

Chapter One: The West Bank: Summer 1993

Mr Dayane's pick-up roars out of Kiryat Arba. My father is up front with Mr Katz while Gad, Ariel and I are sitting in the back trying to forget that the driver is our religious instruction teacher. Father can't understand our embarrassment. To him, Yoel Dayane is simply a friend and fellow traveller. In class, he praises the courageous pioneers of Kiryat Arba, Hebron and Nablus, paying tribute to those brave souls who squatted in the centre of Hebron defying pressure from all quarters to move on. Almost fifteen years later, despite tough resistance from Arab terrorists, and Goy loving Jews, they're still around - stronger and more determined than ever.

We pile out of the truck and walk the short distance to the Cave of Machpelah. Truth is that no right-thinking Jew, living in Hebron, or Kiryat Arba, can stand the idea of sharing this holy shrine with Arabs, so we harass them at every opportunity.

As usual, there's plenty of action at the foot of the steps leading up to the Cave. A gaggle of American tourists is being softened up by a towel-head guide. These twisters hang around, offering their services for a few sheckles. Mr Dayane speaks through clenched teeth.

"Why do we allow these *Canaanites* to ply their filthy trade here, of all places?"

"A good question, Yoel!" Mr Katz waggles his finger in our direction. "Hopefully, by the time these boys are running things, they'll all be gone. In the meantime, we can only show them how we feel."

Father smirks. He believes that expelling Arabs from Judea and Samaria will solve all our problems. On the other hand, mother argues that we must share what we have, and be more tolerant, if things are ever to improve. She never lets him away with anything. She's so different from the other wives who wouldn't dream of contradicting their husbands on such matters.

We move inside. As usual, the shrine is crowded with gawking tourists. Locals, coming here to pray, have a hard time of it, their anger often spilling over into violence. The Americans are now crowded round the Cenotaph of Abraham, their guide trying in vain to hurry them along. Having been paid up front, he's no doubt anxious to get the tour over and done with. Mr Katz deliberately barges into him. He grimaces through a mouthful of yellow teeth, and shakes his fist at us. He looks like an angry, old goat. Gad laughs in his face as we follow our elders into the Tomb of Joseph. There we join a dozen Hebron men holding bibles and mumbling prayers. There's hardly room to breathe and the barrel of someone's semi-automatic nudges painfully into my back. I try to wriggle forward a little, stepping on Ariel's heel in the process. He yelps in pain.

A group of Arabs, standing just beyond the tomb, are offering up prayers to Allah. In a deliberate attempt to bait us they chant in loud voices. It works. The alcove empties as we move out to confront them. An anxious security guard hovers in the background. I'd hate to do that job! Nearby, the tourists are now listening attentively as their guide drones on about the centrality of the patriarch, Abraham, to both Judaism and Islam. That sort of blasphemy would normally set things off, but today our attention is

focused on more serious matters.

One of our Hebron brothers raises his weapon and noisily releases the safety catch. The trouble-makers glance over at us, showing no fear or signs of backing off. He gestures at the nearest of our antagonists

“Get the fuck out of here, Mohammed!”

“Mohammed”, smiles as if in response to a greeting from an old friend. His intense, black eyes display no such warmth, however.

“I trust you are all well. I hope that Jews and Moslems can continue to share this holy place in a spirit of cooperation and goodwill.”

His courteous reply allows him to occupy the moral high ground in one, swift step.

The Hebron pioneer is unimpressed.

“You and your terrorist friends out, now! I won't tell you again

The young Arab raises his eyebrows in mock bewilderment.

“There is no need for such hostility.” He glances round at his comrades for the first time before continuing in the same affable tone.

“Next thing you know we'll be rounded up and dumped in a concentration camp.”

The words send a sudden, cold shiver up my spine.

As if previously rehearsed, one of the Arabs feeds him an opportune line.

“You mean a refugee camp?”

“Is there a difference, my friend?”

The pioneer's finger tightens on the trigger - the slightest pressure and the thing will go off. Fear beats around us like startled birds. I notice that the tourists are pressed against the rail surrounding the Cenotaph, now aware that something is seriously wrong. My father, trying to act tough, looks anything but. I suddenly recall mother telling me recently that he was “all talk, no action.” I was furious at the time, but maybe she was right. His face is deathly pale beneath its mahogany tan, and his whole body is trembling. I feel ashamed, and pray that no-one will notice. Fortunately, everyone's attention is fixed on the Arabs. Mr Katz's face is beetroot red and slicked with sweat; his swollen neck and bulging eyes remind me off a spawning bull frog. My shame is swept aside by a sudden impulse to giggle.

At that moment, the security guard intervenes.

“Break this up! What are you thinking about? This is no place for violence!” He turns to the Arabs. “You'll have to leave now!”

They make no move to obey. Instead, “Mohammed” feigns surprise.

“Why are you picking on us, sir? We have done nothing wrong. These men and their brats are causing the trouble. They are the ones sticking their guns down our throats.”

He looks straight at me with a mocking smile. I frown and stare back. Who the hell does he think he's calling a brat?

“Look, we don’t want any trouble in here, so let’s just call it a day, okay?”

The guard is trying to sound conciliatory. Maybe he’s one of those Jews who has a problem acting tough around Arabs, although you’d think he’d be used to it by now. Goy loving traitors, my father predicts, will be singled out for special punishment in the Time of Redemption. I suddenly wonder if he lumps mother in with such sinners.

Again, the Arab smiles.

“Of course, sir. Your wish is our command. I forgot for a moment that our necks are under your heel. How stupid of me!”

He turns away, motioning his comrades to follow. The aghast Americans squirm out of his way as though he might suddenly explode in their faces. There is no doubt that “Mohammed” and his mates have won this round.

Shaking his head, the Hebron pioneer flicks his weapon back to safety and frowns round at us.

“That is what we have to put up with here every day of the week.” Flecks of spittle fly into Mr Katz’s face, but he doesn’t react in the slightest. He is ferociously intent on what the man is saying. “The *canaanites* always cause trouble when they know it’s hard for us to do anything about it. They’re thieves and cowards, the lot of them!”

I have some trouble with this branding, but Mr Katz suddenly intervenes.

“You see how it is, boys? We are mocked and persecuted in our own holy places. That is why there can never be any compromise with the Aravim while even one of their number pollutes our sacred land.” Gad nods fiercely and my own unease dissolves as the words strike home. He’s right! Why should we tolerate such blasphemy? “You boys are the future. Never forget that, and never forget your God-given duty. Then you will ride high when the Messiah redeems his people.”

The Hebron man grunts his approval and turns to speak to one of his friends. I notice the concourse is now almost deserted. The tourists have fled. Clearly, no-one wants to be caught in the crossfire.

Outside, things are also quiet. There is no sign of the Arabs who upset our prayers. Father and Mr Dayane seem to have lost their appetite for confrontation and are anxious to depart. On the way home, Mr Katz tells us that plans are already afoot to punish the Arabs for their latest act of sacrilege.

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Gad phones me a few days later and confirms that things are heating up. I’ve been expecting something of the sort. He tells me that his father, as chairman of the locally affiliated Committee for Safety on the Roads, has come up with the perfect plan to harass the enemy while providing a watertight reason for doing so. The problem of Arab children throwing stones at cars on the outskirts of Hebron has escalated recently, so the Committee has voted to patrol the hotspots in force.

“Father says that we can come along to observe.”

“That’s great news!”

“It’s what I expected. Why shouldn’t we be in on the fun?”

The idea of us “observing” is ridiculous, of course! Although we won’t be armed, our fathers will definitely want us to be in the thick of things. If mother finds out she’ll be furious. I suppose she’s only trying to protect me, but, if what everybody says is true and we are fighting a ruthless enemy who wants to wipe Israel off the map, there can surely be no room for sentiment.

I remember father once demanding to know why she condemned our just battle for survival when her own father had fought so heroically in defence of persecuted Jews. She turned deathly pale before replying in a voice that could have curdled milk.

“How dare you bring my father into this? You and your friends are not worth the dirt under his finger nails! He laid his life on the line so many times fighting real evil. What you call a just battle for survival is a miserable excuse to occupy land and oppress innocent people.”

Father tried to make the best of it but I think even he realised he’d gone too far. I thought it was a bit weird at the time because, as far as I knew, he’d not ever mentioned Grandfather since we left Jerusalem more than two years ago. She stood with her hands on her hips glaring at him until he skulked out of the room; then she slumped down on the couch, covered her face with her hands and began to cry. I couldn’t decide whether to run after father or stay and comfort her. In the end, I just stood there like an idiot, doing nothing at all.

“So, we’ll see you tomorrow morning then? I think we’re coming over to pick you and your dad up at about eight thirty.”

“Yeah...that’s fine.”

For a moment I have trouble shaking loose. Problems at home have been nagging away like a sore tooth recently. And, to make matters worse, I can’t get that young Arab trouble-maker out of my head. It was as if he was being forced to play a part without any chance of simply being himself. Maybe we’re all characters in a terrible tragedy whose end is already set.

“Are you okay, Sam? You sound pretty out of it.”

“No, I’m fine, really! I’ll see you tomorrow.”

The phone clicks off and I slowly replace the handset. I sometimes don’t understand what’s going on inside my head. Whatever happens, I don’t want Gad or anybody else to think I’m going soft on Arabs.

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The gathering is large. I recognise some of the faces from meetings at the Kiryat Arba Community Centre; but there’s lots of others here who I don’t know, including boys of my own age and younger, presumably from Hebron. One of their rabbis, a fat, little man with no neck and stocky shoulders, is standing on the back of a van addressing the crowd. His voice, high-pitched and indignant, carries well.

“I am gratified to see such a large turnout today. Thanks are due to David Katz and our

Kiryat Arba brothers for their help in organising an appropriate response to continuing *Canaanite* profanity.”

A low growl of anger demonstrates that feelings are running high.

“We will approach the designated area thereby gaining the element of surprise. Remember to fill up your pockets with stones. These will be necessary to provoke the reaction we seek. Under no circumstances fire your weapons until the Aravim retaliate. It is vital we are seen as having been forced to use fire-arms only as a last resort. If there are any among you who have trouble with the apparent immorality of such a deception, please remember that we are not dealing here with fellow human beings. We, and we alone, are the true children of God, and the inheritors of the land. Lies are not lies in these circumstances. Any methods we choose to rid ourselves of vermin are perfectly acceptable.”

The rabbi receives a rousing cheer as he steps down, and we set off. It’s mid afternoon and the sun beats uncomfortably hot on my neck and shoulders. We pass through a large olive grove. A group of Arab labourers, seated in the shade of an ancient tree, stare at us but we ignore them. Although these peasants are not our target today, they could be soon enough. Many groves have been bull-dozed in recent months, because terrorists use them to conceal guns and bomb-making equipment. I’m not sure why they would choose such obvious places, but father says I’ve still much to learn about the wiles of Satan and his followers.

We reach the first few houses at the edge of the district selected for our assault. The unclad breeze-block walls and rusty corrugated iron roofs show how poor local residents are. Few of these miserable hovels have electricity or running water. Mr Dayane once told us that Arabs understand nothing better and it would be a waste of money to attempt any improvements.

Father’s hero, Rabbi Levinger, wrote in a recent article that although *we live in close proximity to the Arab, we, the vanguard of the chosen, inhabit a separate universe of thought and feeling, and that is only right and proper*. Father cut the piece out of the local newspaper and told me to memorise it for future reference. He must be worried that mother is bringing too much influence to bear.

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I stoop to pick up some loose stones at the side of the road. Others are doing the same thing. Father instructs me to stay close. This is really embarrassing. I can’t believe he’s treating me like a stupid kid. If the other men are content to let their sons stick together, why can’t he just leave me be?

I experience a rush of excitement as the assault begins. Mr Katz grins as women and children rush around us, trying to escape indoors. I see him take deliberate aim at an old woman wearing a black shawl and cream *hijab*. The stone strikes her on the back of the head, and she tumbles forward onto the road. The sound of breaking glass mingles with yells and screams. I hurl my stones at a second floor window. They all miss and bounce harmlessly off the walls. I hear Gad whooping in delight as he brings down a terrified boy. Father has vanished and I fight my way through the throng, eager to rejoin my

friends. At that moment, a crowd of yelling Arabs arrives. Just as I make it over to Gad, a bottle glances off his shoulder and shatters on the ground. His face distorts in pain. Mr Katz rushes up, firing his gun in the air. He suddenly levels it at an old man, struggling to pull down a metal grid over a shop window. It barks once, twice and the Arab slumps forward onto the dirty, iron slats.

Father is back, his face twisted in fear or fury, I'm not sure which. Bullets whine and ricochet around the buildings. Within seconds the street is almost deserted. I hear the wail of an approaching siren. A few metres away, a woman is dragging herself along the ground like an injured animal desperate to escape its tormentors.

Mr Katz helps Gad along, smiling and chattering to keep his spirits up. Ariel and I trudge behind them. The excitement has evaporated and, despite the flow of words, I feel depressed and ashamed of myself. Images of the casualties, especially the elderly shopkeeper, sprawled in a puddle of his own blood, fill my head. I wonder if he'll die before help arrives. Perhaps sensing my despondency, Mr Katz smiles round at us.

"We showed these bastards a thing or two today, eh? It'll be a while before they cross us again now they know we mean business. Rabbi Greenberg was right when he said we're not dealing with human beings. Think of them as cockroaches, if that helps."

It doesn't! I'm finding it hard to visualise those we attacked as anything other than innocent victims. And Mr Katz was really enjoying the violence. Surely you shouldn't be getting off on killing vermin!

Gad is trying to make the best of things but I can see he's hurting. He'll probably have to go up to the hospital for an x ray.

Luckily, when we arrive home, mother is out. Although I'm not injured, my left shoulder aches and my legs won't stop shaking. I strip off and take a shower. The water, swirling around my feet, is filthy. Next door, I can hear the whir of the washing machine as father rinses away the evidence of our most recent battle for survival. It reminds me how strained things have become at home. Neither of my parents is able to be honest, and both try to sway me, attempting, wherever possible, to cover their tracks. I can't help wondering what life must be like in the Katz household, where Gad's mother agrees with everything her husband says and does. My mother, on the other hand, is so like grandfather - independent of thought, and willing to take on the whole world if need be. Maybe, once upon a time, father admired her for that. And, I suppose it's possible she respected his passionate commitment to a safe and secure future for our people.

As I switch off the taps and step out of the shower, my thoughts return to Gad. Lacking his fanaticism, we all accept his leadership without question. It was bad enough when he was hurt in a street fight last year, but this latest injury will make him stronger than ever. He has a knack of avoiding real damage while promoting his role as martyr for all it's worth. The funny thing is, I wouldn't trade places with him. He struggles so hard to stay on top - to act the part - that he's never able to let his guard down for a second. Maybe he's a bit like "Mohammed" back in the Cave of Machpelah. I try to imagine his reaction if I was ever to make the comparison.

When I come out of the bathroom, cleaned up and feeling a bit more normal, father calls

me through to the lounge. He is sitting in his favourite armchair looking extremely serious.

“Sit down for a minute, Sam. We need to talk.”

This behaviour is unusual and I start to feel nervous again. Maybe he feels embarrassed about his failure to make enough of an impact today, and wants to justify himself in my eyes. It won't be the first time.

“I asked you to stay by me today and what did you do? You went off with your friends while my back was turned. That is not what I expect when I give you an order!”

I'm not sure what he's up to, but I feel a slow throb of anger begin to build inside.

I struggle to remain calm, and explain what happened.

“I was throwing stones, and when I looked round you were gone. I couldn't see you anywhere, so I thought it would be safer to join my friends.”

The explanation doesn't help. Maybe he thinks I'm criticising him or something. He stares at me as if waiting for an apology. I don't see why I should back down - it's not my fault he vanished at the crucial moment.

“The point is, Sam, that you disobeyed me.”

Maybe it's his high-handed tone, or maybe the pent up emotions of the day. Before I can stop myself, words tumble out.

“Mr Katz doesn't treat Gad like a little boy. He does the business which is more than can be said for you.”

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Quick as flash, he grabs me by the front of my tee shirt with one hand, and slaps me hard over the face with the other. The pain slices through the thin skin of my self-control. Using physical punishment as a means of discipline shatters my illusion of adulthood, offending my dignity beyond recall. I wrench away from his grip and lash out with my right fist, catching him square on the nose. I'm taller, broader, and probably stronger than father. The crunch of bone and the gush of blood satisfy something deep inside me, while, at the same time, shocking me to the core.

Looking round, I see mother framed in the doorway looking utterly horrified. Father has sunk onto the floor, moaning and clasping his face between both hands. The enormity of what I've just done suddenly breaks over me. I lean down, wanting to comfort him, but he pushes me away, rises unsteadily to his feet and lurches out of the room. Stepping to one side, Mother lets him pass and then stares at me in disbelief. Finally, she follows him out, leaving me alone.

I feel physically sick. How could I possibly have struck my own father? Our rabbi teaches that violence committed against a fellow Jew is a heinous sin, unless the victim has consciously betrayed his people. I shudder to think how he would react to the sin of a son wilfully striking a parent. Tears trickle down my face. Once this gets out I'll be treated like an outcast - nobody will understand. I feel confused and scared. I don't know how I could have lost control so easily, and lashed out so hard. What would

grandfather think of me now? Family meant so much to him. He would be appalled by such an outrage, despite his coldness towards father.

I hear the rise and fall of mother's voice from the next room. Although I can't make out any words, her tone is derisory. She's probably trying to find out what happened while helping father clean himself up. He is saying nothing. Should I go through and beg his forgiveness? I decide that would probably do more harm than good.

Mother re-enters the lounge and stares at me again without speaking. My discomfort grows under her steady gaze. Finally, she breaks the silence.

"I never thought I'd ever witness a son of mine strike his own father! Your grandfather used to say that violence begets violence. It seems the only way you can react these days is to lash out and ask questions later. Is this how you were brought up to behave?"

"I'm sorry. I only wanted to..."

"Only wanted to what? Teach your father a lesson he'd never forget, perhaps! Is that what things have come to?"

"I didn't mean to..."

"Don't insult my intelligence with any half-baked excuses, Sam. There's no justification for what you did!"

I bow my head. She's right. There is nothing I can say or do which will ever make up for such an act.

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After a long pause, probably to allow the realisation to sink in, she breaks the silence. This time her voice is a little less harsh.

"Try to understand why you would do such a thing. Has hitting your father made you feel any better?"

I feel ready to listen to what she has to say but, at that moment, father appears. I want the ground to open and swallow me up. He's pressing a freezer bag, packed with ice, against his face. To my amazement, he's smiling through his pain. He walks across and pats me on the shoulder with his free hand.

"I'm sorry I slapped you, Sam. There is no excuse for that. And, I'm sorry I embarrassed you in front of your friends this morning. I've been treating you like a child and I have paid the price for my stupidity."

I can hardly believe what I'm hearing. I thought that he would never speak to me again. Instead, he's actually apologising. I rise and hug him tightly. He laughs and thumps me playfully on the back.

"Where did you get such a right hook?"

He sounds like he's proud of me. Contrary to the disgrace I was sure was coming my way, it now feels as if I've passed an initiation test. I experience a warm inner glow, and my shame evaporates. I hardly notice mother leaving. Only the loud bang of the door alerts me to her anger. Father glances round for a moment.

“Don’t worry about her! Women can never really understand the bond between father and son. But how am I ever going to explain this?” Father looks woeful and points to his swollen face. My guilt returns in a rush.

“I’m...I’m not sure....”

He laughs again. “Don’t worry - that’s the easiest part of it. I’ll say I got in the way of an Arab fist and Mr Katz will be mad it wasn’t him. You know what he’s like, always trying to be the biggest martyr for the cause.”

I nod.

“Yeah, Gad’s just the same. He’s got to be one step ahead of the rest of us.”

I can’t believe we’re having this conversation. Father has never ever criticised any of his friends in front of me - especially Mr Katz - and I wouldn’t normally dream of putting down Gad in front of him. This is something entirely new between us.

There are a few moments of silence during which I experience a powerful desire to beg his forgiveness.

“I’m really sorry that I...”

“I don’t want to hear another word about it, alright? What’s done is done.”

How could I have ever have thought badly of him? I’ll die before I lay a hand on him again. Not only has he spared me terrible humiliation, but he’s actually confiding in me as never before.

“Let’s get out of here and show off my war wound. Should we say it was a stone, or do you think we can convince them I was beaten up by an Arab mob?”

I laugh. “You don’t look that bad. Let’s stick with something the Katz’s are likely to believe. If we go over the top, they’ll smell a rat.”

“You’re right. We’ll work out the details on the way.”

As I pull on my jumper, I wonder what mother was going to say before father’s dramatic entrance, and before relief blotted everything else out of my mind. It suddenly occurs to me that his decision to forgive me was a very effective way of counteracting the shame she was about to exploit. I feel as though I’m punching him for a second time. Maybe it’s because they’ve both been trying to outdo each other for so long now that I always doubt their motives. Still, if his intentions hadn’t been genuine, he would surely never have overcome his rage and humiliation so quickly. What he said came from the heart.

Father’s arm is around my shoulder and the ice-pack has been discarded. He proudly displays his new proof of Arab hostility to the world.

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Two days later, Mr Katz calls round at our house. I hear father talking to him in the lounge; their raised voices and whoops of laughter, spark my curiosity. I wonder what they are talking about. The outside door slams shut and father rushes into the room.

“Look at this, Sam!” He throws a cutting from a newspaper onto the bed. Unable to

contain himself, he picks it up and thrusts it into my hands. "Read it! This is what we've been hoping for - it's why we're going to beat the Arabs in the end."

I smooth out the crumpled sheet.

Seven hurt in Hebron shooting incident

Three Kiryat Arba residents were injured in a clash with a mob of Hebron Arabs yesterday afternoon.

A group of Jewish families, members of the Kach-affiliated Committee for Safety on the Roads, were passing through the dangerous Harat a-Sheikh district of Hebron when they were set upon by several hundred Arabs, and pelted with rocks and bottles from rooftops and alleys.

A woman and two children were injured.

To escape, the settlers fired in the air, and when that had no effect, they fired at the legs of the rock-throwers.

Last night, four wounded Arabs were brought to Mokassad Hospital in East Jerusalem. One, the hospital reported, was in a critical condition with bullet wounds in the abdomen. Another was seriously wounded in the head and chest, and a third lightly wounded in the leg.

The IDF relayed a report on the incident to the Hebron police, who have opened an investigation.

The Committee for Safety on the Roads said it would continue to patrol Arab neighbourhoods which Jews have previously preferred not to enter, until attacks on innocent people ceased.

I look up. Father's eyes are burning into me.

"Well? The whole thing has really worked out for us, don't you think? That bit about the two children and the woman being injured is excellent, although Gad won't like being called a child. But who cares; it cranks up sympathy for our cause."

I really want to share his enthusiasm, but, find it hard to feel joyful about a pack of lies being passed off by *The Jerusalem Post* as the truth. I know it's what we wanted, but can't help thinking about the man shot in the abdomen - no doubt the victim of Mr Katz's shooting frenzy. And, as for the injured Jewish woman, the only injured women in the skirmish were Arab women; and the only real children in the firing line were Arab children. There was no mention of their injuries in the report; some of them must have been pretty badly hurt. Again, I realise the danger of thinking this way, but just can't help it. I force a smile for father's benefit.

"It's a good story."

"I can't wait to see peoples' faces when they read it. I'm off round to see Mr Dayane. Do you want to come?"

"No. I've got some homework to finish off."

"You're quite right. I'll see you later on then. Keep up the good work!"

He snatches up the cutting and dashes out of the room. Seconds later, I hear the front door bang shut once again. I feel sorry about lying to him, but I really don't feel like celebrating.

Mother comes in from the garden and shakes her head.

“What's going on? No, don't tell me, I don't want to know.”

I can't explain what's happening to me. Some days I'm up for it, other days I just don't want to know. When we were walking around showing off father's “war wound”, I was moved by peoples' reactions. For once, we were the centre of attention - heroes of the hour. Gad and his father were hugely impressed. A part of father, shrunken by past failures, blossomed in the warm glow of their approbation. At last, he was the person he most wanted to be.

Later, though, after all the excitement had died down, the significance of the lie grew in my mind. I felt like the world's biggest fraud. The fact that father was exhibiting his bruised face to all and sundry while our victims lay in hospital - perhaps dying from the wounds we'd inflicted - felt shameful. I couldn't help wondering what grandfather would have made of it all. His sympathies, I'm certain, would have been with those we assaulted - his contempt for our lies, absolute.

Of course, if we are a people set apart - and our enemies in league with evil powers - there is surely nothing to worry about. I hear this said over and over again. Grandfather, on the other hand, rejected all such ideas. Maybe the fact that he shunned the synagogue accounted for his lack of faith. I know that's what father thinks, even if he never actually says so. Few would dare to criticise Shoah survivors, especially those who fought in the Warsaw Ghetto. Here in Israel, such people, whatever their views, are regarded as heroes and righteous Jews.

I really want to believe, but maybe it's what grandfather went through - things that father, Mr Katz, and the rest of them, could never begin to imagine - that always holds me back. At least one of their “heroes” wanted nothing to do with the cause, and never stopped condemning what he regarded as racist outrages in Judea and Samaria. I don't know where all this will eventually lead me. I've somehow got to sort things out in my head and move on. Maybe I need to find out more about grandfather. Over the past few years, I've forgotten a lot of what he told me. I can remember most of his “ghetto” stories, but the other stuff has gone hazy. Mother is probably the only person who can help, but how do I avoid getting caught up in the emotional fall out?

Excerpt 2

From Chapter Four - Warsaw: December 1940

Leo scrapes the frost away with his fingernails and peers through the chink he has created in the windowpane. In the grey light of dawn, he can see two mounted German police officers riding along Okopowa Street, on the Aryan side of the wall. A white sea of mist, swirling around the horses' withers, seems to bear their riders over mysterious depths. He shivers violently as if icy fingers have clutched his heart.

they had the place to themselves. Now they have one room only, and share a toilet with the thirty or so other residents living on the stair. While Mr Shreiberman is easy to get along with, his wife, embittered and resentful at the hand fate has dealt her, gives everyone a hard time. The situation could, of course, be a lot worse. The vast increase in population, and the relentless pressure on space means that at least one more family, and perhaps two, could have been squeezed into the flat.

Outside, the cobbles are slick with ice. Leo slips and almost lands on his back. Gesia Street, crammed with stalls offering a huge variety of articles for sale, is already busy. It seems as though people have been wandering aimlessly all night waiting patiently for the moment they can resume their endless bartering. Maybe they congregate here to simulate a sense of community. Away from tiny, overcrowded rooms, and a gnawing hunger never satisfied, folk can gossip and forget their troubles for a while. Beggars, sprawled at the sides of the packed thoroughfare, are largely ignored, possibly because their presence provides an uncomfortable reminder of the thin dividing line between subsistence and penury. He experiences a sudden stab of nostalgia for the social buzz of market days in Krasnow.