be treated like an ordinary human being.

Jenna remembered the time and she packed up the books he had for her and turned to leave the shop. Eli had followed her out and reached to put his hand out to her. He had suddenly remembered she was a Muslim and began to withdraw it. She saw this and took his time-weary hand into hers, "Goodbye Eli."

For just that one second, all of the cultural differences and historical alliances that separated them lay buried like ancient history. He saw something beyond a pair of eyes and a scarf. Eli could see through her, and what he saw was the heart of a young girl whose intensity transcended other girls her age. She was smarter and more determined, in the least, to settle for the limited opportunities offered by a city like Ramallah. She'd seen enough of that by witnessing her own mother's life. He knew that the only problem for Jenna was getting out, how to change what would become an inevitable sequence of events. Those who had the ambition, along with the opportunity had left. These days it was much harder. Most girls remained, married and lived in a squalid way. Eli did not see Jenna remaining in such a world, one in which she found too small. It seemed to him that she didn't know exactly what path to choose, but she did know which one not to choose.

Jenna kept wondering that if she saw Eli in the center of her target area, could she detonate? She suddenly wanted to cry because she knew that if she saw him right there she could not do it. She just wouldn't! Here they were telling them to forget everything they ever learned about fairness. Their sole responsibility was to advance the cause of the Palestinians, and once they understood this, they'd somehow lose their sense of guilt that accompanies a plan of mass destruction. "The problem is," Jenna thought, "that it is not easy to stop caring about someone even when your whole world is telling you not to." These feelings were hard to shake off whenever she thought of that sweet and un-malicious man who had done nothing to her except greet her with a smile and a bag of books. She knew that he

would be the one who would say, once her fatal act was completed, "There is no way Jenna would do such a thing. She was such a nice girl."

She knew that Eli genuinely thought well of her, and he wished her a happy life. But she also knew who he was, an Israeli Jew, which placed him in an unalterable position in a customary role of alliance and interest. The well being of Jewish people, naturally, occupied a very important place in his heart, because of common identity, history, and the need to survive. No matter how much sympathy he might have had for Jenna and her kind, she knew that what he felt for his own was immeasurably more.

In any case, she thought that if she were wrong then it was just one more mistake in a life full of mistakes. As cavalier as this kind of reasoning might have been, Jenna could not afford to think any other way.

In the morning, before they left, famous clerics, one from Kuwait and the other from Lebanon gave them final sermons. The Kuwaiti cleric, Sheikh Hassan Qaton began by reminding them of the roots of their misery and the role the Americans played in it. He said, "In 1948 the United States became impressed with the Israeli muscle, and coined it as a major military control and then offered them the resources to gain a significant strategic advantage over the Arabs. Within time it was concluded that the commonsense consequence of opposition to growing Arab nationalism would be to support them as the only tough pro-Western power left in the Middle East. The United States saw the Israelis as an obstruction to the Arab threat, but they also saw the Palestinian people as an obstruction to the Israelis. Because of this, Israel, their strategic asset, has had their full support. America's dominance is the reason the strength of the Israelis is safeguarded, so if any Palestinian is looking for an American backed peace agreement to liberate him and return him his rights, then he is a fool that has been grossly misled.

We know that the American goal is to arrange the world in such way that materially benefits it. Their interest is not humanitarian, but economical, and it has made it its mission to gain autonomous control of the Middle East and oil-producing regions. This is nothing new. The Americans have historically given support to Middle Eastern monsters, Arab and Israelis alike. The rich Arab countries know this and in spite of their wealth they are afraid and powerless when it comes to Western demands. Look at Saddam Hussein. He was allowed to be as evil and corrupt as he wanted, as long as he fulfilled his function. His most appalling crimes were considered irrelevant as long as the higher purpose of stability was served. Unfortunately for him he invaded Kuwait and fell from grace. Prior to the invasion it was necessary to rely on this murderer to keep order. The rules governing their friendship were understood well enough until his miscalculation in Kuwait. This initiated what you might call a political divorce, and ever since the wheels of power have been turning to eliminate him.

You see, rights accumulate to various players according to their position within the general strategic formation. The United States has rights by definition. The cops on the beat have privileges unless they defect, in which case, if too independent, they become adversaries. The local supervisors have rights as long as they keep to their business. If an "iron fist" is needed to preserve 'stability' so be it.

The people in the villages of Palestine have neither wealth nor power, and consequently no rights by simple political logic. Worse, the Palestinians are an annoyance; their miserable fate has been an irritant, with a disruptive effect on the Arab mind. Therefore a choice has been made to eliminate them and their people, a truth that explains a lot. It has become essential to eradicate the Palestinian problem somehow, by violence, by expulsion or by elimination altogether. The idea is that if the Palestinian issue can be disposed of, it should be possible to bring the implied dealings among the participants with rights to the outer surface, and expand them, incorporating others in a US-dominated regional system in the most 'strategically important area of the world'. This, my brothers and sisters, has always been the basic rationale in the so-called 'peace process'. It is the reason that the Americans have consistently thwarted diplomatic efforts to return to the Palestinian people everything that belongs to them. Most of these efforts have called for some recognition of the rights of your people, but the American government maintains that Palestinians have no rights when it hinders Israeli power."

The Kuwaiti told the recruits that what they hoped to bring about by their sacrifices might not be accomplished in their lifetimes, next year or even in their generation. "For this reason many will ask, why do you do it? The answer is because the Palestinians have not been heard by any other means of communication. The answer is because your Arab brothers closed their eyes and their doors to you. The answer is because unfairness is how one group of people enabled its own survival over the survival of another. The answer is because Allah will give you the kind reward in the next life that you could not have here in this life."

The other cleric from Lebanon, by far, had the most powerful effect. He was a man whose reputation preceded him. Were you to follow him, you would see that the people who surrounded him revered him. They loved him for his simplicity - despite the power he wielded among people in his country. His personality, charismatic on one side and reflective on the other, had impressed them. It had become clear to his supporters that he would never back up or retreat. He could psychologically take them by the hand and in an almost mechanical like fashion convince them to do his bidding. When he spoke he was always full of intensity, and if jihad were created by the passion he created within a crowd, then the battlefields would be full and the bodies of martyrs would be piled high. The man who spoke to them that day was Hezbollah leader Sheik Hassan Nasrallah.

He began by asking those who sat before him, "Where was Israel before the year 1948? During the First World War and Second World War? After World War I, there was Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Egypt. There were two mandates, one British, one French. There was no state called Israel. There was something called Palestine and the Palestinian people. Among them, there were Muslims, Christians, and Jews living together. But then violent organizations came, bringing with them many large groups of people from various parts of the world to Palestine. They occupied your land, displaced your people, and committed massacres. Therefore this state was established on the basis of occupation and has usurped your rights

and the rights of others. Israel remains a foreign body in this large area, and it has always proven that it is unable to coexist with this environment, because of the scope of the massacres that it has committed does not permit it to coexist. Over the last 50 years, the State of Israel has proved that it is an expansionist state, and wants to dominate the region, and it is not convinced of what it has already. It always intervenes in the affairs of the other countries in this region, as it has happened here in Lebanon.

The current Intifadah is not that of Hamas or Islamic Jihad. It's the Intifadah of Fatah, who has fought to suppress Islamic Jihad, Hamas, and the rest of the Palestinian people. Their negotiations have not given the Palestinians the minimum of their rights.

You can look at the West Bank. Cities are like prisons. The Israeli forces can close them quickly, and everything stops in these cities. This is the result of their Oslo Agreement. What Arafat and the Israelis agree on have not affected the course of events. The Sharm el-Sheikh summit did not produce an agreement. It was a failure. They brought them together just to tell them—stop fighting. The Palestinian must stop throwing stones, and the Israelis must stop firing rockets. And in the view of the Sharm el-Sheikh summit, rockets are equal to stones.

You are not a terrorist organization. You must consider yourselves a resistance movement against occupation. Israel is the terrorist because they are killing children, women and old people. There are those who call you suicide bombers and say you embark on suicide operations. We don't call them suicide operations but martyrdom operations because suicide comes out of a loss of hope in life, while martyrdom is a love of life."

"When our countries face aggression, we must be fully ready to resist," he said, "The one who has no weapons must obtain some, and he who does not have the will to resist must find it. We do not need to revise our position on the kind of resistance we intend to wage. Our targets have been chosen and well defined, and your presence here enables the resistance to be in a state of high preparedness to respond. All of you here will become martyrs. Martyrdom operations are the only power the Palestinians have against the sophisticated Israeli military machine. Balance cannot be reached unless these operations are carried out in the heartland of the enemy."

The session concluded with a piercing warning, "You must get everything right. This is the most important thing you will ever do and you won't have a chance to repeat things. You must follow every instruction to the letter, even if you don't understand it. There won't be anyone there to stop and explain anything. Do what you have been shown here, be exact, and let God help you with everything else!"

Every voice was silent and only a couple of clearing throats could be heard.

Later that evening she retired for the evening.

That night when she slept she dreamt sleeping under a tree in an uncovered grave. She saw herself lying in an open coffin with leaves all over her body that had fallen from the tree. Suddenly the lid fell shut and she began to scream, calling for help and just as she is about to take her last breath, helpless and abandoned, she saw light.

Jenna woke up and set up in bed.

"What a confusing dream." She thought, while her heart throbbed with fright. The entire experience brought on headache. She managed to get a hold on two aspirin and awhile later she lay down again and began dozing off.

At dawn she rose, said her prayers.

In the morning Jenna and the suicide brigade returned to the base camp on a bus, sitting in rows, side by side. An awakened spirit ran through their rank and file, and it was obvious to see that they were all prepared, and made ready not as a people, who make haste to do a feat that all men comprehend, but rather as a people made desperate to conclude some unusual duty that must be done, no matter how horrific and incomprehensible.

Having completed their entire course; they were flown back to Cyprus, put into separate cars and taken to different hotels. They were flown out of the country at different times, never to see each other again.

When Jenna returned to Palestine it was with a sense of aloneness and detachment that she had never felt before except when someone very close to her died. Knowing that her stay there would be only temporary lessened her affinity to her homeland. The consciousness of her own vulnerability, and the feeling of absolute righteousness of her proposed action, temporarily, made her content. She could narrow her concerns in life to only two; to work against the further subjugation of her people, and last, spend her remaining days attaining the kind of spiritual virtue befitting a martyr.

Only thoughts of Zakki tormented her. It was not only remembrance of him, but it was a vivid picture of what might have been. She imagined a free and rising homeland, one in which she would have subsequently married, became a good mother, and who would have slowly relinquished some of the bitter memories of the past. In stronger moments regrets would not trouble her. She accepted that life is not perfect, nor was it meant to be, and that no one gets all that they hoped for. Jenna decided that life is made up of invisible bars and that it is simply impossible to achieve any real freedom. Her only deliverance would come from sacrificing and dying for Allah. She would continue to say her five daily prayers with complete devotion, and whenever possible she would do more. She felt that she had submitted to the power of God. All that she could do was follow His will: hold on, not look towards the future and wait for her destiny. In truth, Jenna believed that she lived not by her own determination, but by the determination of her maker, and she felt an odd kind of serenity in this surrender.

Jenna really began to take in the essence of her final act. She sat through the darkness of the night examining her mission in all its dimensions, in all its aspects, and more deeply than she ever considered it before. The more she attempted to visualize it, the more frightened she became. At one point she was seized by an awful panic, which did not leave her during the next few days. Sometimes when she thought of what her own hand would sow, she'd freeze from fright: for from this terror she could only conclude that her final act was indeed brutal, yet a destructive mechanism for which there was no other resolution. She hoped that all

those who would eventually pass judgment on her action would understand the sequence of events that led up to her final act. She wanted everyone to understand that from her very birth she was a person whose days were numbered, whose life was filled with a graveyard of emotions. Death at an early age, such as hers, would be meaningless. In her mind she'd had already been sentenced to death; why wait? She reasonably understood that if, while hopeful and free living life in the pursuit of happiness, she chose to end her life and take a cluster of people with her, morality and human consensus might blame her for committing a seemingly insane act. It would be without reason. But what sort of morality or human consensus would insist that she live her life in a world of freedom, luxury and expectation from which she was so unmercifully denied admission to. Should anyone be offended that she wished to forgo another twenty one years of terror, the spilling of blood, and the loss of life; where twisted and knotted lives grew only more intricately twisted, until the voice within her refused to grant her reprieve from her rage and respite from disturbance. In the last remaining weeks of Jenna's life she sat about putting things in order. Her mind was full of scenarios, each one worse than the last. She could suppress her thoughts when she was working, but when she was idle, she found herself tormented by waking nightmares as a nerve constantly trembled in the pit of her stomach. She took sleeping pills in the evening- it was the only way she could get any rest at night.

She told her sisters to take whatever they wanted from the house. When Aaliyah asked why she was not keeping those things for her own use, she explained that there was not much use for many dishes and household things. With Ahmed away, she was alone and did not need very much of anything. She was shedding her past like a snake sheds its skin. She felt no compulsion to spend her remaining days with anyone other than her sisters; Ahmed was safe and studying abroad. There were no other childhood ties to bring to a close. For the first time in a long time, Jenna's days ceased to revolve around school, political activities and home. Most of her time she spent alone. She was bemused by how accustomed she'd become to being without human company. Her indifference towards life grew. During this time she learned Layla was pregnant. This peace of news she received with unresponsiveness. All her attention and concerns were elsewhere.

One evening the telephone rang. It was Samuel, Isaac's cousin; he was calling to invite her to a ceremony called an "unveiling." He explained to her that it was a Jewish custom that traditionally takes place a year after someone has passed away. Friends and family gather around the gravesite to see the headstone of the deceased unveiled. According to Jewish belief, when someone dies the immediate family is supposed to say Kaddish, the mourner's prayer, three times ■ day. This is done every day for an entire year. After the year is up they believe that the soul has reached heaven. When the stone is unveiled it signifies that the deceased person is resting in peace.

The very next morning Jenna was off early. She'd intended to return Eli's books, turn around and go back to the bus stop. She thought of the unveiling ceremony. She wondered if Mr. Levi knew.

"To go or not to go?" she questioned herself. And an inner voice told her that it would be wrong to go there, that it would only result in a dispute, that Isaac's father would always be bitter and unrepentant for any of the events that had caused his son's death. Nothing could come from her visit but anger and the reopening of an old wound. "Never mind, I will try anyway," she said, trying to summon up the courage. "For Isaac, I will do it."

Instead she walked three blocks over to the office of Solomon Levi. She walked pass the door and looked covertly through the window. From there she could see someone sitting behind a desk.

"I should turn around and go home," Jenna thought. "What am I doing here?" She drew a deep breath, walked to the front and pushed against the door. There was a middle-aged man about fifty sitting in front of a computer monitor. He glanced in her direction and looked away. She put her hands in her pockets and squeezed her fists, hesitating. She could have pretended to have made a mistake and left. She just didn't want to. Jenna advanced toward the counter, not sure of what she was going to say. What was she doing coming uninvited to someone's office, and especially this someone who might very well summon the police. Right then she envisioned herself being handcuffed and shoved into a police car for trespassing.

Solomon felt her hesitation and kindly asked her to come in as he typed on the keyboard. She took it as a sign from God that she was doing the right thing. "Excuse me sir, but I was wondering if I might speak to you for a moment. My name is..."

"I know who you are. You are Jenna. Isaac spoke of you."

Jenna blinked. She had expected anger but when he turned and spoke the name of his son his voice was filled with tenderness.

Solomon turned around and began typing again. The silence, though it lasted for only a moment, became intensely uncomfortable. To break it he turned around to show that he was not disturbed by her presence. He made an effort to soften his expression and then his voice. "How can I help you?"

"Mr. Lévi, I came here to ask you if you would please come to the cemetery where your son is buried for the unveiling. You know, in accordance with your tradition.

It's been a year sir and I was just hoping that you had found it in your heart not to be angry with your son anymore. Isaac loved you. He told me that all the time. So if you need to be angry, be angry and then forgive him. Next week you're supposed to go to your son's grave and honor his memory in a way it should be honored. Maybe you didn't think he was a good son but believe me, Mr. Levi, he was good."

"I know," Solomon signed.

"What?" She whispered, stunned.

He rose from his seat and walked over to the counter where Jenna stood. "The problem is I wanted him to be perfect." His eyes filled up. "I thought I could force him to change and make himself different. I thought I could force Isaac to make the journey I wanted him to take. He couldn't. Oh, he might have been better for a

while but he would have eventually continued because he had no choice. I knew him well enough to know that my son and his heart were inseparable and his beliefs were part of his heart. It was because of my cruelty and my pressure that Isaac took his own life, and his mother lost a sensitive and kind child. Now that it's too late I don't need him to be perfect anymore. I just need him."

For a moment she felt a chord of compassion for this emotionally limited, but critically wounded man. In that instant her heart flowed towards this him. She wanted to lay her contention aside but, however penitent, Jenna could not quite forgive Solomon for hurting Isaac the way he did, even though part of her believed that Isaac left because he wanted to, because felt defeated, and that all his efforts would never come to anything.

Isaac knew that he was not fighting an easy battle; perhaps the pain from being separated from your family and the pressure of helping the resistance finally overcame him, Mr. Levi."

"I'm not so sure of that. Isaac was completely committed and would have continued to fight as long as it took. I think the reason my son ended his life was because, for a long time. I kept trying to make him a certain kind of person, the kind of person I thought he should be and he just wasn't like that. And when I think about it, I think for so long he tried to tell me and still please me at the same time. He tried to make me understand but I wasn't about to listen. I was determined to have everything my way. What was best for me was best for Isaac. Now I know that underneath Isaac was dying. When he couldn't make me see that, something broke inside of him and he couldn't stand being here anymore."

Jenna nodded and said, "We all miss him very much."

He sat back in his chair and rested his hands on his lap. There was stillness and quiet. After several moments he turned around towards in his chair. "I will be there, but before you go I was wondering if you might do me a small favor? Actually it is not for me but something on behalf of my son?"

"Yes, if I can Mr. Levi."

Solomon walked to the back of his office and began to turn the numbers of a safe he kept there. Reaching into the safe once it popped open, he pulled out an envelope. He returned to the front counter and placed it in front of Jenna.

"This is everything that Isaac saved. I learned after his death that he'd been giving the family of a little boy named Yunus a hundred dollars every month. This money I have here is for them. It is what Isaac wished. There are also some instructions inside this envelope that will help get my son's gift to them every month."

"Thank you Mr. Levi."

"It is not my doing; is it Isaac's" he sadly acknowledged.

He followed her towards the door and commented as he walked along, "We've moved from our home. I don't know if you knew."

Jenna shook her head acknowledging that she did not.

"We could not live there without smelling the actual scent of death. We could not be near the spot where Isaac died without remembering his body laying in the place he once played.

Jenna timidly said, "Good bye Mr. Levi." Before she knew it she was out of the door. Outside she leaned against the wall and closed her eyes, thinking of Isaac. Solomon Levi stared through the glass as Jenna walked away. The sun would soon set. The ordinarily busy street had taken on a slower pace. He gazed at the veiled girl as she stood patiently across the street, waiting for a bus. He felt the absence of any animosity for her, and realized a compass of compassion, too complex for him to calculate at a pivotal point in time, had guided the relationship she had shared with his son. In the end it became one of his greatest failings. Even with his vast experience in the world and in his wildest imaginings, Solomon could not have foreseen how pride, short-sightedness and futility would come and destroy what was most precious to him.

Whatever his failings, he had to find a way to resolve them. He had not accepted, when Isaac lived, that there is no blueprint to relationships and that they have to be settled in compassionate ways with space for both to get what it is they need. He needed to forgive himself. He could live his life in the deep whole of regrets of what should have been. An important part of this journey would be the steps he took to Isaac's unveiling.

All Jenna had ever wanted in her life was a world that could be made right when it went wrong. Recently she learned she'd have to settle for the fact that she could make only a small part of it right. She was satisfied that she'd done that by going to see Solomon Levi.

Jenna walked for a little while. There was no place to rush to and not much to do. She sat on the bus bench and let her face feel the sun. A car backfired in the street and an old woman fell to the ground covering the back of her head with her purse. The avenue shopkeepers ran to the windows, and the tenants above the stores came out to their balconies. Everyone showed some degree of fear on his or her face. A couple of people laughed when they saw what had actually caused the commotion, but Jenna found no humor in what she saw, believing it to be a sign of the times and a sign of what was still yet to come.

Many attended the service in Isaac's honor. There were a host of relatives, friends from the university and his comrades from Jews for Justice, including a few Muslims. Jenna stayed in the background, hoping to remain unnoticed. They were all in the same place for the same reason, but there was a distance between them, in thoughts and ideas, in hopes and actualizations. Confounding when you thought about it. Here she was in a Jewish cemetery, catching glimpses into the faces of a diverse group of people. In all likelihood one was unsure and probably apprehensive of the other. It was only the grave that united them. She was amazed that one person masked by wood and earth had evoked this unbiased gesture of affection and created a temporary bridge that connected all of them beyond their ideological differences.

Isaac's parents seemed to be devout Jews. Jenna had thought Isaac to be more political than religious. This was perhaps what made him different, this was perhaps what led them to separate lives.

Isaac's parents were a striking couple, dignified in their grief. They walked hand-in hand with the rest of their children to their eldest son's grave. In the minutes that followed several friends and relatives trailed to the gravesite. Jenna recognized some of Isaac's friends from the university and from the Jews for Justice headquarters. Jenna did not walk alongside the others. She felt no urge to hold onto anyone. She came with no flowers or any symbol of grief, but that did not mean that she cared for him any less.

It was strange seeing some of them in their religious dress. She watched some of the students give Isaac's parents their condolences. It was as if he had just died. She, too, felt saddened and reached into her pocket for a tissue to wipe away her tears.

Isaac's family began crying as everyone else watched without interference. His mother wept with her whole body. There was one very cold part of Jenna that thought his family deserved every one of those tears, especially when she looked over at the headstone and missed the man who was buried beneath it.

For many who attended Isaac's unveiling, it was one of the most difficult days they would ever have to remember, yet it was merciful too because it involved forgiveness, and the kind of civility in death that could not be found towards the end of his life. There were plenty of tears, muffled sobs and expressions of regret. Some held hands; others recited prayers. She wondered, "Why are they here now, when they were not here before? Why now? Was it because his unveiling gave them the chance to repent for the condolences not given when he died? For the grief once selfishly withheld? Did their presence signify love or atonement? And could atonement and guilt ever be an expression of love?"

She edged closer until she was standing nearer to the crowd. Solomon walked towards her with his wife and thanked her for coming, but she made no reply. She was much too affected. Her eyes were wet and she could not have spoken without bursting into tears. Jenna knew that she would always be in awe of this young Jewish man as she reminisced about some of those heartbreaking days when distraught people who had been given notices to vacate their land or close their shops came to the Justice office to solicit Isaac's help or advice. Jenna could see the compassion and anguish- and deep down fatigue in his eyes, and once she had to wonder if she was about to see him cry. He'd sit there at his desk and look for solutions that did not exist for those people who were too old to resettle in a camp or just leave Palestine. Isaac didn't have to do any of it. He didn't have to listen to their endless complaints and problems. It made her wonder how had the social allegiance of someone who had been treated so well by his own people throughout his life been so radically transformed? What had prompted this young man, born to privilege and polished by a fine education that would have led him to a life of promise, risk giving up everything in the beginning of his life? Why would he choose to become a rebel and position himself to help Palestinians?

After the ceremony, Jenna made her way back to Ramallah. She walked along the avenue, moving through the crowds feeling puzzled and listless. It was warm and the sun seemed to send a ray directly on top of her head. She wished to go to

somewhere peaceful and cool, a place where she could sleep without dreaming, but she knew of no such place, and anyway there was still a plan that had to be set in motion.

The evening before what was to be her last, she went to visit the home of her sister Aaliyah. As with most sibling relationships, there is always one dominant member. For Jenna it was Aaliyah, she was so much like her mother in looks and disposition, but to Jenna she was also a friend and Jenna was hers. It was Aaliyah's care and support in the face of their mother's death that had helped her greatly as Salsan slipped, by inevitable stages, from the world in which Jenna was afraid to live without her.

Aaliyah's friendship and being her sister meant the world to Jenna.

Aaliyah had just finished helping the children with their homework, and she appeared a little tired. She looked over at Jenna and shamefully admitted that she wished that she'd gone to high school. At the age of thirteen, Aaliyah had decided to quit school, opting to stay at home and care for the house with her mother. At the time it did not seem all that unusual. Salsan, herself, had no formal education. A lot of girls believed that there wasn't much point in spending endless hours in the classroom if all they intended to be was a wife and a mother. Now that Aaliyah had children she felt differently.

"You can't believe how bad I feel when they ask me how to spell a word and I cannot tell them. Even to help them with their history, I constantly have to refresh my memory. Most of the time they are teaching me things. There are so many new things for them now. It's not enough for them to have teachers, you know- the parents have to help them as well if they are going to really learn anything!"

Jenna felt badly about her sister's insecurity and poor opinion about herself. "You are too hard on yourself. You have no idea what a good mother you are. Looking at you makes me wonder what kind of mother I would have been."

"Been? Why do you talk like that Jenna? You'll have children someday!"

Jenna shrugged, hoping to make the conversation light; "All I know is that I never saw children with better manners than yours."

The compliment seemed to light up Aaliyah's face.

Resting her head on folded arms, Jenna watched as Aaliyah put her children to bed. Every night it was the same ritual; she'd read them a story and last, she'd sing them a song. Aaliyah never liked being away from her children, not even for a little while. Even when she had to go to the doctor or had to go into town to do some shopping, she said she felt misery whenever she got her coat and said goodbye to her children. It was easy to see why. There was so much life within that house when they played and sang, so much laughter and so much affection. When Aaliyah was not looking, Jenna placed a letter she'd written the day before in her sister's dresser drawer. In it she explained what she planned to do and why. She told her that she believed that martyrdom was the only way Palestinians could be heard and she described how the Israelis had taken away almost everything she had ever loved, almost everything that had meant anything to her. She blamed them even for Salsan's death. Jenna advised her sister to raise her children to defend

what was rightfully theirs. To both sisters she left her undying love and gratitude and she asked that they always remain close to Ahmed, and to tell him that he was everything to her.

After she completed her task, Aaliyah motioned Jenna into the kitchen. Over tea they talked about their mother, their brother, and of course, the future. It was the future part that distracted Jenna and filled her with thoughts so that she ceased to hear her sister's words for a few moments. As distracted as she was she knew that there was not enough time to say all she wanted to, yet she felt completely happy to hold back and listen to the voice she would hear for the last time. While she listened, she was all the time admiring Aaliyah- her kindness and her purity, together with her sincerity.

With a sense of sadness Jenna thought that those were the things she would miss most. She'd miss the way Aaliyah's children climbed all over her whenever she came to visit; she'd miss seeing them grow up and knowing who they turned out to be. She would miss these kinds of moments with sisters that warmed her in the simplest ways. She thought about some of the other things she would miss, too. She'd miss seeing herself a few years from now giving birth to her own child and holding that child next to her, smelling its pure scent. She'd miss all the people who sparked feelings of love and respect within her, like Zakki. He made her feel more than she had ever thought she could. She'd miss the sound of his voice when he called her name. As she sat there, she tried not to think about all she expected to happen. She knew that anything was possible.

"What's wrong with you? You look like you just lost your best friend." Aaliyah flashed her a look of concern. Jenna was a bit surprised because she found her statement to be rather foretelling, but, she shrugged off her comment and remarked that she was just tired. Aaliyah wasn't buying any of it. From Jenna's eyes alone she knew that there was something.

"There's always that little part of you that you keep secret, even to those who care about you the most."

Jenna smirked, "Oh yeah?"

"Yeah, really Jenna," Aaliyah commented on a more serious note.

"That's nonsense," Jenna replied.

Aaliyah glanced at her mistrustfully, but her suspicion receded, pushed back by the same sisterly desire to trust and protect.

"Well," Jenna said, "I'd better go."

"No," pleaded Aaliyah, "Why don't you sleep here tonight?"

"No, I'm going. I have to clean and study for my exams." Aaliyah had no idea that Jenna had not returned to her studies.

Don't worry, I'll see you soon," Jenna concluded hurriedly, noticing again the concerned look in her sister's eyes at her last words.

"Goodbye," she said to her sister, holding her hand, kissing her and then taking momentary stares into her face, with a look that could only draw her near to her. Then Jenna looked down hesitantly and said, "I love you, Aaliyah."

Troubled by the despairing look with which she had uttered these words, Aaliyah took hold of Jenna's arm and, again, begged her to stay. She refused so

Aaliyah put on her scarf and walked Jenna beyond the door. It was one of the few times Jenna hated that her sister could read her emotions so well. Jenna hugged her sister again, but it was not as usual because she missed her already. Jenna walked away, but after going a short distance she turned to look around and found Aaliyah still standing there. It was the last time their eyes met. Aaliyah, sensing that something was not right, wanted to follow after her, but instead composed herself and remained where she stood.

Jenna thought about all the promises of peace and good fortune that still found hope in Aaliyah's spirit. She wondered if it would ever be that way for her and all of their people. Some of her optimistic friends thought it would; some of the politicians led people like Aaliyah to believe that they did not have long to wait. She prayed that they were right and she hoped that her sister would live to see it. Jenna waved her away and crossed over to the next street.

"I am going to break her heart," Jenna thought to herself, then silently grieved inside because she could not tell her how lucky she had been to have a sister like her. Yet at that moment she wished that she had never known her that no one had ever loved her and she had never loved anyone. How much easier this would be. Jenna wanted to grab hold of her sister, hug her as tightly as she could to her chest and ascend to a safe place beyond the heavens, to a place of perfect bliss. She wanted to tell her sister that she would have hurt anything that ever moved to harm her and that she would be giving her own life to prove it.

It was a chilly night, and she was glad for the warmth that enveloped her when she opened the door. From the entry way she could see that there was a light on inside. How surprised she was to find Zakki there. All evening he had been waiting for her and he appeared to be in a state of nervousness. There was no greeting, only, "Where have you been?"

She could only gaze at him astonished. His tone was eerie. Jenna could not look at him directly, knowing that if their eyes met, she might easily betray the secret of the entire operation. Jenna lowered her eyes and turned away until he could no longer see her face except in profile.

She did not have to see him to know that he was in a despondent state; his misery filled the entire room.

He followed her into the kitchen, where she asked him if there was something she could get for him, but he refused. She did not know what to do so she started to pile the dirty dishes into the sink. Her hands were in the suds, but she wasn't cleaning. She was motionless.

"Jenna?"

Slowly she turned towards him, but he didn't speak. She kept quiet, knowing that Zakki would pick up where he left off when he was ready.

"Jenna, I am going away and I will not be returning, but before I go I must know something."

His news surprised her but she knew that it was all for the best.

"Go ahead Zakki, you can ask me anything." She said, sensing his shyness and difficulty.

"What was I to you?" He was almost on the point of tears.

This was her moment, the moment she thought that she would not have. It was the only moment she'd ever share her heart with a man, and this was not any man; this was Zakki. Years ago when he was about to embark to Afghanistan with her brother, she had hardly noticed him at all. But from the moment she met him again, right there in her own home, after he'd come to bring her mother news of the death her brother, Zakki had always had a special place inside of her. From that moment on, she knew, somehow, he would be her last thought on this side of her grave. "You know Zakki, how we are taught that God holds our hearts between His two fingers and that He can turn it anyway he wants?"

"Yes, I know." He answered.

"Well, it was you who held my heart between yours."

Zakki then turned to face her with the most painful smile she had ever seen. It was awkward, having all this between them.

She continued to speak. "I do not remember the exact moment or the hour I knew I had feelings for you. I was in the middle of them before I knew that they were there, I only know that I am grateful for them and that if I had married, I would have wanted that person to be you." Suddenly Zakki was filled up with the perfect and indescribable love for the woman that he would never marry. He did not know it, but her love for him had sustained her and given her confidence in love of herself and in the cause to which she aspired.

He sat down at her mother's kitchen table, and then he got up. For a couple of minutes he seemed hardly to know what he was doing and could not stand still. She knew he wanted to say something and that whatever it was, it was causing him a considerable amount of difficulty. However, it was Jenna who was to take command of the urgency of the moment; she needed him to know something else.

"Zakki, there is something else I need to say to you. I need to thank you for how happy you've made my family and me; in all the things you did for us. I want you to know that I know why you never asked me to marry you and what you must have gone through making that decision. You were just trying to protect me. Now I don't know what exactly comes next beyond this life, no one does, not exactly, but I do believe that there is mercy so I will find you waiting."

Zakki looked away. "I didn't marry you because I didn't believe that I had anything of value to offer you. To offer a life, you must first have one. So many times I wished I could have come to your mother and asked permission but..." Zakki did not finish. His eyes said the rest.

"I understood." She said. "I understood."

That she was content to love him just the way he was made him feel honored, but it was also a sign that she loved him too irresponsibly. That was the way of Zakki's life; every element of happiness had some little trace of unhappiness. To live pure happiness was not of this earth.

They were silent. Jenna felt grateful for his brief, but humble, declaration. Zakki was a man who talked about his feelings; he just never let you inside of them. Sadly, her childhood ideas about love and marriage would not inoculate her from destiny. She could not have been protected from being on a collision course with a

man, burdened with a warrior spirit so intense, that a commitment with any woman could not be consummated without the shadows of rage, sorrow and blood. His lot in life was determined by Israeli occupation and the vision that one day it would all end. He was a man who had grown tolerant of an existence that left him incapable of shaping a life with any woman he might love. He forsook Jenna because he loved her and because any real happiness seemed unrelated to him and what he must do. He could never bring forth children with her unless he was sure that they would never have a childhood like his own, that they would never be humiliated by soldiers and never be made poor and hungry. He tried to think of the right words that would explain, but he could think of nothing; it was a frustrating but irrefutable fact that there is only one life on this earth allotted to every man.

Right at that moment Jenna was able to stop aching for the life she would never have. She would never live to know it and maybe that was better. There was something sweet about not knowing, something poignant about being left with the thought of what could have been, where disappointment is not a sure thing. It's only a possibility that never comes to harm you. She held on desperately to her belief in the next life and looked at the man who had given her most of what passed for meaning in her life until now.

"Zakki? Did you know how much mamma loved you? You were such a comfort to her, to all of us. You made the last year of her life so much easier. I don't think she could have handled her illness as well as she did if you hadn't been here." Again they were both quiet. Then suddenly, at the same moment, they both looked towards each other and begin to speak. Zakki, serious and somber, Jenna with a shy and engaging smile, interrupted each other. Both stopped, waiting for the other to continue.

"Sorry, what were you going to say?"

"Oh, nothing important. Please tell me what you were going to say."

Then he said it!

"I know where you are going! I know what you are going to do!"

"He knows!" Jenna thought. Suddenly relief flooded her anxious face.

She remained standing in the middle of the room for a few moments. She felt as if there were irons locked around her legs. Somehow she carried herself over to the sink again and held herself up. All the emotion and anxiety that weighed so heavily on Jenna at that moment forced her to clutch the counter's edge.

Complete silence controlled the room. Jenna felt physically weak as she made herself stare out of the window, unable to say a word. Some seconds passed. Jenna turned towards Zakki, and for a few seconds she could not find her voice. She waited uneasily for him to say anything. Right away, she knew that he'd become acquainted with the plan. She also knew that he loved God more than he loved her and, therefore, would never attempt to stop her. Then he said something else that she had no way of expecting.

"Listen to me Jenna," he said, with his voice trembling. "I came here because I wanted you to know that wherever you go, I am not far behind. Understand I am not far behind you."

What may have been characterized as cryptic to someone else was apparent to her. As soon as he said it, she understood its meaning. She looked around and their eyes met. And by the expression in hers he knew that she understood his words. Jenna knew that there were to be more than one bombing in the city tomorrow, she just had never guessed that he might be involved in one of them. He saw shock and anguish register in Jenna's eyes that even her shyness and censored feelings could not conceal.

Jenna bit her lip and closed her eyes momentarily. She could not envision for him what she had envisioned for herself. Her heart made that way too difficult. She opened her mouth but briefly hesitated, her eyes glistening with tears. She blinked hard and brusquely rubbed a hand across her face.

She tried to compose herself and composed her voice, which stuttered, "How long have you known?"

"Since this morning," he answered. "I tried to not to come, but I had to. I could not end this without seeing you first."

Aimlessness among the Palestinians seemed intense at that time. The purpose of having more than one operation was to increase morale among their people, decrease a sense of hopelessness and most of all, to make Arafat appear to be out of control. It, undoubtedly, had been a terrible year so far. Top leaders had been assassinated, the cemeteries were filled with too many civilian casualties of their own, and there was no economic relief in sight. It had sown seeds of doubt in many, including the frailties of the last engagement in which the bomber should have caused the enemy more fatalities. As it were, only four people were killed and this toll included the bomber.

Jenna gasped and lifted her eyes to see his face. In the flicker of a moment, tears were streaming down her face. At the same time, everything within him softened at once and he, like her, quietly wept. For nearly twenty minutes neither of them spoke, yet there was a sense of peace and understanding between them. Then Zakki stretch out his hand, took a piece of paper and wrote something on it. He read over it, folded it carefully and pushed it across the table towards her.

She looked at him questioningly and then took the paper and opened it. As she read it she felt ill in the pit of her stomach and then the feeling of sickness came over her. The message said, "At 12 o'clock noon I will be deceased. I will no longer exist in this dimension. At half past the hour you will join me."

A shudder passed through her when she thought of him dying, but strangely enough, it made her less fearful of losing her own life. It made Jenna feel like she was embarking on a journey, and although this one was permanent, she was not going to be alone.

She held the paper in her hands as if it could bring her some part of him. Jenna wished, so much, that she could have been his wife. By coming to inform Jenna of what would occur tomorrow, Zakki was demonstrating his own need to close the door on their complex and impossible relationship and show her how much he cared. It was the only thing that he had to give her. Before he left he looked at her and said, "I admired you more than you ever realized."

"Sometimes you gave me more credit than I deserved," she replied, but with a rush of warmth inside her at the strength of his admiration. Zakki seemed calm, accepting of his decision to end his life. He had been trained to welcome dying and had been so close to death almost all of his adult life. Years of bearing witness to it, imagining it and being near to it alleviated a man's fears. He'd survived bombs, gunfire and arm-to-arm combat. He knew that his rendezvous with death was predictable. He knew that he was experiencing one of his bitterest moments. He was a man twenty-nine years old who had run away from intimate love, not wanting it so much for the feeling of being loved, but wanting it for the rite of completeness that it would have awakened in him, creating a transformation of experience that would have given him access to being a complete man. Jenna followed Zakki beyond the door. As soon as she stepped out she felt an icy coldness grip her, yet she did not mind.

When he looked back at her for the last time there were tears in his eyes. She'd only seen him cry once, when he mother died. She stifled the impulse to run after him and throw herself in his way. Instead she took a step back into destiny's grasp. Zakki said goodbye and began walking rapidly down the street. Jenna called out his name, but he turned only to repeat the words he'd spoken earlier, "Wherever you go, I am not far behind."

No need for any more words. To herself she muttered, "May God take you soul gently as I have prayed that He will take mine."

Out of ruins they had found and lost each other.

Now Jenna cried and seeing him disappear into the night was enough to break her in two. For Zakki days and nights simply rotated themselves, bringing him closer to death, but it was the Israelis he blamed for degrading his passage and for filling it with indecency and misfortune.

Jenna knew that she could never appreciate any life that Zakki was not apart of, and so, isolated because she was convinced that the strength of love could never really reach her, could never be sustained in the world in which they live. They could neither go forward or backward. It was with this appalling certainty that she watched the man who should have been her husband walk away. She could see her life now and she could see what it might have been twenty years from now. But what she couldn't see was a way to get from here to there. For this reason, Jenna accepted that she and Zakki would die, that their time would arrive tomorrow was of no major importance; it would only upstage their mutual hatred for living in a debased and tragic life. She wondered, what else could a Palestinian do with his only asset, his life. What else was he obligated to do with it? He must make every attempt to end it on the harshest terms possible. It would be this thought that kept both of them moving forward. Their people had been forced to look down to a ledge where a man hangs without human privilege and out of the reach of help. Beyond the man, only just ahead of his grip, stands everything that once held him safe and whole; home, trade and culture. Below him lies a spiraling dark pit.

Once she returned to the house she went to her room and tried to prepare herself for bed. But who could sleep? Who could passively lie down, close their eyes and

rest when distracted, as she was, by the events ahead of her. She put on her mother's robe and decided to sleep in her bed. She sat down heavily, more fatigued than she thought she could be and still be unable to sleep. Jenna looked over at the clock. It seemed to move incredibly slowly, far more slowly than ever before. It was as if the world had gone into slow motion. She went over and over the plan in her mind. Once again she studied a layout of the theatre. She studied the architecture of the bomb and how it should be placed on her body. For the last month she'd practiced with twenty pounds of weight strapped on her body, now she could do it with practically no effort.

That night Jenna could not sleep, she spent the whole of it praying and remembering. Eventually, she yielded to the drowsiness that came upon her, but that was not until about five o'clock in the morning. When the alarm sounded, at about half past seven and she awoke, the day was shining through the window. She got up assenting to the situation ahead of her; she was prepared to fulfill the agreement as promised, without deliberation, without expectation, tightly restraining all her own human inclinations and thoughts, determined not to change the events of the day and to keep up her nerve without allowing herself to reflect about what was happening and about to happen. She'd fortified herself to move in the direction of Jerusalem. She dressed herself repeating again and again, "Oh God. Lord of the world, have mercy on me!" She sounded these words as she closed the door behind her.

She walked away from her home and what was the life of Jenna Hayat. The air was heavy with the smell of oven-baked bread. It was a cool morning but bright and calm. A score of people seemed to be taking advantage of it on the streets. Once in the lane, she walked looking at the ground in thought, only at moments betraying an unclear yet intense uneasiness. She stopped short. It was the chill that made her hesitated and wonder if she should go back and get her coat. The she realized it didn't matter; she probably wouldn't live long enough to need it. She calmly trotted along, thinking it was easier to go than she had supposed it would be. She got inside a taxi that was to take her to an appointed location. She was leaving Ramallah, a ghetto for Palestinians to live and die within, a place for settlers to take possession of when they decided they needed more land. For this place was a disfigurement of sorts, an ugly symbol of emotional waste. Jenna was sorely aware that she was walking away from a life she refused to live. As the world beyond these boundaries pondered the future of suicide bombers, she knew that hundreds would follow. Places like Ramallah and Jenin, Hebron and Nablus would provide a rationale. Most would prefer to believe that this kind of action was rare, but it would become more common than a date tree in the Middle East. Jenna had seen it fill up Israeli and Arab graveyards. Palestinian mother's tears inspired such actions without even knowing they were imparting such deadly ideals in their sons. Now even their daughters were treading the path of what they believed to be justifiable homicide. The young and old will be waiting in line, frustrated and impatient, and like many others before them- dying to kill. And the promise of eternal peace will provide them with all the weaponry they would ever need to ruin

the lives of the people who took over their land. Now Jenna Hayat would be rid of a past entangled in a web of grief and warfare weaved in such complex ways that made it seem that she was created to surrender to the lures of revolutionary suicide.

As she rode down the highway, Jenna looked across a land that was vast in history, religion, and culture. She thought surely there was enough there for everyone. The sun's rays lighted the soil on which she was born. The mountains' height gave it uneasy shelter but not refuge. Still, looking at her motherland was like looking at a part of herself. What misfortune that all these immeasurable things could not have been more commonly shared. What misfortune that parts of what she'd borne created a disfigurement and lesions in her damaged heart- the part where misery and pain was too immense to heal any suffering.

First she journeyed to a section of Jerusalem called Khanesa Al- Qayama, a part of town primarily inhabited by Christian Palestinians. As planned she went inside a dentist's office above a flower shop. She walked through the door and turned to go down to the end of the hallway. After descending down a back staircase she encountered a young woman, who with familiarity, clutched her arm. She was led to a hidden room. Once inside, a tall, lean elderly lady greeted her. She looked very tired and had an indistinguishable smile and a odd, rather shy expression. She proceeded to dress her with care. "You must hold very still dear."

Jenna's hair was pulled back and braided. After she was stripped waist up, explosives were placed below her breasts and efficiently attached to her skin with duct tape. She was dressed in a high-collared, white blouse, a black jacket and a mid-length skirt. Studying herself in a full-length mirror, she completely understood the role that she was about to play. She looked old-fashioned and academic; she did not look like a bomber. When the old lady finished, she lifted her eyes and looked at Jenna with a glance firm and full of thought, yet at the same time there was an obvious look of pity.

As she looked at herself in the mirror she thought of the strangeness of it all, the difficulty. The moment was so close at hand and the danger of making a mistake was ever present in her mind. She could very well end up killing only herself! Something was bothering her. Suicide, that's what it was, a horrible act and one in which she would die. A chill came over her body when she thought of her own blood exploding out of her skin, her head ripped from her body, one part detached from another. There was a weakening and sickening sensation in the pit of her stomach, as if she'd been stomped by a heavy boot. Her lips trembled and her throat felt desiccated. She thought of what her mother once said after Ayah blew herself up in the supermarket, "Decent, sane people do not do such things." But then something inside hardened, and she resented agonizing over it, particularly now. She was committed to this deed and Zakki would not be far behind. She must be brave like him and thrust himself forward. A voice sounded from some place within, "You have chosen, not you must act! You must! You must act!"

She knew that she was one more bomber- not such a big profound blow to the Israelis under the current circumstances, but sufficient enough to cause some grief and make enough of them fearful of the future. Terrible indeed it was but it was an

opportunity to voice her pain and contempt. "Well, this is not so terrible at all" as she viewed her reflection and as she pondered her place in paradise. It was more than absolution; it was a place endless pleasure.

Jenna had gone inside looking like herself and had come out looking like someone else. She felt hideously exposed; she'd never gone outside without her headscarf since she was a girl of only ten years old.

The people on the bus were reading their morning papers. For a while she rode with her eyes shut, trying to make her mind blank to thoughts of her mother and the sound of her voice saying, "No, Jenna!"

She sat uncomfortably, believing that by ending her life in the theater on that destructive afternoon she would perhaps move Israelis one bloody step forward towards de-occupation. To her this was a just act. Israelis were wrong, not her. Hadn't she'd lived in a state of perpetual torment? For that reason she was pardoned, acquitted in her own mind and in the eyes of God. Never mind the different opinions; everyone has to acknowledge that there are some acts which everywhere and at all times, regardless of the legal system, are justified and should be regarded as so as long as man is man. So she thought. She also thought about the reward. As Zakki once explained, "When a suicide bomber decides his fate, he must always envision a prize for that fate. In order to walk down the path of death, a bomber must believe that there is some good for him at the end of that path. He needs a vision of a promised land to have the strength to go. The Promised Land for the Palestinian rebel is paradise. All his hopes and desires are concentrated on it."

Paradise for Jenna had once seemed too far, but now she was on her way.

The day seemed brighter now. All the coldness of the morning had fallen away. On route they were stopped at a security checkpoint, but the officer did not request identification. It would not have mattered if he had. Jenna was ready. He eyed her fiercely, but he did so to all the others. The officer disembarked and the bus continued to make its way to the city center. Sitting towards the back of the comfortable bus, mildly rocking with the swift pace of the vehicle, Jenna, once again reviewing the events of the last few hours amid the increasing rumble of the engine, saw her situation in a rather different light from what it had appeared to be only a week ago. Now the thought of death did not appear to be so tragic and she did not feel so very alone. Now she rebuked herself for the level of self-pity to which she had sunk. "Others have made this same terrible journey, and done so having suffered more throughout their lives. How could I bring myself to think that my losses have hurt more than anyone one else's?" And without further deliberating over whose pain was more, she began to view the city. The traffic was jammed up, slow enough for her to scan the foot traffic streaming pass the restaurants, shops and toy stores. She remembered a moment in time, long ago, when she had happily journeyed these same streets with her father, on the way to the bakery where she would find sweets and fresh breads. There was no fear then. There was just a little girl who clung to her papa and listened to the laughter in his voice. "Was that little girl really me," she thought? So many things at that time, in

that period of innocence, had seemed so wonderful, and now were forever lost and unattainable.

The bus suddenly stopped. The light seemed to remain red for a long time. There was a man on the street, who looked at her through the window and bowed his head. "Oh, change, light," she said in her mind, making no attempt to return the gesture. The worst part of her life was the inability to go back in time, to start over again, and to hide any memory of what had come to be. She remembered the day her father died. She remembered his dead body covered with a blanket, the blood running beyond it, and his hand extended beyond what was obscured. She remembered his watch ticking away around his wrist as it lay still, the second hand in motion, and wished that she could hide the memory of it. "Why?" She said, "Why?" and she was on the verge of tears.

Jenna arrived in downtown Jerusalem at exactly 12:05 noon. She could hear the sirens of emergency medical crews and police vehicles far off in the distance. There was no reason to guess why. She heaved a deep breath. People came into the streets. The crowds outside thickened and the pace of the people hastened. Her mouth became parched. "Zakki. Zakki," she thought. Squeezing her eyes shut failed to erase an image of Zakki dead. "He is gone! It is finished!" Jenna said to herself, as she pressed her forehead against the window of the bus, and in reaction to her unbearable vision, the conception of the stillness of the body after it meets death and of the dreadful nightmare merged into one and immersed her entire being with a chilling fear. She forced herself with all her might to keep a self-control that would keep her dry-eyed and firm. "Was it painful?" she wondered. She must not allow herself to think about it. She buried all her grief and alarm, rather than allowing them to rise up inside her like relentless demons, unleashing all of his horrors. Zakki was dead. She knew it. There are some things you can just feel, and the thought of him waiting for her made Jenna feel only more determined, more fixed to resist her fear. She remembered the expression on his face, his parting words, "Wherever you go, I am with you." Jenna had known that she always had his affection from the very start. This was not a supposition. It was always so clear to her. She saw it in the ways in which he revealed himself to her, in his kindness and grace.

"I, too, valued him, but had to exchange him for a cause that demanded everything from both of us. Now he has passed from this life, "A life that has taken all that it can take from me!"

Her instinct was right. He was gone. Zakki had now passed from this maddening life in which every fleeting day and hour had become for him more incomprehensible and disagreeable. Jenna was convinced that he would be better off in the place he awoke. He would not be disappointed, nor would she, after joining him there. Right at that moment she felt like a tightrope walker who holds his breath as he treads carefully with only a slender strand of support- terrified of making the smallest mistake that will prove disastrous. The bomber does not fear the disaster, however, but fears only that it occurs before its time. So many thoughts engrossed her, so much that she did not notice the bus coming to a

complete stop until passengers lined themselves in the aisle, waiting to disembark. She got out with the crowd of other commuters and kept herself among them as if she were one of them, all the while remembering why she had come there and what it was she intended to do.

She walked past soldiers without being spoken to and without apparent interest. "Very well," she thought. "They have no idea. They have no reason to look at me any differently than they would look at anyone else. Oh, but if I had on my scarf, I would be something ugly, awful, dangerous and incomprehensible!" That she did not catch their attention meant that they took her for an Israeli, an ordinary citizen. With a gratifying expression she continued towards her destination. Plodding down the boulevard, she made every effort to conceal her disgust for the people walking past and on the side of her, and there was the thought that once she arrived at the theater she would make these people sorry for everything. The clearness, with which she saw her own life, and the life of the people she passed along the way, gave her an unwavering incentive. Jenna began to rush along, as if she were being hunted, more than ever determined to achieve her objective. She hurried on. "Keep up your pace and direction," she told herself. "Keep up your nerve but don't create suspicion!"

She scarcely looked at passersby's and avoided faces altogether. A truck horn sounded in the traffic and made her jump. Her heart was beating in her jugular vein. A huge truck, gears grinding, surged past and she fought the panic that overcame her, trying to think of nothing but the mechanics of martyrdom and being reunited with Zakki. She stayed on course, focusing carefully on nothing but the objective ahead.

Upon reaching the crowded theatre she made her way to the head of the line and realized that she had completely forgotten to select a movie and had to make a great effort to pick one quickly. "Cinema 3," she said, handing the clerk the cost of the ticket. She then filed past several others, some of them children. This was the only discomfiting reflection about her objective. "I will, inevitably, cause the death of those who are so innocently unconnected to our suffering," she thought. "I have never wanted any child to endure pain." But then she came back to her own past, and remembered her own pain. "As a child I suffered. Until now I have been suffering. I don't have anything anymore." Jenna watched the children hold hands and cling to their mothers and she was resentful. "The death of my mother was almost predictable." In her mind, one pain naturally followed the other. More and more she'd become unwillingly detached from all that was left to her. Her will to die increased with every loss, and as the conditions of her life became foreseeable and cruel, Jenna felt no human affinity. Her mother had died and, now Zakki was dead, too. All that was life was over.

She handed an attendant her ticket, thinking that life, a sequence of increasing torment, was approaching its end. "I am going," she muttered inwardly, and thought about how dreadfully her heart was beating.

He pointed toward Cinema 3 and reminded her that the movie had already begun. She returned the smile he'd given and prayed that he did not speculate over the paleness of her face, her parched lips, or her breathing, which came in soft and

nervous broken gasps. Jenna walked hastily down the corridor; on each side of her the human forces of opposition that had carved her fate passed. Their cheerfulness and pleasure, the ease with which they moved created a greater inducement. Three high school girls ventured passed her as if they were in some sort of a race. They turned their heads to look at her. One whispered a remark to the others, and she felt that they were laughing at her. Jenna slowed her steps and let them have a great amount of room for maneuver, for she wanted nothing more than to have them out of her sight. Looking at those girls as they make their distance; Jenna thought that none of this would be her fault. They, not she, were the guilty ones. Anyone is guilty when they stand there and watch, even if someone else is pulling the trigger when, "the murders of my people have their tacit approval."

Her world, and now, looking at theirs, affirmed her sovereignty, affirmed why she was in that theater. She could not make a mistake. She would not make a mistake. There was only one act left, one without alternative. It was the only calculation that would equal the sum total of an inescapable disaster.

She shook her head trying to clear it.

As she continued to dart down the passageway she could hear shouts of laughter and felt that she had not a moment to lose. As she prepared to go into the viewing room, she looked inside, and was about to move in, feeling the adrenaline flowing. Her eyes flew from one head to another wondering which one of them would die this day, and then she suddenly she heard a voice and felt her left arm abruptly seized. She felt doomed; how had she been detected? She'd seen no one, but someone must have seen her! Would this be her only chance!

She spun quickly to face her interceptor as she reached into her blouse and grabbing the switch connected to the detonator. Her fingers closed around it. She met with her pursuer's eyes, face to face, "Eli!"

He knew he had recognized the woman he saw peering into the screening room. He stopped short and peered at the familiar face and advancing a few steps, gently reached for her arm. His eyes widened, turned bloodshot, and releasing her, he raised his hands into the air. With tears rushing down her face she stepped back, immediately trembling in every limb, unable to believe that she was seeing him. He looked at her shiver, looked at the way she was dressed and a shock registered in his eyes that he made no effort to conceal.

"Oh merciful God!" he said, as though trying to deny what he was seeing. When she looked at him full face, he looked at her carefully, and saw that she bore the look of fear. His expression was guileless and large, and he knew instinctively why she was there. He then folded his hands together and sorrowfully shook his head. Jenna wanted Eli not to be there, more than that she wanted not to see hurt in his eyes. Most of all she did not want to be the one who took away his life. Jenna wanted to warn him away, to tell him to run and that if he didn't he would die. But she remained quiet and would not allow herself to explain. She would not tell him that she was sorry or try to make him understand that they are both just victims of a two-sided tragedy. She stood there, her chest heaving with panic inside. So many thoughts shot across her head that she felt the need to clutch both sides of her head.

"Come to me, Jenna. Let me help you. It's okay. I can help you," Eli reassured as tears rolled down his kind face.

She looked at his extended hand and part of her wanted to take hold of it, but she couldn't. She realized right at that heinous moment something she had denied once upon a time; that they were always fated to be ruined, Eli, Isaac, Zakki, and herself- all ruined! At that moment she became intensely aware of the tautness of the rope that bound them altogether, a rope of ceaseless pulling, first to one side and then to the other, yet as her hand reached under her garment, it became unsteady.

"This is wrong. What are you doing? You can't be thinking to do such a terrible thing. You have your whole life ahead of you," he implored, with a real look of compassion in his kindly old eyes.

"You can't understand!" She answered.

"I do understand and I know what you want, but this is not the way! You cannot hurt innocent people just because you are unhappy with the way things are! God will never open His arms to the murderer of innocent people."

"How do you know what I want? What do you know really know about me, Eli? If you knew me then you would know that I want nothing, nothing at all except that this be all over. And I don't think you know anything about my God!"

"It is the same God."

"How can that be? Mine doesn't give a man permission to take what does not belong to him!"

"Stop it Jenna. You don't know what you saying. You are wrong!"

"I'm wrong? I'm wrong?" She thought. "Of course he thinks I'm wrong. He is a Jew. He lives inside himself. His real concern is for other Jews. He doesn't care about me. Eli could never understand about me. He hasn't seen what I have seen, suffered what I have suffered. He was given a chance for happiness, while my life was crushed again and again."

"I will not let you do this!" he shouted at her.

By then a few people had come upon them and passed with apprehension, not knowing what was going on, not knowing any better of the situation. They stared indirectly out of curiosity, and fell silent, looking at her up and down.

"Let me help you, Jenna. Please let me help you!" He pleaded, gesturing his hand frontward, resolutely, and with fear and disbelief, looking into straight into her face.

His pleading only served to infuriate her to the point of bodily pain, and she felt like covering her ears to avoid hearing the sound of his voice. She did not respond and continued to stand there with her hand on her waist, under the influence of anger.

Eli's voice was insistent and in a hushed but shrill tone, he explained, "This is outrageous!"

"I have no choice." She screeched.

When she looked at his demanding demeanor, heard the piercing tone of his voice, her distrust for him destroyed any kind of pity she might have felt for him. "Oh! Now that he is so angry, I can see his hatred for me." She thought.

“Surely you don’t want to die and take innocent people with you?”

It was then that she became fiercely disturbed and became anxious to make her position clear.

“No one is innocent here, and this life means nothing to me. For a long time it has been one I do not want, one that I am completely sick of. I am only glad that I can give it up for the sake of God and for my people.”

“This is insane, Jenna. Who has convinced you of such things? What have they done to you?”

Her thoughts and his assertion made her feel cold and hostile towards him. She was steadily becoming more and more angry, not because of the words that he said, but because of his tone which clearly proved that he felt offended and affronted.

“You don’t know anything,” She said contemptuously.

And as much as she wanted to make him understand, she knew that the opportunity would never arrive. He would never see that for Jenna, death had presented itself and it was coming towards her with an irrepressible force. When it arrived everything would come to an end, and that she, Jenna Hayat, who never really had the chance to begin anything, at that instant, had the chance to finish everything. Suddenly she saw Eli about to turn and she would not allow it.

“Don’t move Eli! She said, looking at him with contempt, straight into his eyes. She did not stare at him with her previous timidity and fear, that had seemed to reveal some misgivings, but with a determined manner, which did not weaken her intentions.

At this cataclysmic moment, and in the face of the most urgent need of immediate action and the sudden progression of rage sufficient, she easily disregarded his pleading hands and his gazed at her distorted and unbalanced face-mystified and all but empty in its registration of a compulsion to blow everything away. Jenna ingesting the wretchedness of her condition instantly fell into the tide of hatred, not only for herself but for Eli – for him wanting to contain her.

Eli saw what he considered to be madness and an urgency to stop her possessed him. He could see that their destruction was imminent. The expression on Jenna’s face was cold and decisive.

“Wait! Think about what you are going to do, just for a few minutes. Dear God, Jenna, just for a few minutes!”

She could not now, as she had done often, go over the whole course of her reasoning. She did not need to. She was connected to those reasons, and found all her in justifications in them more clear than ever before.

Her worldly desires were futile, and equal to rain water, which is a good thing in itself, but only it does not remain. Like the snow that melts under the rays of the sun, you cannot build a foundation on it. Whatever is allowed to thrive is only short-lived. Once the water is gone, so is the vegetation to which it has lent itself a vigorous show of abundance. Such are the dreams and hopes contained in the life of this world. Jenna remembered her own people, with their hands they had planted olive gardens and harvested fruits, now they bargained over a loaf of bread. With their hands they had erected cities on top of desert sands, and now they could not be sure of a roof over their heads.

"I must let my faith carry me higher and higher to the gates of paradise," She thought, "and from this unreasonable world in which power, glory and position- all that men scramble for- are but for a short-lived performance, unlike the world for which I am striving, the world which is to endure forever." The solution to her complexities and how she must perform was already in her soul. She was now ready to embark upon her journey.

She looked one last time at Eli. Seeing him afraid and in an obvious state of despair, she felt a rush of sadness. Jenna felt sorry for him with all her heart and for just a second, her hands became frightfully weak, but she knew that she could not allow that. The intensity of her passion, the assurance of what was to come, the sensation of cold that swelled within her body merged for Jenna into a feeling of transcendence. She turned and appeared as if she were walking away. Eli looked confused and roared out of frustration, "Where are you going?"

"Where God wills me," was her last reply.

Eli knew instinctively what was coming next and he began shrieking senselessly; and disorder in the hall began. Many people came out to see what was going on, some dashed away nearer to the exit

There was no going backward. "Oh my God, have mercy on me and forgive me for everything." With a terrible effort Jenna jerked around, and split second, simultaneously exploding.

Every life has an end, Jenna knew that, but she left hers desperately hoping that her death was just the beginning.

AFTERWORD

The affirmation of joy, expansion, and liberty is deeply rooted in our capacity to love. From self love, the innate desire to create a safe haven evolves, to preserve one's own existence, which is not only an essential part of our nature, but our right. Our self and what ministers to our needs are often primitive and instinctively determined. It is a rare act of selflessness to combat the thinking of the world, which usually glorifies the self and places the self at the center of all existence.

Just as one needs to identify with another person in order to love them, one must also appreciate their own existence to create a style of self-protection, and then devise an atmosphere where their interest can be served. The essence of true survival insists that the individual ought to be an end only for themselves. Anything transcending our own survival needs is secondary, or does not factor into the equation at all. Each individual must find their own way, depending on their own self interest. Through associations of like-minded individuals, one's interests and boundaries are enlarged and each individual then becomes a multitude, assuming the role of an instrument, not of God's will, but of the state that represents his needs. The self may feel that one's true purpose is to inspire ethics, promote reverence, and rectify an era of injustice and despair. However, through allegiance and state indoctrination, the attitude of self becomes increasingly divorced from the virtues to which it originally aspired. This human love mixed with self love may be ultimately self-serving. We can be deceived by the selfish teachings of humanistic behavior, and instead of resisting the temptation of the world, we become culture-bound.

One's paradigm or world view and one's relationship to that view provide the boundaries and circumstances within which we develop our vision about the virtue of our aspirations.

First and foremost, there must be a righteous defense of the question, "Have we not the right to be?" This is a simplistic and, in certain situations, a consciously diversionary question. It is a fact, of course, that all people have the right to be. This fact merits particular importance, and the question of the right to be becomes urgently intense when we see a people who have experienced a particular kind of destruction and unmatched dehumanization which might naturally elicit an uncontested bias for one people over another. The majority will spare themselves objection with those who protest once the point of what is ethical is blurred by sympathetic reverence. Take for example the following mindset: "The Jews have suffered immensely. Why should they not have their own state to resettle, evolve and flourish?" A history of victimization provides the basis for the most pseudo-ethical posturing. It allows the former victim to claim moral virtue for all of their acts, whatever the consequence, and allows the psychological preparation needed to make their adversary the beneficiary of blame. It is an old doctrine under a new administration, thus, any criticism voiced against the teachings of self-worth, self-love, and self-esteem is regarded as ipso facto proof that the speaker does not want

justice and that a particular people should remain in their misery. This idea stretches all ethical credibility and is in stark contrast to the concept of democracy, particularly when theory is substituted from actual practice and loses itself to the disconnectedness of humanity. The rationale for this entitlement is bound together only when people are predisposed to allow it through the dynamics of entitlement psychology, vested interests, and successful neutralization of their adversary. These are the successful elements which prepare a nation for guiltless aggression. The logistics of ethics breaks down and there is no legitimacy because there is no explanation for how the former victim can wage a war soon after their struggle for their liberation and their right to exist, while denying other men the same right, and denying them the opportunity to go beyond their status of a peon and into a entity with a social and economic viability of their own.

As human beings, we enlarge and preserve our self-concept through the process of taking action and then reflecting on what we have done and what others tell us about what we have done, thereby gaining support and solidarity. However, our failing lies in reflecting on what we have done with others and in our failure to reach beyond what appears to us to be our sacrosanct objective certainties.

The state, along with history, is quite decisive in the evolution of human spirit and creed, and is also the most potent and effective means of ethical manipulation. It is within the power of the State to exercise an overwhelming impact in the realm of moral values and social indoctrination. The most bitter evidence of this influence lies in its ability to have us forget, which leads to brutal self deception. Stillness and the passage of time have led to a reflexive disconnection. It is only more cold and evil when it comes from those who, in the past, have been on the receiving end and who cannot help but recognize that another person's devastation is close at hand. If we should remind such individuals that hunger and homelessness is more than a symbolic depravity of an inhumane history, and that freedom is the privilege of not following another person's will, we would not be telling them anything they do not already know. If we should say to the Israeli government that the anguished inhabitants of the West Bank are in many ways a dying people, that they are slowly becoming a human scrap heap as a consequence of technological development, educational deficiencies, an environment of poverty, and other causes that disqualify them from employment in a skilled economy, and ask this government how it felt when the Germans erected a wall to alienate, humiliate and to minimize their existence, where would our conversation lead us? Examination of the problem must begin with a distinct overpowering socio-political condition that exists within Israeli society: Palestinians are obsolete. While this is not correct in a moral sense, nor in the biological sense, it is true in the minds and schemes of those who, with unreasonable power and authority, control that nation. While it may not be true among all Israeli citizens, their sentiments against tyranny, mass oppression and human destruction are not sufficiently strong enough to eliminate these schemes to fail. Once an economic advantage, the Palestinian is now expendable, and replaceable by Jewish immigrants from Africa and other poor countries. The bread will still be baked, the olives will still be plucked from the garden, and the café's dirty dishes will be

washed- by others. The sweat chores of that nation will be done by someone other than the Arabs and the Palestinians who live on the perimeter of a society that is brutally pragmatic. Poverty and unemployment within the refugee camps are more, not less critical today than ten years past, and the people who dwell there continue to look at each other with a grim unwillingness to hope that things will ever change.

Palestinians became refugees during the war of 1948 and in its aftermath, they were disowned in every significant way. Almost a million Arabs of historical Palestine left. They fled the country, leaving their homes, property, and in many cases, their extended families. Most went to neighboring Arab countries who did not want them. Even today, the majority of Palestinians live within a hundred miles of the historical Palestine border as they wait on the periphery to return to the land of their birth. Host governments have never quite offered them a home or a safe haven. Israelis expected that refugees would easily integrate into the societies in which they were forced. This was an incorrect assumption that would not become reality as the Arab governments insisted that United Nations Resolution 194 be enforced, which called for the return of refugees to their communities.

Political strategists, sociologists, and some historians experience a complex kind of censorship: oversight. This result in a failure to acknowledge the fact that human experience lives in the process of coming to action. Selective analysis of cause and effect is partly to blame for blind sight and the lack of an effective solution towards democracy in Israel. "An Unordinary Death," a fictional work, can be a dialogical teaching tool, allowing the reader to develop an enhanced understanding about the debilitation of the human spirit, and through the complex characters, the reader develops a further comprehension of a suicide bomber's characteristics and their socially constructed world. Characterization presents a mechanism that can make disparity more visible than statistical information, bring clarity to the various complexities dealing with social conflict, and narrow an error that blames the victim for their own depravity. The publication of "An Unordinary Death" is both dismal and an occasion for hope; dismal because it is a sharp reminder that a catastrophic trend has unfolded and is now commonplace, and a cause for hope as this book is sorely needed in these horrific times. In order to allow a nation, a people, to complete their mission towards self-fulfillment, their plight must first be understood and alliances of empathy must evolve with the willingness to struggle on their behalf. Caesar Chavez once said, "To be a man is to suffer for others." How can we suffer for others if we do not believe that others suffer?

"An Unordinary Death" is a call to give up one's own way and to come under the yoke of humility, not for the sake of one group, but for the sake of all. Humanity demands that all decent minds rise up against the reality of mass injury. Ariel Sharon has made a symbolic gesture by withdrawing from Gaza, but that political gesture is far from the bold support of a leader serious about peace and social equality for all, especially when he is content to erect his wall of alienation at the same time and drop bombs on civilians. The history of the Palestinians remain in their hearts and minds, even in the absence of land, that history can never be surrendered. To the Palestinian, the geographical preservation is dependent on a

new age of enlightenment in which their needs will finally be met. Ironically, this decision almost completely belongs to the nation of Israel. The decision is the manner in which they, and the Palestinians, will die.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

“Khalilah” Christina Sabra grew up in Southern California, where she converted to Islam. She studied Criminal Justice at California State University at Los Angeles and did her graduate work at UCLA in the field of Paralegal Studies. After teaching for several years she temporarily worked as a humanitarian relief worker in refugee camps in Afghanistan and taught English as a Second Language in Beirut, Lebanon. In the years since, she has worked with several civil rights organizations. She hopes that “An Unordinary Death” will not only reveal itself as a fictional work but as a tool of education.



An Unordinary Death

...The Life of a Palestinian

Khalilah Christina Sabra

Most children come into life, initially at least, with a degree of trust that they are going to be treated fairly. The way a social order kills that sense of trust is often cumulative, overt and consciously executed. Within such a situation it is likely that, once becoming a man (or woman), he will not develop an instinctive inhibition about killing his co-species. One will commit such an act upon a group or individual with whom he has no sense of identity and with whom there is no empathy or conscious feeling of guilt relating to their destruction. It is an uncomfortable revelation and a hideous result of social deconstruction.

Such is the case Jenna Hayat, a young woman Palestinian woman. A limping soul navigating through a dismal passage of existence, Israeli occupation is a septic wound in her heart that can't be healed, and being Palestinian is like being punished for a crime she hasn't committed. She is not hell-bent revolutionary; she is not a feminist or a nationalist, and she is not a psychopath with a death wish. She is just an ordinary young woman, trapped amid savaged inequalities.

Jenna once remarked to a close friend that life was so long when you are not happy. Hers was very unhappy. Her mother succumbs to cancer, she is not permitted to marry the only man she ever loved, and she feels herself alone in is world in which there is no mercy. A martyrdom mission makes perfect sense in a life such as hers and longevity is inconsequential. Jenna makes a final and far-reaching decision, which is to look for her mercy from God instead of mere mortal men.

"Khalilah" Christina Sabra grew up in Southern California, where she converted to Islam. She studied Criminal Justice at California State University at Los Angeles and did her graduate work at UCLA in the field of Paralegal Studies. After teaching for several years she temporarily worked as a humanitarian relief worker in refugee camps in Afghanistan and taught English as a Second Language in Beirut, Lebanon. In the years since, she has worked with several civil rights organizations. She hopes that "An Unordinary Death" will not only reveal itself as a fiction work but as a tool of education.

