

VOICE OF VALOR

GEULA COHEN'S FIGHT FOR ZION



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Translated from the Hebrew by Hillel Halkin



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TO MY COMRADES: -

THOSE WHO ALSO DREAMT DURING THE DAY -

WHEN ALL OTHERS HAD MADE PEACE WITH THEIR DAY:

THOSE WHO ALSO FOUGHT AT NIGHT -

WHEN ALL WERE SLEEPING AWAY THEIR NIGHT:

WHO FELL BY THE WAY OF AWESOME HOURS. AT A TIME

THAT WAS NEITHER DAY NOR NIGHT. AT A TIME

OF TWILIGHT. WHEN WORLDS ARE CREATED.

GEULA COHEN WEAVES HER PERSONAL STORY TOGETHER WITH THE CHRONICLES OF THE LECHI UNDERGROUND DURING THE PERIOD OF THE BRITISH MANDATE OVER PALESTINE.

AS A SECRET RADIO BROADCASTER, LATER AS A PRISONER AND AFTERWARDS FOLLOWING HER ESCAPE, SHE WRITES WITH SPECIAL APPRECIATION FOR THE INNER FORCES THAT URGED ON THE YOUNG FIGHTERS IN THEIR BATTLE FOR THE FREEDOM OF THE JEWISH NATION IN ITS HOMELAND.

GEULA COHEN HAS BEEN A MEMBER OF ISRAEL'S KNESSET SINCE 1974.

SINCE 1990 A DEPUTY MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY.

"BLACK," I say again to the barber.

The barber scowls at my bloneness and pours and pours from a container of dye, rubbing the thick liquid into my hair. In the mirror, from beneath the black dye, the blonde hair still flows toward me. He reaches for another container and pours and rubs and dyes.

"Blacker," I say to him. "Like the black I used to have. Like the black roots."

"Wait." He is impatient. "Don't be in such a hurry." And he swivels me away from the mirror. Behind my clenched lids is a riot of color. Reds. Blacks. Golds. The barber pours, dyes, brushes; he combs my hair, rinses it. My eyes are still shut. The barber combs and brushes. He spins me around again.

"It's me," says the face from the mirror.

"It's me," say I to the face.

It is 1948. The last time I had seen myself as a brunette had been in 1947, after my escape from prison; before my hair was dyed to conceal me from the British police. Now, in 1948, no need for disguises. I stare at myself openly in the mirror, at my black hair rising freely from the roots in my scalp.

I was a member of the Freedom Fighters of Israel, the *Lechi* or, as we were commonly called by English and Jew alike—the Stern Gang. I came to the *Lechi* by way of the *Etsel*, and to the *Etsel* by way of *Betar*. But these are details of no importance; there really was only one way to the *Lechi*.

In 1943 there were sixteen of us enrolled in an *Etsel* officers'

training course. We each had a number; mine was 16. Number 16, attention! Number 16, at ease! Number 16, attention is not at ease! Number 16, hands at your sides! Number 16, eyes front, no daydreaming! Number 16, that's a rifle you are jiggling, not a walking stick! Number 16 . . . Number 16 . . . !

When the course began, I knew several of the group; a few quite well. But I was immediately drawn to five strangers—a girl and four boys. They witnessed my awkwardness with lively, undemanding glances. Even the way they stood in line, casually ignoring the rigid ranks, distinguished them from the rest. Like all of us, they breathed in time with the marching cadence, but between one breath and the next they seemed free—rhapsodic. I was attracted, but without realizing it; they encouraged, but not too much.

One evening they were gone, all five of them. No questions were asked; none were permitted. During that meeting I was particularly obstinate and provoked a dressing down at every turn. Everything I did and didn't do was wrong until, finally, we were called to attention and the Order of the Day was read:

“The following numbers have been expelled from the ranks of the Organization. They have been exposed as belonging to the Faction. It is forbidden to come in any kind of contact with them. Anyone violating this directive will be tried and punished with the utmost severity.” The numbers were being read, but no one was listening. All eyes, the leader's too, focused—was it my imagination?—menacingly on me. From that moment, emptiness began to gnaw at me: not chaos or turbulence, but an abysmal, indissoluble, exasperating nothing.

“The Faction” had become the Etsel label for the Lechi after the split in 1940, when Abraham Stern and a few companions resigned from the parent organization, Etsel, to start a movement of their own. “Factionalist” was a dirty word, to be spit out rather than spoken. Simply to utter it was to pronounce a sentence to oblivion. That was the sentiment in Etsel in 1943, and it was also my own.

The first time I ever heard the term “factionalist,” in fact, was

when Abraham Stern was killed in February, 1942. I was on my way home from the teachers' seminary which I was attending at the time, and I ran into an excited crowd. A man standing behind me asked, "So they finally killed him?"

"Killed whom?"

The picture staring at me from the newspaper that he held in his hand was vaguely familiar.

"I wonder who got the thousand," somebody muttered.

And then I remembered. This was the face posted up and down the streets a few weeks before, with a caption promising one thousand Palestinian pounds to anyone contributing to the capture of the gangster Stern—dead or alive. That evening at a cell meeting our discussion leader simply said, "A lost soul," casually adding in the tone usually reserved for those long dead, "A factionalist."

I had entered the officers' training course after two years of clandestine activity in the Etsel. During that time I had attended secret meetings, learned to handle arms, and stolen through the darkness—it had always to be dark—to a house in the suburbs where a small group of girls was instructed in assorted arts of conspiratorial behavior. A marvelous stealth pervaded the atmosphere. To be privy to a perennial secret was a new and invigorating sensation. When one lives by a cold and covert light, a walk in the sun becomes an intoxicating experience. The whole world was shrouded in a glow of mystery. But at the very heart of the mystery—within the clandestine world of the Etsel—there was nothing at all to marvel at. There was nothing new, nothing strange; everything seemed right and normal. It was as though beneath my civilian clothes I still wore my old Betar uniform from long ago, one suit fitting lightly upon the other without friction or contradiction. Until that evening when five numbers were read aloud and I was impelled to follow them.

In a week they found me. The first issue of Lechi's *Hechazit* was lodged innocently in the mailbox, and I read it. And that was my beginning and my finish and everything encompassed therein—all. It was the first time in my life that the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet had arranged themselves on a page especially

for me. I felt that I was writing rather than reading the words. Here, finally, was substance enough to fill my emptiness. Motherland, freedom, war, enemy—such stale old words seemed newborn, and I was Adam, tasting them for the first time. That was it! Short, lucid, consistent. At that moment the barriers between me and the outside world collapsed. There was no longer any need for them. A door had been opened for me. The vacuum was stirring with life. In it, endless characters, groping question marks, were swarming, moving, converging, all together, all as one, circle centering upon circle, point enveloping point, rising to form a single wand, upright, authoritative, certain. That's it! Exclamation point. No more doubts. No more choices. No more duplicity. One line, cutting, vertical, peremptory.

In this moment a spark had been touched off, a spark in which lay the power to live all at once the essence of that life I had never savored. Perhaps this helps to explain the dual process which began nebulously to take shape in me at that time, which accompanied me throughout all my years in the underground, and which I am now able to look back upon with a special clarity, having returned to normal life. At the same time that I was descending into the underground, shackling and repressing impulses and whims that I had long taken for granted, I was drawing up from it a whole new world full of yearnings and desires which I had been harboring unaware—a world that was spontaneous, free and unchallengeably mine.

When I put the pamphlet aside, I was angry, furious at it and furious with those who sent it to me. Defect from the Etsel? Never! I would never be taken in by such words. Never!

"NEVER!" I declared a few days later to Elimelech and Dov when they came to my home with more Lechi reading material.

Elimelech spoke first, hesitantly and apologetically: "We really owe you an explanation for walking out on the course without saying good-by. We simply couldn't put up with it any longer. A group of us left Lechi after Yair's death to hole up somewhere until the coast was clear again. We couldn't go back to our homes. We were looking for some kind of large body where the police wouldn't find us. Any body, we thought was better than none, even the body of a sleeping giant like the Etsel. We thought that maybe we could waken a few people there, exert some influence. But we got nowhere. There wasn't an opening through which we could crawl or breathe. A giant without a soul. So we're back with Lechi, ashamed perhaps, but with no more illusions. I'm not trying to pressure you. . . ."

"You're not trying?" Dov burst out. "You *are* trying. Why shouldn't you try?" And to me he cried, "Come with us. You're one of us. It's as simple as that. Take the pamphlets or leave them, it makes no difference. You're one of us anyway. It's something you can smell. It's in the nose—in the blood."

Dov and Elimelech, each tale in himself. Dov seemed always to be following some distant beacon; head and torso thrust forward to get there—wherever—faster, first; commanding others with the impetus of his own body: *Follow me!* In 1948, at the battle of Irak-Suwwaydin, as a captain in the Israeli army, stand-

ing straight in the turret of his charging tank, he was killed by a sniper's bullet. Something was always calling to him from the front.

When he wanted something, he asked for it. "Mother," he said when he visited my family for the first time, "I'm hungry." Whatever got in his way he batted aside. No one ever tried to diminish him, or control him; there would have been bloodshed. That's how Dov was, tall and blond, feared by the British, and with a reputation that became legendary during his brief life. Every operation, every bank robbery—successful or not—was attributed to the same wild, blond giant.

But Dov was not just another terrorist with revolvers spilling from his belt. He was uniquely, irresistibly, irreplaceably Dov. He loved to sing and he sang loudly, at the top of his voice, although he had absolutely no ear and couldn't carry a tune.

"Dov, enough!"

"Stop it, Dov!"

Dov never stopped. Dov wanted to sing, so Dov sang. Key, pitch, octave, melody—these were mere terms, little details that mattered not a fig to Dove. He had his own esthetics, and what counted was the melody *he* heard, and the joy he took in singing it. He was the same with poetry, jotting all his brilliant ideas down on paper where they didn't seem so brilliant. But Dov didn't care; he sent them to an editor to be printed, and couldn't understand why they were rejected. But Dov never stopped.

Then there was Elimelech, who carried death with him wherever he went. Elimelech was ashamed to live, ashamed to desire or to love. He was a poet. If he had told a woman he loved her, she wouldn't have known what he was talking about; it was this way and that way, it was her and all the other women in the world as well. But all his songs and bashful dreams were concentrated into one wish for physical and violent action. Elimelech wanted to be a gunman—nothing less. But watching him fondle a revolver, it was obvious that such slender hands could never pull a trigger.

"Stop dreaming about operations, Elimelech. Recruiting members is also important. More important."

He did the work assigned to him, but went on pleading for,

demanding, his right to die, while fate played grizzly jokes on him. When death seemed certain, as in the assault on the train depot in Haifa where many were killed and the rest wounded, Elimelech emerged safe and sound. A year later, when the Etsel successfully engineered a mass escape from Acre prison, the only bullet fired picked its way through forty prisoners to zero fatally in on Elimelech.

Two distinct stories. And together Dov and Elimelech made a third story, in the middle of which I entered. After Elimelech came several times to see me, I asked for a leave of absence from the Etsel course. A rendezvous was arranged with a third party whom I would not be permitted to see. "Not because we don't trust you," Elimelech said, "but it is better this way." The meeting would take place in my home; we would be separated by a curtain.

"Mother, I need a white sheet. . . . Mother, put the children to bed early tonight. . . . No, don't leave the room, just leave the outside door open. . . . Someone is coming. . . . He wants to talk with me, that's all. . . . Mother, the sheet is too short; help me knot it. I can't do it myself. . . . What can't you understand? A certain person, a man, wants to talk to me from behind a curtain. What is there to understand? . . . Mother, is it ten o'clock?"

Before my visitor uttered a word, I heard the metallic taps of his revolver as he toyed with it. Shadows played across the sheet, heavy and black, sometimes fading to gray. At times they threatened to come tearing at me through the linen. His voice rose and fell as he repeated the story that Elimelech had told me weeks before, how from one had come two. I listened impatiently. I knew about the 1940 split between Raziel, commander of the Etsel, and Yair, a member of its high command. Raziel had announced a cessation of anti-British activities for the duration of the war with Germany; Yair said "No!"

Of course, there had been ideological differences to begin with. A majority of those in the Etsel had seen the enemy in Hitler. The war against him, they thought, was more ours than anyone else's. The British who were fighting the Germans were our temporary allies. Yair and a few others dissented. Never mind that war, they said. The only way to save the Jews of the Diaspora was to create an independent homeland; deprive the English of their power.

Between master and slave there could be no cease fire. There could only be war.

Now, through the white curtain, came another version of the split. "It's a question of style," the voice said. "Not just the style of living, but the style of dying as well. Two men, Raziel and Yair, set out on the same road. Raziel was killed in a military action in Iraq, on a secret mission for British intelligence. At about the same time, Yair was being riddled with bullets by British detectives in Tel Aviv."

Raziel was a soldier who obeyed the law. Yair was a poet; he made the law. The soldier was weighed down by his weapons; his movements were limited by his specific gravity. He could never catch up with the poet who took to the air, sustained in his flight by visions of higher worlds. Eventually, of course, the soldier would reach the point where the poet last stood, and he would hear echoes of the poet's song. From these echoes he would spark a conflagration. But it was more than a question of time: "It's a question of style," the voice said again from behind the sheet.

"And it was I who helped to hang the sheet. I wish it were his shroud. You say no and he says yes; you spurn him and he seduces you. Why didn't I come and throw him out of the house? But no, I couldn't budge. I was glued to the floor, like a fool, a cripple. And your father is like all the others—a babe in the woods. 'Get up,' I say to him. 'Get up. Can't you see what's being done to your daughter in your own house?' And what does he answer: 'Let me sleep.' God in Heaven! Sleep? 'Get up,' I say to him. 'My heart bodes ill. Make him leave,' and he turns over on his other side. 'A certain person' you told me. 'A certain person wants to talk to me from behind a curtain.' A curse on the curtain. Why didn't you go with him? He's already taken you. When I think that my hands opened the door for this certain person. . ."

Mother knew better than I how ready I was to go with him, that I would be meeting him again, and that there would be no need for sheets or curtains between us. His name was Mattityahu, and he was one of twenty members of the Lechi who had recently escaped through a tunnel from the internment camp in Latrun. We met again in the street, and with his dyed hair and his made-up

face and his dark glasses, he was himself a walking curtain. So deft were his disguises that when, shortly after our second meeting, he was arrested by the British and sentenced to death, they didn't recognize him as one of the escapees for whom they were so frantically searching. He revealed his own identity in the courtroom.

One day the sergeant from my Etsel course dropped in to pay me a visit.

"What's that in your hand?" he asked, recognizing the *Hechazit* pamphlet. "Give it to me."

"Why?"

"You know why. That material is not allowed."

"Why?"

"It's put out by the Faction, that's why. And that, by the way, is what I wanted to talk to you about. We know that you are continuing to associate with the expelled members."

"I'm on a leave of absence."

"You have no leave to do as you please."

The opening salvo. The sergeant had a message to deliver from the organization. His duty done, his manner changed and he filled the room with the good and familiar incense of many days and nights of comradeship. But he could never depart for long from his official phraseology. He spoke emphatically about the honor and glory of Betar; he almost snapped to attention when he mentioned the great Jabotinsky. But all it added up to was: Don't you remember the way we sang together and yearned together? Don't you remember the way the scoffers laughed at us and threw stones at us when we marched? How could you have forgotten that? We were like one man, united. . . .

When Elimelech arrived that evening I had my decision for him.

"What happened?" He beamed.

"It happened *really* a long time ago. But there was one last string which I couldn't cut and it tangled all the rest, a very long, sentimental string. Along came our sergeant today and grabbed it, and played with it for all it was worth, and then it happened. The string simply broke."

"Yes, subjunctive."

"What's subjunctive?"

"I'm sorry, I meant to say conditional. It's a conditional sentence."

"What's conditional?"

"Didn't you ask if the sentence was subjunctive?"

Laughter.

"No, that's what your neighbor asked. What I asked was whether you had a question too, or was everything clear to you."

Why did Baruch leave the storeroom before the other boys arrived? Elimelech said it was to keep the cache from being discovered once the shot was heard. Yesterday Baruch died. The day before he accidentally shot himself in the stomach with his own gun in the Lechi storeroom in Haifa. He didn't wait for the return of his companion, who went to get help; he dragged himself to a nearby house, rang the doorbell, and asked for assistance. The owners of the house, merciful Jews that they were, gave him some water and phoned the police for help. Just as three comrades arrived to take the wounded man away, the police pulled up at the door. Baruch insisted that the three run for it and he covered their escape with a grenade. Two policemen, a Jew and an Englishman were hit. Of the two, however, it was the Jew who was killed. First to jump—first to die. The three escaped and Baruch began to crawl from the house on his belly, on his torn guts.

At the hospital, the doctors sought to save his life; they wanted to operate, but the police refused permission; saving the man might mean losing his last words. Every minute counted. They tormented him with questions, but Baruch wouldn't even tell them his own name; he just vomited blood and ceaselessly asked for water. He was permitted the blood; the water was denied him.

Yesterday he died, still thirsty. It was Amos who told me about his death. There was nothing about it in the morning papers. Tonight memorial notices will be posted all over town and everyone will want to know about a dead boy named Baruch.

In a week's time there were more memorial notices, and everyone wanted to know about Zion and Eliezer. Zion was one of the three who came to Baruch's rescue. They eluded the police, but not the bullets. Zion was hit and brought to Eliezer's house in Yavniel. Somebody informed, and on April 6, 1944, police opened fire on the house. Zion and Eliezer fought back until their ammunition was gone. Down to their last two bullets, each put his pistol to his mouth and squeezed the trigger. The British had plenty of ammunition when they broke into the house, but there was no one left to kill; there were only two dead bodies armed with two empty guns.

One morning I arrived at the seminary, late as usual, long after the bell had rung for classes to begin. The students were all running about in the hallway shouting, "We go home at noon. We go home at noon."

On the board in the classroom was an announcement signed by the officers of the class. The handwriting was Amalia's: "By order of the National Executive a period of fasting and general mourning has been declared for today from twelve o'clock noon to twelve o'clock midnight."

Nothing in particular had happened. A simple exercise in arithmetic had shown that a staggering number of Jews had been killed so far in European death camps. The tallies had shaken the conscience of the nation's leaders, who in turn sought to shake the conscience of the people dwelling in Zion so that they could shake the conscience of the world. It was nothing new. If the addition

had been made the previous day, we would have started to shake the conscience of the world a day earlier. The world's conscience was just itching to be shaken.

And my conscience? Morning after morning I saw scores of numbers, hundreds and thousands, hundreds of thousands, printed in the papers—the burnt and the butchered. I had seen numbers tattooed in blue on the arm of one who had managed to escape from a concentration camp, one number that had stepped out of line. But the living screams of the dying didn't reach me along with all those numbers. I never saw their last writhing spasms. I could not even clearly see the one whom I sought—the killer—the German. I saw him and I didn't. Someone was hiding him from me. He too wore a helmet, but he was British. It was he who formed a screen between us, who stood before me poised to kill, and it was in his ears that I screamed: "But I'm alive, alive! Fear me, I'm alive!"

Nine o'clock. Three hours until noon: one for logarithms; one for pedagogy; one for Bible. Such orderly procedure when everything was going haywire. The bells at the end of each period simply recalled our minds from their wandering and briefly freed our confined bodies from the wooden desks. We congregated in small groups.

"I'm against fasting," announced Dina, her voice dry, insignificant.

"Against it? Why?"

"Because I just think it's stupid."

Dina had never before been for or against anything. When Amos had asked me for the names of my classmates who might be contacted by the Lechi, or sent reading material, I couldn't think of a single one. And now here was Dina . . . Could it be? I drew closer.

"What's stupid about it?" Amalia demanded, pushing her way into the circle.

"Thinking that it's going to help anyone," Dina said.

"When you fast, you think about why you're fasting."

But Dina laughed. "When you fast, what you really think about is not being able to eat. I never think so much about food as I do

on Yom Kippur. Who ever thinks then about God and sin? I'm against fasting in general."

So that was it. She was against fasting in general. And I was already thinking that she was *for* something, even if it was above all else, for "wiping out" the terrorists. Which was to say that Amalia was a loyal member of *Haganah*. She was a walking ideology, sometimes defensive, more often hot to attack, always quick to wage battle. Now she was in the middle of another group, talking. No, making a speech. How official-sounding her voice was, like a megaphone! And the speech was generally the editorial from yesterday's paper.

The bell rang for the next period. Amalia held forth and nobody budged. A teacher approached, brief case in hand, hesitantly edging his way into the circle. Slowly a place was cleared for him, but class had been forgotten. The circle of students grew larger and wider. Amalia gathered momentum. Her chest rose and fell with her voice. Her sentences rocketed in every direction. Inhale, exhale, inhale, exhale. She supplied air enough for only the first half of each sentence, the second was on its own. In hold—exclamation point. "Through fire—and through water! We shall prevail—always! We shall fight—to the last!"

In such moments she was physically transformed. Hardly anything was left of her broad, stubborn, Slavic face; there remained only a stony profile whose outlines quavered and blended with all the other faces in the circle. Even her slightly crossed eyes, which normally gave her a spiteful, recalcitrant look, straightened themselves out.

The recess bell rang. It was already noon and time to go home. Suddenly I was alone in the long hallway. It had felt so good to stand in that circle and now it was gone. I felt pain in my right knee on which I had fallen the night before. It was beginning to swell.

Right from the very beginning, as soon as I had taken the bundle of posters from Amos, I knew that things wouldn't go smoothly. Soon it became obvious that a man was following us.

"Let him," said Dov. "We'll stick a poster on his puss."

Elimelech chortled. "But first we'll add his name to the list. He'll be the tenth."

The posters carried a notice about two Jewish detectives whom Lechi had put to death, and a list of nine others who were warned of a similar fate should they continue to collaborate with the British police in hunting us down.

Elimelech walked in front of me and spread the paste, while I fixed the posters to the walls. Dov kept an eye on all of us from across the street. When I stopped, the person behind me stopped; when when I started again, he followed. Nachalat Binyamin Street was a busy thoroughfare and it was still early in the evening. We were armed, but it didn't pay to make a scene, especially at a time when posters like ours were going up all over the city. And it might have been just a curious pedestrian, someone looking for a contact with the underground? More than once our people posting bills in the street had been approached and asked to provide a contact. Only the man behind me had steely eyes and kept his hands in his pockets. A detective?

The bundle of posters grew smaller. I stopped at the cold drink stand at the end of the street and asked for some juice or other. My shadow stopped beside me. I picked up the full glass, threw it in his face, kicked him in the groin, and took off on the run. It was then that my right leg buckled, as though the kneecap had come loose. I got up. It didn't hurt. I kept on running.

When we reassembled later at an agreed hour in the Garden of Kisses, Dov fell all over me: "You stole my thunder, but it's definitely worth a kiss. He's still stretched out there. How did you do it?"

"When Dov smells something," Elimelech said, "you can count on it; it's a one-hundred-per-cent sure bet. . . . Is she one of us or isn't she? What did I tell you?"

AT THE newsstand near my home only two papers were still fluttering on the wire in the morning breeze. Who had been out so early and bought up all the papers? Who in the neighborhood besides myself had been waiting since yesterday to read what Chisia Shapiro said to the judges?

The reporters in the Jerusalem courtroom had taken it in stride. "The defendant waived her right to be represented by counsel. She challenged the court's jurisdiction to try her. Standing in the dock, she attacked the judges and demanded to be treated as a prisoner of war." By now an account of such behavior was no longer a scoop. A week and two weeks earlier, however, when two members of Lechi, Tsvi Tabori and David Beigin, stood on the exact same spot and challenged the authority of the court to proceed against them—then it had been *news*.

The first person ever to challenge the authority of a British court to sit in judgment on a Jew in the Land of Israel was Avreshka Selman. That was in 1931, ten years before the Lechi came into existence and ten years before Avreshka became a member of it. In 1931 he was only one of a band of zealots whose strategy for fighting the British was purely intuitive. An intuition can't illuminate the way from afar, but it can give enough light to point out the proper direction to take. Avreshka was guilty of the charge brought against him. He had taken part in organized resistance to the 1931 census, the sole purpose of which was to supply data for new restrictions on Jewish immigration to Palestine. Caught, he stood and challenged the authority of a British judge to try him.

Intuition of so high a caliber is magical. Like a single ray of light it splits the darkness perpendicularly from above. Even more magically, however, it carries its own death within itself. To banish the darkness so that you can begin to act and to create, an intuitive flash isn't enough; you need an eternal light. And so, when two Lechi members, in 1944, proclaimed that they were challenging the jurisdiction of a British court to try them as criminals—a proclamation rooted in the values they lived by as well as in the code of war itself—there was something revolutionary in their conduct. Not only did Tsvi, and after him David, challenge the authority of a British court to try them; they also denounced the illegality of the very presence of a British regime in Palestine.

The reporters present in the courtroom hemmed and hawed; they didn't send in their first drafts then, as they did with Chisia; there were too many corrections to be made. It's hard to get everything right the first time a prisoner in the dock suddenly turns prosecutor and a judge suddenly appears as the accused. The reporters had to think it over: *O Law, are you upset? O Law, can it be that you are unjust?*

But that was only at the outset, at Tsu, at Tabori's trial. At the second trial, a week later, the judges' wigs stayed firmly on their heads; there was no longer any danger of their being thrown off balance by the aggressive tactics of the accused. Now they even had a statement of their own to make: "You are stabbing in the back men who are ready to sacrifice their lives for you. You are pointlessly undermining the hopes of the remnant of European Jews."

The next day Enshel Shpielmann in the dock was allowed to get as worked up as he pleased. The judges listened patiently; they even took the liberty of interrupting him from time to time to inform him that he was being irrelevant. He could take their word for it; they were judges after all, so they knew what the rules were. And what, actually, did Enshel's statement—a declaration to the effect that when his forefathers were leading cultured lives as scribes or priests or prophets or kings in this very Jerusalem, the progenitors of the judges were roaming about in the forests or on the steppes of Asia—have to do with the illegal possession of a revolver, the crime with which he was charged?

Irrelevant. The defendant is accused of possessing a weapon and he pleads lineal descent from the high priesthood. Asked who he is—the number of his identification card is all that is needed—he replies: A descendant of one of the oldest nations on earth. You can't even enter that in the record.

When he was asked if he had any request to make before his sentence was pronounced, he did have one, to be sure, but it was highly irregular: He wanted to know what they—the judges from London—were doing in Jerusalem.

“Ten years!”—a fair answer to the question, more or less. A relevant answer at any rate. “Ten years!” Brief and to the point. In a month the judges would be compelled to deliver a slightly longer sentence when Mattityahu Shmuelovitz would stand before them charged with illegal possession of a weapon and with shooting a British policeman. What was it he had said to me that night through the sheet? “Our arms are always with us; they won't go on missing the target forever.”

Chisia wasn't sentenced to death. True, there had actually been a bullet in the barrel of her gun. True, Chisia had told the judges how sorry she was that the police had surprised her in her room, so that she hadn't had a chance to defend herself. But the gun had been in a purse and Chisia was a woman. As the reporters in the courtroom described her: “A short, slender blonde girl with eye-glasses.”

“A slender blonde.” As though slender blondes were rare. As though all short blondes with eyeglasses were now standing in the dock, expressing regret that they hadn't been able to shoot it out with the police. A Colt revolver in a woman's purse, loaded with six bullets, one of which was waiting in the barrel . . .

The judges were men and it put them in an embarrassing position and only complicated matters. But it was only in Paradise that Eve could pull the wool over men's eyes. The judges' eyes were wide open: “All your behavior shows that you are a silly, thoughtless young girl who was misled by certain persons intent on violently disturbing the peace.”

Chisia was sentenced to four years.

I cursed them, envying Chisia her moment and waiting for my

own: simply to stand there before them and throw my contempt in their faces; simply to stand there, a prisoner, without bombs or guns, and yet victorious! When my moment finally came, the statement I read to the British judges had been prepared as far back as Chisia's trail.

A silly young girl, not to be taken seriously . . . Was it only the judges who thought that?

"Why does it always have to be operations?" Mazal, the commander of my unit, asked when I demanded that he let me take part in an actual combat activity. "Operations, operations, operations!" he scolded. "That's all I hear from any of you. Yesterday it was Drora; the day before Leah, Ofrat, and Michal; and now you. I don't get it. Isn't putting up posters an operation? Aren't undercover work and radio transmission operations?"

That was all he said. The questions stopped me. But I knew that if he had gone on to say what was on his mind, he would have added: "Leave the rest to us."

Leave it to you? And what about the blister on my finger that broke and bled all the while that I—just like the men in the class—was practicing cocking the stubborn hammer of the Mauser? To whom shall I leave that? I drove myself. The skin was peeling off my finger. I smiled and tried again. Just let there not be any difference between me, the one woman in the class, and the others. Just let the weakness of my sex not make itself felt, though I bleed not only from my finger. "Leave it to us"? And when it came to training with mines, didn't Leah leave many of the Lechi boys behind in the field? Weren't they still pressing the plunger when her charge was already going up in smoke?

And then there was Yael from Jerusalem, who waited day after day near the home of General Barker, commander of the British forces in Palestine. And one day he left the house and she hurried toward him, not running—just pushing a baby carriage. You don't run when you have a little baby in your carriage. The baby in the carriage, however, was a doll with a dynamite body and a detonator for a heart. And this was known only to Yael and to her finger as the two of them waited for the signal. . . .

All of these objections, though, are strident only now, when I set them down on paper. At the time I protested to Mazal, my voice was muffled by an inner misgiving: Why all this brag-gadocio? In fact, all the while I stood before Mazal, demanding to be let in on an operation, I demanded it only with my mind. All the while my intellect was trumpeting about discrimination and injustice, my heart looked on from the side: It's really best this way. Leave it to them. That's how it is and that's how it should be.

Whenever I accompanied any of the men as they set out for an action, I always noticed the same expectant gleam in their eyes and the same tense, yearning look on their faces, an anticipation of some longed-for and abstract object of sacrifice; and I knew that here was a spark of that primeval fire in which truth is born and lives; that here was the kind of tension from which the artist surely springs. Years later, however, I realized that the same tension had existed within me, only less strongly. Years later, when I first felt the flutter of a living creature inside me and immersed myself in an intoxicating release from the tension of conception, it suddenly dawned upon me why women, unlike men, are never born to be artists. Before a woman feels the pangs of the creative longing without which there is no art, her body already carries within its walls the labor of her love. The power of desire penetrates the flesh so deeply that it can never be truly expressed.

Yes, leave it to them, said a droll voice within me. But if I had had the ear for profounder voices, I would have heard the following as well: They will perform better on the battlefield than you, not only because they are stronger and quicker at cocking the hammer, but also because their spirit thirsts more than yours does to vanquish the death which you shall one day conquer within your own body.

In any event, Amos announced to me, "Tomorrow we're going out to the dunes for target practice."

"THE teachers' seminary is taking us on a tour of some schools." With that lie I could freely iron my khaki clothes and even manage to take some food along. Home was easy. The seminary was slightly more complicated, but two forged notes—one from the doctor and one from my mother—and I was free to go to the dunes.

Whenever Dov and Amos had spoken about the dunes, I had imagined them rising in a single wall, hiding things from me, taunting that as long as I had not penetrated their secret, I had not yet penetrated to the bottom of the underground. Each time my heart would twinge with desperate envy. When?

Yosele, the runner, was assigned to take me to the dunes. We left at twilight.

"We'd better hurry. The bus for Cholon leaves in a quarter of an hour."

"Cholon?"

"That's what I said, Cholon. You mean you've never been there? It's only a few kilometers from here, a new development they've built on the dunes. Some development! A couple of houses that look like boxes; it's a wonder they haven't already been buried by the sand."

Just a few kilometers, and I had been dreaming that one had to travel for nights on end.

Yosele didn't notice that I was sad. He didn't even look at me. He was a courier. He always had to be looking at his watch to see what time it was. "What time is it, Yosele?"

But suddenly it occurred to me that I had never bothered to look at Yosele either. I used to see him practically every day, and sometimes twice a day. . . . Take a message, send a message; I'm gone, he's gone. See you later. . . . Now he sat by my side in the back seat of the bus to Cholon, a single yellow curl coming down over his forehead. I became annoyingly sentimental. How yellow he was. All of him: his eyeballs, his hair, his skin. In addition to his messages and his scraps of adhesive paper, Yosele had eyes and hair and skin. Crumpled square notes sealed with pieces of brown adhesive paper, always in a hurry jouncing and joggling in Yosele's pocket until he gave them to their rightful owner. Yosele hurries; he swallows the alleyways; the streets swallow him. He has a specially large pocket; he sticks his hand in and he pulls his hand out; he puts in a message and he takes out a message; a street corner and he's gone.

He seemed so distant, as though he grudged my going to Cholon. Could it be that he, too, would have liked to fire pistols at a target? His sad eyes had likes and dislikes, too. But he had to make another trip back to the city to fetch Boaz, Ephraim, and Yoram. Yosele knew the way to many places; he could take you door to door. Tomorrow he would have letters to give out to Uzi, Uri, and Nira; and the day after tomorrow to others, and so on, to all who were scheduled to take part in operations, and write *results* on little pieces of paper and give them to Yosele, who would give them to somebody else.

"Yosef," I said, turning to him. "Yosef."

All of a sudden I had a great urge to hear his voice. I couldn't remember having heard it before, just a dim and distant echo saying "hello" and "good-by."

But what could I have said? Why did Yosele look at me with such astonishment? All I did was to call him by his name, Yosef. What on earth for? It was the first time I had ever called him that. Why hadn't it ever occurred to anybody to call him Yosef before? It sounded so nice and self-contained. Who added the garish ending, making it sound so tawdry, so public? Anyone could call him Yosele, anyone at all.

"Have you been to the dunes often, Yosele?"

“Have I been often? How do you think you could get out to the dunes if Yosele hadn’t been there many times before you?”

Why the third person? Or did Yosele always talk about Yosele this way? And the anger in his voice, as though I had tried to attack him? What are you, Yosele? Why are you, Yosele? But I couldn’t. I mustn’t. How had I ever missed the prideful, arrogant note in his voice? I had never listened to him so well as I listened now to his silence: What do you think? Would anyone ever get anywhere at all if Yosele hadn’t been there a long time before him? And whose heart do you think beats faster before an operation? Yosele’s heartbeat accelerates a long time before, and a long time after. Not that Yosele takes part in operations. If he did, who would run urgent errands and cradle bundles of dynamite and grenades against his chest to get them from the storerooms to those who use them? Careful Yosele, careful that your heartbeat doesn’t set them off prematurely.

In 1948, Yosele’s heart blew up, hit by Arab mortar fire in the dunes of the Negev.

YOSELE had gone for some water. The evening breeze played mischievously with the sand, smoothing down the little dunes, rounding them off, lifting them gently upward a grain at a time. A grain plus a grain plus a grain equaled a dune—creation—until that too was whisked away by the wind and dispersed as infinite particles. It all depended on how the wind blew.

Really, it was a shame that the boxlike houses across the way hadn't been covered up by sand; their whitewashed façades were so ugly. Squared-off, right-angled boxes: everything ruler straight, deprived of imagination and love—here in the midst of the shifting dunes where minute by minute all was reborn. Even the ridge I sat on, the tallest in view, seemed changed.

"I'll be back soon," Yosele had said. "Don't you and the dune go and get lost together."

It was getting dark. Why hadn't he taken me with him? It couldn't have been for security reasons: those boxes couldn't possibly be inhabited by any of our people.

"Tonight we'll save the boys the trouble of coming all the way from the bunker to get water from one of the yards," Yosele had said.

I had heard of a bunker in the dunes, and I also knew that a number of "refugees" were living in it. These were the twenty Lechi members who, a half-year before, had escaped through a tunnel from the political prisoner camp in Latrun. Refugees because they were escaped jailbirds with no real roof over their heads. It was easier to escape from prison than it was to find a hiding place.

Despite the fact that the mass escape was a hard blow to British prestige and a definite boost to Lechi's reputation, particularly among the Jewish youth, in 1944 we still lacked sufficient sympathizers and money to allow us to rent suitable rooms in which to hide escapees. There were so many inquisitive eyes, not only those of British detectives and hired agents, but also those of ordinary Jews whose ideas about freedom and foreign rule differed from ours. True, their confidence in the British regime and British justice was constantly and severely shaken: by the sinking of the refugee ship *Struma* in the ocean; by the Arab riots instigated against the Jews; by the English death sentence upon Jewish land reclamation, saying, this far you can go and no farther. For Jews this wasn't justice, and they began protesting with increasingly abusive language. But in one respect the Jewish public still saw eye to eye with the British: Jewish boys who had taken upon themselves the fight against the foreign regime were back-stabbers. Jewish officials publicly denounced Lechi operations and actively encouraged informers.

Thus it wasn't possible in those days to make any long-term arrangements for hideaways. A room could be fine one day, but that night someone might be seen throwing suspicious glances at it, and on the morrow it would be worthless. Drora, who was scheduled to pose as the wife to one of the escapees, suddenly discovered that distant relatives of hers lived in the neighborhood—distant, but close enough to permit dropping in for a visit. The marriage had to be annulled. An escaped prisoner was not his own boss. He couldn't come and go as he pleased for fear of being recognized.

Three days after the twenty escaped, Siman-Tov was recognized by the police and shot as he made his way through some orchards in the Plain of Sharon. Getting about in a disguise wasn't easy as it looked in the mirror. One refugee, for instance, decided to disguise himself as a woman. His costume was a smashing success. All the girls contributed: a pair of high heels, a petticoat, a head kerchief, a pair of stockings. Lipstick and rouge were available at any drugstore. "She" looked fine. The only trouble was the man inside. He couldn't help thinking that every male in the street

was about to make him a proposition, that every fellow he heard whistling was whistling at him, and that "she" was getting the eye from each passing pedestrian. The "bride" was too beautiful for "her" own good. A bad business, because eyes in the street could be injurious even when they weren't meant to be. Finally, one day when our hero was convinced that his good looks had positively caught the fancy of someone walking behind him, he sprang, with a most unfeminine leap, onto a bicycle and rode away. It was never ascertained whether he had really been ogled by anyone, but when he leaped upon the bicycle, a man definitely did give chase: it was the owner of the bicycle.

Most of the escaped prisoners went out only at night and to unfrequented places. This not only rendered them temporarily useless to the underground, it also meant organizing a whole new branch simply to maintain contact and supply them with food.

Only a few of the twenty, like Siumka, our instructor at the shooting range in the dunes, had somehow managed to get about freely during the day. But for several of the refugees the dunes themselves, an abandoned area which stretched from Bat Yam to Rishon Letsion, offered a temporary solution to their problem. What was abandoned on the surface sprang to life in the underground. The same boys who had recently dug a seventy-meter tunnel in the Latrun earth to reach the sunlight, dug again with practiced hands, this time to make a bunker deep enough to shut all sunlight out.

Yosele returned with two cans of water and his shoes slung around his neck.

"Adam will like that, two cans," he said, putting one into my hand. "Adam is the king of the dunes," he explained. "He's in charge of the bunker. You'll get to know him."

"One of the twenty?" I asked.

"No, one of the twenty-one," said Yosele with a trace of impatience. He had already said more than was permissible.

Every now and then we put down the cans and I rested my tired arm while Yosele scrambled up a rim of sand to survey the area. I

hadn't the slightest idea what he was looking for. Right and left, fore and aft, there was nothing but sand, sand, and more sand.

"How do you manage to find your way in these dunes?"

"How? Simple. You have eyes. Yosele has eyes. By the bunker there's a tall tree. Me and the tree, we come toward each other. It's a fig with a broad crown. There are other trees too, but this one's the tallest. If you go up on a ridge, and if you know what you're looking for, it appears."

"And at night? Soon it'll be dark . . ."

"At night? Simple. If there's no tree and no eyes, there's still Yosele; that's enough. Once, as a matter of fact, the tree didn't appear and I got lost. It wasn't even dark then, just sort of gloomy. But the tree suddenly wasn't there. A hard wind was blowing and for the first time Yosele didn't know his right from his left. I couldn't even turn back, because I didn't know any more where back or front was. But I didn't want to go on following the wind either, because it could have led me straight to one of the training bases the British have around here. Over there, at that end of the dunes, the British practice on howitzers, nothing less. Once a shell fell right into the bunker, right over one of the boys' heads. Go and sue! After all, they've got a right to this wasteland, too. The shells aren't so bad, so long as they don't show up in front of the bunker themselves. So you want to know what happened? I had no choice. I sat down on the sand and waited. I was scared to stretch out because I was tired enough to fall asleep, and then even if I woke up in the morning, a lot of good it would do me. Me and all my messages would have been buried under a mountain of sand. Like a tombstone, if you get what I mean. I sat there all night until dawn. Know what? Damned if that fig tree wasn't fifty meters from where I was. Less even. Less than fifty meters off. And I had to sit there all night long and curse at the wind."

I was tired. The can of water, though not as full as when we set out, was still heavy, and the sand blew in my face.

"Is there still a long way to go, Yosele?"

"Half an hour more and we're in the bunker."

"In the bunker?"

“No, not you. You’ll wait for me nearby. The bunker’s just for refugees, but the shooting range isn’t far from it. . . . I wonder if Siumka’s here yet. There’s one person, at least, who can get here by himself.”

Yosele whistled along with the wind, which whistled through my disheveled hair. There was sand in my mouth, my nostrils. There is more than one taste and one smell to sand, and the sand which now blew fiercely in my face had none of the intoxicating effect that the playful, caressing sand had had before. Finally, there was another whistle in my ears followed by a loud voice shouting at us: “Bear left! Left!” A tall figure rose on the hilltop over us, hands waving emphatically: “Left! Left!”

The man was naked from the waist up. A large pistol dangled from his hip and a pair of long, barefoot legs stuck out of his khaki shorts. He signaled to us like a traffic cop, then disappeared behind the dune.

“Wait here with the cans—I’ll be right back,” Yosele commanded, and began running in the direction of the dune.

He came back promptly and annoyed: “Come on. I caught hell from Adam for letting you get too close to the bunker. As if there was some kind of boundary you weren’t allowed to cross. ‘Get her out of here immediately!’ he shouted. I don’t understand what all the fuss is about. Maybe it has something to do with Wilkins, that dog of a police chief they shot this week in Jerusalem. Finally some revenge for Yair; finally we got him. But Adam wanted to plug the bastard himself, personally. When Adam was arrested, he was wearing a blue shirt like the ones they wear in the *Hashomer Hatsair*. When Wilkins interrogated him, it drove him batty: ‘I know all your different Jewish parties like the back of my hand,’ and he’d hit Adam in the face. You don’t know Adam, but if you did, you’d know that that’s worse than putting a bullet in him. A bullet goes straight to the heart, but a blow digs deep into a man’s soul. From then on he lived to kill Wilkins, and he was going to do it wearing a blue shirt. Adam and Siumka waited for him a couple of times in Tel Aviv, and each time Adam wore a particularly blue shirt, but Wilkins didn’t show. And the fellows in Jerusalem got him. That’s luck for you. For Adam it’s like being slapped in the

face again. But let's get out of here before I catch hell again. The shooting range is over there, to the left."

"Get out of here." That was Adam's first advance to me. Immediately I bore him a grudge. The can of water suddenly slipped and spilled into the thirsty sand. The king of the dunes wouldn't like that much.

Siumka was waiting at the range, an oasis covered with fruit-bearing fig trees. We weren't going to begin until the next day, since we had to wait for the others to arrive. Yosele was going back to the city to get them. Meanwhile, as long as I didn't approach too close to the bunker, I was free to stroll around in the area, or to climb a tree and have a bite of the sandwich I had brought with me from home. It was peculiar to be eating a carefully made, well-buttered sandwich in the dunes. The following day, when our food would start coming from the field kitchen in the bunker, the bread would be buttered with sand, and the sand would have chunks of meat in it.

I wondered how many boys there were in the bunker. Every few minutes one could be seen running, naked from the waist up, and carrying a gun on his hip. Occasionally, at a distance, I saw small groups of them. According to Siumka, one of the hilltops had somebody watching around the clock.

"Don't wander too far," Siumka said. "It would be best if you went to sleep. Yosele won't be back with the others before morning. I'll be in the bunker until then." Siumka was also a refugee. What had Yosele meant when I asked him whether Adam was one of the twenty, and he had answered that he was one of the twenty-one? Where had the extra one come from?

The sound of spirited singing suddenly reached me from over the dunes. I had never heard Lechi people sing that way before. In the underground you couldn't sing out loud, not only because you might be heard, but also because everything was already singing within you, and if you tried to raise your voice, it would only be swallowed up by that great inner gale. I know that I myself sang that way. All day long. Even when I was putting up a poster, or trailing a shadow, or taking a revolver apart, or trying to recruit a new member. Everything was full of song.

Now the refugees sang boyishly, longingly. The dunes had no harmful ears. The words of Yair's poem echoed back to me:

"We will wrestle with God and with death
We will welcome the Redeemer of Zion.
We will welcome him. Let our blood
Be a red carpet in the streets,
And on this carpet our brains
Will be like white lilies."

Today, after many years—the British having left, the melodies we sang having become so familiar we're forced to turn our attention to the words we sang—when I look at manuscripts and drafts of Yair's poems, their artificiality shocks me. Like an amateur writer of doggerel, Yair would generally begin by setting down in the margin of the page a long list of rhyming words, a miniature lexicon, from which he would proceed to choose his rhymes: fight, right; death, breath. I am shocked—but after a moment a melody begins to come back to me, one that belongs to many, many days and nights, to many hearts and many bodies, a great army of them. And the melody puts fresh life into the dry manuscripts and revives the empty rhymes. They come back, these melodies, as I used to sing them to myself, voicelessly, but also as the boys sang them that night in the bunker, with their full voices.

Bullets whistled in the morning breeze.

"Fire!"

"The sight, the sight, keep your eye on the sight!"

"A hell of a nice hole. Fire again!"

"It's all right to be nervous. Let the gun jerk back a little, but your hand must be steady. Feel the gun as part of your hand."

When Eli was teaching me how to strip a revolver and put it back together again, he gave me a look of personal injury, as if to say, "You handle it as though it were nothing but scrap metal. If you want to kill with it, you first have to put some life into it. So let's have a little more joy, a little more enthusiasm."

Big, tall let's-have-a-little-more-of-everything Eli! Everything he did was with "a little more enthusiasm." It was hard to fathom

such an attitude in somebody who looked down on the world from a height of six and a half feet, hard to fathom the constant ecstatic rubbing of hands and the eyes devout with pleasure. But Eli's enthusiasm was real and infectious. I, too, was infected on this occasion. I'd held revolvers in my hand before; I'd probed around inside them, put bullets in the magazine and loaded them through the muzzle, even squeezed the trigger until they spat fire. But for some reason I could never believe that the flash I saw really came from the piece of metal. But in Eli's presence, when the unloaded revolver was in pieces on the table, I saw for the first time how a gun could become impassioned, how it could hate and take aim. . . . But when I stood in the dunes, firing one again and again—why did I still not feel as though it were a part of my hand? Siumka was right. He himself handled a gun differently. So did Yoram. So did Arazia. So did Boaz. So did Adam.

Even today when Adam picks up the model six gun from our son's cowboy outfit and zestfully fires the paper pellets: b-a-a-ng, bang-bang; when I see his huge hand caressing the wooden handle of the toy, it is as though something in it comes to life. And I see how so many dreams and so many hopes become attached to the reality of a gun handle, and how confidence and potency flow from the gun into the hand until the two become one.

The second evening in the dunes I met Adam. The dunes themselves were our only introduction. I couldn't sleep, couldn't shut the vista of sand from my eyes; I wanted to tumble endlessly in it, to wander and prowl from hill to hill.

I rose.

Siumka raised his head. "Where to?"

"Just for a walk."

"Keep away from the bunker, and don't go far."

The bunker was to the right, so I headed left across a strip of hard red soil and found myself among the dunes. I wasn't going to get lost. The trees, after all, weren't really moving; it only seemed as if they were accompanying me. I fingered the cold pistol in my belt. My head was foggy and the dampness filled my nose. Behind me the branches of the trees moved up and down, up and

down, and disappeared. And I? The bunker was to the right . . . was I still heading left?

"You'd better head back. Why did you go so far from the base?"

"Who are you?" My hand tugged for the gun.

The man laughed. "Do you think one day's target practice is enough to make you a quick-draw expert, even if you did hit the bull's-eye once?"

The laugh was strange, but the voice was familiar. Earlier it had driven me away; now it was mocking me.

"Who are you?"

"Adam. Why so angry? Weren't you warned not to come near the bunker?"

"But I didn't mean to come near it. I was heading in the other direction."

"And you hit the bunker exactly. The lookout told me to be prepared for a visit by a nightingale."

"Who told you about my hitting the bull's-eye?"

"Siumka told me. We supply the bullets from the bunker; that gives us the right to know where they go."

He laughed again, but I didn't even smile. Even his small talk was authoritative and not at all comical. He was wearing a knitted sweater and a beret, and he had a wild, golden-hued mustache.

He said, "Sit down if you like." He sat down a little way from me and offered me a cigarette. "So you couldn't fall asleep, is that it? Used to a mattress, eh? And last night? Last night maybe it was because we sang all night. We hadn't sung around here for a long time, and then last night Siumka felt like singing. We hadn't seen him for quite a while, but instead of swapping memories as usual, someone began to sing and we all joined in. Somebody said it was because of you. If there's a woman somewhere near, even if she's in a treetop, it makes you want to be heard."

"Why do they call you the twenty-first?"

Now he laughed wholeheartedly. "Who calls me that? The fact is, if it suits you I'm one of the twenty. If not, I'm just one, or perhaps, indeed, I'm the twenty-first."

“Is that a riddle?” My voice was coquettish, pleading. Tell me. Tell me, even if it takes all night.

But he fell silent, smoked the cigarette down to the butt and lit another. Then he spoke:

“A riddle? By now it’s something that’s long over with. But a few moments ago it wasn’t a riddle. A few months ago it was nothing but a dream.”

THE SKIES over the prison camp in Latrun were still sunny, but Adam had envisioned storm clouds gathering and winter rains beginning to fall right above the seventy-meter strip of ground over the tunnel. The rain would soak the sand and weaken the wooden supports constructed by the twenty members of Lechi in Bunkhouse 4 where the tunnel began. Adam was a man who followed things to the end, generally to the bitter end. Not everything had an end, of course, and not everything that was begun was always finished—but if there was to be an end, it had to be Adam's way.

Meanwhile, the sun went on shining, and the tunnel remained as it was, finished and well buttressed; except for the twenty prisoners who were eventually to escape through it, no one in the camp knew of its existence. Although as yet no one was suspicious, someone might at any time begin to suspect something. Occasional surprise inspections had so far failed to uncover the tunnel's opening at the cabin's rear, but that was no guarantee for the future. In addition, the sudden gardening enthusiasm of the cabin's occupants was apt to arouse the curiosity of any one of the camp's hundreds of prisoners. Gardens were springing up overnight from the dirt the twenty men let drop from their pockets on their daily strolls around the yard.

There was, therefore, reason for Adam to feel pessimistic. As long as he had been working with the others inside the tunnel, the work itself had imbued him with a craftsman's confidence and had sent his imagination on wild flights. Even when it seemed that he

might choke in the airless, constricted passage, he breathed deeply and kept his hopes up: just a little more, just another meter. But now the digging was done and the tunnel stood ready, inviting Adam to break through the last layer of earth which separated him from the narrow, deep ravine into which it emerged, far from the searchlights and the barbed wire of the prison camp. How could he possibly wait, be patient, and hope for the best?

But that was exactly the demand relayed from Michael, their contact on the central committee of Lechi: "Wait a while, boys. Soon we'll be ready for you. Everything will be all right. Be patient."

And Adam did have patience; he lost it only when new instructions came, postponing by an additional month the date set for the escape.

The week before there had been a different kind of postponement: Adam had been called into the camp warden's office and given a six-month extension of his sentence, "in accordance with emergency regulations." He had remained calm. When you've already had five six-month extensions, you lose your calm only if it doesn't happen a sixth time. But to have one's sentence extended for another month by the central committee? That was no longer a matter of just a little more practice. Now Adam began to ponder the instructions themselves. What lay behind this additional delay? What assurance did they have that, when it was over, they wouldn't be asked to wait another month? But by then there would no longer be any point in waiting, because the heavens would have interceded. Adam saw the entire tunnel collapsing in the winter rains.

"If I could only get to see Michael."

"Michael has no particular need of you when it comes to making decisions. We're all dying to get out of here as badly as you are. But trust Michael; he knows what he's doing."

"What is there to know? Why so many complicated calculations? The only calculation that matters is that any day now the whole thing is liable to be discovered or to cave in. I'm sure Michael doesn't understand how serious it is. Outside everything

looks different. If Michael were in here, we'd already be out there."

That notion tickled someone's fancy.

"If Michael were here? Why not? We can arrange for him to come to the ravine at night. We'll let him into the tunnel and he'll pay us a visit. You'll convince him how serious the situation is, and we'll all leave together."

Adam didn't laugh. In his mind's eye, though still vague and elusive, a picture was forming of how he, Adam, would appear in the ravine, at the far end of the tunnel, and greet the boys as they issued from it one by one. The picture was nebulous, but the determination to meet Michael was quite clear. And not necessarily in Bunkhouse 4 either.

If not in Bunkhouse 4, there was no choice but somewhere outside. He would escape, but not from Latrun. It would be possible, of course, to arrange for a solo escape from the camp—it had been done before—but whether or not it succeeded it was liable to result in a thorough search of all the cabins, and in the discovery of the tunnel. Only . . . how could he get out of the prison camp without escaping from it?

One morning, while he was taking his exercises with the other boys in the yard, an abrupt movement sent a sharp twinge of pain through the small of his back and momentarily prevented him from straightening up. The pain went away, but a decision was made: He would pretend to be ill so as to be sent to the hospital of the central prison in Jerusalem. From there he might be able to escape. A scar on his stomach from an old operation would seem to make the back condition more serious; at any rate, it would discourage any attempt to straighten him up by force.

Instead of heading back from the yard to Bunkhouse 4, Adam began to hobble toward the *Mustafa*, the camp infirmary. Completely doubled over, he seemed to be making strenuous efforts to keep from crying with pain.

The *Mustafa* bustled with activity. One attendant rushed off to bring ice while another administered a shot of morphine. It didn't help; Adam's pain wasn't coming from the nerves. He continued to groan.

The doctor telephoned the hospital in Jerusalem and requested an ambulance. As the attendants loaded Adam into it on a stretcher, the doctor roared at them: "Watch out there! All I need is for that old scar to come apart!" He turned to the driver: "Make it fast. He's in critical condition."

Arnon had stuck a note into Adam's hand as he was being loaded into the ambulance. Arnon, Adam's closest friend in the cabin, was also head of the prisoners' grievance committee, and was thus able to move freely about the camp.

The ambulance began to move, with two policemen armed with Tommy guns and Adam, his feet chained to the stretcher.

The camp warden shouted, "Keep your eyes on him. He's a dangerous character!"

The note was from Gra. You couldn't mistake his handwriting: the elegant, calligraphic letters—the mark of the scribe. Holding it under the edge of the blanket, Adam managed to read it. It contained only four words: "Escape if you can."

Gra was in prison, but he was still a member of the Lechi central committee. His words were a command.

If I can? Certainly I can, sir. It's a good thing, sir, that you were here to command me.

In Jerusalem the nurses treated the dangerously ill patient with great proficiency. The directions they received were strict: "Not to be moved, pending further instructions. To be fed nothing but liquids, pending further instructions."

Adam gulped. Only liquids? He was already half starved to death. Had he known he was going to be so sick, he would have arranged for an early lunch. When would those further instructions arrive? Not to be moved? Soon he would sprout wings and fly away! He took note of his surroundings. He was in a small barred room with six other sick prisoners. Among them were both Jews and Arabs, but all nodded at him sympathetically: "What can we do for you, friend?"

What you can do for me friends, is to stop staring at me all the time, so that I can rest my contorted facial muscles for a while.

And you can stop munching on your dry bread with such hearty appetites and let me digest my liquids in peace and quiet.

In the corridor beyond the barred door were a British sergeant, a British policeman, and an Arab guard. Every now and then they peered into the room. They didn't pay any special attention to Adam. Their job was to keep bodies from escaping, not souls. Adam, therefore, was not their concern. Souls did concern the nurses, and they—particularly the Jewish ones—treated him quite decently: "Did you have a comfortable night? How are your pains?"

Adam wasn't an amateur at this game, so he didn't say. "I feel terrible." Instead he replied, "Much better, thank you," depending on his ghastly voice and his tormented expression to contradict him.

Tomorrow or the day after he would begin to feel better and his expression would improve. He needed to move about, to investigate his surroundings, and to plan the details of his escape.

The distance from the barred room to the lavatory was no more than ten meters, but on Adam's fourth day in the hospital—his first out of bed—it took him twenty minutes to cover it. He took a step and rested; began another step and collapsed helplessly on the shoulder of a nurse. He took two more determined steps forward and groaned, "Nurse, please, I need a chair."

Adam had time. Now, once again he had patience. The ones who lacked it were the nurses and guards who had to accompany him back and forth. But no matter how impatient you are, you don't prod a man who is bent over double and whose head nearly touches his knees. It was heart-rending:

Why do you go about bent over like that, mister?

So that I can soon straighten up, dear nurse, for when I resume my full height and stand up straight, you lovely nurses will still be looking for me on the floor. The guards at the door won't look any higher than my waist. They have never seen my face, so as I glide by them they will pay it no mind, but go about their business, which is to stand watch.

The nurses' and guards' impatience didn't last long. After a few trips from the sickroom to the lavatory and back, their suspicions

vanished; Adam's infinitely slow pace put their doubts to rest. A prisoner like this wouldn't escape in a million years, the guards thought. The nurses thought: Such a patient will kill us before he dies himself. Adam had ceased to worry anyone.

Now he could begin to take notice of what was going on around him. During his first days in the hospital, while his eyes were usually shut, his mind had been ceaselessly at work, inventing schemes and rejecting them, constructing elaborate edifices and tearing them down again. The basic idea, however, had remained unchanged since he left Latrun: On a given day he would doff his gray hospital pajamas, put on his street clothes, and stride straightforwardly down the corridor to the stairway that led to the courtyard opening on the street.

It still wasn't a plan, though; more like a questionnaire: How could a complete invalid, without attracting attention, manage unassisted to put on street clothes under what he was already wearing? Under the noses of which nurses and guards would it be best to make the break? At what hour of the day would the hallway most likely be brimming with civilians—doctors, visitors, and the usual British detectives?

Detectives! There was an idea. Adam's eyes and hair were reasonably fair; he had an imposing mustache, and his physique was such as to be no disgrace to anyone in His Imperial Majesty's service. His stock of English curses would no doubt prove adequate, and his khaki shorts, which were lying in the drawer of the night table alongside his bed, would meet the high standards of British colonial tradition. Only his emphatically Jewish nose tended to spoil things a little, but its dimensions could be offset by the short pipe he had in his possession.

Fine, Adam. Now you can start escaping.

He started. He writhed in pain, was given sedatives, grew wolfishly hungry for a slice of Arab bread. From beneath lowered lids he noticed that a certain sergeant, whose chest was bespangled with World War I medals, was fond of snoozing now and then while on guard duty. The war in which he had fought was over, so he could allow himself his forty winks. Sleep well, good sergeant. When you're asleep Adam can begin to wander. When you can't

sleep, you toss and turn, whether you want to or not. But Adam wanted to. Now he could reach into the drawer of the table and take out his civilian clothes. When you get a sudden attack of pain, you have convulsions under the blanket. While Adam was having his convulsions, he slipped off his pajamas, wriggled into his shorts and shirt, and put the pajamas back over them. Ouch, I can't stand it! Now Adam could groan for real. After one full week on a liquid diet, it wasn't easy to perform such acrobatics—with one hand, too, for the other hand remained above the blanket to ward off the evil eye.

The next day Adam was supposed to receive his first soft-boiled egg, on the doctor's instructions. A pity, too, because Adam had intended not only to skip breakfast, but to skip the hospital itself. The escape was planned for an early hour. He would make his usual slow way down the corridor, enter the lavatory by himself—the guard always stayed outside—and take off his pajamas underneath which were his street clothes. Then he would clap his pipe in his mouth and straighten up. Straighten up? After having been bent over so long, he wasn't certain that he would be able to straighten up.

Adam was ready for the morning. He knew that the early hours were the best, not only because they followed immediately upon the darkness, but also because the corridor was busiest then. The day shifts came on duty; officials milled around, and eyes that had been closed in sleep all night were not yet really alert. At such a time it was not likely that a tall detective in khaki shorts would attract attention, especially not when he looked so upright and self-assured.

Adam knew where he was going, but his feet dragged slightly more than usual as he shuffled to the lavatory. Suppose he didn't succeed? Then the tunnel, too, would be out. He wouldn't be sent back to Latrun; he would undoubtedly be transferred to the central prison in Jerusalem as a disciplinary measure.

The guard waiting for Adam to emerge from the lavatory walked back and forth along the corridor. After having accompanied Adam from the sickroom at a snail's pace, it felt good to

be able to take a few long, animal-like strides. In a minute he would have to see the sick man back to his bed again; meanwhile, a little exercise wouldn't hurt. Suddenly, however, he pulled up short: the sick man was taking longer than usual. His gait this morning had been uncustomarily weak. What could be the matter with him? Did he need help?

The guard quickly called the nurse, who began to knock on the lavatory door: "It's me, the nurse. Don't you fell well? Do you need help?"

Those damned pajamas! Why had it taken so long to get them off? Could it be that he was really sick? He felt awful. He was on the verge of coming out—and now this knock on the door. Was he just dizzy, or was everything around him really spinning? If only she'd stop knocking on the door; if only she'd stop persisting: "Do you hear me? Are you all right?"

"Yes, thank you. I don't need anything. My bowels are loose."

Hurry, Adam, hurry! They mustn't try to come in. Put the pajamas back on. . . . with the nurse waiting outside he had no other choice.

The first attempt had flopped. At least he wouldn't lose out on the egg. Only he wasn't hungry. Yesterday's liquids were rising in his gorge. Swallow them, Adam! Eat your egg. Perhaps it will give you the strength to undress a little faster tomorrow.

In a short while the doctor would be making his morning rounds. Before that happened he would have to undergo another attack, so that he could writhe beneath the blankets and take off his street clothes.

"How do you feel today?" the doctor asked.

"Better," Adam answered. "A little better."

"Tomorrow morning you'll prepare the patient for X rays," said the doctor.

"Fine," said the nurse on duty. "Tomorrow at ten."

At nine o'clock the next morning a tall gentleman, smoking a pipe and wearing a white shirt and khaki shorts, stepped out of the lavatory of the government hospital in Jerusalem, turned to his left with firm, measured steps, and headed for the stairway that

led down to the exit. It was a shame that he didn't have to use any of the English curses which he had rehearsed all night long. He really would have liked to rattle off a few of them at the Arab sentry standing by the door, just for the sake of making some noise. But the sentry salaamed and swung open the gate.

Adam set off in a great hurry. Twenty friends were waiting in the tunnel at Latrun.

A month later he appeared in the ravine with Dani and Avraham and helped pull his comrades one by one out of the earth and into the moonlight. There were twenty of them and Adam, who helped pull them up, was the twenty-first.

Little did I dream, that sandy night as Adam finished his story that in two years time I, too, would escape from the same Jerusalem hospital, take the exact route, turning left from the wash-room, head for the exit, and leave. Not as a detective, though, and not in khaki shorts, but wanting to shout at the top of my lungs into the empty reaches of the world.

THE BOY'S faded cap is tilted down over his forehead to keep off the sun's rays. He dips his brush into the pastepot standing near him on the sidewalk. In his hands he holds a large poster lettered in gleaming blue. The poster is affixed to a wall. Five fingers press it smooth. One of the corners begins to curl. Another touch of glue and all resistance is gone. Now the paper is without a wrinkle. The boy takes a second poster from the bundle.

My friend and I stand looking at the bill posted on the wall. "What are you smiling at?" he asks. We are in Jerusalem and it is 1959, shortly before elections for the fourth Knesset.

"At the poster," I answer.

"Have you read it?"

"No, but did you see the way the boy got the corner to stay down? . . . Read it? No. The letters are too blinding in the sunlight."

"There you go again." My friend sighs lightly, as though he had caught me being naughty. "The romanticism of dark nights. In case you still don't know, permit me to inform you: The British have left. They've been gone for nearly a dozen years."

The romanticism of night. . . . The large, colorful words on that poster are lifeless not because they weren't drawn clandestinely on a stencil, but because these letters were never dreamt by anyone in the middle of the day or night.

For my friend the darkness is when he can stick out his tongue at whomever he pleases. And he crows:

"There are thieves in the night, too."

Indeed, there *are* thieves. Once—it was autumn of 1944—as we lay in a public park at three o'clock in the morning, on a bench not far from me one began to snore.

"We'd better get out of here," Boaz said. "There's someone on that bench over there."

"It's not necessary," Yoram answered quietly. "He's a thief. He's hiding from the bright lights the same as we are."

We had been in the park since midnight, taking turns at sleeping. Two of us would stay awake and one would sleep. Now it was my turn to sleep. Yoram turned to me. "I hope the paste you made is thinner than it was the last time. You're not cut out to be a cook."

"It's much thinner," I said. "This batch was made by my mother."

First my mother hadn't been able to find her saucepan. Then the starch disappeared. Then the tablecloth stuck to the china.

"What are you cooking this time?" she asked me, returning home unexpectedly from a visit to a neighbor.

"Starch. For my skirt."

"And yesterday too? And last week? Move over"—my mother pushed me aside—"and let me make the paste properly for you. Just don't think that you can fool your mother as easily as you fool the English. You're gone for whole nights at a time. First it's a party at a friend's house, then it's to study for an exam. Starch for your skirt! Just don't go and fasten your skirt to the wall. Hand me that spoon."

The man on the bench rose and stretched. He stopped for a moment as he passed, inspected us with sleepless eyes, and sauntered on with his hands in his pockets.

"He's not a thief," I said. "He just fell asleep on the bench. Did you see how he looked at us?"

"You know nothing about thieves," Yoram sighed. "That's just it! He wasn't afraid of us because he could smell that we weren't here to serenade the moon either. But why aren't you sleeping?"

"It's not worth the effort," Boaz said. "In a quarter of an hour we begin work."

"Have you read the placards?"

"There's nothing to read. A black border. They're memorial announcements."

"Who's going to spread the paste tonight and who's going to post the bills?" I asked Yoram.

"We'll do it the usual way," he replied. "What's different about tonight? Or have you changed your theories about the relative importance of the two jobs? It's been two days, after all, time enough to change an immutable theory."

He mischievously raised his voice to an emotional, declamatory pitch: "To put up a poster . . . to feel the smooth paper cling to the rough wall . . . how the warm letters pierce through the paper to the cold stone beneath.' . . . So you're laughing now, eh? I warn you, you have to be careful about letting yourself go like that when you're with me. I don't forget. On the contrary, I remember. I even remember your exact expression at the time. You seemed to be joking, but you were perfectly serious."

"Enough!" I laughed. "It's really strange how small things can make such a difference. It's just a question of mood. Tonight I'll spread the paste."

Yoram didn't press me, nor did I offer any explanation. I was, in fact, worried about the possibility of another passionate outburst on my part, which Yoram would re-enact long after I had forgotten it. Then, too, I was perhaps embarrassed to admit that the white placards with the black borders frightened me. Why surround death with such a shape? What did it enclose?

"Let's move," said Boaz. "A whistle means take cover, as usual."

Boaz didn't waste words. In fact, it was difficult to think of those abrupt, clipped syllables of his as words at all; orders were what they really were. Whenever Boaz spoke, it seemed to me that he was giving a command—when he talked to himself as well as when he spoke to others. I had heard him talk to himself. It was in Cholon, at night. We needed a place to conduct classes in weaponry, so we rented an isolated house at the far end of Cholon. The next thing we needed were some respectable-looking citizens to live in it. My sister Yehudit and her husband were chosen. They

weren't as innocent as we might have desired; they had already had contacts with the underground. But there was no alternative. When they were approached, they didn't hesitate. They left their home in the city and took up residence among sand dunes and guns, far from the acquaintances and diversions to which they were accustomed.

During the day we learned how to grip a rifle; at night we practiced. Boaz and I once stood watch from midnight to dawn. Except for the barrels of our guns, glinting as they projected out over the window sill, it was completely dark. All around us were the dunes, black as the night itself. Boaz and I hunched over our rifles and kept watch. We lay side by side and I could hear his heart beat. Then I heard him tell it to be still, and I couldn't hear it pounding any more. Boaz had given an order!

As always when we posted bills, Boaz was the lookout. Ever since we first formed a trio it had been taken for granted, without words, that Boaz would be the lookout. That was the way he was. Even wearing his white shirt and his gray slacks, he seemed to be in uniform. He was the very epitome of order. When he went underground, he sank straight down, frictionlessly, with his clothes perfectly pressed. He was never dirty, never sloppy, never forgot his manners. If one chose to go underground, he thought, that was no reason to turn everything else upside down. He was under only because up there, on top, it had become impossible to live; up there the intruder wore all the uniforms, gave all the orders, and got in everyone's way. Now Boaz kept an eye on Yoram and me to make sure the intruder didn't get in our way. Should he happen to do so, law and order incarnate stood behind us. Boaz was armed.

I spread the paste and Yoram posted the placards. I never looked at him; all I heard were his footsteps and the dull rustle of the paper. The distance between us hardly changed at all. How many times Yoram had complained before I finally learned to keep it the same? If I advanced too far ahead of him, he wouldn't know where the paste was; but it was equally bad to keep him waiting while I spread it on the wall. Another thing I'd had to

learn was to find a suitable place for the next bill without wasting any time in looking. In the end I learned: while I was applying the paste in one place, my eyes would be searching along the wall for another. No, the surface is too rough there. That store window is better, but the owner may take the poster down in the morning. And all the time my hand kept working.

The paste felt warm tonight, perhaps because my hands were so cold. I hadn't yet become accustomed to the pre-dawn chill. It was the safest time to work, however. The streets were deserted, and the occasional rumble of a British armored car as it patrolled through the city could be heard blocks away, leaving one plenty of time in which to dive into an alleyway and disappear.

It was safer, but colder. The black emptiness of the streets chilled my bones and the webs of sweet sleep radiating from every house caused me to shiver. For whom? For what? Not a soul looked down from the windows. If you had nothing on your conscience, and if there was nothing you wanted badly enough, you could sleep like a log all night long. The blinds were all carefully lowered. Good night. If you didn't look out the window, the prospects for sound slumber were first-rate. As were the prospects for posting bills.

But the time I most enjoyed working was before midnight, when the streets, though slowly emptying, were still alive. Then someone might halt before a newly affixed poster and read it. Perhaps he would scoff silently; perhaps he would curse out loud. Let him curse. The curse would turn against him in the end. One couldn't go to sleep so easily after having read something like that at midnight. I liked to watch as someone took a deep whiff of words I had just pasted on a wall. If only it weren't so dangerous at that hour! But the more life there was the more death there was. More than one person had been arrested or shot posting bills before midnight.

Boaz whistled. A searchlight flooded the street. I ducked into a courtyard. If they found me now, I wouldn't be asked for my papers: my hands sticky with paste would be identification enough. We still had the opposite sidewalk to do, the entire right side of Ben-Yehuday Street, but the paste would last. Tonight's

placards were small. Memorial placards were always small. There was little to say when the dead man's name and cause of death went unmentioned and there was no funeral to announce. All that was needed was a white space to contrast with the black border. On it was written a single name, the underground alias of the deceased. Yet, the paste would hold out. We would even be finished early.

The next morning, however, I was late to class anyway. It had been happening ever since I joined Lechi. From that day on my nights were full of posters and paste, of reading material distributed secretly to prearranged addresses, of hand bills showered at entrances to movie houses and auditoriums. My latenesses were entered in the record. My marks began to fall off, too.

"Unsatisfactory," the supervisor said, evaluating my week of practice teaching in a third-grade class.

"She'll never be a teacher," she added to the class when she analyzed my work before the other students and the instructor in pedagogy. "I sat in the classroom with the children all week long," she went on. "A group of eight-year-olds. I simply had to feel sorry for them. They were inhibited, thoroughly cowed. Of course, there was silence in the class, but it was simply because they were all too frightened to open their mouths. They didn't understand a thing she said. She stood up front, a couple of feet from them, and worked herself into a frenzy, over what I'll never know. 'Four minus one is three'—explosions. You'd think it was the revolution. 'The lion hit the bear'—fire and brimstone. 'The Children of Israel crossed the Jordan'—a speech. And tension; what tension! Luckily the bell rang every hour to stop her. Unsatisfactory." Our pedagogy teacher couldn't understand it.

"Why don't you try?" our instructor queried during the recess. "Why don't you care?" He wanted to be friends with me, to help me. But he didn't understand.

His first inkling of the truth came to him one day early in 1945 when the allied victory was only a question of time. The actual surrender was still a few months away; it was close enough, how-

ever, for our instructor to assign us the composition topic: "What Will You Say to the Children in Your Class on Victory Day?"

When he entered the classroom the following day, his cheek muscles, which had a tendency to quaver, were twitching abnormally. He was a hot-tempered man, yet there was generally something good and unembarrassing about his anger: the brunt of it remained within him, confined to his tremulous cheeks, and only the pain traveled outward. Now, however, his wrath was unconcealed. Without bothering to sit down, as he usually did, he took our compositions from his brief case, picked one up with shaking hands, and began to read, his unsteady voice vainly pursuing the anger that outdistanced it:

"Victory? Victory for whom? Not for us. Hitler may be dead, but millions of Jews died with him. If the war really was our war—then it was Hitler who won. If there were any allies at all, they formed an alliance against us. Hitler lived to see the British carry on his work: shutting the gates of our land in the faces of those fleeing him, and locking them up again. And so my children, when you see all the colorful flags fluttering in the wind today, ask: 'Why is the blue and white flag so sad?' When you are told that today is a day for rejoicing, ask: 'Who then will mourn for the dead?' When you are told that today an armistice was finally signed, ask: 'Why, then, are armed soldiers patrolling in our streets?' Don't believe what they tell you; don't believe in their victory. You may not yet have learned to tell a lie, but you know when you hear one."

"Lies, lies, lies!" Our instructor flung the sheets of paper on his desk and walked feverishly toward me down the narrow aisle.

"If that's how . . . if that's what you think our children should be told on such a day, you belong with them, not with us . . . with them . . . those Fascist pamphleteers."

All eyes were focused upon me. A bitter taste was in my mouth; I felt a thickening of saliva in my mouth and swallowed it. It welled up again—a river. It was only when I couldn't swallow any longer, when my body was inundated, that they began to flow from my eyes.

I rose, collected my books, and left. I walked out of the class-

room with measured steps and with head high. I walked down the corridor the same way. By the time I reached the street, however, I wasn't walking any more; I was in headlong flight. Not homeward, though: no, not yet home.

That evening Amos bawled me out: "What irresponsibility! Why did you write it? I don't know how you'll manage, but tomorrow you'll have to undo the whole thing. They mustn't suspect you."

"Undo the whole thing." He might as easily have said, "Undo yourself, undo your temperament." In one place or the other you had to come undone. One couldn't live as a single person in two different worlds.

I did my best. But though I could obscure what I had done, I couldn't efface it entirely. And so, when a short while afterward a typewriter was stolen from the building, I was the first to be called to the principal's office. He wasn't mistaken. It was I who had broken in the night before with Ephraim and Dov. We used a set of keys that I had removed the previous day from the janitor's jacket. Now the typewriter rested in its case underneath my grandmother's bed.

"WE NEED a typewriter," I had overheard Dov and Ephraim saying.

"There are some in the seminary," I said. "A whole lot of them."

"They're no good to us in the seminary," said Ephraim. "Can you get hold of one?"

"No, but I can get hold of the keys."

It wasn't the first time that I had worked with Ephraim in what we jokingly called "confiscations." We worked like any other burglars: at night, using jimmys, and without bothering to ask permission.

One Saturday I was handed a slip of paper on which was the address of an apartment in north Tel Aviv. It was occupied by Ephraim and another fellow. The moment Ephraim saw me—it was our first meeting—he burst out laughing. It wasn't that he thought there was anything particularly funny about me; it was just that he was full of laughter which he couldn't hold back. He laughed in joyous, spontaneous bursts, and I began to laugh, too. Somehow the situation seemed hilarious.

Every few minutes Ephraim went over to the kerosene stove in the corner and inspected the flame, which had been burning since the night before. Ephraim was an orthodox Jew. He wouldn't strike a match or turn on a light on the Sabbath. And actually there wasn't any need for those things—one could eat food cold. But Ephraim was not only a Sabbath observer; he was also a lover of *cholent* and to make good Jewish *cholent* you have to be something of a connoisseur. It's not the meat that makes the *cholent*;

you can do without meat if you have to. What makes the *cholent* is knowing its quintessential properties, enveloping it with warmth, tending to it lovingly, hungering for a bite of it. In all these Ephraim was an expert.

By noon we could wait no longer. "How about it? We're getting hungry."

Ephraim laughed thunderously, paroxysmally: "Hungry? *Cholent's* not to be eaten when you're hungry. *Cholent's* to be eaten when you want to eat *cholent*." The word *cholent* gurgled from his mouth.

Finally we sat down to eat. Once we began, we didn't stand on ceremony. Two of us ate ravenously, but only Ephraim had his head in the plate. Two of us licked our lips, but Ephraim licked his fingers, sighed audibly, and didn't say a word. In an hour's eating he had to savor all the many hours of waiting which had begun long before I arrived.

That night I watched Ephraim squint through the keyhole of a foundry in south Tel Aviv. The Sabbath was over, and as soon as the sun had set, we left for a "confiscation." The object was to get keys and tools with which to perpetrate future burglaries. There were four of us: Dov, Ephraim, Elimelech, and I. Elimelech and I were the lookouts; we pretended to be lovers, out for a stroll. We could not afford to be dreamy-eyed, though; we had to stay alert and keep watch so that we could warn Dov and Ephraim in case of trouble.

The four of us stood on the street corner opposite the foundry while Ephraim issued instructions. He was no longer his Sabbath self. He still had the same intense eyes and the same avid lips, but they now expressed nervousness and apprehension rather than pleasure.

Ephraim surveyed the building. The main door facing the street was, of course, out of the question—too many people. But this was an advantage too; the more people there were on the street, the less conspicuous the lookouts would be; so too, there would be less chance of running into a British patrol. Now to look at the rear of the building; that was sure to be more deserted.

Time to switch partners. Leaving Elimelech, I put my arm

through Ephraim's and the two of us headed for the courtyard—an appropriate spot for a couple in love. It was dark there. Ephraim shinnied up the wall until he caught hold of the grates on the first-story window. I lit a match, but he was already on his way down.

“I could squeeze through the window, but it's not worth troubling with the bars. It would take too much time.”

He took out a chain of keys and began to try them. None worked. He felt along the ground with his hands, stretched out flat on the pavement, and slipped a thin strip of metal between it and the door sill. The old wood groaned painfully. Suddenly something flashed in the darkness. An idea. Ephraim's eyes glittered and he rocked with laughter: his Sabbath self come back again.

“Okay. Go back to Elimelech, and remember: don't get out of earshot. But don't come too close, either. Tell Dov to come here.”

When people ask me today, as they have more than once, “Would you be prepared to do it all over again?” I'm never sure exactly what they mean. I suppose what they would like to know is whether I'd be ready to expose myself to armed violence again, to confront death, to run the risks of a jail break, or perhaps just to suffer the deprivations of underground life in general. When I, however, ask myself the same question, I think of the many “jobs” we pulled off, big ones and small ones. Jobs that were indeed far removed from the threat of death, but which were very close to ordinary crime; ordinary thefts, conducted according to the best professional standards.

It is eight, or eight thirty; we wait impatiently for our intended victims to leave home and go to the movies. We'll know in advance when they return, because when they bought their tickets for tonight's show someone was standing behind them and buying a ticket, too. Nothing suspicious about that. Where there's a line, there's always someone behind you. If they should not like the film—after all, who knows?—and decide to leave in the middle, someone sitting beside them will get back to us in time to sound a warning.

Now they leave their apartment, confident, complacent. They

have a Yale lock on the door. When people walk out of their apartments, it never occurs to them that locks are made by men. There's no lock we can't violate. We drill a hole in the door directly above the Yale, and through it we lower a looped ribbon. The ribbon fits nicely over the bolthead. A twist here, a turn there, and—if your fingers are practiced and agile enough—the door squeaks on its hinges. The hole? A hole can always be covered. A neatly trimmed piece of cardboard saying, "Will be back soon" or "Will return tomorrow" is affixed to the door with a rusty tack, right where the hole is, should anyone happen to look. The signs vary, depending on the time and place.

The "confiscations" were small and the loot wasn't much. Sometimes we'd only get an identification card or a passport. The next day these would have new photographs on them and would be made out in the names of new owners. Sometimes we'd get away with nothing but our tools and our pounding hearts. Usually they pounded from fear, but sometimes also from laughter. Once, for instance, our sole booty was a lady's wig spangled with fake pearls. We couldn't blame the man who had given us the tip, which he swore was reliable. The luster of those pearls could have deceived anyone. We had a good laugh, but the gunrunner who was going to supply us with pistols in exchange for the pearls didn't think it was funny at all.

These burglaries were small, cautious affairs; we did them on tiptoe, under cover of darkness. We were still weak then and there weren't many of us. In two or three years, however, we grew more powerful, more expert. Armed to the teeth, we held up British banks in broad daylight. The newspapers began to do us the honor of calling us "gangsters."

Would you be prepared to do it again?

Today I go by the rules. I observe the legal code. I don't steal. Why, then, don't I have the feeling of purity that I used to have? Today I'm good, but I'm different. I'm good because I keep away from evil. It wasn't that way then. Then I was good because I fought with evil, because I wanted to exterminate it. Its presence bothered me until I couldn't rest. When it bothers me nowadays, I take my leave of it and slam the door in its face. But when it

bothered me then, I slammed the door behind me and set out after it.

In doing so, I dirtied myself. That was inevitable. Evil is dirty. We were very close, evil and I, and when you wrestle with someone you can't avoid touching him. Sometimes it was hard to tell us apart. My hands weren't clean; on the contrary, they stank, but had I used my fingers to hold my nose, evil would have slipped through them.

Today I go by the rules, but things are different. Several years ago, when I went to work on my dissertation for my philosophy degree, I chose to write on the topic: "The Nature of Imperatives in the Bible." I set out to prove that there was in the Bible no such thing as a conceptualized morality, and that therefore no ethical system could be built on the basis of scriptural writings. Like Job, I argued that without the Absolute you fall short of morality, whereas with the Absolute you pass beyond it. There are only imperatives from above. Sometimes, however, the Divine Will conceals itself, and it is then that one stands in need of systematized laws. But this makes it vital to remember—and humbly—that when we on earth give out grades for "good" and "bad," these are not necessarily the same grades as those that are entered in Heaven.

Such thoughts are disturbing and are generally avoided by most people, but they never bothered me when I was in the underground.

Today, accustomed to speaking abstractly, I would say that this was because—given the atmosphere in Lechi at the time, and considering the way we all felt—none of us was capable of taking a relativistic approach. We lived the Absolute. Not that we never talked about ideas, or about ends and means, or about what gives sanction to what. On the contrary, we talked about these things a great deal. I remember how one evening, when I was still in the Etsel, we were examined on certain material that we had talked about in our discussion group. One of the questions I was asked was: "What is the difference between individual morality and national morality?"

We had spent many evenings on this subject, so I had no diffi-

culty in phrasing my reply: "Whatever benefits the nation, even if it brings harm to many individuals, is morally desirable. Whatever brings harm to the nation, even if it proves a blessing to many individuals, is morally undesirable."

Who doesn't remember such catechisms by heart? To know how they ended, you only had to know how they began. There was no danger of confusion or error.

"Any questions?" our discussion leader asked.

No, there were no questions. Everything was perfectly clear to everyone, like the letters of the alphabet. What remained to be acquired, however, was the ability to read and write facts with that alphabet. That was more complicated.

In the Lechi we didn't conduct examinations or have prearranged discussions, but everything we did or said was done and said against this background. The questions themselves had been asked and answered for us long ago—at the moment we went underground, in fact. And just as none of us asked whether it was permissible to flout the laws of the British Government (who was there to give us permission?), or whether it was morally desirable to ambush the enemy if you had a chance, so none of us requested a special dispensation for burglary. How could you question whether a particular means was more or less valid than another when the basic question—the legitimacy of the underground itself—went so much deeper and was so much more intractable? The very fact of going underground created a new set of laws, and above all one prime law which bestowed on the underground its authority to legislate and to judge. The formal justification of this law was grounded in a single thought: to protect the weak from the strong. Those who were in power, who controlled the workings of legality, were always the strong.

This was our justification. But there was no more need to justify to ourselves the why and how of it than there was to justify our own existence.

Close indeed to crime, on the very threshold of it. So much so that when I encountered the peasant woman, Khalisa, while I was in prison in Jaffa, I didn't ask her, "Why did you steal?" I only

asked her *how*. She had been sitting on the steps of her cell, crying bitterly.

“What are you crying for, Khalisa?”

“For my misfortune. Now he’ll take someone else.”

“Who will?”

“Mustafa. He’s taken the money and now he’ll buy a wife with it.”

“What money?”

“My money. The money I stole.”

“How did you steal it?”

“I don’t know. The same way I always steal. I was walking past the house with Mustafa, just walking, but my eyes were on the house. The door was open; it called out to me. ‘You wait here,’ I said to Mustafa, and I went inside. The way you go into someone’s house. There was a big black cloak on the bed. It called out to me, so I went over to it. I found a bundle of coins in a handkerchief. I took them. And then—may God curse that hour!—on my way out of the door I saw a henhouse. One of the hens called out to me—may God call out to her in the same way!—and then I was caught. They didn’t find the money because I had already slipped it to my man. Now he’ll buy someone else. May the devil take them both!

Despite my “professionalism,” I could not keep the blood from rushing to my face when the principal called me into his office and questioned me about the missing typewriter. I found myself unable to deny the accusation with the required coolness, and before I could recollect that I had a perfectly moral right to lie, I blushed with a deep, natural embarrassment. And that is what saved me. That display of emotion convinced the principal of my innocence, and he apologized to me.

Soon he was to have a chance to retract his apology. Meanwhile, I was requested to return to class.

ONE MORNING, during a history period in which we were considering the twelfth century, the door swung open and the room was flooded with fluttering sheets of paper. Amid the flurry could be seen two large boyish eyes and a thin, undulating arm; then these abruptly vanished and the door slammed shut. Everyone, even the teacher, bent to pick up one of the leaflets.

They were underground hand bills, whether ours or the Etsel's I couldn't tell. It was certain, though, that they weren't the Haganah's; in those days one didn't see Haganah bulletins floating aimlessly in the air in a random search for readers. The Haganah was privileged to distribute its material in a more orderly fashion, and the public did not have to read it under the table.

No, these weren't Haganah hand bills. If they had been, Amalia wouldn't have jumped from her seat and, followed by Leah, run to the door in pursuit of their youthful disseminator. Both girls belonged to the Haganah. Who didn't belong more or less to the Haganah? If you didn't belong, you were an extremist. Amalia, as a loyal Haganah member, rose to chase the small extremist with the big eyes. To be sure, we were in the middle of a lesson, and the teacher was trying to restore order—but in an emergency who asks what time it is?

I restrained myself from jumping up and running after Amalia. I mustn't give myself away. Along with the other students, I obediently put the hand bill aside and concentrated on the crusades. In placing the paper on the corner of my desk, however, I caught sight of the heading. There were no words, only the number 251.

But that number spoke for itself. It stood for the 251 members of Etsel and Lechi who, six months earlier, in November, 1945, had been flown from Latrun to Africa in the dead of night, and exiled to a prison camp in Kenya to prevent them from escaping. The seventy-meter tunnel dug by the inmates of Bunkhouse 4 had been easily filled with sand, but the gaping wound dealt to British pride had not healed so readily. Then, too, as far as the police were concerned, there was no guarantee that another twenty or thirty prisoners wouldn't start burrowing in the ground. What the British forgot to take into account, however, was that no matter how high the transports soared on their way to Kenya, they would have come to earth again, and that it was in the nature of earth, however black and strange, to be excavated. In fact, the tunnels dug in Africa differed from those of Latrun only in being longer and better constructed. . . .

What was the teacher talking about now? Our eyes and our thoughts were glued to the door, and sure enough, before the period ended, Amalia and Leah returned. Without so much as a glance at the teacher, they began to circulate among the students, collecting the hand bills as they went. Not a single girl questioned their authority. The teacher didn't even bother to inquire who had appointed them. They themselves, for that matter, never stopped to reflect that perhaps they owed us an apology, or at least an explanation. Their very aggressiveness carried its own sense of conviction.

But I wasn't convinced. By the time Amalia came around to me, I was waiting for her angrily, my blood boiling within me and befogging my brain. As soon as she put out her hand to take the hand bill from my desk, I grabbed it with my own.

"What do you want?"

"The hand bill!"

"Is it yours?"

"It's mine. Give it to me."

"I won't."

"It has been decided to confiscate all extremist writings."

"Who decided?"

"It has been decided."

"By whom?"

"A special committee."

"Special for what?"

"Are you going to give it to me or not?"

Give it to her, give it to her, a voice within was saying, but aloud I said, "No, I won't give it to you."

"Then I'll make you."

Amalia reached for the hand bill and, in trying to pull it from my clenched fist, managed to rip off a piece of it. I rose, pushed her backward, and wadded it more tightly into my palm. Amalia fell upon me with both hands. The teacher was out of the picture entirely. This particular battle had nothing to do with the Crusades.

The leaflet by that time was crushed to a pulp, but my fist was unyielding. Shoving and dragging each other, we reeled into the long, wide corridor outside the classroom. A large circle of students formed about us; the recess bell had just rung for lunch, and girls were pouring out to witness the spectacle.

We were evenly matched, both of us with long wild hair. The monotonous thudding of our blows was punctuated by the sound of ripping paper as Amalia succeeded in tearing loose additional pieces of the hand bill. Much of it was by now in tatters on the floor.

We fought wordlessly, in pantomime, and no one interfered. Now and then we broke off to catch our breath, but immediately, and with precise timing, we resumed hostilities.

Suddenly it was over! We both let go at once, fell back a step, and made no effort to re-engage. A tiny shred of paper was all that protruded through the fingers of my still tightly balled fist.

"We're going to see the principal," I said.

I was the last among my classmates to stand in awe of disciplinary measures, but I was now experiencing the pangs of conscience that I should have felt before. What had I done? I had revealed myself before everybody and betrayed my vow to the underground.

It wasn't the hand bills that had provoked me to such an outburst—it was the boy. After all, I myself had distributed hand

bills through the building several times a week. Whatever was left from a night of posting, I would stuff into my brief case the next morning. I could count on my father to waken me at dawn. He never needed to be awakened by anyone; to him sleep was but a way of passing the time till daybreak when he might arise and thank God for the restoration of his spirit and the gift of another morning.

I would take my bulging brief case and slip quietly off to school. There I would steal through the empty classrooms while the janitor was still asleep, leave a hand bill on each desk, and stealthily depart again.

I had been used to seeing hand bills seized several times a week. Amalia hadn't always been in such a hurry to collect them and tear them up. Sometimes, before they reached the wastebasket, one of the girls who had managed to read a few lines would sarcastically declaim the choicer phrases, or perhaps even venture a few original critical observations. Occasionally someone might counter with a quip or a staccato laugh, but these exchanges had never become arguments. If you approved of anything the hand-bills said, it was best to keep perfectly quiet; if you disapproved, you were already spoken for; if you were indifferent, you had nothing to say in any case. And so unanimously, by general consent, the bills had been consigned to the trash can without my losing self-control.

There was one time, though, when I very nearly did. I had hidden leaflets in a number of desks that morning and one of them had fallen into Leah's hands. It was a mimeographed account of the two Eliahus, Eliahu Hakim and Eliahu Bet-Tsuri, who had been sent on a mission by Lechi in November, 1945, to assassinate Lord Moyne in Cairo. Lord Moyne never did get around to asking them about their business in Cairo, but they, in Jerusalem, knew about his. He was the British Minister for Middle East Affairs and from Cairo, once he removed his aristocratic gloves, he pulled the diplomatic strings of the region. It was he who had ordered the exile of young Jewish prisoners to Africa. Upon being offered a plan for the mass rescue of the survivors of Hitler's holocaust, he had replied, "What shall I do with a million Jews?"

And it was from his headquarters in Cairo that the orders had gone forth for the sinking of Jewish refugee ships.

And so, from Lechi headquarters in Jerusalem two boys went forth to kill him. Having successfully carried out their mission, they were apprehended by the police, and in April they were hanged.

Leah sat composedly on top of her desk, holding the open leaflet in her hands. She had been mouthing the words silently to herself, but suddenly she brayed aloud: "Quiet! Listen to this. Get a load of this smart aleck—what's-his-name?—Bet-Tsuri: 'When my mind commanded my finger to press on the trigger . . .' Are you listening? When his mi-nd com-man-ded his fin-ger . . ." She deliberately drawled the words, drawing out the last syllable of each. "Do you get the profundity of it? He's not just a common murderer, he's a mind, a mind that presses the trigger. He's lucky to have gotten away with hanging. Ach, I'd hang the whole bunch of them."

Ach, I would have liked to throttle you with my own two hands then, Leah, instead of having to throttle the curse that rose in my throat. . . . If she had only flung the leaflet against the wall—but that hollow laugh of hers poisoned my soul. "Why my mind commanded my finger to press on the trigger . . ." That, I knew, was from Eliahu Bet-Tsuri's declaration before the courtroom in Cairo. The words Leah had just finished picking apart were reformed in my mind's eye, upright and spare. When I had read the leaflet over the night before, I hadn't paid them any particular attention. Now, however, I saw Eliahu Bet-Tsuri spring to life from those very same syllables, saw the full-blooded order spurt through his body from his mind to his finger on to the trigger, on to the projectile, blackly on to the blue blood of the English lord, crying: "Death!" Because of you, Leah, because of your flippant, passionless, narrow little mind, I was suddenly granted a vision of the great and luminous mind of Eliahu, marshaling its passions, commanding them in the image of God: Thou shalt and thou shalt not.

How could it have been possible that the night before Bet-Tsuri's words had seemed to me only a fanciful metaphor, so that

I did not see the terrible imperative as it passed through his body and seared his soul, fusing them into a single truth? The answer to this was that the night before the entire leaflet and all that was in it had been reduced in my mind to a single statement made by Eliahu Hakim as he was being dressed in the traditional red burlap suit of the condemned. He had said to the hang man, "This is the finest suit of clothes I have ever worn in my life."

Eliahu would know. He was not unacquainted with finery. In his superb wardrobe were the most stylish suits made out of the best-quality fabrics. He came from a wealthy home; name the cut and color, Eliahu had it.

But no, not red. This was the first red suit he had ever put on. It wasn't pleated either, and it didn't have cuffs. It needed to be pressed. It bulged in the wrong places. It wasn't exactly the right size. Eliahu had no mirror in which to see himself, but he knew just the same. His heart was mirror enough.

"This is the finest suit of clothes I have ever worn in my life." Why didn't you think of something funny to say about that, Leah? Or didn't it suit you? You could have recited it with dramatic pathos, you could have waxed sentimental and cried while you laughed—until you choked.

I had controlled myself then and hadn't lost my head. Why, then, had those two boyish eyes had such an effect on me?

"We're going to see the principal," I said to Amalia.

Not too long before the principal had lodged a complaint against me. Now the tables were turned.

"Do we or don't we have freedom to read around here?"

Didn't I express myself clearly enough? Why was he blinking at me that way? Why did he keep looking at the typewriter on his desk?

"What do you mean by 'freedom to read'?" he asked at long last.

Amalia came to my assistance: "She means, is it or is it not permissible to distribute extremist writings here? Is it or is it not permissible to hand out Fascist propaganda to the students?"

Amalia didn't wait for the principal's answer. She didn't really have any doubts about what was allowed and what wasn't. She

simply wanted to remind the principal of the answers in case he had forgotten them.

Without waiting for an answer, either, I turned and left. In the end, however, I was answered.

A month later, as I was racing up the stairs to get to the auditorium in time for my final exam in pedagogy, the last examination we would have to pass in order to receive our diplomas, I heard someone's footsteps behind me. It was the principal.

"Please come with me to my office."

"Now?"

"Yes, now would be best."

"But there's a final examination. Couldn't it wait until later?"

It couldn't. The principal was right. Nor did it make any difference, because the pedagogy exam wouldn't be any good to me even if I passed it. Awaiting me in the principal's office was a memorandum demanding my dismissal from the teachers seminary on the grounds that I was a member of an extremist organization.

It wasn't a very personal memorandum: it was simply a form letter from the National Council ordering the dismissal of suspected terrorists from schools and places of work.

"I'm very sorry," said the principal. "Is everything clear to you?"

Suddenly, I could no longer accept the fact that I had spent six long years in this one place. I turned and fled.

“Now THAT you yourself are a mother, perhaps you can understand what I went through on the day you left home,” my mother said to me recently.

Understanding was something I would have been capable of even then, had I wanted to make the effort. But it wouldn't have helped any. My mother's heartache simply didn't register on me. I was being born anew in the underground, a birth which concerned no one but me and the pangs of which I alone felt. It was, I admit, an advanced age at which to be born—I was already seventeen springs old, well reared and well cared for—but all this had been necessary that I might have the strength and the maturity consciously to choose my own way of life and death.

Now that I have given birth to a child of my own, I know how to answer my mother. A child, I would say to her, is born only once from his mother, but he may be born countless times in the course of his life, and not always from a warm womb.

Can I understand what my mother went through all those many days and nights when I was in the underground, in **prison**, in solitary confinement? To do so I only have to listen to the **palpitations** of my own heart when my son is late in coming home from the friendly, pleasant kindergarten near our home. Yet the rhythm of those heartbeats is very different from the rhythm which even now, as I write from a distant and mythical world, reminds me of the surge of excitement, the joy, I first felt on the evening I said good-by to my parents' home.

“I'm going,” I said.

My mother knew where, but she asked me anyway. And in the moment of asking, her face grew larger and longer with fright. I lowered my eyes and made no reply. My mother tugged aimlessly at her long colorful apron and waited.

“Where?”

Several days after my dismissal from the teachers' seminary, an item appeared in the Haganah's *Eshnav* concerning “the well-known daughter of a well-known Yemenite figure who is now in a well-known underground organization. . . .” Everything was spelled explicitly, gloatingly, and I knew that I would have to leave home immediately. A single word reverberated in my mind: *underground*. I was suffused with that word without knowing exactly what it meant. I was acquainted with several Lechi members who ventured out of doors only at night: “They're living underground,” it was said. I knew that certain people went about in all kinds of disguises: “They're incognito, in the underground,” I was told. I saw others living so anonymously that they could hardly remember their own names: “They've gone underground,” it was whispered. Once I was asked to deliver a letter to a top-floor, walk-up apartment. It was raining furiously when I arrived. I tapped out the signal on the door. “Those are underground knocks,” I had been informed. The room was small and narrow and piled high with papers. There was no window, the door was falling off its hinges, and the rain poured wickedly through the roof tiles. The man I had come to see stood rinsing a plate in a stream of water pouring through the ceiling.

“Convenient, isn't it?” he said to me with a smile before opening the letter. “No need to step outside, the faucet comes to you. It's more conspiratorial.”

A few raindrops spattered in my face. Standing there in the corner of the room I must have looked startled, for he continued almost apologetically, “Your first time in an underground apartment, eh?”

What *underground* really meant, though, I still didn't know. Nevertheless, when my mother asked me where I was going, I replied, “Underground.”

My mother had been waiting for that one word all along, but

when she actually heard it, she was struck with terror. She put the little finger of her left hand between her teeth and began to nibble on the nail. Her mouth went taut. Suddenly she exclaimed impulsively, "But you mustn't! Underground or no underground, why do you have to go away? You can go underground right here with us. Right here, at my side, no one will lay a hand on you. I'd like to see the Englishman who would dare to take you from me. Where will you go? How could any place be better for you than here? And you're still so young; you have to be here, with me, at my side." As she spoke she flung up her apron. It hung for a moment in mid-air and then settled to cover her dress again.

When her eyes began to tear, I knew that she knew I would go. When we embraced, she kept pressing me closer and closer, with a tremendous effort, as though I were being torn away from her.

And then I left.

That night I was taken to a one-room bungalow by the seashore. The sea wailed shrilly like a drowning man crying for help. I didn't know why, but it made me think of my mother as I had left her standing in the doorway, fingering her brightly colored apron. Now she must be still awake, waiting, hoping that I would return. As usual, Father would be taking a reasonable approach. After all, what could the underground be? Dark attics, tunnels, labyrinths in the earth? Tomorrow he would find out exactly. There was an answer to everything.

Tomorrow I would receive a new name. Not just an informal alias, but a name, a brand-new name that would be mine forever. I would be "illegal." I derived a mischievous pleasure from the thought. In a way this was a kind of game that I was still young enough to enjoy.

The bungalow was noisy that evening. Arazia, sitting at one end of the mattress on which I lay, played on a large accordion, and Bentsi, Siumka, and Nadav stretched out on the wickerwork mat by the wooden wall and accompanied him with hoarse voices. The Russian melody sounded alien to me, its revolutionary air affected. It didn't move me and not until I caught myself humming it along with the others did I realize that it was only a pretext for

another and older melody, a melody whose source was our own world of dreams.

Only Hertska didn't sing. His auburn hair disheveled, his shirt unbuttoned almost to the waist, and only half tucked into his pants, he sat in a low wicker chair and jiggled his right foot atop his left thigh. His hands moved jerkily in the air, as though he were in the middle of making a speech. His voice, however, in contrast with his gestures and grimaces, was surprisingly low, practically inaudible. I noticed that he was holding a pamphlet of some sort. He didn't look at us at all, and he evidently considered it immaterial whether we listened to him or not.

I went over to him. He had worked himself into a state of great emotion. He studied me at length and then suddenly flinging the pamphlet in the general direction of the men on the mat, said to me, "Now you'll be like the rest of us. You'll never be a free bird again. The only time you'll leave the bungalow will be at night when everything is dark outside. As for the sun, you may as well forget about it. You'll deal only with the moon. Romantic, isn't it? You bet it is, but only for the first couple of nights. After you've been sitting like this for days, for months, and damn near rotting away, waiting only for night to come so you can go out and catch a breath of air—then it won't seem so romantic any more. It'll seem pretty c-crummy."

His face was pallid in the lamplight. His hands shook.

"It's been ages since you've harped on that tune—not since this morning, as a matter of fact." The voice was Siumka's. "Tonight you've got a new victim, you might as well take advantage of her. Go ahead, gripe, go all to pieces. You'd think someone had forced you to escape in the first place. Plenty of fellows in Latrun would have been happy to change places with you."

"You with your endless wisecracks. What exactly do you find so funny about all this? What I'd like to know is where you get off being so cold-blooded. Months have gone by since we escaped and we're still locked up in this place with nothing better to do than to cook soup without beans one day and beans without soup the next. We're not allowed out during the day because we may be arrested; we're not allowed to see action because we may endan-

ger others. The one thing we're allowed to do is to go out of our minds. No, there are a few other things, too. We're allowed a breath of air in dark alleyways at night. We're allowed to pull our hats down over our heads, and we're allowed to receive encouraging notes from headquarters: 'Patience, boys, patience.' But where are we supposed to get this patience from? Our fingers are itching, there are no barbed-wire fences around us, but they preach patience to us."

Arazia got to his feet and put the accordion in the corner of the room. Unlike Hertska, Bentsi, Siumka, and Nadav, he was not one of "the twenty." He was "legal," and it was he who had borrowed from the food bill tonight in my honor. The pea soup was on the thin side, but a bottle of red wine stood on the table. Now he poured some into our only glass, to commemorate my first night in the underground. I drank first, then Siumka, then the others. In a soft voice someone began to sing, and everyone on the mat joined in:

"Through bars and through grates
Comes a song of rebellion
A song that awaits
A day of redemption."

My eyes began to smart. It was long after midnight. How were we to sleep? There were five men and me, two mattresses and not a single bed. I was given a pair of black leotards to put on beneath my skirt in place of pajamas. They must have looked terribly silly, not so much because of the figure I cut in them, as because of the protection they were supposed to give me.

The thought of such protection never even entered my head. It wasn't that I was above thinking of sex or that I was so thoroughly emancipated in my attitudes toward the subject; on the contrary, there was then nothing at all ordinary in the idea that I should spend the night under a blanket with a man, if only to one side of him. That night, however, it was simple, and so it continued to be in the nights to come, not only for me, but for many other girls in the underground as well.

Didn't the men have any hot blood in them? And how they did!

And so did I! Were they so dedicated that the touch of a woman's hand could arouse in them no other thoughts but of the Destiny of Israel? I have only to look around me today—and many of the companions of those days are still alive—to answer in the negative. There was nothing monkish or ascetic about them. Our abstinence was in observance of the unwritten underground covenant that existed among us to do nothing that might allay the tension by which we lived, a tension higher and more exalted than that between the sexes, in the grip of which both male and female fused into something new and sacramental.

And so we found ourselves under the same blanket. Gradually each of us became lost in his own thoughts, until somebody remarked, "You look miserable. Are you already homesick?"

Miserable? I wasn't even aware of being sad. It was true, though, that I had been yearning—whether for home or for something else I didn't know. It was all so indistinct.

The voice went on musing: "It's probably you who are the lucky one. At least you're still capable of feeling homesick, of thinking about your family. We are like stone. We don't have human hearts, parents. I had a mother, too, only now she's awfully far away, or perhaps it's only me. It's not that she and my father and my brother went to the gas chambers long ago. It's on account of life here in the underground. It freezes all your emotions, it commits your heart and mind to a single thing."

"Let her sleep," Siumka advised. "One woman and already we're all falling apart. Why make it hard for her ahead of time? Sooner or later she'll find out for herself. . . . Listen to me, as long as you can still feel, or get sentimental, or nostalgic, go right ahead. Maybe talking this way isn't our fault but yours for having brought the smell of your mother's apron with you when you came tonight. I don't know if it's any consolation to you, but this much I can promise you. You won't feel sorry about your mother for very long. Before many months are up you will have forgotten, like the rest of us. You won't have time for it, believe me. The past becomes hazy here; it fades away and loses all importance."

"No," said yet another voice meditatively. "Sometimes you do remember, you do miss them. There's my father begging me not to

go. Palestine is at the other end of the world. There's my mother crying, and wiping her eyes, and crying some more. I'm astounded at how cruel I am. I want to comfort her, to promise her, but I can't and so I go. Sometimes it comes back to you like that, some warm old feeling, very old, comes bubbling up. Home. A lot of fat Gentiles laughing and mother standing in the doorway saying: 'But you're still a child, a child.'

The bungalow was quiet. The kerosene lamp went out by itself. It is dark at home now, too, I thought. Mother has given up waiting.

The following day I received a brand-new identification card: Hair—black.

Eyes—brown.

Height—five feet five inches. Exactly right. The last time I was measured in the infirmary at the teachers' seminary, I remembered, I was five foot five and a quarter, but something about the way I stood hadn't suited the nurse. "Not that way. Stand straight, please. There's no need to arch your feet. That's right—five feet five inches."

Also on the new identification card were an address—a real street and an imaginary house number—an official government seal, and my photograph. A single line had been left empty on which I was now supposed to sign my name.

What was my name?

Shoshana Halevi, I wrote. I reread it marveling *Shoshana Halevi*?

That same morning I received an envelope from Yosele, an envelope which was supposed to arrive for me once a month from now on, but which would not always be on time. In it was my monthly allowance: twelve Palestinian pounds.

"It has to last you for the entire month," said Siumka. "If you start out with two pounds and lay the other ten aside for the end of the month, you'll manage."

"And if you chip in a little something to our soup kitchen, you won't even have to start out with two," slurped Hertska from the bowl in which he was immersed. "And if you don't think too

much about your mother's cooking, I assure you that ours will taste delicious. The main thing is that the food is hot, and that the bowl empties and your belly fills up."

How many meals were there in a day? How many times a day did one get hungry? From now on I would have to divide it all into twelve Palestinian pounds. Into a little less, actually, because I would also have to pay for my transportation around the city. Clothes weren't included in the budget. They weren't like hunger pains which you had no choice but to silence. In fact, it didn't hurt at all to have to put on the same clothes in the morning that you had taken off the night before. In the first place, there wasn't any mirror. But even if there had been, there wouldn't have been time to look in it. And if there had been time to look in it, you'd see what you brought to it. And what we would have seen was the whole world naked and ourselves clothed like kings.

Today, I begin every month with scores of Israeli pounds, but somehow they're never enough to cover expenses. Why, I ask, has the currency become so inflated? What is it today that drives us to be so acquisitive and competitive?

"I can't understand it. I simply can't," I was recently told by a friend who had been involved in some business dealings with an ex-Lechiite I had known in the old days. "He used to be willing to sacrifice everything he had, even his own life. Nowadays he'd slit your throat for a penny."

My friend doesn't understand now because he didn't understand then that the reason we were so ready to give up everything we had was that "everything we had" was worth nothing to us, having already lost whatever significance the average man attributes to it. If we left all our possessions behind us when we went underground, if we said good-bye to all worldly pleasures, it wasn't because we were monks or ascetics, but because, having ascended to a higher plane, we were experiencing what no intermediary could possibly provide: the giving up of ourselves—which was all, really, that we had to give—and receiving the whole world in return.

Why did we need the house we had left behind or the life-insurance policy, or the savings account?

And that was true not only of our own savings accounts, but of others' as well. When we held up a rich man and robbed him of all he had, we were led to do so by another aspect of the same truth which, could it have spoken, would have said to him: Fool! Not a single thing that you own is secure. In return for the benefit which you imagine you receive from your belongings—life everlasting on earth through some perpetuation of your memory after death—permit us to present you with the real thing, and with interest. Your money, which we will put to use in our struggle for truth and glory, will give meaning to your life even after you are gone. What belongings, what earthly goods and chattels, could provide that unforgettable sensation of possessing and being possessed by the entire world, a world in which one lives forever and in which one acts not out of one's own petty interests, but in harmony with the imperative "Thou shalt!"?

"WE'LL have to change our procedure," said Yosele to me. "From now on we'd better arrange to have block meetings."

In a block meeting each person involved would circle a square block in a direction opposite that of his partner. Somewhere on the way the two would run into each other. A person walking along the street called less attention to himself than a person who remained standing in one place.

I expected Yosele to hand me a written message, but instead he delivered it orally:

"There's an initiation tonight. Amnon will be waiting for you at the usual place at nine o'clock."

"What time is it now, Yosele?"

The time: nine o'clock. The place: an abandoned field in north Tel Aviv. The blindfold really should have been removed from the boy's eyes because there was nothing to see but darkness. The darkness was a gift to us. Ceremony could proceed.

The boy's blindfold should have been removed, for even with eyes like an owl's all he could have seen were the dim, dusky lights of the far-off city. Amnon, Pinchas, and I sat behind him; all we could see were his white blindfold gleaming through the dark and the nervous movements of his back. Perhaps he twitched his shoulders like that on account of the thorns. In crossing the field a short while before my feet had been badly scratched by them, and one prickly reed had made so bold as to reach up and lacerate my thigh. In the darkness the thorns seemed sharper and more nettling than ever.

The boy tried to clear his throat, turned his head this way and that, breathed loudly and without rhythm. What could be making him so uneasy?

Soon we would begin. We should, in fact, have begun already, but Amnon, whose job it was to open the proceedings, always found that part hard. He would invariably become entangled in a thicket of stammers and false starts. But, once he got under way, there was no stopping him; he would run on and on, his eyes shut tight in ecstasy. Not that the stammering and the sentences trailing off in the middle entirely disappeared; they were rather, incorporated into the body of his discourse, adding a touch of sincerity here and there to the rhetorical splendor.

Amnon, in charge of our recruiting division and of initiating new members, would face the potential recruit and turn red with fright: How was he to begin? The choice of words was infinite; which should he pick? And suppose—God forbid!—that he should falter in his speech? What if he weren't convincing? Once he began, however, he would flame with excitement. Why wasn't the prospect yet on fire? How could he possibly still have any doubts?

But tonight, Amnon was wasting his time. The prospect he sought to inflame was already burning full blast. Perhaps by some miracle Amnon would realize this and turn himself off. But no! With his eyes ecstatically closed, he went on explaining, expounding, though the object of his attention had in fact been converted long ago.

The boy's questionnaire had been sent to us the previous day by the agent who recruited him. Where the form called for recommendations, no names had been entered. In their stead was a story: After months of unsuccessfully trying to reach us, the boy, a seventeen-year-old high-school student, had accosted a billposter one night and asked for a contact. In filling out the questionnaire the recruiter wrote, "He begged for a contact." The billposter asked for his name and address, but remained suspicious; perhaps he was a plant. The information was forwarded to our intelligence bureau. The boy was followed, investigated, cleared. It was our job tonight to question him more closely about himself.

"Why did you follow the billposter?" asked Amnon abruptly.

"I was looking for a contact."

"With whom?"

"With you—Lechi."

Why so shaky, young man? Do you think that Amnon doesn't know with whom you sought the contact? It's only that he takes a special pleasure in hearing the name.

"What is Lechi?" he asks.

Spell it out, boy, spell it out.

"The Freedom Fighters of Israel."

"You were looking for a contact with the Freedom Fighters of Israel," Amnon repeated, savoring each syllable. "Why?"

The boy didn't reply. Was he thinking it over, or was he simply at a loss for an answer?

The voice that finally issued from the trembling form was the voice of a small child. "I don't understand the question."

The voice of a child! Now, sitting behind him in the dark, I began to see him for the first time. I saw black nights and a boy tossing on his pillow, asking himself: Why? And answering: Because . . . I saw black nights and a boy wandering the streets, asking himself: Where? And entreating billposters: Please.

"Why were you particularly looking for a contact with us, with the Lechi?" asked Amnon.

A few weeks earlier he would have asked the question differently. He would have said, "There's another underground organization fighting the British, too—the Etsel. Why, then, did you decide on us?" In August, 1945, the Lechi and the Etsel had come to a comprehensive agreement covering the undertaking of joint military operations and the pooling of intelligence services and other resources, though a complete merger of the two organizations was still not possible. The Etsel still lagged behind us in appreciation of political realities. The very oppressiveness and brutality of the mandate regime so obscured the fact of its essential illegality, as to prevent the Etsel from achieving a true understanding of the nature of British imperialism.

Despite this, we made every effort in those days to think in terms of co-operation; so, in initiating new members, we no longer raised the question of the differences between the two groups.

That was why Amnon used the word "particularly." Why . . . particularly . . . the Lechi?

But the boy didn't understand, and so he threw the word right back at us: "Because I particularly wanted to join up with you."

Amnon was exasperated. "Why us and not the Haganah, for instance."

Now, for the first time, the boy's back relaxed and his shoulders slumped a bit. He knew where he was. When next he cleared his throat, it was because he had an answer. Had he or hadn't he stood for hours before our posters, studying their every word? Had he or hadn't he hidden a copy of every Lechi hand bill that had been distributed in his classroom so that he might take it out later when he was by himself and fatten himself on its contents? He recalled every one of them, word for word. As furiously as they had then been gobbled down, they were now regurgitated.

"The Haganah? It's the lackey of the Zionist leaders who mislead the people and fawn before the British power. The Zionist leaders co-operate with the oppressor to incarcerate Hebrew fighters, but stand idly by when Jewish settlements are under attack. The oppressor shuts the gates of immigration, and the Haganah pleads 'just one more visa.' The oppressor turns back refugees from the shores of our land and they proclaim a day of mourning. The oppressor seeks to reduce us to a ghetto existence and they protest only with words. The oppressor murders Jews in the Jewish homeland and they grease the rifles that they've cached away so that they shouldn't grow rusty. The oppressor . . ."

Enough! Stop, boy, stop, we know all that. We wrote it ourselves and pasted it upon the walls.

"The Lechi? The Lechi believes that against an illegal regime there is no other recourse but a war of liberation, fought with every available weapon and with every available means. The British have power on their side, but not justice. The Zionist leaders have justice on their side, but not power. Only Lechi combines justice and power."

Finally the boy came to a stop. There was little left for Amnon to say. One only had to look at him to see how blissful he was to

be vicariously reliving the experience of being recruited into Lechi.

The ideological part was over. Now it was my turn. The boy knew why, all right, but did he know how?

The posters on the walls didn't say much about the "how," and what did they say had to be gathered from between the lines. And even then, what did one really glean about so-and-so who had been tortured in prison but wouldn't talk, or about the rope in Cairo that had choked two boys to death but couldn't choke their song?

But this boy wasn't required to know all that . . . yet. He was only obliged to answer yes or no. A single word. I put the questions to him and he answered them.

"Are you ready?"

"Ready!"

"To suffer all willingly and in silence?"

"Ready!"

"To die?"

"Ready!"

Why are you yelling in my ears like that, boy? I'm not the hangman. Take it easy; no one's rushing you. You needn't answer so unhesitatingly, as though you were raring to go: Ready! Ready! But maybe it's best that way. If you're going to say "ready," maybe it's best not to give it too much thought.

But here we were almost at the end of the ceremony and I had not yet begun to ask the questions I really wanted to ask. And so, before nudging Pinchas' elbow to let him know that it was time to deliver a few concluding remarks on the seriousness of entering a conspiracy and on underground behavior in general, I decided to get a few of them off my chest.

"You're a high-school student. What grade are you in?"

"The last year."

"Have you been preparing for your final examinations?"

"Yes."

"Suppose you're not allowed to take them?"

"Why shouldn't I be?"

"Suppose that one morning, while the examinations are being

given, the principal politely invites you down to his office and reads you an order expelling you from school on the grounds that you belong to a terrorist organization? Are you ready?"

There was a muffled sigh, a gulp of air, and silence.

"Are you ready?" I prodded.

The boy swallowed again. He made a move as if to rise, then sat down again. "Ready," he breathed at last.

"And to leave your home, to go underground and say good-by to your parents . . . are you ready?"

Answer me, boy answer me. What is there to think about? What's taking you so long? Don't you know that you've already left your home a long time ago? Can't you see it there in the distance, in the dim light among the houses? Look at me, boy, and see for yourself. Nobody asked me, but if I had been asked, and if I had spoken the truth, I would have said, "No." Leave my home? No. My parents? Never! Look at me, boy, look me in the face. I lied. It's terrible, but I've already forgotten them. Siumka was right when he said to me on my first night in the underground: "You won't feel sorry about your mother for very long. Before many months are up you will have forgotten." Siumka was more than right. It's been simply weeks, not months, since I left home . . . but when did I ever have a home?

Only I did have one, and because of me many sleepless nights were passed in it. The first news of home that I received came from our intelligence bureau through Yosele a week after I had left: "The police visited your home. They asked about you and conducted a search. Don't circulate in the open needlessly. Arrange any appointments for the evening." Two weeks later I received a letter from my parents:

Where are you? Wherever you are, may the Lord protect you, but you mustn't go out at night. The police have been coming here for several weeks and always at night, two, three, four times. They turn the house upside down. They wake up the children and count them—ten minus one. "Where is she? Where is your daughter?"

And we say, "We don't know; we wish we did."

"All right," they say. "We'll keep coming back until you do."

They come back the next day; they ask questions: "Doesn't she write letters? Doesn't she come to visit? Doesn't she get homesick?"

And we say, "No, obviously not."

"All right," they say. "We'll keep coming back at night."

Among them is a certain dog; his name is Sergeant Seidel, and he's sworn to bring you back to us. When he leaves he always says good night to us in Hebrew. That's not good; it's a bad sign. Be careful. Above all, you must never in a moment of weakness come here even once, not even for a single second.

THE following day found me sitting on one side of a curtain in the home of Lechi sympathizers in Ramat-Gan. On the other side of the curtain sat Michael. After talking for a while we moved to another room, where we sat facing each other directly. Now I was looking at a curly black beard that framed both sides of a massive, protuberant head. The head itself emerged from a black coat buttoned at the collar. Underneath its bushy eyebrows were two piercing eyes. I did not notice the mouth until it began to speak; I was guided to it by the luxuriant mustache, which moved up and down in unison with the beard.

With such a real live beard, it was only natural that Michael's identification papers should list him as a rabbi, a man to be respected and revered. And so he was. For if in the eyes of most people it was the beard that made the rabbi, what could be said against Michael's beard? There was nothing sham about it. On the contrary, it was entirely home grown; it was Michael, as it were, gone to weed.

Indeed, the beard would be allowed to go on growing merrily for another year, until the day it struck a certain Police Lieutenant Martin as being improbable. That was in June, 1946, on the day of the dread dragnet, when thousands of citizens were penned up in the streets of Tel Aviv while crews of British detectives combed them, searching for suspected terrorists. A certain Rabbi Shamir attracted Martin's attention. Peering through a razor blade, the detective discovered Michael.

His eyes made Martin a dangerous man, too dangerous to be

permitted to go on snooping freely about the streets in broad daylight. And so it came to pass that one morning in August of that same year, two white-clad athletes, equipped with rackets and balls, appeared at the tennis courts in Haifa. They circled the playing area, but made no attempt to play. Of all those who saw them, only Police Lieutenant Martin was suspicious: noticing them as he left his house across the street that morning on his way to work, he suddenly narrowed his eyes and reached for his gun. He didn't like the looks of the two men. It was precisely on account of this sixth sense of Martin's, that the two men were there. His body, riddled with bullets, was left lying on the court, together with a pair of rackets and a small white ball.

It was only my eyes, then, that Michael's appearance could dazzle completely. But that was because I was already in a daze when I saw him.

"A holy blindness," Yair had called it in one of his poems. "A shady gangster" is what Yair was called by the clear-sighted, the unilluminated, who thought themselves clever because they could see their own shadows, measure distances in inches and feet, count time in seconds, and see the swamp before they noticed the mountain; who believed in good because they knew there was evil, and in great deeds because they were familiar with small ones; who forever held a compass in their hands with which to circumscribe every angle so that all should be confined to the scope of their circle; who labeled "blind" the person they could not see and "mad" the mind that soared beyond their ken.

If every member of Lechi saluted the dream and followed it to the end, he was only behaving like any soldier who salutes his commanding officer and pledges to obey him. In Michael's presence, I became for the first time a fully conscious soldier, understood for the first time how I could salute without ever raising my arm. Whatever broke against him came back more sharply focused than it was when it went. Every single one of us broke against Michael, but the experience left us consolidated rather than shattered. There was something rocklike about him. Michael was compact, solidly grounded, unshakable; the whys, ifs and

maybes broke against him and were smashed, leaving only *yes* or *no*, which is to say: the deed.

And Michael was but one member of the Lechi central committee. Over the years the composition of the committee frequently changed, but there were only two other people besides Michael who became an organic part of it: Gra, who was one of the twenty escapees from Latrun, and Eldad, who had recently been imprisoned there.

Three all together. Who among us had not had some occasion to be thankful for such a triumvirate? Who had not passed a pleasant hour musing on their complementary natures and functions: the tactician, Gra; the organizer, Michael; the visionary, Eldad.

Or rather: Michael, the co-ordinator; Eldad, the ideologist; Gra, the diplomat.

Or rather: Eldad, the spirit; Gra, the mind; Michael, the character.

Or rather . . .

After Yair's death, the continued existence of Lechi was due to this extraordinary combination. It was not until many years later that I realized it was also responsible for Lechi's eventual demise.

Not that it wasn't truly a wonderful team. On one side of Michael you had Gra—a man brimful of life and laughter, who liked his wineglass full, and was himself full of love for the land. When he talked of the far stretches across the Jordan, of the Golan, the Gilead, the Bashan, the very names seemed to trip off his tongue like sheep down a mountainside. The sounds alone made you want to set these names to music.

You couldn't resist feeling attracted to him. His heart was so big that there was sure to be room in it for you, too. When one of us stood before him, Gra always saw him first as an individual, and only afterward as a member of the collective "we." Even when Gra found himself in the company of someone hostile to us, he never failed to slap him affectionately on the shoulder. Did they not, after all, have their humanity in common? And having first allowed such a person to enjoy the full sense of his own superiority, Gra would begin to fight. An overconfident opponent was

the easiest to lick. Gra would begin without fireworks. Why bang on the table if you could just as well place a glass on it instead, drink to the other's health, make your desire his desire, and sigh good-naturedly at the end: "Well, if that's the way you want it . . .?" Why give a straight yes or no answer if you could reply with perfect simplicity: "Honestly now, how could you even think of such a thing?"

No one could make friends as Gra did. When, at the beginning of the Second World War, an important diplomatic mission had to be sent to Syria, Yair sent Gra. Whenever there was a need to enter into negotiations with the Haganah, Gra personally took them upon himself. Even if it was only a case of a falling-out between two members of the Lechi, by the time the two of them were through seeing Gra, each had received satisfaction.

No fireworks: always in a still, small voice—and sometimes no voice at all. Gra had a talent for silence. His silences, however, were well worth listening to; something was always being said in them. When Gra talked, he never had to pause for words because he had already thought out everything. What he said was always well expressed and to the point. There was never any danger of his losing his train of thought. Everything was considered. Each word was clear, purposeful, carefully weighed.

Eldad was entirely different. There were no restraints at all with him, no confines, no frame. He was like the wind, like fire.

His physical appearance wasn't impressive; there was just enough body to be a vessel for his spirit. He was emaciated, and no wonder: two thousand years of being pushed around by strangers was enough to make anyone lose weight. But no matter—as long as the spirit held out, there would be a body, too.

He expatiated about symbols; he talked about Jerusalem: Only Jerusalem can survive without a body because, of all cities, only Jerusalem has a spiritual as well as a physical existence.

His back was bent; had it been upright, it would have been dashed against a wall in some foreign lands. Had he not learned to stoop, he would have been crushed to death.

But thin, stooped as he was, what mattered was to hold the flag high. Not that the body that held the flag shouldn't stand

proud and straight; Eldad knew what it meant to yearn for a beautiful body. That was why he was now on the central committee, why he spoke so ardently in his writings of the need for comeliness, grandeur, regality. None knew better than Eldad the sufferings of Exile.

When the yearning for beauty smolders in the pit of pain, a fire is kindled. Not many of us came near that fire, but we all benefited from its warmth and saw by its light, even those who had to stand on tiptoe to reach it; not wildly grasping, however, but with confidence, for we all knew that our own backs helped to support it.

Michael gave Lechi its subterranean, Eldad its vertical, dimension. Yair descended to Lechi with commandments from the mountaintop, but it was Eldad who, in article, essay, and poem, chiseled on walls of stone the gospel of war. And these stones pierced hearts, coursed through veins, and emboldened men to fight.

Michael, Gra, Eldad: a triumvirate. But they did not make one. Together, the man of action, the man of intellect, and the man of vision could not make up for the lack of a single leader whose word would be law, not because it happened to be logical, or practical, or impassioned, but because it was the product of an inner, compelling, and categorical imperative.

Though none of the three possessed the necessary inner fire to become an undisputed leader, the outer fire of war against an alien ruler sufficed to unite them. With the extinction of this fire in 1948, however, and the alien's expulsion, the team would break up.

Meanwhile, it was still 1946; the alien was yet in power and the struggle against him was at its fiercest. The high hopes that the Jewish community had hung on the British regime were left dangling in thin air until one by one they perished. Now that the illusions were dissipated, they left behind them a great thirst for action.

"Now is the time to seek out new channels for reaching the youth," Michael said to me. "The youth is looking for us. We have to step up our recruiting drive and find ways of reaching a

wider audience. *Hechazit* is no longer enough. The rhythm of the times is too quick for a mimeographed monthly.”

What Michael neglected to say to me then was that in a month's time, as soon as our technicians had successfully concluded their experiments at setting up a transmitting station, I would be standing before a microphone and broadcasting for the Voice of the Hebrew Underground. He contented himself with saying, “From now on you'll be working with Amnon. We have to strengthen the recruiting division.”

The operations division, too.

When I returned that night to our bungalow in the Machlul quarter of Tel Aviv, I found Adam, wearing a shirt and without his revolver on his hip. He greeted me with a smile: “This certainly beats the dunes for hospitality.”

He was excited. It wasn't simply because he had abandoned the dunes; the dunes, as a matter of fact, had abandoned him. Unidentified footprints had lately been sighted in the sand. They didn't belong to Yosele, or to the refugees, or to any of our people; they had been made by strangers who, accidentally or not, had penetrated the area of the bunker. Since Adam was no longer an absolute monarch, he had no objection to abdicating his kingdom. When Michael asked him to return to Tel Aviv, he scattered his sands to the wind and came.

Adam was excited over the new job Michael had given him: to reorganize the operations division of Lechi.

Before he could begin, however, he needed a roof over his head, and he was temporarily assigned to our bungalow in Machlul. At the same time, it became necessary for me to move out. Not that we were overcrowded; a few weeks previously Siumka had gone to live somewhere else, so that even with Adam we were still only five. The neighborhood itself had suddenly become too cramped. One evening we made the discovery that we lived among neighbors with eyes in their heads, and that our bungalow had windows through which to look, and cracks in the walls through which to spy.

Spying by day one might have chanced to see four men and a woman sprawled out on a mattress or squatting on straw has-

socks. Spying by night one **might have** seen shadowy wraiths slipping out of the bungalow one by one and vanishing into the dark. Seeing led to thinking, thinking led to imagining, and imagining led to gossiping.

One evening we learned what they were gossiping about. Amnon and I were out for a twilight walk while I reported on a recent meeting with a potential recruit. Behind us there appeared quite suddenly a large gleeful band of children. Before we could turn around to see what the laughter and the shouting were about, the children rhythmically began to chorus: "There goes the whore of Machlul; there goes the whore of Machlul; there goes the whore . . ."

But tunelessly.

I can't remember whether or not I smiled, but I know Amnon didn't. He turned bright red and, refusing to look at me, stared at the ground.

Amnon knew neither where I was living nor with whom. He knew only that I had left home and was living somewhere in the underground. He, too, was living in the underground, but he had always thought of me as being surrounded with a translucent halo of purity. If only they had called me "sternest bitch" or "terrorist slut"—but to be called simply "whore," without the word *Lechi* to modify it . . . The children merrily continued to chant: "There goes the whore of Machlul; there goes . . ."

If I was not successful in getting Amnon to look at me with the sympathy and veneration due a martyred saint, I liberally bestowed those feelings upon myself. No torture, no pain, no incarceration to which I was afterward exposed ever flattered and hallowed my pride as did those few words intoned by the children of Machlul.

Still without looking at me, Amnon murmured that I had better change neighborhoods quickly. Granted, being an ordinary slut was not a crime for which one went to prison; and the average decent citizen, as long as it did not affect him directly, was not likely to turn one in for it.

That evening, however, Hertska's reaction was, "Great! If they think that, they'll never suspect anything else!" Nevertheless, once

a whisper like that began to make the rounds, there was no way of controlling it. One never knew how it would end.

And so I had to leave the bungalow, and the sooner the better. Wiser for the experience, we decided that in the next place I would live with a "husband," and Adam and I took a room in a small cottage. It was furnished with beds, chairs, a table, and sunflowers by Van Gogh on the wall. The brilliant gold ring on my finger took care of the rest. To prevent trouble in case we should sometimes have to put up guests for the night, we explained to the landlady that, as ex-members of a kibbutz, we should occasionally be entertaining old friends of ours vacationing in the city.

GRA, sitting opposite me, began to laugh: "Don't get excited; it's not an examination. If you fail, you won't have to take the course over."

It was the prospect of success, however, that excited me. I had been requested to audition that day so that Gra might determine whether I was suited to be an announcer for our new radio station. The original Lechi station, over which Yair used to broadcast, had ceased to function in 1942. The new one was to begin operations within the week.

In time to come, the same quickened heartbeat that I felt as I stood before Gra for my audition would regularly recur twice a week as I spoke into the microphone. It was as though a chorus of throbbing voices that had been hidden within me all along, waiting for a signal, clamored forth triumphantly from every cell in my body.

I stood before Gra, a copy of *Hechazit* before my eyes, and searched in vain for my voice.

Where could it be? After all, I had often and calmly faced an auditorium full of students and teachers to recite the protest poems of Bialik, so pleased with the sound of my own voice that the poem never seemed to last long enough and I had to force myself in the end to return to my seat.

Standing before Gra, I stared at the copy of *Hechazit*.

It was a swarm of black letters falling into columns of words and of words falling into columns of bodies, advancing, moving forward, filling the empty spaces until there was no longer room for anything else; it was living, breathing, seething print:

“And as you now pass through the streets of Zion and Jerusalem, so you shall continue to pass: armored and armed, on guard and under guard, ridden by fear and stricken with terror. For you shall know no peace in this land. . . .”

I was nothing but a voice, a voice composed of fiery letters alone with the smug, evil laughter of their steel-masked faces.

“We will wipe the laughter from your faces. Your limbs will be seized with panic. Your children will be orphaned, as you have orphaned the children of Israel. Your mothers will wear mourning, as the mothers of Israel have mourned. . . .”

“For every youth on the deck of a sinking ship, for the cry of every Hebrew mother as she watches her children bob in a lifeboat in mid-sea, for the tears of every Jew who reaches out his arms for help and is denied it. . . .”

“We will make your lives hell, day and night, night and day. For we are sworn to the freedom of Israel.”

“Good,” says Gra enthusiastically, his reddish mustache jerking up and down, “very good.”

“Well done!” Michael’s bushy eyebrows signal to me as we stand in the home of our friends in Ramat-Gan shortly after our first broadcast. He has delivered the first half of it, I the second. “Well done!”

“It’s true!” whispers our trembling audience, its ear glued tight to the radio in home or street: “It’s the honest truth!”

“Don’t go through the marketplace,” Adam warned me every Monday and Thursday evening as I set out for the studio. He knew that it was a bad spot in which to be when you didn’t wish to be seen. But I loved the market, and on Mondays and Thursdays I loved it in a special way.

Generally speaking, I loved it because it was a market, because it was always humming with human voices and brimming with goods that in the twinkling of an eye would make the transition from a peddler’s shelf to a woman’s basket, from homeless merchandise in quest of an owner to the exclusive property of some shopper. I loved the bargaining, loved to watch the multitude of hands as they sorted the good from the bad.

My introduction to the market had occurred as soon as I was old enough to carry my mother's shopping basket. Clutching it with both hands, I would be dragged along to where the Arab vendors kept their stalls. To me these stalls always seemed to be the soul of the market. It wasn't that the merchandise on sale there was any cheaper or better; it just seemed somehow brighter, prettier, and more captivating. The lemonade man who adorned his head with colorful feathers and decorated his small cart with lemon boughs hung with tiny, tinkling bells; the butcher with the flamboyant handle-bar mustache who planted live flowers in the bloody shank of the freshly killed cow hanging from his meat hook, calling out all the while to his customers in song and in verse—all this captivated and entranced me. Most of all, however, I loved to listen to the bargaining that went on between my mother and the vendors in earthy and epigrammatic Arabic, a bargaining that in my eyes had little to do with another penny's profit on the one side or another penny's expense on the other. It was art, not business. The apple or grape, my mother and the peddler, were all lively actors in a theatrical fantasia.

"Twenty grush a kilo!" the apple vendor intoned. "Apples from paradise, twenty grush a kilo!"

"Five!" my mother would say.

"Five? Five grush for apples like these? Watering the tree cost more than that!"

"Seven," my mother would say, insisting that the other day she had paid seven for finer apples.

"Finer than these?" The vendor's eyes sparkled as he fondled an apple in his palm. "The Lord doesn't make them any finer than these, may His name be praised. Finer than these? No, woman, it's the taste, not the looks, that counts. What's beauty if it's only skin-deep? I have a friend, for example, he's handsome to look at, but inside he's rotten to the core. His heart is eaten up by cancer, may you be spared the same fate."

Here he would suddenly slice the apple in half: "The Lord be praised, the Lord be thanked, just look at its heart! Take a look: like Paradise before the first sin. Here, taste it; let your mouth savor it; don't be bashful. Give some to the girl. A delight to the soul! Fifteen grush, not a penny less."

“Nine grush, not a penny more.” My mother turned as if to go.

“Why in such a hurry, my sister? Why is everyone in such a rush? Haste is for the devil, my sister. See how my apples long to be yours! Look how they practically roll into your basket by themselves! They belong to you, not to me. How can we earthlings defy the will of the Creator? Twelve grush, no more, no less.”

My mother’s hands would already be burrowing in the pile of apples. The vendor would weigh them out, put them in a bag, and bid her a hearty farewell. How my heart would rejoice to hear the warm clink of the coins in his pocket!

Those were the days when I was still a small girl and carried my mother’s basket. But now, passing through the market every Monday and Thursday, my love for it was of a different kind. Those were the nights I broadcasted from our station, located in a building overlooking a nearby lane. And on those nights, in one corner of the marketplace, a group of basket-laden men would gather around one of the stalls, the owner of which had long since ceased to cry his wares and was now busy fiddling with the knobs on his receiving set, trying to get a frequency between 35 and 37 on the short-wave band. Soon Lechi radio would be on the air.

The men would crowd around the stall and I would elbow my way past them. Both they and I jostled and shoved—I to get to the station, they to hold their ground. And yet I would not hurry. I wanted one more look at their brooding, expectant eyes, one more look at their attentively cocked ears. Then I would be off down the alleyway, past two guards loitering by the door, and up the steps to the uppermost floor, from where I could see four more guards, this time armed, patrolling on the roof.

Inside the room Alex, Eli, and Gad would be waiting for me. Gad and I read from prepared scripts into the microphone. Gad had the job because of his voice, which was strong and incisive. But my voice was a call from within me, and if that call should ever stop, I would be voiceless.

I didn’t realize this at the time, but I know it now, and every time I am called upon to step up to the microphone at some reunion of old friends, I realize it afresh.

The microphone looks the same, but instead of Alex with his tin earphones, nervously twisting the controls on a transmitter concealed in a suitcase and looking at me sternly with eyes that were made for laughter, I see beside me a strange man calmly adjusting the electrical wiring. I look out on the audience from a high stage, but I have no voice for it, and the audience has no ears for me, and no "current" runs in the wires.

I was never a born announcer. If nonetheless I managed to do an effective job for twenty-minute periods twice a week, it was only by virtue of the voice clamoring within me, the voice I stifled for several thousands of minutes during the rest of the week, and which I had been stifling for thousands of years. If I performed well, it was not because I was in any way a professional; it was simply because I believed in that voice and abandoned my body to it, letting it rend me, burn me, char me to ashes if necessary. After every broadcast, the smell of cinders was in my nose. Something in me was being offered up on an altar.

ELI never quite managed to keep from smiling sideways at me those two nights a week. Indeed, I must have been a strange sight standing there in the narrow, soundproof room with my thin neck stretched toward the microphone and my entire body talking into it, now lifting my voice, now raising my arms, now shutting my eyes, and now stamping sharply on the floor. Perhaps there was something strange about talking into a piece of metal. But it wasn't metal I addressed; most of the time I didn't even see it. Instead, I saw ears, many pairs of ears—alive, alert, warm, and yielding to my voice—turning toward me in the street.

The metal microphone could not be stretched to Eli's six and a half feet, and he had to bend until he was level with it. Then, his lips pursed, quivering, he would wait until Alex gave the signal: It was only seven twenty-nine. Still a minute to wet the lips again, or bite them as long as it was done quietly. Behind Eli's arched back Gad swallowed while I swallowed behind Gad. Three pairs of eyes were turned to the corner in which the transmitter lay. Then the signal:

In days that are red
With carnage and blood,
In nights that are black with despair . . .

Eli only whistled the melody, but I heard the words. Eli whistled the theme in a minor key, but I saw wild daubs of red and black dancing in space and nameless, colorless shadows prowling among them.

In country and town
Our banner is flown
And on it are conquest and war.

The melody had an end, but the story was endless, for it was the story of Lechi itself, an anthem for unknown soldiers composed by Yair. It wasn't a marching song; the music wasn't martial. It was an anthem of cellars and alleyways, of roadside yearnings that were not yet uniformed. Of course, without a military tunic one had no place to hang one's medals; but on the other hand, with a chestful of jingling metals, how could you listen to the heart dreaming inside?

Two other musical themes were heard regularly over underground radio in those days. From Kol Yisrael, the Haganah station, came the dirgelike notes of "Hatikvah." That melody of ancient anguish, written as a single expiring breath, as though it had been composed by the original Waters of Babylon, was now pressed into service as a call to arms.

Late in 1945 the Haganah announced that henceforth it would resort to violence in its struggle against the British. This resolution, however, came neither from any heightened sense of national honor, nor from any particular confidence in the outcome of the campaign. The seemingly endless capacity for suffering had been finally exhausted, and the long-standing faith in British promises had worn thin at last. But within a year, when the British regime would start arresting the Jewish leaders on a mass basis, destroying the community's economic life and threatening it with total annihilation, the Haganah would once again reveal the old incapacity, this time by raising its hands high and throwing down its arms. No child of tears and anguish could long survive the exultation of battle. Within a year "Hatikvah" would cease to be the opening theme of a resistance radio and would become the knell of many a fruitless protest rally. "Hatikvah" could induce the exiles to abandon the Waters of Babylon, but it had not the power to lead them as far as the Banks of the Jordan.

Over Kol Tsion Halochemet, the Etsel station, one heard the anthem of Betar, *Lamut o lichbosh et hahar*. Only the opening bar

of it was whistled on the air, but it was always enough to make me want to snap to attention, no matter where I happened to be at the time. When you marched to it, the very ground under your feet seemed to slope upward, so that you found yourself climbing higher and higher until the mountaintop came into view. Nor were you alone when you marched: The line of which you were a part stretched out on both sides of you, while behind you the mountain's flank was littered with the footprints and graves of others who had tried the ascent.

A single five-note bar rose from the underground, but I restrained myself when I heard it and didn't stand at attention, for the streets at the time were patrolled by enemy troops. And until they were gone, until the times were safe for such a song, I would continue to prow through days red as blood to be swallowed up by nights black as pitch, to climb the stairs to the attic and listen to Eli whistle through pursed lips into the microphone.

He would be followed by Gad's clear, commanding tones: "This is the Voice of the Hebrew Underground! This is the Voice of the Hebrew Underground! This is the radio station of the Freedom Fighters of Israel!"

And now it is my turn:

"From the depths of the Hebrew Underground our voice will rise. We do not speak by the grace of the British regime, or under its supervision. Our voice calls out freely. It is the voice of those fighting for the liberation of the Jewish people and its historic homeland. . . ."

Freely . . . but somewhat hoarsely nonetheless. *Mix two egg yolks with two teaspoonfuls of sugar in a quarter of a cup of boiling water, stir well and drink.* It never helped. It wasn't a hoarseness that came to me from the outside; it was a hoarseness which lived within me and over which I had no control; it came and went as it pleased. And why did my voice tremble? It wasn't that I was cold; I could feel the words hot and parching on my lips. I ran my tongue over them and drew a breath of cool air:

"Again and again we have been dealt insult and injury. Again and again our blood has been shed. Where now are those who

insulted us? Where are the shedders of our blood? But the People of Israel lives on, bearing its glorious past . . .”

Eli, I knew, was behind me draped over the back of the sofa, and grinning; Alex I could see at my side, moving the microphone closer to my mouth.

“No war is holier than ours, for none is more just. The land of our fathers, the land of the Kingdom of Israel awaits our redemption. The land is rich, the nation is large and deserving. Who then stands in the way? The dev——”

The word “devil” leaped from my lips in a wholly formed shout, but only a part of it reached the microphone, which at that very moment went flying to the floor with a crash.

Alex quickly shut off the current, but without noticing him I went right on talking. He had to grab hold of me and shake me to get me to stop.

“Who do you think you’re talking to?” he asked, spacing his words in an effort to control his temper. His tone softened: “Who’s standing in the way?” He nodded smilingly, mimicking my last words. “Before you go ahead and blame the devil you’d better look to yourself. I just don’t understand how you could knock over the microphone like that when you were holding on to the script with both your hands.” He set the microphone back on its feet.

“You’d better start that last sentence over again from the beginning,” he ordered.

“And when you take on the devil this time——” someone laughed behind me—²for God’s sake, don’t use your hands.”

I didn’t laugh. Neither did Alex, sternly setting the microphone before me again. We had lost two precious minutes.

“YOU ARE listening to the Voice of the Hebrew Underground! You are listening to the Voice of the Hebrew Underground! The British divisions could not stop us. The solid wall of British bayonets has been smashed. During the night of the twenty-first of October, Jewish fighting forces struck a single co-or-di-na-ted blow at the enemy, from Acre to Gaza, from the sea coast to the hills of Judea and Jerusalem . . .”

Looking at Gad from my seat on the cot in our studio, seeing the radiance in his face and listening to the pride in his voice, I couldn't help envying him. He spoke into the microphone as though the hands of cheering thousands lifted his spirits on high.

I envied him, but not selfishly, for I knew perfectly well that his voice was better suited than mine for such triumphal occasions. Unlike mine, it was not hoarse, pained, prayerful, shaky, and staccato. It rang out loud and clear.

And today was no day for hoarseness or pain. Today the seemingly impossible had happened: The very same men who as recently as yesterday had considered us beyond the pale were now standing at our side. The Haganah, which for so long had done nothing but mock us and betray us behind our backs, now fought with us side by side.

Not that the enemy had changed any. The enemy was the same as ever. He smiled apologetically and pointed over the sea at Germany. As far back as 1940 Yair had seen how that smile concealed the real foe—the British. But even after Germany's defeat,

the Haganah continued to be fooled by it, and smiled back. Only in 1946, did the cries of drowning refugees and of desperate immigrants turned back within sight of land really open its eyes to the truth.

Once they were opened, the Haganah saw the enemy for the first time; seeing him, it also saw us, the "extremists," engaged in mortal combat with him; and seeing us, it soon saw itself swelling our ranks, but we continued as three separate bodies: the Etsel, the Haganah, and the Lechi. The alignment was close enough, however, so that all three could strike together and simultaneously. Thus was born a single Jewish fighting force, known as the "Insurrectionary Front." And on the twenty-first of October, members of all three organizations, acting on a basis of equality, participated in a series of strikes from Acre to Gaza, from the seacoast to the hills of Judea and Jerusalem.

"The long-awaited day has arrived. The Hebrew Insurrectionary Front is no longer merely a dream. . . . We do not believe that this movement has arisen simply over the question of a few immigration certificates more or less, nor do we believe that granting additional visas can put an end to it. The Front will continue until its goal has been completely achieved. We are deeply convinced that this new unity of Hebrew fighting men has not taken place by accident. Let the world realize that this is but the beginning."

I envied Gad, but even as he spoke, I heard the voice of Moishle as it came to me one night from a mattress on the floor of the Tel Aviv apartment in which Adam and I lived. The sound of it was mournful, accusing: "We're done for. It's not a beginning for them; it's an end for us."

A month before, Gra had summoned us to meet with him in small groups in order to explain to us the reasons for the recent cessation of Lechi's military activities and for the negotiations then under way with the Haganah concerning the formation of a common front whose authority we would accept as binding, even if that meant calling a halt to some of our more "extreme" operations. Gra's arguments were convincing. A partial war involving all the people was preferable to a total war involving only part of

the people. We must not be power hungry. As long as the Haganah was willing to fight, what difference did it make who signed the orders?

Gra appealed to our pride: "See, we've been right all along! Look how we've won."

The very fact that a common front should arise at all was a moral victory for us. Logic was on Gra's side. Should Haganah renege on its commitments, the stigma of "dissidence" would then pass to it. Morally and materially we could only emerge the stronger.

A month before, sitting apprehensively in front of Gra, none of us could think of anything to add to what he said. We weren't surrendering. We were submitting to the authority of "the Front" only because our own goals were being furthered by it. If the Haganah ever backed out, we would proceed on our own.

Only one person present took exception at that time.

Moishele was the first overnight guest to stay in our apartment. He was not on vacation from a kibbutz, but he was homeless nonetheless. It was late one night when he arrived, but sleep was not uppermost on his mind.

The creaking of the door awoke me. When I jumped from bed in the darkness, Adam quickly came over and told me in a whisper that he had a visitor and that I should turn and face the wall. When I had done so, he switched on his flashlight. No one spoke. All I could hear was the sound of Adam pulling at his mattress and laying it lengthwise in the narrow space on the floor between our two beds. Still wordless, he took one of the two army blankets with which I had been covered and spread it over the springs of his bed. I heard someone undressing behind my back. The beam of the flashlight danced over the wooden planking of the wall.

The visitor stretched out on the mattress. Adam squeakily settled down on the bed springs. Now the room was pitch black and the only sound was the voice of the man on the mattress, mournful, accusing: "It's all over with."

"No," said Adam. "Nothing's over with. It's only the beginning."

"The beginning of the end," said the other.

"No!" Adam exclaimed. "A cease fire isn't an end. It's simply an interlude. It's not we who have surrendered to them. It's they who have given in to us."

"But we have surrendered."

"No, Moishele, we haven't. You're much too pessimistic." The bed springs squeaked again.

So this was Moishele, Adam's old friend. I had long been fascinated by the story of his escape from prison. I hadn't met him when I first heard it, but even if I had, how could I have reconciled the infinite sadness of the man on the mattress with the wild transports of laughter that overcame me whenever I tried to imagine the details of his escape?

Moishele hadn't escaped by himself. He had been joined by Yashke. Both were serving sentences in the central prison in Jerusalem that winter of 1942. It was Christmas time, but the yule tree in the courtyard of the prison warden's house looked sad behind all the barbed wire. And so, when Moishele and Yashke, both expert electricians, suggested to the warden that he allow them to decorate it with a few light bulbs, it never crossed his mind that a nefarious Jewish scheme was afoot.

A barbed-wire fence separated the warden's courtyard from the outside world, and as the two men worked they were watched by an Arab guard. The two men needed help. They had to connect the tree to an electrical outlet, but the tree was in the courtyard and the nearest outlet was in the warden's cottage. Not only that, but for some reason it was necessary that the wire be strung as high up as possible. It followed that as the two of them ran it along the cottage walls and out the door into the courtyard, somebody would have to remain within to hold it up to the ceiling.

The guard! He gladly volunteered his services. The master would rejoice to see the tree all lit up.

"Get up on the chair," Yashke told the guard, handing him one end of the wire. "Raise your arms and hold the wire against the ceiling."

The guard stood on the chair, but his rifle prevented him from freely raising his arms. It was placed in the corner.

“Higher,” said Yashke. “Higher, the wire actually has to touch the ceiling.”

But the guard was too short. His arms didn’t reach.

One of the two men had a brilliant idea. “The rifle!”

The weapon was brought from the corner. Held upright, its muzzle pressed the wire firmly against the ceiling.

“That’s one,” said Moishle. “Stay right where you are and don’t move. The voltage in the wire is very high. Be sure you don’t move.”

The guard didn’t move as the two men began pulling the wire about the room, nor did he move when they headed for the door, passed through it, and started along the cottage wall. The guard only knew that there was voltage in the wire, very high voltage. He could feel it running through his fingers. What he couldn’t do was see that, when the two men reached the tree, they failed to stop. The tree was in the courtyard, the guard was in the cottage. . . . And he was still in the cottage when Moishle and Yashke came to the barbed-wire fence, jumped over it, and ran for their freedom.

The guard couldn’t see them running because he was holding the wire against the ceiling. The one thing he couldn’t understand was why the wire should have suddenly slackened. Could it be that the voltage had dropped?

Who could have guessed that the utterly dejected voice now speaking in the darkness had once crowed so merrily in the green cottage? *Higher, good guard, raise your hands higher. Fine. That’s it. Only for the love of God, you mustn’t move. . . .*

“I’m not a pessimist, Adam, I’m talking facts. I’ve received an order from Gra to postpone the operation we were planning in Haifa. Gra received the order from them, the Front. We’re done for, Adam. It’s the end of Lechi.”

“The end? The end for whom?” Adam demanded. “What’s come over you? Didn’t you hear Gra say that a partial war involving all the people was better than a total war involving only part of the people?”

“It’s not better. It’s no good at all. We were all set to move in Haifa. We could still move in, at any minute. If we don’t, it’s

going to be a disaster. But Gra said to postpone it. The Haganah won't ever fight the British, but it's already finished us."

That night in our apartment Moishela was wrong: Lechi wasn't finished. Exactly three weeks later, on the night of the twenty-first of October, it went into action. Moishela knew because he was one of those who saw action that night. And Moishela was wrong about the Haganah, too, because on the night of the twenty-first the Haganah went into action also. That Moishela didn't know because, on the twenty-second of October, he was no longer alive to be told.

That night in our apartment Adam was right: When, eight months later, the Insurrectionary Front disintegrated, the Lechi and the Etsel were given a new lease on life. The central committee of Lechi was right: When the Haganah knuckled under, the ranks of those who kept on fighting were strengthened. Our activities even began to reach overseas, and our prestige soared in the eyes of the Jewish community.

That night in our apartment Moishela was wrong: The order postponing the assault on the oil refineries in Haifa was reversed by the central committee, and on the twenty-first of October the refinery buildings were shaken by a mighty explosion. The oil, however, did not go up in flames, nor did the tanks catch fire. The time bomb failed to go off at the time and place for which it was set. It went off at a time and place that were set for Moishela instead.

The operation in Haifa could not have been delayed any longer without endangering our men. The plan to blow up the oil refineries had been hatched before the formation of the Front, and a number of Lechi agents had been hired as workers in the plant. The explosives that they had smuggled in with them drop by drop and stored in secret hideaways itched to go off. If the plan was not carried out quickly, they were likely to be discovered. And so, when Moishela appeared before the central committee to argue his case, he put the committee in a difficult position. Gra suggested to the high command of the Front that the sabotage of the refineries be included in one of the first co-ordinated strikes, but the Haganah

nah refused, claiming that destruction of the refineries would go beyond the strategic objectives of the Front and would be an open act of war. Besides, the Haganah did not exactly see the connection between burning oil and helpless refugees, although on behalf of those same refugees it had recently attacked a British internment camp for illegal immigrants at Atlit, launched a series of assaults against British radar stations scattered along the coast, and sunk three British patrol boats anchored in Haifa harbor. Between British patrol boats and Jewish refugee ships, however, there was clearly a connection.

In the future the Haganah would grow more liberal. It would widen its attacks to include police stations in general and not just those along the coast, and on the fifteenth of June, 1946, it would venture so far as to blow up eight bridges adjoining the borders of Palestine. It would grow liberal, too, in regard to the extremists, and would give Lechi the green light to blow up the repair shops of the Haifa depot, the nerve center of the Palestinian railway system.

But that was in the future. For the time being it opposed the sabotage of the refineries. The dangers involved in further postponement did not impress Haganah. Michael and Yashke, however—the same Yashke who wired the warden's Christmas tree, and who was now operational commander of Lechi—were impressed not only by the dangers of postponement, but by the prospects of success as well. So many burning oil tanks meant so much scorched earth on which the foreigner would stand. Taking upon themselves the responsibility for any possible deterioration in the unity of the Front, they sent word to Moishele: "As the man immediately in charge of the operation, the decision is yours."

Decision? Moishele had made up his mind long ago. Now he swung into action. Late one night he broke into the refinery. There were others with him, including the second-in-command, Yehudai.

"That afternoon we went to make a last inspection of the area, in order to determine whether there would be any chance for a getaway," wrote Yehudai in a report to the central committee after the failure of the operation. "At one point Moishele said, 'As

confident as I am that the operation will succeed, at times, I still feel strangely about the whole thing and get depressed. I have a feeling that I won't come out of it alive.' ”

The operation did not succeed and Moishele did not come out of it alive. There was, indeed, an explosion, but it occurred before the men had a chance to place the wired clocks and the detonators by the side of the nitroglycerin that lay waiting near the tanks. The nitroglycerin waited in vain, because the clocks and the detonators went off in Moishele's suitcase. Yehudai, who was standing right beside him when it happened, was lucky enough to survive, though in addition to Moishele's scattered body he was obliged to leave behind one of his own eyes.

“My eye bled profusely,” Yehudai wrote. “It came out of the socket, and I took it in my hand with the blood and the dirt and threw it away. Naturally, the minute I felt the slime of it with my fingers I knew it was lost.”

During the Lechi assault on the repair shops of the Haifa depot Yehudai would close his other eye and his blood would flow once more into the Kishon. This time all of it.

But that was still several months away. Meanwhile Yehudai attempted to explain Moishele's death in his report:

“All evening long he was very tense. . . . The slightest noise would make him drop his work and come over to investigate. This happened several times.

“We had time on our hands. It was eleven P.M. Moishele asked me to wake him up at twelve-thirty. At a quarter after twelve Ertel woke up. He woke Moishele, but Moishele said that there were still fifteen minutes left and he wanted to sleep. Ten minutes later Ertel insisted that we get to work. This time Moishele told me to wake him up at twelve thirty-five, that is, five minutes later than he originally said.

“Moishele,” the report continued, “opened the suitcase, took out four clocks, and chose one. He wanted to put the others back, but Dan stopped him. Why put them back? But Moishele wanted to shut the suitcase. My own guess is that the screw holding the hands of a clock was loose, and that when Moishele shut the lid of

the suitcase the screw twisted around, closing the circuit and setting off the explosion.”

“We shall remember!” Gad exclaimed darkly, but still on a note of triumph. “We shall remember the freedom fighter Moishele, who died in the performance of his duty.”

“In days that are red,” Eli whistled into the microphone, “in nights that are black with despair.”

I STUDIED the script in my hand. When I read it over the air, the orderly letters on the page would dart pell-mell from my mouth, leaving the white sheet of paper empty and bereaved. But now, although they were already starting to gasp with excitement, the letters were all still in place. Beside me, Gad, too, was busy rehearsing.

It was nearly seven thirty when I arrived. Hurrying from the bus terminal, I half imagined that every man whistling on the street, every bird call, was Eli over the radio.

I was late but in a good humor, having finally lost the man with a hat, who had been following me for over two hours. When he first caught my attention, I had not been in a good mood at all. I had just appeared for an appointment with my sister, which I had not asked permission to arrange, since I knew in advance that I would be refused. I wanted to find out about my father. I knew that he had been arrested, but not that he had already been released.

"They let him go yesterday," my sister informed me. "He was in jail for three days. Mother had been feeling for a long time that they were getting ready to do something. Lately they'd been coming around every night. . . . Is it true that you're the announcer? Once, in the middle of the broadcast, mother shouted 'Geula! It's Geula! Do you mean to tell me I don't know my own daughter's voice?' Mother thinks that the police know, too. Lately they've been rough and rude, not like before. But do you know what Mother did the last time they came, before they arrested Father?"

She stood in the doorway and said, 'Get out of here. Get out of here at once! You've made my life hell for me; do you expect me to serve you tea and crumpets? Wormwood is all you'll get from me. Because of you I've lost my daughter. Because of you she's afraid to come home. Because of you I haven't seen her for months. Because of you I can't sleep at night. Get out of here, all of you!'

"For God's sake," I hissed between my teeth, "don't talk so loud! We're in the middle of the street."

"And do you know what? They left, and in a hurry. You should have seen those heroes face to face with Mother. I was shaking all the time and trying to pull her back inside, and Father was trembling with fear that they might take her away. But they turned and left. Two days later, on Saturday, they came for Father."

"On a Saturday?"

"They insisted on taking him to the police station in Jaffa by car. But Father said, 'On the Holy Sabbath why must I go by car? If you're in such a hurry, then I'll run. I'll run all the way and, with God's help, I'll get there before you.' I couldn't believe that they'd agree, but for some reason they did. You should have seen your father running like crazy down the street toward Jaffa, on the Sabbath. . . . What are you looking at me that way for? You still haven't answered my question: Are you the radio announcer or not?"

"Stop looking around like that all the time and don't ask so many questions. Tell me what they did to Father."

"Nothing. They didn't do anything. . . . Who is it that you're so afraid of? . . . Mother didn't say a thing to anybody. All she does Monday and Thursday evenings when the broadcast is on, she turns up the radio as loud as she can so that the neighbors can hear, too. . . . They didn't do anything to Father. They interrogated him during the day and threw him in a cell with thieves at night. Father didn't mind as long as the thieves were Jewish, so that there would be a quorum for prayers."

"What kind of questions did they ask him?"

"Nothing, they just kept asking him where you were. Father said that he'd like to know where you were, too. . . . Do you see

that man looking at us from across the street, the one over there, with the hat on?"

"I don't see anything. No one's looking. Stop turning your head in every direction," I said, guiding her into a nearby alley.

"They called for him three times a day, and each time they asked him the same question. They said they wouldn't let him go until he brought them to you. Do you know what Father answered them?" My sister's eyes sparkled. "'Where are your detectives,' Father said. 'Why don't they find her? Or if you'd prefer, if you'll undertake to support my wife and nine children, I'll gladly go out and look for her myself. Maybe I'll have better luck than you.'"

My sister suddenly stopped and hung her head.

"Why don't you go on?" I asked.

"One of them—as a matter of fact he happened to be the nicest, the one who would always say good evening to us when he woke us at midnight—hit Father in the face. He must have thought Father was joking. He doesn't know Father never jokes. . . . Geula, have you noticed? The man who was across the sidewalk is walking behind us now. I think I recognize his hat from somewhere. I think I recognize his face. I think I saw him near our house this morning. . . ."

"Near the house?" I moaned under my breath. "Why didn't you tell me before? Only cut it out. Quit looking around like that. I'll get on a bus at the first stop we come to and try to lose him. You go straight home. It wasn't a good idea to meet today. It wasn't a good idea to meet at all."

I boarded a bus going to the central terminal without any clear idea of what I would do once I got there. My shadow got on behind me. The radio station was located in the area the bus was now leaving, so that once I managed to lose him I would have to double back. By the time we arrived in the terminal I had a plan. I joined a line waiting to buy tickets for buses to the coast. I handed my money to the man in the booth and asked for a ticket to Jerusalem. My shadow, who was standing behind me at a distance, could not hear the ticket seller refer me to the second booth on my left; he could only see my money as it was returned to

me, which he naturally imagined to be my change. Without waiting, he hurried off to get on the coast bus before I did.

“Shhh!” Alex wagged his finger at me. I was disturbing Gad.

I hadn’t noticed that Gad had begun, but once I realized that he was speaking I couldn’t help listening. I more than listened, for as he read, it seemed to me that I was reading along with him, enunciating every word, stopping at every pause. He, however, spoke out loud, while I could only move my lips and sway my body back and forth.

I stared at the script in my hand and listened to Gad. The words he spoke and the words I read became confused in my mind, until everything went blank except for the humming of the transmitter and Alex’s finger resting admonishingly on his lips. A second passed, as did another, and then the finger crooked itself slightly and gestured to me to come to the microphone.

So soon? I hadn’t even rehearsed the script. But really, it wasn’t necessary to have read it in advance; it was only necessary to visualize the High Commissioner in his mansion dressed in full regalia, his eyes blue-black, his mouth foaming, as he called for law and order. So I began:

“You call for law and order, my Lord, and it would please you no end to have it. And why not? *Your* sons and daughters are not dying from hunger and from cold. No threat of murder hangs over *their* heads. . . .

“There is no one who can promise law and order. There is no one who has the right to promise it in the name of the Jewish people. But there is someone who will promise to break your laws and flout your orders. Every Jewish freedom fighter promises you that, and he swears it by a sacred oath sealed in sacred blood: There will be no law and order here, my Lord High Commissioner, there will be no law and order.”

That same evening my father was lighting the first candle of Chanuka. A single candle burned in its candlestick, seven others awaited their turn, and the *shamash*, the “helping light,” stood flickering at one side.

There was no candelabra in our attic studio, but there was flame, and with that flame we honored the memory of eight Jewish boys who had been murdered that week. In my mind's eye the red flame of the Chanuka candle in my father's house blended with the flaming red of the berets of the British paratroops who, on December 12, 1946, had surrounded the kibbutzim along the coastal plain from Tel Aviv to Haifa and killed eight defenders who sought to break the siege.

At home, my father was saying the blessing over the candles. He and my brothers were singing a hymn of thanksgiving to the Lord of all life for the wonders and miracles he performed for our forefathers and would perform again for us. But in our attic there were no blessings except my father's blessings which gave me strength to recite into the microphone a hymn of war that was heard that night in the houses of Israel:

"There will be no peace for Great Britain, either in this land or in any other. Our nation wallows in its own blood, but it is not therefore weaker. It is stronger, more determined, more persevering than ever. Throughout the world Jewish fighters will strike for their people, for we have been swindled and betrayed by Great Britain. A great and eternal people, the People of the Bible, has been betrayed. Therefore do we condemn you, Great Britain; therefore do we war upon you."

IT SEEMED to me that I had just returned that evening from an initiation ceremony in Ramat-Gan, just managed to bury my head in the pillow and fall asleep, when I was awakened by a series of loud knocks on the door. I could see the dawn's light filtering through the cracks in the walls.

Adam and I leaped from our beds as the knocking continued. We could hear the landlady shouting, "Get up, it's a search! Open the door! The entire neighborhood is surrounded."

She burst into the room before the door was fully opened. "For God's sake, you've got to help me! Take this and hide it." She waved a thin woolen blanket in my face. "It's British army issue. Who needed it anyway? Why did my son have to bring it home with him? One, I just happened to say to him—he's the soldier who was staying here this week, remember?—I just happened to say to him, 'If you can manage to bring me a decent blanket, then why don't you? A blanket like the one the neighbor's son brought for her.' I just happened to mention it; I didn't mean anything by it. So this week he brought me one. A wonderful boy. I'm sure you'll get to know him. You don't have to tell him anything twice. But for God's sake, what am I going to do with it now? Please help me to hide it. If the police find it, they're sure to arrest him. They'll arrest my son, don't you see? For God's sake, do something!"

Certainly I see, my good woman: I see that hidden in the wall behind you are two loaded pistols, an automatic revolver and several copies of *Hechazit*. I see that if these are discovered, we'll be in a bad way.

The landlady grabbed and shook me. "Please, tell me where I can hide the blanket. Why don't you say something?"

"I'm thinking" . . . Thinking that I have to empty the pockets of my coat of messages and of the two recruitment recommendations which Amnon gave me yesterday; thinking that last night Adam brought home a policewoman's cap which hasn't been put away yet; thinking that I wish you'd get out of here and take your wonderful boy and your army blanket with you.

"There's nothing to worry about," Adam said suddenly from the corner of the room. "Leave the blanket right where they can see it. That's right, where everyone can see it. When they search, they're only interested in what you've hidden away. Do what I say. Just put the blanket quietly back where it was."

How could he be so calm, I wondered, when my blood was racing so wildly through my veins? But he seemed to have a good influence over the landlady, who returned to her room to put the blanket back where it had been.

"It looks bad," said Adam peering out the window. "If we aren't caught ourselves, we're liable to be caught on her account."

"Because of the blanket?"

"No, because the fat old cow is shaking all over. Couldn't you see how scared she was?"

"She's calming down. But what do you mean 'If we aren't caught'? I don't believe they'll find the hiding place," I said, trying unsuccessfully to sound confident.

"What you believe or don't believe isn't going to make any difference. What I'd like to know is whether this is part of a city-wide search or whether it's limited to just this neighborhood. Look out the window, the place is crawling with police. It looks serious. They must be retaliating for our latest strikes."

"What are we going to do with the police cap? It's too risky to start hiding it now. They might walk in on us any minute."

Adam waved a black beret in the air. "What did you think I was doing in the corner all the time the landlady was making that scene? I was taking the insignia off the cap. Who can prove now that this ever belonged to a policewoman?"

The landlady returned with a brainstorm. She would sit on the blanket. Yes, she would place it on the chair by the front door of

the cottage and remain seated no matter what. No sooner said than done. She folded the blanket neatly and sat on it.

"First rate!" Adam called to her across the bungalow. To me he added in an abdominal grumble, "If only she'd stop squirming around on the chair with her fat behind. You'd think somebody was sticking pins in her."

I went to the door and looked out. Not far from our cottage a number of tables had been set up, behind which were seated detectives and policemen. Here tenants were brought for interrogation. As I came back along the hallway to our room, I noticed a vase of wilted roses standing on the mantelpiece. They went well with the room, I thought. Their very sadness bespoke the gray routine of ordinary life. There was no need to ask the landlady's permission to take them. She was still absorbed with her blanket.

The police were still a few doors away.

"When we attacked police headquarters the other day, the British must have had an attack of nerves," I said to Adam, who had shaved and put on a tie and was now polishing his shoes. "And to think that the operation was approved by the Insurrectionary Front!"

But Adam was not in a self-congratulatory mood. "Do you have your identification papers?" he asked.

"I'm holding them."

"What's your profession?"

"I'm a private tutor. And you?"

"Traveling salesman for processed wood products," he answered, every inch the self-important businessman.

Still no police.

"If they don't get here soon, you'll need another shave," I said with a forced laugh. For some reason Adam's well-scrubbed appearance unnerved me. Every few minutes I would run my hand through my hair, rumple it, then smooth it out again. I wished there was a mirror in the room, a tall, full-length mirror like the one in the closet in my parents' home.

"If we're caught," I said, my eyes seeking out the hiding place between the double walls of the cottage, "we'll be sentenced to life."

"Or afterlife," was Adam's somber comment.

"They're coming!" The landlady's voice was unsteady.

Five men entered the room—three plain-clothes men and two armed soldiers. The plain-clothes men were all blond. One examined us from the side, the second ransacked the room, and the third went through our papers. When he had finished, he turned to Adam. "Pictures!" he snapped. Adam respectfully did up the buttons of his jacket before answering.

"Pictures?" he repeated, first in English, then a second time in Hebrew: "Pictures?" He pointed to the wall, on which were Van Gogh's sunflowers, a portrait of a puzzled-looking drunk smoking a pipe, and a gay drawing of some dancing ballerinas.

"Family pictures! Pictures of your family!" the inspector barked irritably.

"Family pictures?" I suddenly had an idea. "They are all with my family. We're only living here temporarily until we find an apartment. In the meantime our furniture and all our albums are at my parents'." I tried to sound as pompous as I could, and as I spoke I kept twisting my "wedding ring" about my finger.

Whether it was the drunk on the wall, the wilted flowers in the vase, or Adam's clean-shaven face that inspired me, is something I'll never know; in any event, at a nod from the inspector the men thanked us, apologized, and left.

"I can tell you now," said Adam after they had gone, "when I took part in the operation last night, I was less scared than I was just now. To be caught like this, with one's hands in one's pockets, it's—how shall I say?—it's meaningless. And to be flown to Eritrea, so that they can put a bullet in you there, it's"—he searched for the right phrase, gave up, and said again with doubled anger—"it's completely meaningless."

Adam's anger, however, was not meaningless. He hadn't mentioned Arnon, but I could tell just from looking at his face that he was thinking of him. Arnon had been his friend, one of the twenty who escaped from Latrun. Recaptured by the British in Haifa two months ago, he had been sent to an internment camp in Africa and had been killed there.

Six weeks ago, on Arbor Day, the fifteenth day of the Hebrew month of Shevat, when Jewish children were planting tender sap-

lings up and down the countryside of Palestine, two tender corpses were being planted in the soil of Africa. One was Arnon, who had been flown there from Latrun along with 55 other prisoners. Jewish prisoners—251 of them—were already interned in Africa at the time, but Arnon's group was quartered separately, for the authorities had a special score to settle with these men. Unlike the previous deportees, the members of Arnon's group had known in advance that they were going to be transported and were prepared to fight when the hour arrived. They resisted the British soldiers in the prison camp at Latrun, they resisted them all the way to the airport, and they resisted while they were being loaded onto the planes.

But resistance couldn't get them very far when they had nothing but their hands to use against rifles and electrified barbed wire. The men were forced at bayonet point into armored vehicles, prodded with rifle butts into waiting transports, and spirited off to Africa.

Now there the British were looking for a fight. On the pretext that one of the prisoners was seen trying to escape, they laid down a barrage of rifle fire on the entire camp. Twelve men were wounded, one of whom, Ezra, a member of the Etsel, called out for help. Arnon, who was among the uninjured, ran to his aid. He never got there, however, because he was cut down by a bullet on the way. Not that it made any difference: Ezra, as it turned out, was beyond help.

The search ended late that afternoon. As soon as the curfew was lifted, Adam hurried off to town, without giving me any particular assignment. Until nightfall my time was my own. This was because my work in the underground was divided on a day-night schedule. During the day I worked with Adam in Operations, carrying out observation assignments, smuggling arms from one place to another, delivering messages to various points outside of the city, all the routine little jobs and "confiscations" which "the newspapers never write about." I have my own way of reading the news. When I see those fat black headlines telling about some sensational operation of ours, I always add a lot of little headlines

of my own about all the days that it took to get the operation ready, about all the petty annoyances and the major worries.

The newspapers never report stolen bicycles or write about a robbery in a store that retails uniforms to policemen. A week later though, they'll run a big story about a daring bank stick-up committed by a well-armed gang of Sternist bandits disguised as police officers, who made their getaway on bicycles having unlisted license numbers. They'll write about a bank stick-up even if it fails; about the disappearance of a few milk cans they'll say nothing. But your heart pounds just as hard when you're swiping milk cans as it does when you're stealing Tommy guns from an army camp. Besides, what would you do with the guns if you didn't have the milk cans to put them in?

We used to lie in ambush for the milkman as he made his rounds at dawn, waiting for him to leave his milk cans in the street while he entered some houses to make a delivery. Then we would leap from our hiding place, load the cans onto a wheelbarrow, and trundle them off to our workshop. There the cans were fitted together in pairs: the top was removed from one can, the bottom from another, and the two were soldered into a single unit, large enough to store Tommy guns and rifles without fear of rust, since the cans could be hermetically sealed. And when we carried those heavy cans to the fields, or orchards, or deserted lots in which we would hide them, our hearts would pound, yes, and go on pounding for the rest of the day.

At night I worked with the recruiting and propaganda division. On those nights when I didn't broadcast from the studio I was kept busy attending the initiation of new members, or meeting on street corners with potential recruits to talk to them about Lechi and its work.

I would walk with a prospective new member through back streets, or sit with him on a bench in a public park, and do my best to convince him to throw in his lot with us. Sometimes I succeeded; at other times we parted and went our separate ways. Those who resisted me, who hurled bitter accusations at me, were the ones I was most certain of winning over, for their very opposition was in reality a desperate plea: Help me against myself.

Those whose questions were coolly and carefully phrased, on the other hand, as though calculated in advance to be unanswerable, were certain to decide against us in the end. Such persons might agree to meet with me a second time or they might not, but even if they did, we would meet only to part again. There were other types, though, who, when they left me, would leave a part of themselves behind: Someday, I knew, they were bound to come back, for, though they took their fears and doubts along with them when we said good-by, they left with me as security their will to overcome these things. It was just that they preferred to be helped by time rather than by me. And time, for such people, was not just a continuum in which events took place; it was something with a life and soul of its own, so that when sooner or later two of us would meet again, in the course of some operation, perhaps, or simply by accident in the home of a mutual acquaintance in the underground, both of us now members of Lechi, known to each other only by our code names, would smile fondly at each other and think of the times that had lived and breathed and were no more.

But tonight I had no appointments. The two new names Amnon had given me at the initiation the night before, and which I had not had time to look at, were now safely deposited in the little hideaway by the window sill.

I was glad that I would not have to meet with these two people until tomorrow, glad that tonight was my night to be on the air. Ever since I had begun to broadcast, my success as a recruiter had steadily diminished. More than once I caught myself rubbing shoulders with some recommended prospect and talking to him as though he were the entire world, forgetting that he was a single individual to whose manner of thinking and speaking I had absolutely to attune myself. If I succeeded as an announcer, however, it was only because, when I stood facing the microphone, it seemed to me that I could see my hundreds and thousands of listeners right before my eyes, and that I was talking to each one of them singly, addressing each as an individual, as though each were a world unto himself.

"Do you feel that way about it, too?" I asked Gad one time

before a broadcast, as he was leafing through the pages of the evening's script.

"I'm not sure that I know exactly what you mean by 'as though each were a world unto himself,'" he said, looking at me artlessly. "But yes, more or less, I feel something like that. . . . But perhaps we'd better get back to preparing for the broadcast."

Rehearsing was easy these days. For several weeks now our scripts had been arriving typewritten—two copies, one for me and one for Gad.

"I'll deliver the second half of the program tonight," I informed Gad suddenly, with a gravity unusual for me. It just so happened that this portion was ideally suited to the clipped, authoritative male voice, a voice dry and cutting in its delivery. It dealt with the government's new emergency regulations concerning criminal procedure and capital punishment and its phrasing was ominous and harsh.

As a rule, I read the more wistful, ruminative portions of each program, leaving the accusations and threats to Gad. Why, then, did I want so much to read these cold, biting sentences tonight? Evenly, deliberately, I spoke each word:

"For every murderous British law the Hebrew underground will enact an opposite and equally cruel law of its own. There will be quick justice and no mercy for all British criminals. The foreign regime has decided that prima-facie evidence is no longer necessary in order to condemn a man to death. We have decided the same! The foreign regime has decided that membership in an enemy organization is punishable by death. We have decided the same!

"Henceforth, in accord with the laws of the Hebrew underground which have been enacted as an antidote to the British terror, all officials in the illegal foreign regime will be dealt with as accessories before the fact as will members of the following criminal organizations: The British administration; The British army of occupation; The British police; The British secret service.

"Belonging to any one of the above-mentioned terrorist organizations will henceforth be considered sufficient evidence to call down the death sentence upon the guilty party. It will be unneces-

sary to conduct an investigation into the actions of particular individuals. Any individual who continues to serve in a criminal capacity and to help execute British laws or terror has sentenced himself and will be accordingly dealt with by the Hebrew underground.

“Listen, Sir Allan Cunningham, hangman and High Commissioner—attention! While you are so busily preparing for the execution of our people, do not neglect to prepare burial grounds for your criminal henchmen. British general, British commissioner, British hangman, attention! You too will be paid in kind.”

It was the last broadcast I remembered. From the next one I remembered only two words, which I shouted as Gad pulled me toward the door, words which were not part of the prepared script but which were heard over the radio nonetheless: “*What happened?*”

I WOULDN'T have remembered even those two words, had not Sergeant Seidel reminded me of them the morning after in the jail in Jaffa.

That night—the night of February 18, 1946—began just like any other. The sky was dark above, the marketplace busy below. In our attic studio one minor change had taken place: Dan was filling in for Eli. When Dan dropped in that night, Eli decided it wasn't a good idea for so many people to be present, and since Dan could whistle the Lechi anthem as well as himself, he left. Dan had insisted on staying for the broadcast. He had just returned from a mission abroad and was hungry for contact with us. With him also was "the old man." Before Dan went abroad he had lived in "the old man's" room which was now our radio station. The two were old friends.

What the broadcast was about that night I don't remember; I remember only that I was unable to get really involved in it. Usually, while broadcasting I became oblivious to everything around me, even to my own words. Now I not only heard myself speaking, but was aware also of each whispered comment between the old man and Dan, and of the door opening and closing. A revolver lay on the table in front of me just as it always did, but tonight I seemed to notice it for the first time. Fully loaded, it nevertheless looked strangely powerless alongside the microphone; lifeless with nothing to say for itself.

Again the door was opening, not yet closing. Again Dan whispered. I resisted an impulse to look behind me; diagonally to my

right was Alex, hands and eyes busy with the transmitter. Several more times the door opened and shut. Suddenly, Alex left the controls and disappeared from the room.

Still talking, I turned around and found myself entirely alone. My voice dinned in my ears and I alternately ran my hand around the base of the microphone on the table and over the handle of the revolver lying by its side. Frightened and overcome by a terrible sense of isolation, I felt I was about to scream. Then I realized that Gad had returned; he was clutching my arm, pulling me after him toward the door and without realizing what I was doing, I pulled the microphone after me, shouting into it two last words: "What happened?"

"Follow me!" said Gad. "They've come; they're here."

I dropped the script. The microphone rattled against the revolver and tumbled to the floor. Gad and I were running for the exit.

The roof was dark and deserted; so were the stairs. Gad held my hand as we raced down. The stairs were still empty. We jumped and landed in the arms of soldiers pointing submachine guns. While we had been descending one flight, they had ascended three. Now we were trapped. They wanted to mount the last flight of stairs, and we were in their way. They didn't know who we were, but they pushed us into the nearest apartment and went on up to the top floor. They knew what they were looking for, knew that radio Lechi was located in the attic. Their tip had been a sure one; there was no uncertainty in the way they were going about things; they knew exactly what they were doing.

We had allowed ourselves to go on broadcasting too long from the old man's room. It may not have been long enough for the British to track us down with their equipment, but it had been long enough for someone to grow suspicious of the constant traffic in and around the house every Monday and Thursday evening. If he had waited only a few days longer, if he had a qualm or two about turning us in, his information would have been useless, for we were on the verge of moving to another location. This was to have been our last broadcast from the attic.

"It's time to quit broadcasting from the old man's room," Mi-

chael had said a few days before we were caught. The two guards downstairs have been feeling lately that something isn't right. They're probably imagining things, but we shouldn't stay so long in one place anyway. There's a good chance that soon we'll find someplace else."

But Monday had come around again, and at seven thirty the "someplace else" still wasn't ready. Well, one more broadcast could hardly make any difference. Why take a pessimistic view of things?

"It has nothing to do with optimism or pessimism," said Adam. "The fact is that the place has been 'hot' for some time. And if they come, you won't stand a ghost of a chance. Those guards are nothing but token gestures. I was always against having them there," he went on vehemently. "What good are their miserable pistols going to be against tanks? It's not 1942 any more, when you only had to stick your hand in your pocket to make a policeman or a detective turn and run. When they come for you nowadays, they don't come one at a time. They come with an army. They drive up in armored cars. Ten revolvers wouldn't be any use."

The two downstairs guards were taken before they could even signal. The guards on the roof hurried down the stairs to check on what was happening and ran into armed detectives at the front door. The old man, hearing the sound of footsteps on the stairs, ran up to the roof, followed by the others. They could see an unusual activity in the street, and the guards at the door were missing, but they still didn't know what was happening. Alex returned to the room. There everything was in order; the controls were still set; I was still at the microphone. He rushed out again to check what was happening.

The situation soon became clear; sirens were sounding, and hundreds of soldiers were surrounding the building. Dan and the old man made a beeline for the only exit—the front door. Gad and I had just started down after them when we ran smack into the soldiers, who pushed us into an apartment on the third floor. We found ourselves confronted by a woman in a housecoat. "What's going on here? Who are you?"

Now they are already upstairs, I thought. I had left my purse there, and in it were my identification papers with my photograph, as well as a copy of a recent poster and the name and address of a recommended recruit.

Gad turned to the woman. "Why all the fuss?" he asked. "We're Jews, just ordinary Jews. This wasn't our idea, the soldiers pushed us in here. Do you mind if we go inside? Perhaps there's someplace here we could hide," he added like a man who no longer has anything to lose.

"Hide? Soldiers? Hide from whom? Who are you? What do you want here? Get out of here! Hide? Impossible! . . . Well, come in if you must, come in already, but no hiding. My son still hasn't come home; he hasn't come home yet. What happened? What do the soldiers want here?"

We entered a room where there were two young ladies, a man, and a small child of about seven, who looked at us disinterestedly. The woman in the housecoat kept making hysterical noises from various corners of the room. She moved a book from the table on her right to the table on her left, dragged a chair from the door to the bookcase, only to pick it up again and place it by the table. She fidgeted with the metal comb in her hair.

I was cold. My new coat was also upstairs. I had just bought it a week ago, in the Old City of Jerusalem, and all week long I had been waiting for the weather to be cold enough to wear it.

I had been sent to Jerusalem with a message, and all the way there on the train I kept thinking to myself that, in case I had to wait several hours for an answer, I would go to the Old City and seek out in the back alleys where sheepskin coats were sold. There, in the narrow, winding streets of the market area, always brimming with Arab peddlers and all kinds of merchandise and smells, I had once seen a coat whose warm fragrance had remained unchangingly fresh in my memory.

Years before that my parents used to take me with them to visit the Wailing Wall and we passed through those same alleys. Each time that I saw a wrap of yellowish-white wool in some vendor's narrow stall I would stroke it with my hands, rub it against my face, breathe its fragrance as deeply into me as I could, and go home longing for just such a coat of my own.

In Jerusalem, as it turned out, I did have to wait a long time before returning to Tel Aviv. I went to the Old City to look. Looking, after all, wasn't buying. I looked. Trying on a coat wasn't buying either. I tried one on. As soon as I felt its warmth against my flesh and saw my black hair against the soft white wool, I knew I could never take it off again until it was my own. . . .

Now it hung in the attic, and British soldiers were pawing it with their cold, strange hands, and breathing its woolly odor.

In the strange apartment Gad took a gray, broad-brimmed fedora, from a hatrack and clapped it on his head; he selected a volume from the bookcase and stepped toward the sofa where the small sleepy-eyed boy was sitting.

"I'll be your teacher, son, and you be my student. . . . That's right, I'm your teacher. Here's a book. Can you read? Don't you get it? I'm your teacher. Why don't you read?"

The voice wasn't the proud, aggressive one that I heard in the attic. It was nervous and weak. Terrified, the boy looked dumbly at his mother. She didn't return his gaze. No one in the room looked at anyone else; each seemed lost in a world of his own. A chilling fear seemed to penetrate from the stairway.

Gad spoke again: "Listen to me, son, I'm your teacher. Why don't you read? Don't look over there. Look at me. I'm your teacher."

The terrible laugh that crashed through the room was my own. Gad's angry eyes, the child's puzzled eyes, the women's frightened eyes were all staring at me. A terrible laugh! Perhaps I had really been trying to cry. Perhaps it was not Gad—sitting there in a gray hat, thumbing through a book, forcing a child to read—who was so funny, but myself, standing helplessly by the door, unable to feel a thing, or to do anything useful.

At any rate the laughter restored me to my senses. I forgot Gad, ignored the stares, and said to the lady of the house in my normal voice, "Do you have a purse? Please give it to me."

"A what?"

"A purse," I said, hating her voice. "A large handbag!"

"What handbag? What for?"

"Just a plain handbag; give me one. And a coat, too," I added threateningly, hating everything about her. I could feel my eyes bursting from their sockets, straining to see through the door and up the stairs to the attic, where the soldiers were, this very minute, going through the pockets of my white wool coat and laughing, my papers clutched in their hands.

"I don't have a handbag. I don't have a coat. Get out of here! What do you want from me? My son hasn't come home yet. Everything is surrounded. What do you want from my life?"

"Then I'll take them." I started for the closet door, but she got there before me and locked it. Now, however, I was alert and could feel immense forces gathering inside me: escape, flee, escape. . . .

Ignoring the hysterical shouts of the woman, I probed around the apartment, hoping to find a means of escape. A drainage pipe ran from the kitchen to the courtyard three flights below. I might be able to clamber down. I dropped a spoon out the window, but as it hit the ground, I heard the English shouts and curses.

Neither was there any escape through the bathroom. No way out. I went back to the kitchen window, to the pipe and the British soldiers in the yard.

Back in the bathroom again, I looked in the mirror and saw a desperate face, frightened eyes, and tousled hair. I did not see the lines in my face, I saw only a conflict of blood and impulse.

There was really little resemblance between the face looking out at me from the mirror and the photograph in my identification papers. A similarity in the hair, perhaps, long and disheveled in both cases—but nothing more.

I gathered my hair in both hands, swept it upward, and fastened it with a clip. The subdued image that now regarded me with cold eyes I could hardly recognize.

Re-entering the main room, I could tell that Gad wasn't fooled in the least. He winked at me warmly from behind his book, confidentially, as if to let me know that it was really he and no one else sitting there with a hat on his head and a child by his side. He winked triumphantly at the child, who, face buried in the book, had begun to mumble a few words.

I shifted my glance to the window, and there—how could I have failed to notice?—an arm's length away stood a tall tree whose topmost branches climbed up and out of sight.

Trees look different when seen from the top. For one thing, you can't climb down them as easily as you can climb up. But I wasn't interested in climbing, I simply wanted to find myself a hiding place in the thick, broad foliage.

"What are you trying to do?" screeched the woman in the housecoat, catching hold of me.

"What are you doing?" asked Gad, visibly alarmed. He laid his book aside. "It's suicidal; you'll never manage," he said, pulling me back indoors.

"My God, she wants to kill herself!" I heard the woman explain to others in the room.

Just then death knocked on the door—two plain-clothes men with some soldiers—and made straight for me, looked me directly in the face, and said nonchalantly, "Ah, yes, it's you. Please say something to us in Hebrew. Something in Hebrew, if you don't mind."

"No understand English," I answered brokenly. "No understand what you want from me."

"We don't want you to speak to us in English," the two said together. "We want you to answer in Hebrew."

One of the soldiers by the door rattled his gun. He was a "poppy"—the word used by Jewish children for British paratroops on account of their fiery red berets.

"What should I say? What should I say?" I chirped. This time I spoke in Hebrew, but in a voice not my own: high-pitched, affected, bland, and not at all hoarse.

But my purse and my identification papers were already in their hands. My new hairdo was no disguise and it really made no difference to them what I sounded like. They broke into an empty, evil guffaw.

"Suppose you tell us where your purse is."

"I don't have a purse. What purse are you talking about?"

"And your identification papers?"

"They're at home."

"What home?"

"My home. I live with my parents."

"What's your name?"

My name? How could I have forgotten to think of a name? Quick, think of a name, quick. How could I have forgotten? For God's sake, quick.

"Your name, please?"

My papers say Shoshana Halevi. But my name's not Shoshana, it's not Halevi either.

"My name is Tsipora Yisraeli," I said triumphantly.

"Come with me," laughed the fat detective.

A single soldier went before me and the two detectives followed at my back. I didn't know whether Gad was behind me or whether he had already gone in front, but wherever he was I was afraid to look up for fear of giving him away.

The roof was swarming with "poppies," plain-clothes men, and police. By the attic door I was made to join a line of people standing with their hands up; soldiers were busy going through their clothing. It was a starry night and light filtered through from the studio; I recognized Alex, whose hands were held high like everyone else's. He was no longer wearing his tin earphones. I began to count: *one, two, three . . . eighteen hands*. Nine pairs. One belonged to Dan, another to one of the guards whom I recognized, but the old man was not in the line.

The soldier who escorted me did not ask me to put up my hands. I wasn't being searched, either; only policewomen were allowed to search females. I didn't like having this special privilege: I wanted to raise my arms like the others, like Alex, but for some reason I couldn't get them to move from my side. It was cold. Everyone else had a coat; I had nothing but a blouse.

The two detectives who had been in the apartment below approached me, accompanied by a third. Only afterward did I notice that he was carrying my purse. His eyes weren't particularly large, nor were they particularly prominent, but they seemed to rove freely in their sockets, as though they had an entirely independent existence of their own apart from the pale face to which they belonged. They oscillated endlessly, not only peripherally off to

the sides, but in and out, as though they were turning over and over. Even after I came to know Sergeant Seidel much better, during the hours I spent with him in the interrogation room in Jaffa jail, and later still, as a result of his being one of the witnesses for the prosecution at my trial in Jerusalem, I never really saw anything but his eyes.

He smiled at me as though we were old acquaintances, scrutinizing me as though I were a toy marble between his fingers. He was assisted by the two detectives, who beamed a large flashlight directly in my face.

"At last," he said finally, in a sibilant Hebrew. "At last. But you've got to give me credit. I kept my promise. I promised your mother I'd find you, and I did." He laughed. "I'm sorry about having to cut you off like that in the middle, really I am. But your mother owes me a reward. Why you're trembling, aren't you? I do hope it's only from the cold." He rolled his eyes to the left and gave an order to one of the detectives. "The poor child is cold and the coat she left behind is so warm. Bring it to her."

"I'm not trembling!" I protested. "I'm not cold. I don't know what coat you're talking about."

A detective arrived with my coat.

"That's not mine!" I exclaimed in a loud voice when he tried to put it around my shoulders.

The detective went on talking, but I no longer heard what he said. I was looking at the entrance to the roof where a new contingent of "poppies" had appeared with Gad. The hat was gone from his head. My thoughts wouldn't come consecutively. Without a trace of emotion, I watched the soldiers coming and going through the attic door. Detectives were turning over the few books on the cot; others were busy inspecting the transmitter. Nothing had any connection with me.

The hands in the lineup were lowered. The search was over. A police lieutenant conferred with the three detectives. As soon as they finished talking, rifles clanked, commands were shouted out. Those arrested were arranged in single file. Familiar faces: Gad, Alex, the downstairs guard. Unfamiliar ones, too. Some tenants in the building were being booked on suspicion, among them, I

found out later, two young tailors, illegal immigrants from Poland who had been living in a room adjoining the old man's.

At the exit we were greeted by sounds of clashing metal, of voices shouting, and of motors roaring. Our military escort tried to clear a way for us while we remained standing by the door. Tanks and armored cars and a sea of red berets flooded the street. This dingy, dull red didn't resemble poppies at all.

Finally we pushed forward, treading more on the feet of the soldiers around us than we did on the pavement. Loaded into a paddy wagon that locked on both sides, we were made to sit on the floor, surrounded by armed troops.

A soldier stood between Alex and me, but even though I couldn't see him, I knew well enough what the expression on his face must be like. The car started with a jolt. Across from me sat Gad. I saw myself in his face as in a mirror. A warm wave spread through my body, and for the first time since he had dragged me out of the old man's room, I realized exactly what had happened.

It's over, I thought. An enormous sense of relief, a delicious feeling of weakness, came over me. Shoshana Halevi is no more. Suddenly I was gripped by a powerful urge to stand once again before the mocking eyes of the detective and shout my true name, my only name, into his ear.

In Jaffa prison we stood in a long corridor and waited to be booked. I didn't know the person standing next to me, but he was obviously one of us, one of the guards perhaps, for I heard him whispering something to his neighbor about the old man's escape: "When I saw that the front exit was blocked off, I knocked, out of desperation, on the door of somebody's apartment. And who do you think was inside? The old man himself. He was sitting with his jacket off, stroking his beard, and playing a game of chess." I didn't manage to hear the rest of the story, so I reconstructed it for myself. . . .

When the old man discovers that the front exit is already blocked off, he has no choice but to knock on the door of somebody's apartment. The old man has a handsome beard and a

generally impressive appearance, but since he is always careful to come and go in the dark, no one in the house knows who he is. He introduces himself as a passer-by who has been ordered into the building by the police. "What's happened?" he asks. His voice is quiet, low, convincing. No one knows what's happened, but in the meanwhile why not sit and wait? He removes his jacket and takes a seat at the table. On the table is a chess board. The old man knows how to play. As long as no one knows what's happening, why not try to get in a few moves? When the soldiers enter the apartment, the old man is forced to break off the king's gambit development that he has been working on. But only for a minute. Such a handsome beard, after all! Such an impressive face! The British believe him and leave. If they hadn't been in such a hurry, I muse, they would have reaped a handsome reward, for the old man has been on the wanted list for some time and his picture appears in police stations and newspapers everywhere with a price on his head. His shaven head, needless to say.

We were booked by an Arab police officer, who kept rubbing his eyes as though he had just awakened. He was flanked by British policemen and plain-clothes men. The detectives who had arrested us were already gone. A strong light coming from the corner blinded my eyes.

Each one of us was questioned briefly: name, address, place of current employment. Alex said that his name was Yitzchak. Gad said that he had forgotten where he lived.

"What's your name?" the officer asked me.

I didn't shout my real name into his ear. I said it wearily, and wearily I added the address of my parents' home. I felt sorry for my interrogator, for the way he kept rubbing his eyes. I, too, had the same desire: I wanted to lie down somewhere and shut my eyes, to sleep, for only in sleep might the terrible storm raging within me subside. I wanted to lie down somewhere, to curl up and shut my eyes, to shut them so I would not see . . . and no one would be able to see me.

MIDNIGHT.

The door slammed behind me with a fearful impact. I turned around to look at it. It was high, and its rough iron surface was rusted. It stood there impassively, as though, in all the time it had been there, it had never once been opened.

The British sergeant accompanying me walked now to my left and now to my right, now in front of me and now behind me, and kept hurrying me along with impatient nasal grunts. At the far end of the hallway, he pulled a metal chain, which produced a long, monotonous ring. As the echo died away, I heard steps approaching the door from the other side and the cold, cynical, nerve-racking jangle of keys.

The door swung open on a small court into which emptied several staircases. Near me stood a still figure in a gray uniform with white buttons with a high starched collar. Two lusterless eyes, heavy with sleep, revealed a woman's head. She kept shifting a wad of chewing gum from cheek to cheek.

The sergeant had disappeared, leaving the two of us alone. The matron relocked the door and addressed me in a thick, halting manner: "*Yallah!* This way to the stairs. Quick, up, *Yallah!*"

Her voice was tired and mechanical. It came from nowhere and went nowhere.

At the top of the stairs we stopped before a grated door. The icy bars burned my flesh when I touched them. How stupid of me not to have taken my coat! The police had known who I was in any case, as far back as the apartment. It had been obvious in the

smile beneath Sergeant Seidel's blond mustache: "*Why you're trembling, aren't you? I do hope it's only from the cold.*"

The matron opened the cell door with a giant key, the biggest, ugliest key I had ever seen. She seemed to have to grip it with all her strength just to keep it from running away. Did she have a home? I wondered. A family? No, out of the question. It was impossible to conceive of her having ever smelled a man, or even a flower. When I tried mentally to strip her of her uniform, I could picture nothing but a hollow frame of a head connected to a thin, wasted body and ending in two feet joined inseparably and pointing in the same direction, the very image of the key she held in her hand.

In the dark cell she switched on a weak electric light. Afterward I was to find out that light bulbs in jail cells are all the same, just bright enough to let you see the gloom around you. Her hands were probing at me rudely, her fingers in my hair removed each single pin, and inspected it carefully. She began on my body. Hands up. I clenched my fists. I wanted to bring them down on her head as hard as I could, to send her reeling back against the wall.

"I'll undress myself," I said.

I hardly recognized my own voice. It bounced as though in an echo chamber off the nude, moist walls. There must have been something menacing about my expression. Surprisingly, she backed away.

"All right. *Yallah*. Undress, but be quick."

Yallah: that was the beginning and the end of all her conversation. In the way she pronounced the word there was a vague hint of a distant disappointment, the cause and the explanation of everything she said. All else was superfluous.

She was a Jewish woman in her fifties, with a face shriveled into many wrinkles. Her hair was pulled back with a great show of severity. What fascinated me especially, though, were the clever movements of her hands, which raced through my clothing with dexterity. Every now and then she glanced up at me with undisguised anger for having waked her from her sleep, at the same time muttering at me indistinctly through her teeth. She was giving me some kind of lecture; the words "Jews" and "shame" kept

recurring in her speech. Somebody, it seemed, had behaved shamefully, had stolen perhaps, or had sold her body. Shameful. The matron had a right, in fact, to assume as much about me because most of the women in the jail in Jaffa were either Moslem peasant women arrested for theft or fighting, or Jewish and Christian Arab prostitutes and drunks. Political prisoners were uncommon.

The only thing in my pockets was a used bus ticket. Rolling it between her fingers, as though further annoyed by the meager results of her search, the matron half shouted at me to get dressed.

I breathed deeply with relief. She appeared glad to be done with me. She yawned long and pleasurably and left the cell, ordering me to follow her.

She pointed to a pile of rags lying all in a heap in one corner of the corridor. "Take one *borsh* and two blankets. *Yallah*, quick. Then back inside."

The pile was made up of torn, foul-smelling blankets and some clumsily sewn pieces of material that vaguely resembled rugs. These *borshes*, as the matron called them, had been made by the prisoners from torn blankets, cut into strips and stitched into a sort of a ticking. They were meant to serve as mattresses.

It took three turns of the key to lock the door of my cell. I was happy to be left in the dark. Groping my way to a wall where I could place my mattress, I stumbled against a soft body. A hoarse, voluptuous voice called out in English, "Hullo, who's there?"

English? Here in jail? My suspicions aroused, I answered curtly and aloofly, "A Jew."

"Lovely!" said the voice. "Lovely!" And went on to explain that she herself was an Arab, a Christian, but here she was. She liked the Jews, but she couldn't stand the English. They picked on her, wouldn't let her write her memoirs. Five times she had been a chambermaid in the Egyptian royal palace. It would be a great book. She would show me some of it tomorrow. Phooey, the English! It wasn't her fault that her British companion got drunk. It was because of him that she was arrested. Ever since the time she had gotten into a drunken quarrel and been hit in the eye—she would show me the scar tomorrow—she had kept away from strong liquor. The night before last she had just had one drink—

not even enough to warm her insides—and then they arrested her. Phooey! First they seduce you and then they arrest you. They're all the same. One Englishman is no better than the next. They're all men. They fondle your body, they whisper that they love you, and then they beat you and punch you with the same hands. But no, this time she wouldn't let them get away with it. In a day or two she would be out of jail and then they would see. He got her drunk, embraced her, and all of a sudden two other men were dragging her off. One of them couldn't keep his hands to himself, but on the sly, so that the other shouldn't see. Phooey! Why so sneaky? What was there to be ashamed of? Wasn't she well-built? Look.

She burst into a wild, rattling laugh and I, too, began to laugh. What was coming over me? What was so funny that I should behave like this alongside a common whore? "A whore," I said again to myself, almost aloud. And still I felt like laughing. I took a step backward and tried to pull myself together by thinking of all the moral catchwords I knew, by invoking all the spirits of propriety to come to my aid. You couldn't call this prostitution. There was nothing false about this woman. Hers was the first breath of life, of truth, to reach me behind these walls despite the frightening hoarseness of her voice and her cynicism about everything—the world, men, God who made them.

In the darkness, with the *borsh* in my hand, I listened to her.

A Jewess? That was good. With Jews one could get along. They didn't drink; they didn't beat you. I should know that better than she. So why was I embarrassed? There was no reason to be. Perhaps I had also been with an Englishman? A soldier? It didn't pay to get involved with them. They had no money and they forgot you right away. Once she had spent the whole night with one of them—she would point him out to me once we were out of jail—and the next day he approached her on the street and started to introduce himself. Phooey! As if anyone needed an introduction anyway. I swallowed an impulse to lecture her on the error of her ways. But face to face with such unadorned truth, all the distinctions I would make to her, all the maybes and the might-have-beens, seemed petty.

A FAMILIAR voice awakened me. No time at all seemed to have elapsed since I had heard it last. Then, however, the owner of it had been lying on the floor and I had stood above her in the dark; now our positions were reversed.

The chambermaid from the royal Egyptian palace—she called herself Lila Murad after a famous Egyptian actress—looked at me coquettishly; her moonish face loomed frighteningly large. She was short. Her hair was thin and wispy, but it formed a complete circle about her head, which seemed entirely divorced from her body like a skull suspended in air. Her eyes—one large and one small, one turned upward and the other down—protruded from their sockets. Her nose, which was covered with sores, and the upward twist of her mouth, gave her an appearance of suffering. Her suffering had a name—syphilis.

It wasn't the fear of death that one saw in Lila's eyes, it was the fear of life, and the sight of it left me feeling powerless rather than commiserative. Hers wasn't an honest open fear of something—anything—in particular; it was a hidden, pervasive fear, reflecting complete hopelessness.

Her colorful dress was filthy and wrinkled; she held a pair of fancy silk stockings in her hands. When she saw that I was awake, she smiled at me out of the corner of her mouth, and bade me good morning.

Everything seemed old and familiar to me, as though from long ago: Lila's smile, the cries from the adjacent cells, the face of the attendant who opened my cell door, even the Arab prisoners

crowding around me. They were peasant women to judge by their costume and dialect. After nodding at me vigorously to demonstrate their sympathy for my plight, they turned to the daily scrubbing of the cells. I was struck by how completely at home they were.

I descended the stairs to a small courtyard surrounded by a stone wall topped with strands of barbed wire. By a dripping faucet in the yard sat Khalisa, in tears, her head resting in her hands. A girl sat next to her on the ground and tried to talk to her. As soon as she saw me approaching, she sprang up and came running toward me, as though she had been expecting me for a long time. She caught hold of my hands and held them between her own, calling out my name, which somehow she knew, in her peasant accent:

“For the love of God, Kula! May a long life be yours, and your father’s and your children’s too, if only you help me! You’re Jewish; you can understand their accursed language. Tell them that I didn’t steal; tell them that the pot was empty. They don’t believe me, Kula, but I’m telling the truth. Allah in Heaven knows that. He knows that it wasn’t me who took the neighbor’s pot; it was my five-year-old son; he’s barely a child. Just a plain earthenware pot, there was no food in it, may you never lack enough to eat. Because of that pot they locked me up. How was I to know that worthless bitch was hiding all her money in it? I never even knew she had hidden it underneath her bed—can you imagine such a thing?—in that little wooden chest of hers. Did I ask the child to steal it? I beg of you, may God sweeten your days, help me! You know how to talk to them. Tell them I have a baby at home, only two months old. He cries for me day and night; I can hear him now. He’s hungry, he wants to suckle. I know he does. See how the milk drips from my breasts. Whenever the milk drips like that, I know my baby is hungry, he’s crying for me.”

She threw herself at my knees, weeping. The milk was dripping from her just as she said; it had stained her dress and was now wetting my feet.

There was in me a terrible desire to strike out at somebody, at something, at anything, to rip and tear at it with my nails, my

body, my brain, until nothing was left. My eyes fell on the dripping faucet near which Khalisa sat, mourning the loss of her stolen money and her man. For a moment the faucet seemed to be the source of all our troubles. I hurled myself at it, twisted it shut, and ran as fast as I could back up the stairs.

In the cell adjoining mine five prisoners were seated on the floor, and a sixth, pregnant, was telling them her story. With her hands folded over her belly, she spoke freely, without self-pity, dwelling intently on every detail, as though she had been requested to present a comprehensive report. Without a trace of embarrassment or sorrow, but with a great deal of resentment, she described her arrest. If only she had managed to hide the money first, then she wouldn't mind at all; she'd sit in jail for a few months and they'd let her go. It wouldn't be the first time. Hadn't both Fatima and Aziz been born to her in prison? When she was pregnant with Aziz, however, there had at least been something to look forward to when she got out. The money had lasted her to this day; she hadn't given a red cent of it to her husband. "The police took it all," she had told him. But this time, to have to sit here like this for nothing!

"I said to the policemen," she continued, raising her voice, "'At least give me back some of the money.' But they only laughed, those sons-of-the-devil. One of them, a really funny-looking one, asked me, 'Why do you steal?' I said, 'It's from Allah, all is from Allah,' and they started to laugh again, the infidels."

"God be praised, all is from Allah," chorused the others in agreement, and raised their eyes toward the ceiling. *All is from Allah*. I nodded from where I stood in the doorway and turned back to my cell.

In the afternoon an Arab boy dressed completely in white—the prisoners called him "the medic"—brought us olives, jam, and Arab bread. I ate the olives and gave the sweet, black jam and the dry acid-tasting bread to Lila. While she was eating, she knit her brows, rummaged nervously through her pockets, and finally thrust her hand into her blouse, pulling out a number of dirty,

wrinkled sheets of paper containing a penciled scrawl that could barely be distinguished from the creases that lined each page. She smoothed out the pages and, smiling at me shyly, reminded me of the memoirs she had mentioned the night before. Then she began to read.

I was astounded. It was a diary, written in an elegant literary Arabic. Either Lila must have had some education, or else she really had been a servant in an aristocratic home. She continued to read, pausing now and then to bite into the bread, and then forged on again without taking time to chew. Not until she had finished several paragraphs did she stop completely to swallow the food that was in her mouth. She wiped her lips with a self-important gesture, looked at me expectantly, and asked in a whisper, "Well, what do you think of it?"

My amazement must have been written on my face, for Lila seemed satisfied and commenced to read again.

A bell rang in the matron's office, interrupting her. When I had heard that sound for the first time, a few hours previously, the other prisoners had explained that it came from the intercom system connecting the women's wards with the central office below. Since then, every time I had heard it, I had jumped involuntarily, and I jumped now as I saw an attendant approach.

"You're wanted for interrogation," she informed me. "They're coming to take you right away."

For interrogation? For torture!

No. Since the Eliahu Korev incident the British had stopped using torture as a means of interrogating members of the Lechi. Eliahu had been put to incredible physical torment, and though his body had managed to survive the trial, his mind never fully recovered from the bloody horror of it. Lechi swore to avenge him and we did. He was the last Lechiite to be tortured in prison. Although the British continued to deny us the favorable status of prisoners of war, their treatment of us definitely changed for the better.

A British lieutenant, accompanied by an Arab policeman, entered the courtyard. Some women, in the midst of rinsing their

mess plates, were clustered around the faucet in the yard. They stepped back in confusion when they saw him and then began to salaam obsequiously in his path. The lieutenant ignored them completely, only shaking his head now and then as if to free it from some bothersomē irritation.

The young mother who had accosted me earlier came running to us, clapped her hands emotionally and looked at me pleadingly. Lila Murad also, shaking her hips and pressing as close to the lieutenant as she could. She took a deep breath and winked at him debauchedly until the Arab policeman pushed her away.

The lieutenant surveyed me. "Ready?" he asked, and we left the courtyard.

In the narrow corridor we encountered two Arab prisoners bent double under a heavy load of stones; they took advantage of our meeting to put down their load and rest their tired backs.

The lieutenant knocked on a door and we entered an office.

My white sheepskin coat, my warm sheepskin coat, lay draped over the back of an empty chair. Behind the table, sat Sergeant Seidel.

"Please, do come in, Miss—well, now, what shall I call you? Is it to be Miss Shoshana Halevi, Miss Tsipora Yisraeli, or can we perhaps settle on just plain Comrade Geula?"

His Hebrew was fluent. On the table before him were a pack of cigarettes, a Hebrew newspaper, and a bottle of beer. My coat was on the back of the chair I sat in, and I imagined myself in its enveloping warmth and protected from the evil eyes across the table.

"Cigarette? . . . You don't smoke? It's not permitted in the Stern Gang, is that it? Ha, ha, ha. Or perhaps it's not good for your voice? Well, I don't suppose it makes any difference now that all this has happened. And what did happen, Geula? *What happened?*"

I played with the sleeve of my coat and could concentrate on nothing but the burning sensation I felt in my cheeks. *What happened?* Was he making fun of me? What *had* happened?

"What? You really don't know what happened? But why do you

look so cross? I'm not responsible for the question, you are. Don't you remember?"

"I never ask questions."

The sergeant turned the Hebrew paper he had been reading so that it faced me and pointed to a thick black headline: "'What happened?' Those were the last two words of the mystery announcer. . . ."

I wanted to read the rest of the story, but he had already taken the newspaper back with a triumphant sweep of his arm.

"So what did happen, Geula? What happened? Why don't you answer me? What are you thinking about?"

I'm thinking about my mother, Sergeant. Not about you, and about myself, and not about what happened, but about my mother, hovering over the radio at home, turning up the volume as high as it can go so that all the neighbors can hear, devouring my every word. Then suddenly—Shhhhhh!—and simultaneously with me she asks in a fright: "What happened?" I am already running down the stairs with Gad, the microphone is rolling on the floor, but she, my mother, is still asking what happened. What happened to Geula? What happened to her?

"Shall I tell you what?" asked Sergeant Seidel in English, lighting a cigarette. "Do you know what I'm thinking about right now? I'm thinking about your mother. She's a very smart woman, your mother. For weeks I was in the habit of dropping in on your family every night, and your mother, between cake and tea, would curse under her breath and tell me about you. 'If only you knew her! She's interested in nothing but books. God knows how many times I had to say to her, "Geula, go outside; play with your friends." You might as well talk to the trees; she sticks her nose in a book and she reads. God knows how many times I had to tiptoe into her room after midnight and put away the book she fell asleep reading. I'm willing to bet you that right this minute she's sitting somewhere and reading.' You have a smart mother. She curses me under her breath and says, 'Photograph? What do you want a photograph for? I'll describe her to you. Take a look at me. You wouldn't call me thin, would you? Well, she's twice my size. Try to picture it if you can. And it's a funny thing, I don't know how it

happened, but she's the only one of my children with light hair and blue eyes.'

"Ha, ha, ha," laughed Sergeant Seidel, looking at my dark complexion. "Light hair, blue eyes! . . . No, I didn't believe her. I knew, of course, that the exact opposite must be true. In fact, when I saw you on the rooftop last night I recognized you immediately. And yet, after talking to your mother, I wasn't entirely sure. If I had seen you on the street, I wouldn't have looked at you twice. But tell me, where have you been hiding all this time? You caused us quite a bit of trouble, you know. With whom were you hiding out? . . . Cigarette?"

"I was in the underground."

"Now, now, we'll never get anywhere that way. Why, we're talking to each other like perfect strangers. Here we are, just the two of us, and what I would like to know is: Where in the underground? With whom? You needn't bother to give me all their names; it's not really necessary; two or three will be fine. Even one will do. And if you don't happen to remember it now, you can think it over and let me know tomorrow. . . ." His voice trailed off as he said the last sentence, the words dying slowly on his lips.

Then I was under no obligation to answer him. He wasn't really interested in an answer; he was just going through the formalities.

He relit his cigarette and said, "I'm really sorry, but you're in a bad spot right now. If we had caught up with you a while ago, when we first began to look for you, it would have been much simpler. We would have asked you a few questions and sent you home. If you'd only understand us, you could all go home. Take the Jewish Agency people, for instance. Are they any less patriotic than you are? Nevertheless you can talk with them. Or the Hagannah, if you like. Aren't they patriots, too? I'll grant you that lately they've also given us some trouble, but it's still not the same as terrorism. It's possible to get along with them. I simply don't understand how an intelligent girl like you can believe that you can bring down a great empire with a few bullets. The pity of it is, you're really such good people. Yes, good. That's the whole problem. There's no act so evil that you can't find a good person to commit it. Don't you agree? It's a pity, really, you've acted fool-

ishly and now you're in trouble. We'll have to transfer you to Bethlehem, and there may even be a trial.

"Lord, what a triumph for us. And it was so easy. Who would have thought that things could have gone so smoothly? We didn't even fire a shot and against the Stern Gang, too.

"Why did you change your name to 'Freedom Fighters of Israel'? I should have thought that 'Stern Gang' suited you much better. What a triumph! Now it's all over. No more radio station, no more broadcasts, no more—wait a minute. I used to know that melody—how did it go?"

I answered calmly in English, "When the broadcasts begin again, you'll remember."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha. What? What did you say? 'When the broadcasts begin again.' Was that it?"

"When the broadcasts begin again," I repeated.

He snickered unconsciously. Then, shaking with anger, he exploded, "Do you think we left you your transmitter in the attic as a souvenir? Is that it?"

"We didn't receive it from you as a gift the first time, Sergeant."

From whom had we received it, then? It had never occurred to me to ask where the transmitter came from. One didn't ask such questions in the underground. Not only because it was frowned upon, but also because whatever was done by any one person seemed to you to have been done by yourself as well. Curiosity, under such conditions was pointless. I did remember, though, how Buki, escorting me to the station on the first night that we went on the air, had said to me, "Just because the transmitter works by pressing a single button, don't let yourself imagine that it was born yesterday. A lot of people had to press a lot of other buttons first, before it could happen."

Sergeant Seidel was red in the face. He rolled his eyes at me and said, "And perhaps, my poor child, perhaps you think that when that happens, you will be the announcer again?"

"Perhaps? Definitely!"

Suddenly I was overcome with nostalgia for the little suitcase in which our transmitter used to lodge. Only twenty-four hours ago I had been standing right next to it. I felt as though I were being

rent in two, as though if I did not see it again, immediately, tonight, my heart would surely break.

I did not see it again that night, nor did my heart break, but every night that followed, and at other times, too, when my thoughts led me in that direction, a single desire possessed me: I wanted to stand one more time in an underground studio, to whistle the Lechi theme into the microphone myself, and to say in a smiling whisper, *What happened, Sergeant Seidel? What happened?*

“Don’t forget your coat,” Sergeant Seidel reminded me as I rose to leave. “It gets quite cold in the Bethlehem prison.”

WHEN I returned to the women's ward, Khalisa leaped upon me joyously.

"Kula, your mother's waiting for you outside. I saw her. Run to the door."

In the Jaffa jail there was no special visiting room; there was only the opening in the large iron door which served as a peephole for the matron, and through it one was allowed to talk to one's friends or relatives.

"You have a visitor. Your mother's outside," the matron informed me.

I didn't welcome that visit. I wanted the cold, strange, alien jail to remain as it was. My mother's coming would change it, and make it all a part of me.

Just the same, I ran to the door. And when I saw her laughing, loving, weeping, comforting face through the peephole, my hatred for everything—for the jail around me and for the matron behind me—vanished instantly, and I felt nothing but love and compassion for the entire world.

My mother was alone.

"Your father went to see the lawyer; he's been there all morning. And you? You musn't be sad! Eat, drink; don't worry," she said tremulously. "But why isn't your jacket buttoned? You never bother to button your jacket, and it's so cold. Is it very cold at night? And you? Don't be bashful. And tell me what you ate today. I can hardly bear to think of it, I can see for myself that you haven't eaten a thing all day." Her look devoured me through

the peephole. "Look what I've brought you. Your favorite dish. All morning I was busy cooking. What are you crying for? You should be ashamed of yourself! What's there to cry about? You see that I'm here, don't you? You see that I came. This is what I've been dreaming of all along, to see you. What's there to cry about?" She wiped the tip of her nose. "Aren't you happy to see me? All that matters is that you're here, healthy and in one piece! Your father's been at the lawyer's all morning long. What's there to cry about?"

But it wasn't for my mother's sorrows that I was crying then, or even for my own; it was for the smell of her cooking; of its warm, good taste on my palate; of the way my body would absorb it and drunkenly call for more. Pain, blood, or the sight of death rarely made me want to cry. I had experienced all of those things and I had not cried. Often I had felt like screaming, or stamping my foot, or storming the Gates of Heaven with my bare hands, but never like crying. Only the things I loved made me want to cry, the things that were good and worth believing and emulating; in their presence the tears would flow freely; tears which were born in pain or duress, which may have been as old as Adam's fall, but which remained unshed until such moments came along to release them. Now they burst saltily from my memories of my mother's cooking.

It was not the last time I would cry in prison. It was to happen once again, looking into the wonderful, trusting eyes of the prison chaplain, Rabbi Aryeh Levin, when he came to visit me in the infirmary where I lay burning with fever. Then I really had something to cry about. I was sick with pneumonia; everything within me hurt; there was nothing around me but cruelty and malice. And yet, until I saw Rabbi Levin's eyes, there was nothing to cry for. As soon as I saw them I cried.

"It isn't right for a Jewish girl to cry," he said.

But it was right.

It wasn't right for a Jewish girl to cry over the existence of evil, but it was right for her to cry over the existence of good. The power to cry was the power to want, the power to live.

I didn't attempt to answer the Rabbi at the time. Years later,

however, during the month of Av, when pious Jews mourn the destruction of the Temple, we touched the same subject during a talk that we had by the grave of his wife in Jerusalem. "How long," he asked, "can a human being continue to weep for the death of one beloved, for his own flesh and blood, for a wife, a son, or a mother? He weeps for a day, perhaps, or for a year, or for several years, and then the tears run dry. One can't bring back the dead. How astonishing it is, then, that in the case of the Temple, a building of ordinary stone that was destroyed, Jews should have gone on weeping for thousands of years, and that they should still go on weeping, that there should still be no end to their tears. But no, it's not really astonishing at all; it's simply a sign that the Temple is not dead, that it lives on, that it is still possible to hope for its restoration."

My mother left me staring tearfully at the empty hole in the door. Khalisa sat down beside me and did her best to console me.

An hour later, another visitor, also a prison attendant, arrived to see the matron.

At first I didn't realize that it was Virginia. Even while our matron was embracing her excitedly in the manner of an old friend met unexpectedly, Virginia managed to indicate to me by means of a wink that I mustn't let on that I knew her. She was barely recognizable anyway. Not that she was disguised; she was a real prison attendant, uniform and all. When I had seen her last, in my parents' home, I had thought of her only as the future sister-in-law of my sister. I had not been aware that she had been employed in various prisons over a period of years and was well acquainted with everyone else who worked in a similar capacity.

The two women chatted for several minutes and then Virginia suggested that our matron make some coffee.

"While you're gone I'll keep an eye on the prisoners," Virginia called after her. Then she slipped a letter into my blouse, and followed it with a penknife and a scissors. "These may be useful," she whispered. "I'll wait for an answer."

I hurried back to my cell, hid the penknife and the scissors. The

letter was from Adam. There was no reference in it to his words to me the night of my arrest. He simply wrote that if I found a way to put the penknife and the scissors to good use, there would be a place ready for me when I escaped. He would be waiting outside the jail, my audience would be waiting by their radios. "You mustn't forget," he said, "that you broke off your last broadcast in the middle."

I stared at the sky through barbed wire. The wire descended from the roof of the jail to the top of the wall that surrounded the courtyard, forming a kind of a ceiling. Only at one end of the wall, where the loose ends of the strands curled back on themselves, was there a gap. Through it pure blue skies could be seen, and it seemed as though my spirit was soaring high into the azure vault, then swooping back to spur on my body which still sat motionless on the stone steps: Look, over there is a hole; over there is no wire; one can take off, one can fly.

My blood began to flow again. I studied the wall, trying to guess its height and what lay beyond it. In the distance was the sound of the sea, of waves breaking against stones, crashing against another wall. The sea could not be far from the prison wall. I was suddenly seized by an overwhelming desire for the surf; I wanted to see it, to have it run through my hands. All the beauty and power of the ocean seemed to be concentrated in its froth.

That night Lila was transferred next door, and I was left alone in the cell. Shrill cries and sounds of drumming and dancing came from the Arab cell block. The sound of rain falling outside was muffled by a strong wind, which blew icily through the grated window into my cubicle.

It was quite late when I awoke the next day. I joined the other prisoners in the courtyard presided over by the matron who was drowsily working on a piece of embroidery. Now and then, as though in reply to some imaginary question, she would nod or shake her head, or raise and lower her eyebrows, all without exchanging a word with anyone.

I was careful not to look at the gap in the wire; instead, I stared steadily at the matron while I wondered what was on the other

side of the wall and how one could possibly climb out of the courtyard in broad daylight without being seen. I had no idea whether or not the area outside the wall was patrolled by guards, and I had to find out before I could plan an escape. But how?

Lila! I looked around to see where she was. This was her fifth time in this jail and every day she was taken out beyond the wall to sweep the pavement. Just yesterday she had told how the male prisoner who worked there with her was always pinching her thigh. We had been interrupted yesterday. Now I asked her, "Would you like to read me some more of your diary?"

She didn't reply. She looked at me with her oddly shaped eyes, one unbelieving, the other obviously pleased, contemptuously dismissed the Arab woman who had been picking the lice from her hair, reached into her bosom, and drew out the limp bundle of papers. She smoothed them out, ran her hand over her head, and began to read again from the beginning, with great emotion, as though she were hearing it all herself for the first time.

"Did you ever think of having it translated, Lila?" I asked.

"Think of what?" She nearly jumped on top of me.

"Of having it translated," I repeated casually. Before she could regain her composure, I added, "I have a friend out there who knows Arabic perfectly. Perhaps he'd agree to do it. Only how could we get your diary to him?" I spoke softly, as though thinking to myself.

"I have an idea, Lila," I went on. "You go out every day to sweep the pavement, don't you? Perhaps you could get one of the policemen outside to take it for you."

"Policemen outside!" Lila's spirits fell. "But there are no policemen outside!"

No policemen outside! In that case I needn't worry! I only had to get past the matron and over the wall. And now the matron was no longer in the yard—only prisoners.

I raced up the stairs, dug my fingers into the top of the wall, and hoisted myself up far enough to look out over it. A space narrow enough to be jumped was all that divided it from the roof of a large building, one of a series of houses, directly opposite. To reach the rooftop I would have to clamber up the wall, crawl

through the gap in the wire, slip onto a ledge that extended slightly outward from one section of the wall, and from there, leap across.

All told it would take two or three minutes. A minute or two when the courtyard was empty and neither the prisoners nor the matron in sight. But there wasn't even a second during the day when that was ever the case, much less a minute. Even if the matron should absent herself for a brief while, the women were sure to be there. They appeared as soon as they were let out of their cells in the morning, made themselves comfortable in the yard, either singly or in groups, tucked their legs under their broad skirts, and squatted there all day as though in the whole world there could be no finer place to sit. The only time the courtyard was really empty was when we were all locked in our cells for the night.

Why not during the night? I grabbed hold of the thought and began to climb on it, until I could see the aged female turnkey whose job it was to lock us into our cells every evening. I saw her palsied hand clutching the ring from which hung the keys to all the cells, as well as the key that would open the door to the corridor that would take me to the staircase leading to the point closest to the gap in the barbed wire.

As I returned to the courtyard, the sound of the sea was breaking against the wall outside. I could still visualize the narrow ledge and the roof of the neighboring house. I could even see the door of the little cottage in which Adam and I had lived together and would live again.

Lila came running up to me. "I've got an idea. Give me the address of your friend, and I'll find a way of writing him. You know the prisoner who helps me sweep the pavement, the one with the roving hands? Well, tomorrow I'll give him a letter and tell him to see that it's delivered. Why shouldn't he do it? Men like him can always find a way. Just give me the address of your friend."

Two new prisoners were brought into the courtyard. They were peasants, hardly visible amid the clusters of rings and coins that dangled from their noses, lips, and ear lobes. Their faces were crisscrossed by blue lines of kohl and intricate tattoos. Upon sight-

ing them, Lila and several other women who had been sitting on the steps dashed over with a whoop of joy. Soon they were all squatting in a circle on the ground, with the newcomers, a mother and her daughter, seated in the middle, perfectly at ease and clearly happy to be the center of so much attention.

The jingle of their rings and coins and the clinking of keys as the matron returned drowned out the sound of their speech. Somewhere among those keys was one that opened my cell and another that opened the corridor door. The corridor led to the staircase; the staircase led to the wall; the wall led to the roof and to the magic foam of the sea. . . .

Evening. The shrunken hand of the old turnkey shut the door of my cell behind me. If only I could be standing where she was, she who wanted only to sleep. Through the grating I watched her—drab and frail. It would be child's play to knock her to the ground and snatch the keys from her hand.

I didn't have a rope, or even a sheet, but I did have a pair of scissors and the *borsh*. I made a hole in it and cut off a strip of material; then, to see if it was long enough, I covered myself with a blanket to cloak my movements and attempted to tie it around my feet. I was able to pass it around them twice. I cut some more strips of cloth and knotted them onto the first until I had a makeshift rope which I could wind around my ankles, waist, and sides, and still have enough left over to tie about my mouth. That was what I would have to do to the old turnkey. But as soon as I tried it, however, I could see that it wouldn't work. It was impossible to make the gag tight enough. I ripped loose some small rags that had been sown into the *borsh* and rolled them into a ball about the size of an egg, to the sides of which I tied two strips of cloth. I put the rag ball into my mouth and pulled the connecting strips tight around my neck. They tore. I would have to sew them on with thread, but I didn't have a needle. I took my pajama top, bit into it with my teeth, and proceeded to enlarge the rip with my fingers. Sticking my nose through the grating, I called for the guard; as she hobbled wearily toward my cell I measured her with my eyes, trying to imagine how she would look bound in her gray uniform

from head to toe, the rag ball, which I had hidden along with the rope beneath the remnants of the *borsh*, jammed into her wrinkled mouth.

"Can I borrow a needle and some thread?" I asked, showing her the rip in my pajama top.

She handed me a needle from the inside of the lapel of her jacket, then left to get a spool of thread.

"*Yallah*. Be quick about it. It's nearly time to turn the lights off."

I quickly mended the pajamas, stitched the cloth draw strings to the rag ball, and hid it once again beneath the *borsh*. Then I lay down. "It's nearly time," the old woman had said. Yes, it was nearly time, nearly time to flatten her frail old body against the wall.

The cries of the Arab women in the adjoining cells gradually died down. I wanted to get up off the floor, to move about the cell, but I couldn't; I felt dizzy, as though the cell were moving instead of me. Underneath the *borsh*, I ran my hand long the rope, patted the rag ball, and waited for the dark.

The lights went out. "Good night!" called Lila from the cell next door.

"Good night, Lila!" I was already taking off my pajamas. "Good night, Khalisa!" On went the dress. My white sheepskin coat shone lustrous in the darkness. But who needed it? The curly wool would only get caught on the barbed wire, the heavy hide would weigh me down. Socks now, were a different matter! My mother had brought me two warm new pairs. I would wear both. Why leave good warm socks behind?

I stretched prone on what was left of the *borsh*. The discomfort was terrible: My back ached from my neck to the base of my spine; impossible to lie straight, to lie still at all, and so I thrashed about in the darkness on my stomach, bewildered, in pretended agony, howling for the guard. She rushed to the grating and switched on the light. I writhed on the floor pointing to my back, gripping the *borsh* with both hands as if to fight pain, and then slipped my left hand under it to find the end of the rope. My right hand curled around the rag ball as I heard the jingle of keys and

the rasping door as it opened. The old turnkey stepped into the cell; I could feel her breath on my neck. She bent lower to see and placed her right hand on my back; in her left were the keys. She removed the blanket and rolled back my pajama top, revealing the dress underneath.

The next cry of pain was hers, not mine. I had flipped over and pinned her to the floor. She screamed while I struggled to stuff the rag ball into her wide-open mouth. I tried to tie her down but there was nothing to tie. Beneath me was not a body, but a squirming, wriggling mass of flesh and hard, dry bones, flailing and striking out in every direction. And all at once this eel-like form arched and spun me over on my back. Now I was underneath and the old crone on top was beating my chest with her keys. Only there was no longer anything old about her: She was bursting with life. Each aged line in her brow beetled pugnaciously. This feeble creature, who used to gasp for breath every time she climbed the stairs, was nimble and resilient as she dashed for the door, disappeared into the corridor, and went galloping down the stairs.

I was too entangled in snatches of rope and rags from the *borsh* to even move, but I could feel the ground slipping away from under me as if into an abyss. My hands recovered first: as though on their own initiative they began to pick apart the rope and cram the strips of cloth back into the ticking of the *borsh*. I looked at my fingers uncomprehendingly: it was impossible to make any sense out of what they were doing, impossible, for that matter, to see any point in doing anything at all at a moment when all my brave beginnings were ended.

When the turnkey returned with two British lieutenants and the little group halted in front of my cell, I was laughing.

The rope and the rag ball had disappeared back into the *borsh*. I lay under the blanket in my pajamas, my dress neatly hanging on its usual hook, two pairs of socks on my feet, and I laughed and laughed till I nearly split my sides. I started to say something to the three figures staring at me in amazement through the grating,



GEULA COHEN REVIEWING PROOFS UPON THE BOOK'S PUBLICATION.



WITH HER LATE PARENTS, YOSEF AND MIRIAM, WHOSE HOME SERVED AS SANCTUARY AND A BASE FOR UNDERGROUND OPERATIONS.

GEULA MARCHING IN HER BETAR UNIFORM (MARKED BY ARROW).



ניסר כסנת חרדי' ע"י חרבי' י"ן

י"ט בניסן תש"ג
18.12.49

126

אני מאשרת בזכותי כי אלוהה רבין
אשר נשתי אשה ונכנסתי לנישואין
העליונים לא מוסרתי וקרתי א הכתוב בהלכה
וא נגדה אמתיות הנתתי ונתתי מקצועות
(חלה / כדגמגיה) אמתה אלא היו אלוה
באמתיה. ואלו אמתה ראיטתה, אפי'
האמתה אמתיה הנאוק -

ב. חרדי

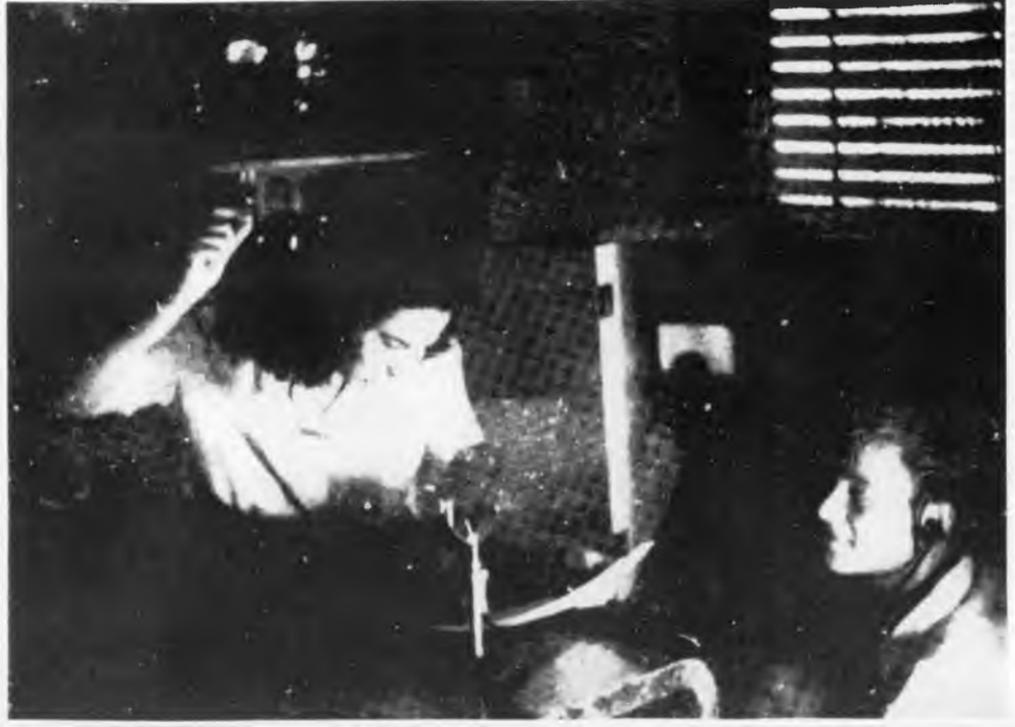
השנה: הניסן תש"ג
במקום: תל אביב



DURING HER STUDIES AT THE TEL AVIV TEACHERS' SEMINARY FROM WHICH SHE WAS EXPELLED BECAUSE OF HER "DISSIDENT" CONNECTIONS.

THE DOCUMENT WHICH CERTIFIES THAT SHE COULD NOT SIT FOR EXAMS BECAUSE OF "POLITICAL REASONS".

DURING A BROADCAST OF THE SECRET RADIO STATION - "THE VOICE OF THE HEBREW UNDERGROUND".





GEULA COHEN AT THE TIME OF HER JOINING THE LECHI.



EMMANUEL HANEGBI (ADAM) - TEL AVIV OPERATIONS COMMANDER.



GEULA IN DISGUISE FOLLOWING HER ESCAPE IN JERUSALEM.



THEIR SON TZACHI AS A PARATROOPER.



THE FIRST VISIT TO YAIR'S GRAVE AFTER THE UNDERGROUND PERIOD WITH YITZCHAK SHAMIR (LEFT) AND ANSHEL (ARIYEH) SHPIELMAN.

AN EMOTIONAL MEETING WITH YUSEF ABU GHOSH WHO AIDED HER ESCAPE.





GEULA ADDRESSING THE "FIGHTERS" CONVENTION IN THEIR FIRST PUBLIC APPEARANCE. AT THE DAIS: (L TO R) YITZCHAK SHAMIR, GEULA, DR. ISRAEL ELDAD, NATAN YELLIN-MOR.

AT THE OPENING OF A KINDERGARTEN NAMED AFTER YAIR IN OFAKIM.





RENAMING OF MIZRACHI BET STREET AS AVRAHAM STERN STREET (L. TO R) RACHAMIM HACHMOV, DANNY SHOAMI, DAVID STERN, RONNIE STERN, YAIR STERN, TZVI KAISARI, EMMANUEL HANEGBI.

GEULA SHARING THE DAIS WITH (L TO R) MENACHEM BEGIN, TEL AVIV MAYOR NAMIR, YITZCHAK SHAMIR, CHIEF RABBI FRANKEL.





VISITING THE BET-LEHEM JAIL FOLLOWING ISRAEL ARMY'S LIBERATION OF JUDEA AND SAMARIA: AT THE GATE, IN HER CELL, ON THE WINDOWSHELF. IN THE CORRIDOR OF THE PRISON HOSPITAL OF THE RUSSIAN COMPOUND IN JERUSALEM.

doubled up, and rolled helplessly on the floor. Finally I quieted down.

“What?” I said at last, looking at the old turnkey. “Do you mean to tell me that you were really frightened? Did you really think I was serious? But I was only joking.” Then, looking at the officers, I added, “I knew she’d be scared.”

The officers didn’t understand Hebrew and had no idea what was going on. They stared at the turnkey, who by now was in a state of utter confusion. She was pale and trembling and once again looked old and decrepit. In a wild babble of Arabic she addressed the two Englishmen:

“I came into her cell, Lord Almighty. She said it was her back. . . . Then suddenly she attacked me . . . She wanted to tie me up. She had a rope in her hand, she wanted to choke me. She grabbed at my keys, she had a rope in her hand.”

The officers looked at me, looked at the guard, shook their heads, shrugged shoulders, checked the door, looked and searched and glared and shrugged again, and left.

THE FOLLOWING day I transferred to the prison in Bethlehem. With me was Aliza. We had never met before, but sitting in the back of the police van we discovered that we were linked together by recent chains of events, beginning on the night of my arrest. On my way to the radio station that evening I had met with Yosele so that he could give me my daily "mail." It included a report on a new recruit—Aliza. I did not find this out until later, because right then I had no time to stop and read the report. And even if I had read it, I would have had no way of knowing that Aliza, the recommended recruit, was in fact a Lechiite of long standing.

Generally, I was careful not to bring my mail to the studio. It was a rule in the underground that whenever one was participating in an illegal activity one had to be "clean," that is, without any incriminating material on his person. And it was unusual to receive reports from Yosele through the mail. Amnon used to give them to me personally, and even then I would copy the salient facts into my notebook in a language which only I could understand and destroy the originals. Two other messages which Yosele handed me that evening I had managed to copy in this fashion. But for the report on Aliza, there had been no time. I left it unopened in my purse with the intention of disposing of it immediately after the broadcast.

When the British detectives went through my belongings in the studio, they naturally found it. The report was in the form of a series of questions and answers, painting a picture of a young girl eager to be accepted into Lechi. But before one of our agents

could be sent to contact her, she was arrested by a British plain-clothes man. He, too, was completely unaware that Aliza already was a full-fledged member of Lechi. That she planned to join us was sufficient reason for taking her into custody.

The van climbed up the road toward Jerusalem. A female guard was seated by our side and across from us were three British policemen with Tommy guns. Two more sat in the cab and an armored car followed us.

Two of the policemen chatted loudly, smoked and laughed. Aliza and I sat in rigid silence. Suddenly, almost simultaneously, we turned to face each other: something had to be done, we had to oppose something of our own to the barrels pointing at our bodies. We began to sing. At first we hummed to ourselves; then we raised our voices to what was practically a shout, and we went on shouting, stridently, tunelessly, into the heartless black muzzles of the guns.

The policemen fell silent for a moment and looked disconcerted. One of them raised his gun and fondled its butt. Then they started to talk and laugh again. The song we were singing struck me as being somehow out of place, unreal. I bit it off between my teeth; one last, hoarse, constricted note and it died. Aliza looked at me questioningly, then her voice too began to fade away. The van sped noisily along the road. The driver was evidently in a hurry. The armored car behind us would disappear beyond a curve, then spurt back into sight again.

The policeman sitting opposite me was getting on in years. His visored blue cap covered most of his skull and settled down in front among the wrinkles of his forehead. His veined hand rested on his gun, and he took little part in his comrades' conversation. When he noticed that I was staring at him, he hunched his shoulders, smiled broadly, and shifted his position.

Through the window behind him I stared out at the mountains. Alone up there, I thought, he could never catch me; I could easily outrun him; his fingers, clutching at his gun, would be unable to take hold of the sharp, bare rocks, while I would swing higher and higher, following the traces of those who had gone before. There would be many footprints on the mountain's flank, all with one

message: *Follow us!* Even if he pursued me to the top, he would find it unbearable and would be forced to cast down his eyes. That peak could not be his, nor the skies above, nor the God of the mountain. He would retreat, leaving me behind as he went.

A strong wind was blowing outside and through the window of the speeding car I could see gusts of rain being violently dashed against the mountainside. The rain beat on the roof tiles of the low houses by the roadside, beat on the massive stone buildings of Jerusalem as we passed through the city, and spattered against the windshield of the car as it emerged again into open country. It was still raining hard when we arrived in Bethlehem. The driver stepped on the brakes, the car stopped, and the elderly policeman was pushing me outside.

We were on a hilltop overlooking a series of slopes lined with stone cottages and Quonset huts. Down the hill were large boulders and a tangle of brush. Toward the horizon, distant mountain peaks rose against the sky. I felt an overwhelming urge to run, to plunge head over heels down the hillside, to tumble against the rocks and vanish into the far terrain. Instead, I forced myself to turn around and face the wall of the prison.

The first thing I noticed was the rusty green portal. Neither large nor small, opened and closed by a large iron bolt at its center, it seemed for a moment to be standing there all by itself. Then I saw the stone wall that supported it, or rather, part of the wall, which surrounded a tall, expansive, peaceful-looking building. The silence that emanated from the building, was calm and serene, and not at all the petrified stillness I had expected. Or at least, so it seemed, until I noticed the bars over the windows. Gray, bow-shaped, evenly spaced, they stretched before my eye in an endless crisscross pattern. How lifeless!

The officer in charge pulled on a metal chain hanging from the wall. A familiar ring resounded in my ears; the same raucous sound I had known in Jaffa, forever trailing off in a rattle of despair.

We entered a spacious courtyard abloom with trees, flowers, and shrubs. The roses were as red as any I remembered, the leaves on the trees frisked in the wind and the fragrance of green things and

rich earth was as delightful as it had ever been. I felt as though the trees and flowers and the fragrance had been put there to mock me. I tried to shut my eyes, and it was a relief to hear the voice of the attendant ordering us to step lively, and to feel her calloused hand prodding me to the entrance. She and the British officer disappeared within.

Someone behind us spoke in Arabic: "*Haram, haram*, you poor girls. *Haram, haram*." Too bad, too bad. To the black woman who addressed us, the phrase apparently suggested not only plaintive commiseration, but also complete helplessness, an unquestioning acceptance of whatever fate decreed.

"*Haram*," the Negro woman said again.

Her face was so intensely black that at first it was impossible to distinguish the features, or even to be sure whether, apart from the dazzling whites of her eyes, it had any features at all. White laughter gleamed from two rows of healthy white teeth.

Her dress, the standard winter uniform of the prisoners, was the one drab thing about her. It was made of coarse Arab cloth and was covered by a yellowish jacket of a thick, cross-hatched weave that reminded one of the pattern of the prison bars. Both the dress and the jacket were too large for her and fluttered freely in the breeze. Her cheeks were horribly swollen, and on one temple, directly over the eye, was an open wound. Her lower lip, too, was cut, and badly puffed.

As we stood there, not knowing what to say, she reached out a hand to Aliza—smooth, blonde, pale.

"*Haram, haram*," she said again, her eyes filled with desire. "Lord, how pretty you are! How white and smooth! *Haram!*"

I was too dark for her taste. Her *harams* were strictly for Aliza; in fact, she probably never wasted any of them on herself either. Pity wasn't meant to be thrown away on those who were born dark; they were destined to suffer, and they did.

She winked suggestively at Aliza and shook a menacing fist in the direction of the door. The policemen ogled the black woman lewdly and exploded in coarse laughter. One slapped her familiarly on the rump, and she curled toward him, executing a series of obscene gyrations with her body.

A voice called out from the courtyard, "Selma! Selma!"

She winked at us again by way of encouragement, and ran down a flight of stairs.

The Englishman who knew her said, "About a year ago there was a story in the papers about a fight in which a drunken Polish soldier killed an Englishman because of a woman. Well, there she goes." He pointed to the steps and joined in the laughter.

We entered the building and came into a room piled high with papers and portfolios. A British officer, dressed in an immaculate blue police uniform and, wearing a cork helmet too large for his long, narrow head, sat by a desk. He was the prison warden called *modir* in Arabic. He blew cigarette smoke through one corner of his mouth and scrutinized us carefully. His eyes, as long as they were fixed on us, looked perfectly normal, but as soon as he shifted his gaze, they seemed to vanish from his face; it was as though he put them on like spectacles whenever he wanted to see, then took them off again. He asked names and ages, and read us the order authorizing our internment for the duration of the emergency rule. Then he reached for a shellacked nightstick that had been hidden behind a pile of papers on his desk and, pointing it at two attendants who had been standing unnoticed behind us, indicated that we were to be searched.

We were conducted to another room, dank and gloomy, death-like in its smell, in its color, in the moldy rags and scattered crates. But now I could breathe freely. Little by little, I rid myself of the fear that had gripped me in the courtyard. There was nothing frightening about these walls and bars; these I could meet with walls and bars of my own, shutting myself off from the hostile world, protecting myself from harm. Here nothing could reach me. Here I was safe.

We were searched thoroughly: the attendants practically unraveled the stitching of our clothing. Somewhere nearby we could hear the monotonous hum of voices and the sound of doors opening and banging shut; in the distance an old phonograph was grinding out an Arab melody.

One of the attendants opened a door, motioned us to follow her, and shut it behind us. In the long hallway in which we found

ourselves there was a brigade of Arab prisoners sweeping, mopping, and scrubbing. Attendants in spotless white collars stood over them, directing their work. At our approach, the Arab women rested momentarily, nodded a sympathetic *haram*, and went back to scouring the perfectly clean floor.

Another door and another flight of stairs. A gas fire crackled somewhere to our right and we inhaled the steamy smell of food cooking. I looked around and saw a girl with glasses and braided hair. She wore an apron and, as she ran toward us, her sandals pattered rhythmically on the floor. She was short and thin, and the heavy frames of her glasses merged with her face.

I knew who she was. I had known ever since the morning I rose early to read in the newspaper what she had said to the judges at her trial and had been chilled to the marrow by their answer: ". . . you are a silly, thoughtless young girl." It was Chisia and she embraced us wordlessly.

Finally she was calm enough to say, "We've been waiting for you! Oh how we've been waiting! Ever since we heard about the radio station, we've been waiting. There are five of us here; there's Nacha, and three girls from the Etsel. It's so good that you're here!" She wiped her glasses with the corner of her apron. "It's so good that you're finally here; it's a pity, though, that today's my day to cook."

But she made no motion to go back to the kitchen. The fire burned on the stove, while Chisia's hands burned in mine. My blood simmered with their heat.

The attendant interrupted and I heard for the first time a word that seemed to be perpetually on the lips of every guard: *Mamnua!* "It's not allowed."

If someone were to ask me to describe as briefly as possible what a prison is like, I would give him his answer in that one word: *Mamnua*.

Mamnua—in the name of the warder, in the name of the police, in the name of the High Commissioner, in the name of His Majesty's Government. *Mamnua*—the way of the world, the inscrutable will of Allah. In our resistance to *mamnua* we were fighting the world itself.

THE FIRST week of my imprisonment in Bethlehem was a complete void. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that I was a void, for time did not pass uneventfully. There were days and there were also nights when I lay on my bed and could not sleep; there were long hours, and there were attendants with starched white collars and white handkerchiefs; there was a mouth screaming Arabic, and there were memories brought with me from the outside for those who had lost their own. There were, I remember, eyes that stared at me eagerly as I talked; there was the melancholy yearning of an Arab chanteuse whose voice rose from the grooves of a screechy old record; there was the sound of a dripping faucet and of water sloshing in buckets; the uncontrolled laughter of lunatics being beaten in their cells; a peephole in my cell door through which the eye of an attendant would peer inquisitively; old Arab women meaninglessly shaking their heads from side to side; the cries of prison-born infants, slung in sacking around the waists of mothers, busy washing and rinsing dishes. There were children. The children were three or four years old and were practically swallowed up by their prison uniforms, which seemed to grow faster than they themselves did, gaining on them hour by hour, covering their necks, their heads, their sides, their limbs, until nothing remained of them but their ancient laughter and their tears.

One of the few things I remember was the pattering of many footsteps during the walks we took around the roof. Two by two we were allowed to walk around to make a circle and then another

one. The attendants seemed to spin around us as we walked; so did the walls and the guards who circled them below. Only the sky stood still. There was a great deal of it overhead, a great deal of air and sunlight. The churchbells of Bethlehem rang in our ears and filled our hearts with longing. Afterward, in bed and staring at the ceiling, I still seemed to be going around and around and around. It was impossible to stop.

One cold morning, before the decision to bring me to trial had been made, I was told to get ready to move to the "Villa," a building not far from the main prison, where the Jewish political prisoners were kept. I took my coat and said good-by to Chisia and to the four others, as well as to several Arab women I had come to know during my short stay.

Initially, when they were still few in number, Jewish political prisoners had been kept in the main prison, along with the ordinary criminals. For the last two years, however, they had been assigned to an internment area of their own. Not only had the prisoners themselves agitated for special accommodations, but with Etsel taking up active warfare against the British, the numbers of such prisoners had multiplied greatly. Legally, their status was not the same as that of persons convicted of criminal offenses; they had been arrested under emergency regulations as suspected members of terrorist organizations, despite the lack of sufficient evidence to prosecute them in court. And so they were quartered in the Villa Salem, a two-story building that owed its name to its former owners, from whom the British had appropriated it to serve as a detention camp.

The prisoners were not allowed to come and go as they pleased, of course, but they enjoyed a considerable amount of freedom. They had the run of the building during the day; they could sit or stroll in the courtyard several hours in the morning and the evening; and they could receive a visitor once every two weeks and a letter once a week.

Behind the stone walls of the prison there was another wall, invisible but nonetheless real, separating the girls who belonged to the Lechi from the girls who belonged to the Etsel. It was not a question of dislike—the two groups were not opposed to each

other—but simply of difference—militant and assertive distinctness. In the outside world the two organizations had been united by a common enemy. Each clung to its own principles, though they collaborated in tactical matters. In prison, however, we lived on another plane, an entirely inactive one. In order not to lose our identities completely, we strove to preserve the distinctions. It was the single positive act left to us.

The Lechi group included, first of all, Julie. She had been one of the first girls to join Lechi and one of the first to be imprisoned in Bethlehem. Her story was a familiar one. She had started out with Betar and had gone on to Etsel, where she remained until it split. Then she went with the Lechi faction. Whatever happened to anyone in the Lechi was as though it happened to her. When a member of Lechi was shot and wounded, something in her was shot and wounded, too; when a member of Lechi was killed, something died within her; and every blow that Lechi struck, she felt she had struck personally.

But the converse was not true, for although Julie was arrested, Lechi remained free and continued to function. When Julie's link was torn from the chain, the chain did not break. Something broke in Julie, though. She went on living, but only for the past.

Julie would one day be released and would return to underground life, but she would no longer operate with the same dynamic strength. Her Lechi, the Lechi she remembered, would not remember her, would see in her only one of a long line of workers. Julie would join the line—what other could she join?—but there would barely be room for her.

Part of our circle, but standing slightly to one side, was Frieda, arrested not for belonging to Lechi, but for being Gra's wife—Gra of the central committee. Frieda faced up to prison as though she had been born for it, proudly, like a true freedom fighter. If she had previously done nothing to merit arrest, her behavior now would have warranted it.

Shaula was an enigma. Stiff and meticulous, she made me wonder whether bars and gratings were her natural environment. She arranged her life methodically, ironing, sewing, knitting, as though she were entirely at home. We all knitted and sewed, but only to

pass the time; even while our hands were busy with the needle our ears were alert for the magic words: *You can go home now*. With Shaula, however, you felt that when they finally told her she was free, she would be amazed. Go home? Where? Wasn't she already at home? She would pack her belongings, and the thick prison walls as well, and cart them with her wherever she went.

There were other Lechiites, too, but I felt particularly close only to two of them: to one for the story she told; to the other for the story she refused to tell.

"Tell me about Yair," I pleaded with Tova Svorai. Although she talked a great deal, she didn't like to talk about Yair. Her approach to experience was intensely verbal; words had a kind of living reality for her. Perhaps that was why she didn't like to talk about Yair, for to talk about him would be to relive the hours of his death.

But who among us in Lechi didn't know the story of that death? And not just from newspaper accounts either. On February 13, 1942, the newspapers simply reported that Abraham Stern, alias Yair, head of a group called the Freedom Fighters of Israel, had been shot and killed by the police in an attic on Mizrachi Street in Tel Aviv.

They didn't mention that Yair happened to be in that particular attic at the time because he hadn't been able to find any other place in which to hide. Neither did they mention that during the last days of his life Yair had been forced to wander the streets of the city in search of a place to stay, a collapsible cot folded up inside the suitcase he carried. The cot remained in the suitcase and Yair walked the streets, accompanied by two Lechi girls whose job it was to help him pass the night without arousing suspicion.

The newspapers did mention that in the attic with Yair was a woman whose name was Tova. Had it come to their attention that Moshe Svorai, the terrorist who had been wounded and captured by the police two weeks before, on the thirtieth of January, was Tova's husband, it might have occurred to them to ask: Why did Yair, the leader of Lechi, a man with a price on his head, seek refuge in the room of a woman whose husband had just been arrested? Didn't he realize how unsafe it was? Had the newspapers

bothered to investigate, they would have discovered that those who were safe did not want Yair to disturb their safety. The few who were willing to harbor him would do so only on condition that he give up his underground activities. At last even the streets—where safety was in the hands of God who didn't make stipulations—had become impossible. Yair's picture was plastered on every wall, carried by every newspaper, imprinted on the retina of every detective.

Tova was willing to take Yair in just as he was: hunted, out-cast, and dreaming; and just as she was: a sick woman, desperately worried about her husband and pining for her two-year-old daughter who was far away in the care of her grandparents. But the one place which welcomed Yair on Yair's terms was risky indeed. On the morning of February 13 somebody knocked on the attic door. It wasn't the code knock used by members of the Lechi. Yair hid in the closet as he always did when this happened. Tova opened the door to the detectives. They entered, searched the room, broke down the closet door, fumbled among Tova's clothes, and discovered Yair.

Tova was still in the room when Yair was taken from the closet and handcuffed, but she was downstairs in the patrol car when she heard three shots ring out.

Who among us didn't know how Yair was murdered? Only none of us had been there when the shots rang out and Yair fell; none of us had heard the scream that sounded down the busy street: *Jews, they're killing Stern!* Tova heard it because it was she who screamed.

Now I stood alongside her silently pleading: Tell me. Not how he died, but how he lived. Not how he was rolled down the stairs in a sack red with blood and loaded into a wagon, but how he sat at your side at the table in his thirty-third year, how he wrote his poems and forged his thoughts and wove his dreams of a great kingdom, how he longed for his wife, how he wondered what color eyes his child, then growing in her womb, would have. Tell me with what color his own eyes burned when he was forced to hold his tongue, and whether his hand trembled on the morning of his death when he wrote in his last letter: "I am not one of those who

turn themselves in to the authorities, nor am I one of those who was born to serve authority." Tell me what he sounded like when he talked, what were the things that maddened his mind.

"A madman," the newspapers reported. "A madman," shouted the rabid crowd.

Yes, a madman—if it was madness to go out of one's mind by expanding beyond it in one's dreams—if it was madness to see and hear a new kingdom being born—if it was madness to believe that to be right was to be strong. If these things were madness, then Yair was undoubtedly mad.

But Tova wouldn't tell. Tova couldn't make the transition back from Yair's death to his life, or from Yair's death to her own life, either. It wasn't that she was constantly in mourning; on the contrary, she sang and joked and kept her spirits up as well as any of us. But she couldn't forget. Only once a week, or once a month, was she really able to forget about death, and that was when her little daughter was brought to visit, after having seen her father, imprisoned in Jerusalem. Then Tova would forget; she would think of nothing but life.

Yaffa, on the other hand, told about Eliahu without having to be asked. Yaffa was always looking for an audience. Even when she had no audience, she told her story incessantly—to herself.

Yaffa was one of four girls in Bethlehem who had served with the British army in Cairo at the time of the assassination of Lord Moyne. They had all been arrested on the suspicion of having played a part in it, but only Yaffa had spent a good deal of time with Eliahu Hakim before the assassination and had come to know him well.

When I first met Yaffa, I would not have supposed that such a woman, so soft and feline, so silky and warm and forgiving, could even describe someone like Eliahu, that tall, broad-shouldered, powerful youth, impelled by a mortal hatred for the British intruder whose life he volunteered to take. I would not have expected that a voice like hers, so musical and poignant, would have gloried in talking about trials and law courts, revolvers and gunshots, scaffolds and death.

I was wrong. As Yaffa talked about Eliahu, one could practi-

cally see her brushing back a curl from his forehead, buttoning a loose button on his shirt, straightening his tie, expertly sketching a portrait of a solid individual—a tall, handsome, swarthy young man. Unlike Eliahu Hakim, Yaffa had not been sent to Cairo to assassinate Lord Moyne. When Eliahu arrived on his mission, she was already stationed there as an ambulance driver in the British army. She was a member of Lechi, engaged in smuggling arms from Egypt to Palestine and in transporting mail and propaganda in the opposite direction. When Eliahu Hakim was sent to Cairo by the Lechi central committee, Yaffa was directed to place herself at his disposal.

Yaffa was not expected to take part in the assassination itself. Eliahu Bet-Tsuri, due to arrive in Cairo shortly, would be Hakim's actual partner in the killing. Meanwhile, however, Hakim needed a girl friend to accompany him while he reconnoitered Lord Moyne's residence and for this purpose Yaffa was ideal. While Eliahu was observing Lord Moyne's residence, Yaffa was observing Eliahu. They ate together in restaurants; he was not, she told me, a hearty eater. They danced in night clubs. He was a good dancer, Yaffa related, and this made her wonder why he had joined Lechi.

"A British policeman made me decide. A British policeman who lashed me on the back with his whip when I was a child."

Eliahu's partner, Eliahu Bet-Tsuri, had never been whipped himself, but he told of seeing it happen to others:

"I saw a large crowd of people marching down the middle of the street, shouting slogans and waving flags; some kind of demonstration. A squad of British policemen appeared and began dispersing the demonstrators with their clubs. An unresolved question began to bother me. I knew that these policemen came from abroad and that they had no right to lord it over others in a land that was not theirs but mine. And so, when I saw that day how they went about clubbing a young Jewish lad, I asked myself: Why is it that these Englishmen have to forsake their own homes and families in order to be officers of the law in a country that doesn't even belong to them?"

Yaffa had never seen anyone whipped or clubbed, but even if

she had, even if it had happened to her personally, her reaction would have differed from that of Hakim, who felt in his outraged blood the wounded dignity of the divine image in man, and from that of Bet-Tsuri, who was instinctively protesting against social injustice, against the oppression of the weak by the strong. In Yaffa's case the insult would have been above all to her sense of beauty, which would have been offended at the sheer ugliness of an instrument of violence descending on a human back.

It was not surprising that people like Yaffa, Hakim, and Bet-Tsuri had all found their way to Lechi. If there was anything to wonder at, it was how all of us managed to stay together in following the voice that called to us from afar, despite the fact that no two individuals in Lechi ever heard it exactly the same.

As far back as my first contacts with Dov and Elimelech I could remember thinking how differently the same words sounded coming from each of them: From forward and aggressive Dov they resembled the battle cries of ancient warriors, whereas from shy Elimelech they were like immemorial dreams. And to this I could now add that, spoken by Yaffa, they would be full of the yearning for beauty, that in the mouth of Hakim they would resound with the free man's pride, and that pronounced by Bet-Tsuri they would ring forth majestically like the fiat of God in primordial chaos.

We were like the strings of a harp tuned to a single melody. And perhaps the reason we harmonized so well was that each string remained true to itself.

IMMERSED in my memories, I sat in the courtyard next to a bush. It was good to be able to sit and remember, for it was the past pulsing within me that told me I was still vitally alive.

Suddenly I heard a babble of voices from inside the building and a noise of running and shouting: "*Faraj! Faraj! Faraj!*"

Freedom! One of the prisoners was going home.

The shouting was followed by a lengthy moment of silence, followed in turn by a mighty outburst of song that streamed through the walls of the Villa and flooded every heart. The singing grew stronger and stronger, more and more emotional, and suddenly I was no longer in the courtyard but had joined the others in the corridor of the building, singing at the top of my voice a song I had never before heard. It was the "Song of Liberation," a song that the prisoners sang whenever one was released. It was a last memory to take to the outside world, as well as a sigh for the girls in the main prison building.

Only the freed prisoner was not singing. With a frightened expression on her face, she stood silently in the middle of the circle that formed around her. We were eager to help her pack, to help her dress, to comb her hair, but she wouldn't budge; she refused to hurry; she was clearly reluctant to depart. She stood a moment longer with her back to the door, staring at us, then turned and ran to her room, where she threw herself on her bed and buried her face in the pillow, her chest heaving. . . .

The singing continued and a fervent *hora* commenced; bodies rubbed against bodies, hands pressed hands. A prisoner going home unsteadily descended the steps that led to the gate.

Again and again I studied the wall, looking for an escape route. The wall was high, built of heavy stone blocks and surmounted by strands of barbed wire which were attached to a series of metal rods and bellied out in coils over the other side. Up and down the courtyard I walked, endlessly retracing my steps. Always I saw the same thing: the wall and the wire on top of it. Even the smiles of the other girls as they watched me pace back and forth were no longer new.

"What are you smiling at?" I asked them one day.

"At the way you delude yourself," they answered sorrowfully, "just as we once did. Once we also stared at the wall and inspected every inch of it. We were full of plans, we even sawed one of the gratings of our door in half one night—but nothing ever came of it. There's no way out. There are guards posted at night on the roof of the Villa, and during the day there are guards outside the walls. And even if you managed to get past them, you'd be in the middle of hostile Arab territory with rough terrain to follow all the way to Jerusalem. There's no way out."

"There is a way," Julie exclaimed vehemently. "If we could get some outside help, we would find a way. If only our people out there didn't think of us as though we were dead; if only they realized that we have better things to do than to sit here and sew. Then you can be sure that they'd find a way to get us out of here."

"It's true," Dvora agreed. "You can't bore a hole in the wall with sheer will power."

But it couldn't be true, I thought to myself; it mustn't be true! Life here would be utterly unbearable if one really thought it was true. Why shouldn't the concentrated power of the will, working constantly day and night, be able to pierce this dull, dead stone?

I concentrated on the wall. When I was in the courtyard, I stared at it all the time. When I was in my room, I looked at it through the bars of my window. At night, when I slept, I saw it in my dreams.

A large bush grew in one corner of the yard. In my reveries I would climb to the top of it, clamber on up until I had reached the barbed wire on the top of the wall, and then turn around and

climb back down again. I circled the wall endlessly, all morning long and every afternoon until five, when we had to leave the yard and return inside for the night.

Standing at the head of the stairway inside the building, I could see over the top of the wall. Several dozen meters beyond it was a barbed-wire fence about the height of a man. Beyond that there was . . . what?

That evening I could hear the attendants counting us off through the building, as they did every morning and evening, to make sure that we were all present. Originally the girls had had to remain in their rooms for a roll call, but as a result of a protest strike, the order had been rescinded; now they were free to wander through the building while the attendants chased after them from one room to the next, down the hallways, and into the kitchen and the washrooms. All present and accounted for. I got into bed. The lights were turned off. I could hear, as I heard every night, the hoarse voices of the guards on the roof: "Halt! Who goes there?" In reply an Arab sang his name out into the night. Another day gone by.

All night long I saw the bush in the courtyard. All night long I scaled the wall and ran freely in the countryside beyond. When I rose the next morning, I announced to my friends, "Tomorrow I'm going to escape."

This time they didn't smile. They didn't stare at me in amazement, either. We all sat down together and pooled our thoughts on how it could be done.

That night I had a visit from Max Kritschmann, a lawyer who was a member of the Lechi and an active worker in the underground. My father had consulted him. He had news for me: "You're going to be transferred back to the main prison some time this week. They've decided to bring you to trial."

"Tomorrow I'm going to escape," I told him.

"What?" He was startled. "Tomorrow?"

"Tomorrow at six P.M.," I said.

"At six P.M.? That's exactly when the curfew on road traffic begins. Even if we could manage to have a car ready, there would be no way of helping you."

"There's no choice," I answered. "At six o'clock the guard is changed: the day shift around the wall goes home and the night shift takes over on the roof. It's the only time of day when it's possible to make a break for freedom. The area outside the wall is deserted for a minute or two while the new set of guards is moving to the roof. I have to be on the other side of the wall by the time they reach the roof. So at six o'clock I'll be next to the bush in the courtyard. I've already figured out how with the other girls. Can you lend me a pound?"

"It's insane," said Kritschmann, but he reached for his wallet.

"The Jewish suburb of Jerusalem nearest to Bethlehem is Talpiyot," I said. "If I head over the mountains in a straight line, I'll get there during the night. Do you know anyone there who'll be ready to put me up?"

"All by yourself on the mountains, at night, through unfamiliar Arab territory? It's insane!" Kritschmann repeated, but he took out a piece of paper and wrote for me the address of an acquaintance of his in Talpiyot.

It was a quarter to five. The sun had already recalled its rays and murky shadows covered the yard in which Julie, Yaffa, Nelli, Clertchi, and I strolled back and forth as we did every evening until five. On other evenings, however, we had not been in the habit of paying any particular attention to the little shed in which the fuel was stored for our oil-burning winter heaters. Now we could think of nothing else. The shed's one window was hidden from our sight by a clothesline draped with sheets. The sheets were our own. We had washed them about an hour ago, and then hung them on a line which we ourselves had strung.

The other prisoners in the yard could see as much of the shed as we could, but they didn't know that the window had been secretly unlatched from the inside. I had done this the previous day while we were being issued our daily oil ration. Instead of crowding around the doorway, with the other girls, holding my empty heater in my hand I had deliberately stood at the end of the line so that my turn would come last. Once inside the shed, I had waited for the attendant on duty to bend over the oil drum to turn the spigot. Then, unnoticed, I reached back and undid the iron

latch on the window, so that it could easily be pushed open from the outside.

Ten minutes to five. The wash on the line flapped in the evening breeze. I silently prayed that it would not flap too much and give me away when I pushed open the window and climbed inside the shed. The two attendants on courtyard duty sat by one of the bushes on low stools. One of them kept dozing off; every now and then she would open her eyes in alarm, but before long she would shut them again and relapse into slumber. Her companion sat, her chin in the palm of her hand, staring at a group of prisoners exercising near the garden at the rear of the building, where the courtyard swung to the left. I could tell when each minute was up by the pressure of Julie's and Yaffa's arms linked in my own. Finally, their fingers tightened in a powerful clasp, as though to bid me an eternal farewell and to speed me on my way. The imprint of those fingers seemed stamped forever upon my flesh. They turned and walked away without looking back.

I ducked behind the sheets, pushed open the window, leaped into the shed, and locked the window behind me.

The smell of oil permeated everything. I huddled in a corner, the muscles of my face twitching spasmodically. The girls were chattering gaily out in the courtyard. I heard the playful rippling of the wind through the white sheets, the ticking of my wrist watch. Something inside my chest was ticking, too, but quite out of rhythm.

I took a large kerchief from the pocket of my jacket and wrapped it around my head in the manner of the Arab girls of the area. Then I rouged my lips. Beneath my skirt I wore a pair of gymnast's shorts for protection as I climbed the wall. I tucked the hem of my skirt into my belt and fastened it with safety pins in front and in back.

Footsteps of the prisoners strolling in the yard kept passing to and fro in front of the shed. Now I could hear the cries of the attendants as they urged the girls indoors: "Yallah, hurry! It's five o'clock."

A twilight stillness fell over the yard. Muffled sounds reached me from inside the building. Every few minutes someone bumped

against a piece of furniture or broke into song. I glanced at my watch. Now the prisoners were being counted, and big, bovine Nelli—Nelli whom no force could stop once she got moving and no force could move once she was stopped—was on her way to the toilet. When she got there she would lock the door behind her and squeeze through the connecting window that led to the shower room. . . . Now she was there, just in time to answer “present!” to the attendant who was knocking on the shower-room door. But Nelli still had to squeeze back through the window to the toilet and answer “present!” again to the attendant who was knocking there. . . .

“Yes, yes, present!” I answered with Nelli from afar, one “yes” for her, and one “yes” for me, just so the count came out correctly, just so all were present and accounted for, just so no one noticed my absence, so that I would have until six o’clock the following morning to make good my escape.

The day waned, the light reddened and then turned gray. Through the window I could see the tall bush by the wall. I shut my eyes and waited to hear the whistle. It was one minute to six. The girls would not whistle until they saw, through their windows, the guard being changed by the main entrance.

The second hand circled my watch. Last-minute doubts flashed through my mind. Could either I or they have forgotten the agreed-on signal? Perhaps they had already whistled and I hadn’t heard, or perhaps Nelli’s ruse hadn’t worked and my absence had been discovered.

Three . . . two . . . one second to six o’clock. I could hear noises coming from the entrance to the Villa. The window latch in my hand turned with a screech. I was about to shut it again when I heard the whistle. I leaped through the window head first, brushed past the bush in the corner, flung myself against the wall and began to climb. The rough stone was sharp and jagged, but I was no longer aware of its contours, for it seemed to have become one with my own body.

When I reached the top, I looked back at the roof of the building. It was still deserted. The guards had not yet arrived. Perhaps they were somewhere on the stairway, wondering what had come

over Nelli that she should have stopped them halfway up the stairs and begun to ply them with so many silly questions.

I grabbed hold of the wire at the top of the wall, but as I prepared to jump, I looked below me and froze. It wasn't the height of the wall that terrified me, but the coils of barbed wire angling down to the ground on the other side, on which I would surely land if I jumped. I could see myself helplessly impaled on the metal barbs, dangling between heaven and earth. It was frightful. I couldn't bring myself to do it. And yet I knew that if I didn't jump, if I hesitated on top of the wall a few seconds longer, the guards would discover me and all would be over.

I looked at the roof again: still empty, still no guards. I looked at the sky: empty, too, no guards there either. I looked down at the ground and realized for the first time that there were gaps between the wire loops through which it might be possible to fall freely. *Jump!* my body urged me. *Jump! Struggling in the wire you'll at least have a chance. A faceful of barbs is better than a bullet in the back.*

I jumped.

I thrashed wildly about in the wire. My coat was ripped and the skin on my thighs and hands was badly cut, but my feet were firmly on the ground.

There was still no one on the roof. In front of me was the low barbed-wire fence that I had seen so often from the top of the stairs. But now I saw what I had not been able to see then: From the top of the fence, on both sides, additional wire spiraled diagonally to the ground like the sides of a tent. I had planned to leap the barrier in a single bound, but now I could see no way of crossing it without becoming enmeshed in a sea of hooked barbs.

I plunged straight ahead and for several seconds lost consciousness completely. All I can remember is arms and legs flailing directionlessly up and down and the rusty barbs ravenously flaying my skin, as though they had been starving all this time for a taste of human flesh.

"Halt! Who's there?" a hoarse voice shouted in English. A bullet whistled in the air.

I didn't look back. My hands and feet struggled with the wire a moment longer, and then I was free and running to greet the mountains, which seemed to pull me toward them with a thousand magical, invisible strings.

"Halt!"

I took a deep breath and raced down the hillside, stumbling past rocks and stone huts. I fell, picked myself up, and continued to run, eager to reach the bottom of the slope so that I might begin the ascent into the intoxicating mountains.

As long as I was heading downhill the shooting seemed distant and removed, but as I reached bottom and started up the opposite slope, it gradually drew nearer, crackling at me from three sides.

In front of me the way was still clear. I looked desperately for a cave or a niche between the rocks where I might hide, remembering as I ran how in ancient times the Maccabees, and after them the Zealots, had hidden from the enemy in these same hills. The shots were closer now and exploding angrily above my head. On the downward slope I had been protected by the boulders and the Arab huts, but here on the bare mountainside the bullets made straight for my body.

One of them struck me in the leg. The wounds from the barbed wire and the rocks had failed to hurt me because they were my own; but this stung bitterly, for it was the work of men I did not know, who were shooting at me to kill.

I could tell from their footsteps that they were nearly upon me. I gasped, smarting with pain, and realized for the first time that I was not going to make it.

I turned to face them, the mountains at my back. I hadn't made it. I raised my hands, one after the other, the first as an admission of my failure, the second in acknowledgement of their triumph. They were my own hands, but as they rose above my head, I looked at them wonderingly in the gathering gloom of the evening surprised that they could seem at the same time to cower so helplessly before the threatening rifles and to point so defiantly at the heavens above, at God Himself, who had seen a solitary figure at bay in the mountains between sunset and moonrise, had

heard the exultant calls of her hunters, had witnessed the plea of her upraised hands, and had done absolutely nothing about it.

The Arab policemen panted and cursed as they seized me. One of them couldn't stop trembling; his teeth chattered and he hissed at me in a frightened voice, "Daughter of the devil! *Wallahi*, daughter of the devil!"

I don't recall being brought down the mountain or being put in a cell by myself in the main prison building, but I do remember being led through the streets of Bethlehem, flanked by a policeman on each side, my gray skirt still fastened with safety pins to my belt, revealing blue shorts underneath, through the holes in which one could see my open wounds. My legs were caked with blood and dirt, my lips were still rouged red, and all the colors of the rainbow raged before my eyes. An Arab crowd had gathered at the sound of the shots, and lined both sides of the street and mockingly looked on. The trembling hiss of the policeman still sounded in my ears: "Daughters of the devil! *Wallahi*, daughter of the devil!"

Doubtless he was awed and confounded by the fact that all the bullets he and his comrades had fired at me had not finished me. I myself, however, was taken aback by a different thought: All the time that I had been running for my life amid the hail of bullets, I had never once worried about the possibility of dying. Why?

One thing I was sure of: The reason wasn't that the thought of death didn't scare me or that I was capable of facing death calmly. On the contrary, I knew perfectly well that if I actually came face to face with death I would find it unbearable to look at.

Face to face with death I would have to shut my eyes, for I would want not to die but to live, like Eliahu Hakim, who, when he was led to the gallows in Cairo, finally consented to be blindfolded before mounting the scaffold. His first reaction had been to refuse.

"What do I need a blindfold for?" he said to the hangman. "Can I not go forth to my death with open eyes? Why tie my hands behind me? I assure you, I have no intention of resisting."

But that was only his first reaction. A second later he reversed himself. He began to feel how life continued to assert itself within

his body, from which it would not willingly depart, how a black fear shrouded his heart which pounded furiously in an uproar of blood, how a vision of rising suns and the light of dawns flooded his eyes. A second later he turned to the hangman and said, "But perhaps it's really best that way. You'd better do it." And he submitted to the blindfold and extended his hands to be bound.

Perhaps it's really best that way.

Eliahu's bodily eyes were shut, but the eyes of his spirit remained open, and with them he saw many rising suns and many blinding lights, and he sang in their glare as he mounted the scaffold, and even as he choked in the noose of death. The eyes of the spirit could bear to look, but the eyes of the body could not, for like the passionate blood they lusted desperately after life, life now and forever and without end.

"*Hallo, Abdallah, na'am . . .*"

A clear, high voice was speaking in Arabic. It rose out of the darkness of my cell, earnestly and importantly: "*Hallo . . . na'am, na'am . . .*"

I tried to stand, but sharp pains stabbed through my legs and forced me down again. I had no idea where I was. In the dark I could make out my ankle, my right hand, and my two thighs, because of the white bandages swathing them. I was sitting on a hard *borsh*, an unusually hard *borsh*, which seemed to extend the length and breadth of the floor, up the walls, and across the ceiling so that I couldn't tell whether I was sitting on the floor looking at the ceiling or on the ceiling looking at the floor. The middle of the endless wall across from me looked like somebody's idea of a practical joke.

I wanted to look for the door, but I was afraid—afraid that there was none, for it seemed inconceivable that one would ever be allowed to leave such a cell. It was impossible to imagine it empty, without an occupant. I felt cold and cramped. My feet and hands were heavy, but my head was hollow, like a vacuum; thoughts came and went through it as they pleased, unmolested.

I shut my eyes and envisioned the four walls moving toward me until they pressed against my body, the ceiling being lowered over my head until I wanted to run, to scream, but there was no longer any air in which the sound could carry.

"*Hallo, Abdallah, na'am.*" It was the same voice as before, but now it was coming from somewhere outside my cell.

I opened my eyes. The walls were where they should be, the ceiling was still high above me. The Arabic words from outside kept repeating themselves as though to protect me from the nightmare I had just had and to bring me back to myself. I was overcome by a feeling of thanksgiving and in sudden joy I remembered being caught in the high wire fence, running down the hillside and crashing into rocks and thorns. There were the caves I never found and there were bullets . . . my two upraised hands . . . and the endless eyes staring from both sides of the unending street.

There had been unconcealed astonishment on the face of Mr. Thomas, the prison warden, as he stood before me, one cheek twitching perceptibly. He couldn't speak. Several times he approached me as if about to vent the full fury of his spleen, but each time he backed away again, glowering.

"Dismissed! Go back to your watch!" he bawled at the two Arab policemen who had apprehended me, frowning at them as though it were all their fault.

When they were gone, he began to twirl his baton, tapping it now and then against the palm of his hand. Suddenly he rapped one of the two attendants in the room on the shoulder and shouted at her, as though she were forcing him to repeat an order he had already given: "Take her away! Take her away from here! Get her out of here! Put her in solitary."

As the attendants were dragging me off, Mr. Thomas brandished his stick in my face.

"What did you do?" he burst out violently. "Why did you do it, damn it all?"

"I wanted to escape." Why, damn it all, did I sound so cheerful? "I was trying to es-cape."

"Hallo, Abdallah, na'am . . ."

How could I possibly have wondered whether or not there was a door here? Hadn't I banged on it last night with my shoes until the warden finally came?

"First aid," I demanded.

"First aid?" He glared at me angrily. "No first aid!"

"First aid!" I insisted.

It wasn't that my wounds were hurting me; even if they had been, I wouldn't have been aware of it. But I was in a fighting mood; frustrated in my break for freedom, I had a surplus of energy to work off.

The warden went away. I banged harder. Between one thump and the next I heard a distant muffled answer. At the time I thought it was simply my own echo, for I did not know that the five other Jewish girls in the building had found out what happened and were noisily demonstrating their sympathy.

"Thump! Thump!" went my shoes on the door.

"Th-u-mp! Th-u-mp!" came the muffled echo.

The warden returned.

I banged on the door. "First aid!"

He went away without answering. Before I could start banging again, however, he returned. He opened the door, remained standing for a moment in the corridor, then entered the cell. A pistol was strapped to his hip, and hugged close to his chest were some jars, bandages, and a large bottle of iodine.

"The doctor will see you tomorrow morning," he said. "If you managed to survive the bullets on the hillside, you shouldn't have any difficulty living until then." He laughed at his own joke, which evidently he had prepared in advance, and opened the bottle of iodine.

The fight suddenly had gone out of me. Now I was really in pain. He swabbed clean the bloodier of my legs, exposing a deep cut in the thigh, into which he proceeded to pour iodine as though he were filling a basin. The iodine cauterized my flesh. I felt as though I were burning up, but I bit my lips and struggled to keep from crying out, struggled to keep every cell in my body under control so that no groan should break forth from me to give Mr. Thomas pleasure.

I could not tell what time it was because my watch had been taken from me in the warden's office, but it was getting on toward dawn. The door of my cell swung open, and an attendant entered with a steaming tin dish.

"Before you eat," she said, "come with me to wash up."

To eat? To wash? Did she actually mean that I was to be allowed to wash and to eat? In such a cell one could stay alive perfectly well without eating; one simply had to nourish oneself on the living death that surrounded one.

I limped after the attendant on my sprained right ankle. Just as we were about to turn into the corridor, she came to a full stop and began to laugh. Two steps away, in the doorway of the cell directly opposite my own, I saw two little Negro boys, so thin that their blackness belonged to their bones. Each was holding on with all his might to a black, barefoot leg. The two legs, spread far apart and planted firmly on the ground like two columns of dark bronze, led diagonally upward to a woman's waist. She was a tall Negro. An expression of disgust and infinite contempt was on her face, and she looked as though at any moment she might spit it all out into somebody's eye. Her head was bent forward in anticipation, and her coal-black eyes glowed steadily with a blue flame. The lines of her face were statue-still; her nostrils quivered incessantly, so that one sensed a turbulence beneath the surface of her skin.

An attendant was trying to push her through the open cell door, but she stood her ground and wouldn't budge an inch. The turnkey who had brought me my breakfast offered to help, and the two of them fell on her together, only to be contemptuously thrust away by a disdainful movement of her hands. The two little children began to wail in strange, thin voices. Like a portrait abandoning its frame, the Negro moved from her place and struck out at the attendants, driving back first one and then the other with tremendous strength. Then she resumed her former position. The children renewed their grip on her legs, and she leaned once more against the door of the cell, contemptuous and proud.

Suddenly she stirred again. Narrowing her eyes and wrinkling her brow, she cupped her hand to her ear as though listening to something from afar; then, with a single motion, so swift that she seemed to leave her outline behind her, she wheeled and cantered off to one corner of the cell, where she raised one hand again, this time as though she were holding the receiver of a telephone to her ear. In the same clear, high voice that I had heard before, she

spoke into an imaginary mouthpiece: "Hallo, Abdallah, hallo . . . *na'am*. I hear every word, my king. . . . King Farouk, too? . . . No! Not Farouk! . . . Hallo, Abdallah."

She went on talking with Abdallah. The conversation was apparently on the subject of politics, for it abounded on her side in many shrewd references to administrative problems, emergency committees, alliances, and palace revolutions.

The attendants could not stop laughing. Between one hysterical peal and the next, the turnkey who had brought me my breakfast managed to gasp out, "God preserve us, but she's crazy. *Wallahi*, what a lunatic!"

But really, there was nothing to laugh about: there was true majesty in the woman's gestures and expressions, and dignity and thoughtfulness in her voice. Nor was there anything sad or pathetic about her. For several seconds I could scarcely believe that she wasn't actually talking to someone real, about matters every bit as important as she pretended.

She put down the receiver, her face relaxing into the satisfied expression of someone who has successfully carried out a difficult task. Nodding, she walked proudly back to the doorway of the cell, where she stood, immobile as before, a child clutching each leg.

In their confusion the attendants called for help, and were joined by two colleagues. All four threw themselves bodily on her, detached her from her children, and finally succeeded in driving her into the cell. Two of them remained to lock the door, while the others led the children away.

The Negro screamed once and fell silent. She did not scream in the same voice with which she had spoken over the "telephone," but in a voice that was meant for nobody and came from nobody, that seemed to emanate from some hidden, unknowable world of its own. There were no tears in it, no resentment, no bereavement, no fear—it was just a naked scream.

Then one could hear her moving rapidly about her cell, saying in her familiar tone: "Hallo, Abdallah, hallo."

Now that she was safely behind bars, the two attendants wantonly jangled their keys and giggled dumbly. Smoothing out

their uniforms, they went over to the door of the cell together and jeered through the grating:

"Perhaps Your Grace would be so kind as to recommend us to King Abdallah?"

"Would you be so good as to give our regards to King Farouk?"

The Arab prisoners who were busy sweeping the corridor shook their heads sadly at the attendants' raillery. "*Haram,*" they said. "*Haram. Kullu-min-Allah.*"

On our way to the washroom the attendant told me the woman's story:

Yesterday the woman had been found roaming the streets of Bethlehem with her two children, who were naked as the day they were born and chattering with cold. A crowd of Arabs had gathered around her. She was making a speech when she was taken into custody and brought to the prison. She let herself be led quite willingly, her two children hanging onto her legs, until she came to the cell. There she balked, so the attendants called for the help of the policemen in the yard. Finally they left her standing in the narrow, dank corridor and withdrew to talk things over. No sooner had they done this than she leaped from her place, scooped up her two children, placed them on her back, one on top of the other, and darted into the cell, slamming the door noisily behind her.

When I returned to my cell from the washroom, Dr. Perlmann was waiting for me. I had seen her once before in the Villa, when she had come to pay a routine call, but this was the first time that I had actually been a patient of hers. There had been a long struggle before the Jewish prisoners had succeeded in having the regular Arab doctor replaced by a Jew. They had fought hard for this privilege not because their bodies possessed any underground secrets which they sought to conceal, but simply because, in the alien atmosphere of the prison, any contact with a Jew from the outside, even if he or she were not "one of ours," was a source of comfort and encouragement. Dr. Perlmann was not one of ours, nor did she belong to the underground at all, but we all belonged to her and she took an abiding interest in the welfare of every one of us.

She was not "for" the Lechi, but neither was she against it. She was for life, against death. That there was a kind of death which might also serve the purposes of life, was a distinction too subtle to be grasped by the childlike faith of such an elderly woman. And yet she always said that, when she came to treat us, she would go away feeling that we were healthier than she, and this stimulant to our pride did as much to cure us as any of her medicines. It was easy, after all, to pride ourselves on our bravery before our friends, or even before those not particularly sympathetic to our cause, but in the presence of Dr. Perlmann, from whom the very concepts of violent struggle and self-sacrifice in battle were far removed, it was a definite challenge. Nor was it easy for her to display openly her sense of pride in us, for she had to contend with both the watchful eyes of the attendants and with her own inner misgivings. Nevertheless, between pills and injections and professional worries about our health, she somehow managed to bolster our sense of self-worth.

Now she was worried about my wounds. She bandaged them carefully, stopping every now and again to ask, "But how were you ever able to do it?"

It was evening. No rays of sunlight had entered my cell in the course of the day, but the opaque murk that surrounded me had had rays of its own, which now withdrew into the wall, giving way to blackness. Lights in the corridor were switched on. An attendant entered with a bowl. "Your friends were allowed to prepare your dinner," she said. She put it down and left me once more alone.

As I bit into the small loaf of bread that had been baked for me, I heard a crinkling sound. Inside the loaf was a narrow strip of paper rolled into a cylinder. It was a note from the girls up above, who were concerned about me and wanted to let me know that my parents had come to visit me in the morning. Across the corridor the Negro woman was talking on the telephone again. I wondered what had brought my mother and father to the prison on a day not set aside for visiting. Could it be that they had learned of my unsuccessful escape?

The next day I was told by some Arab prisoners who had been in the courtyard when my parents arrived that they had known nothing whatever about what had happened. It was not until they requested permission to see me and were taken to the warden's office that they found out about it from Mr. Thomas himself. Only years later did I learn from my mother that she had known all along that something was wrong. The night of my attempted jail-break, she told me, she had a dream in which she saw me covered with blood, running among trees and calling out for help. She woke with a cry and awakened my father: "I had a nightmare about Geula. We must go to Bethlehem in the morning."

"But it's not a visiting day."

My mother was insistent. A dream was a dream. And so they had come.

When my mother told me this, I didn't attempt to look for a rational explanation. At a time when everything around me seemed so extraordinary, why should I have refused to believe this? Had I seen no miracles occur in broad daylight that I should balk at the occurrence of yet another one in the mysterious night?

The next day my foot was put in a plaster cast. Some prisoners were brought in to clean my cell and the attendant informed me that the commissioner of prisons—the "big *modir*," as he was called, to distinguish him from Mr. Thomas, the "little *modir*"—had arrived on a tour of inspection and wanted to see me.

He arrived in a delegation of three: First came the big *modir*, then the little *modir*, and last of all came Jamila, the Arab head matron. Now, as always, she was right behind Mr. Thomas. When the two of them made their daily rounds of the prisoners' cells, Mr. Thomas entered each cell first and then she entered; once inside, she stood behind him; when he spoke, she listened behind him; and when he left, she quickly repeated in her own words everything he had said to us, and then left behind him. She was taller than she looked because she always stood at an angle, her head thrust forward and her hips thrust backward. Her face—had its Maker ever bothered to finish the work He began—resembled that of a horse. Her thick lips did not quite cover her protruding

teeth, which seemed perfectly formed for a bit, while her cheeks were long and sagging and she had equine eyes. A white kerchief was always around her head. The one really human thing about her was her malignant grin: everything she said and everything she merely thought was funneled through its curve.

"Get up!" she snarled at me from behind Mr. Thomas, who was standing behind the big *modir*.

I remained lying on the *borsh*.

From the very beginning of my imprisonment in Bethlehem, even before I was transferred to the Villa, something in me had rebelled against the custom of standing up whenever Jamilla or Mr. Thomas entered a cell. The girls had their own way of handling this. Whenever they heard footsteps approaching, they would quickly get to their feet, so that by the time anyone came into the room they would already be aimlessly up and about. This tactic, which I too adopted, was in some ways more frustrating to our jailers than a simple refusal to stand would have been; yet at the same time, it was clearly an admission of our weakness, of our powerlessness to do anything else. Now I refused to make use of this trick. Having been so close to freedom, to the mountains and the sky, had given me the extra strength to reject any course of behavior in which there was even a trace of submission to my captors.

When Jamila saw that I had no intention of getting up, she was at a complete loss. She knew how to carry out directions when Mr. Thomas gave them, knew well enough how to transmit his orders to others, but now that he was standing quietly behind the big *modir's* back, she was baffled.

In desperation she took hold of me and began to drag me to my feet. The big *modir* rebuked her: "Let go of her! Can't you see she can't stand up?"

"But she can. She can walk, too; she can even——"

"That will be all!" commanded the big *modir* and took a step toward me. His army uniform looked as though it had been forced onto his hefty body only with difficulty and had been belted and buttoned to keep it from coming apart. He cleared his throat several times without opening his mouth. The folds of fat between

the wrinkles on his aging face gave him an over-all expression of good humor.

"So," he said to me, "you missed your broadcasts, what? You poor girl, you poor silly girl!" His voice grew more imperious. "Well, now, what exactly have you accomplished?"

"I didn't escape!" I shouted, more angry at myself for having consented to answer, than at him.

"You didn't escape?" He began to laugh. "I'm sorry. Really, I'm so sorry. Why didn't you ask us to help you?" Now all three of them were practically rolling on the floor.

"She di-di-didn't escape," howled the big *modir* once more after they had all quieted down, but it no longer struck anyone as funny.

He seemed less sure of himself as he turned to me and said, "Well, now, you didn't really think that we were going to give you a prize for your efforts, did you? You're a lucky girl. If you hadn't been caught the way you were, you would have been killed. Pure luck. Don't you worry about it though. We'll see to it that you'll want to live. We'll see to it that you won't want to go and try to get yourself killed again. You'll see for yourself! After ten days in solitary you won't want to escape any more at all. You'll like it well enough right here in prison."

The big *modir* waved his stick at me and left the cell. The little *modir* waved his stick and followed. Jamila stayed behind for a moment, as though trying to make up her mind.

"You're to be here for ten days," she said to me at last as if she had just come to the decision herself. "Once you've been here for a while, you won't want to escape any more, you silly girl. You'll like it right here in prison." Jamila was amazed at herself. Who would have thought she had so many clever things to say?

As soon as she left, the Negro woman was on the telephone again. Hazily, as though from very far away, I could hear Jamila translating her conversation with King Abdallah for the benefit of the two *modirs*. The men's laughter echoed down the corridor, but the woman only talked louder and more defiantly, and her voice prevailed, for I could hear it in my cell long after the men left. "Hallo, Abdallah, *na'am*."

THE LIGHT in our room was out, leaving only the weak light in the corridor, from which Sarah, the one Jewish attendant in the prison, had just finished bidding us her customary good night through the peephole. A moment later she returned, and said to me, "I completely forgot that tomorrow is the day of your trial. I won't be here in the morning, so let me wish you a good day now." Then she left.

Dvoraleh and Bracha climbed down from the window sill where they had been sitting together in the darkness for a long time and got into bed. Bracha's face was buried in her pillow and her long hair almost covered her back. All of a sudden a single inchoate scream for help pierced the wall of the room. It was not repeated. I jumped from my bed and ran to the door. The light shone dimly in the corridor, no attendants were running up the staircase, and the scream had fragmented into numerous sharp groans which gradually subsided.

"It's nothing," said Dvoraleh, who had not moved from her bed. "You'll get used to it. It's Hatifa the Lesbian, the one with the carnivorous red eyes and the brutal voice. She must have found herself a new victim, a new prisoner. The old ones don't scream any more when she molests them. Maybe it's that little peasant who was brought in this afternoon."

The silence that reigned now throughout the prison was different from the silence before the scream. It was quiet enough to hear a pin drop both inside our room and out, but unlike before, all our thoughts were now focused on a single fearful point.

"Bracha," I said, without having intended to speak out loud.

"Yes?" She sounded as though she had been expecting me to ask something.

"Nothing," I said. "I only wanted to hear somebody's voice."

Bracha's head remained in her pillow.

"It's strange," I remarked.

Bracha didn't ask what was strange. If she had, I wouldn't have known what to answer. Was it strange that it should seem to me that my trial had already taken place long ago in the past? Or was it strange that the little peasant's silence should be keeping me awake? Or was it strange that Dvorableh should be tossing and turning under her blanket in the bed by the door?

"Why aren't you sleeping?" I asked her.

"I am sleeping," she said.

I could hear the churchbells of Bethlehem ringing in the distance. It was midnight. Dvorableh must have heard them, too, because she said to me, "Beginning tomorrow, you'll start to count the days."

Four months had already gone by without my counting them: four months B.C.—Before the Count. Tomorrow, the twenty-sixth of May, 1946, I would begin. For how long?

In the Villa I had met a prisoner who had given up counting the days. She had begun, when she was handed a year's sentence, by drawing forty-eight lines on the wall near her bed, one for each Sabbath in the Jewish year. Every Saturday night, before she went to sleep, she would cross out one of the lines. When the last line had been crossed, she was called into the warden's office and given a year's extension on her sentence. She returned to her room, drew forty-eight more lines on the wall, crossed them out with a single horizontal stroke, and added one more small vertical line, which she left as it was.

"Lalmekema, Kula, Lalmekema, Kula."

The voice in which the attendant told me to prepare myself for the trip to Jerusalem was full of human compassion. The order may not have started out that way when it left Mr. Thomas' office, but by the time it reached me, it had been modulated many times.

Mr. Thomas shouted it to his assistant, who shouted it to the attendant standing outside the office door, who passed it on to the attendant posted on the first floor, who passed it on to the attendant on the second floor, who passed it on to the attendant on the third floor. When she hoarsely passed it on to me through the door of my cell, she transmitted with it all the emotion and solemnity that it had picked up along the way, not a little of which was contributed by the pitying sighs of the Arab prisoners who were cleaning the corridors at the time. When they saw me emerge from my cell, they left off their work, gathered around me, and lamented my going in a medley of groans, phrases, and tears: "*Haram, va haram. . .*"

Among them all only Khalisa kept silent. When I had first met her in the jail in Jaffa, she had been awaiting her trial; now it was over, and she was serving a six-month sentence in Bethlehem for the theft of one chicken. More than any other Arab prisoner, I wanted to say good-by to her.

"Until we meet again, Khalisa," I said.

She took a hesitating step forward and whispered to me, as though she were reciting a carefully rehearsed secret: "Don't be afraid, Kula; they won't do a thing to you. You haven't stolen anything; you haven't robbed a single person. They're sure to let you go, Kula. Just tell them the truth. Tell them that never in your whole life did you ever steal——"

"*Yallah*, don't block the way," angrily shouted Sabaat, the attendant assigned to escort me downstairs. "Move on!" She drove Khalisa and her companions back to their work.

I was glad that of all the attendants it was Sabaat who would accompany me. She was a kindhearted woman and I never could figure out how she had ended up where she was; perhaps, had she not had the job of jailer, no one would have noticed her kindness, which owed much to the daily injustice by which she was surrounded. In a different environment her heart might simply have gone to sleep inside her stiff, wooden body.

I had already said good-by to the Lechi and Etsel girls in the washroom that morning. Now, as I descended the stairs with Sabaat, I could see their heads bobbing up and down behind the

gratings of their cell doors. Bracha alone didn't wave. I pictured her hands tight by her sides, clenched into fists.

A Scottish lieutenant, who was in charge of the convoy that would take me to the courthouse in Jerusalem, was waiting in the warden's office. He had a round face and his lips had a way of champing together when he spoke. Every now and then he glanced at me as though I were some dangerous wild animal which was liable to turn on its captors at any moment.

The door leading from the office to the courtyard outside was partly open, and Sabaat quickly steered me through it. When I had walked through this same courtyard upon my arrival four months ago, the first prisoner I had seen had been the large black Selma. Now I saw her again, watering the flowers. When she spotted me, she came running over and planted herself before me with her dripping sprinkler in her hand. I didn't realize at first that she was crying. Her eyes did not have any tears in them, and had it not been for her quivering lips and her moaning, there would have been no way of knowing.

"Are you crying, Selma?" I asked.

"Don't go with them, ya Kula. Don't go. They won't bring you back again, the sons-of-dogs. They're murderers, sons-of-whores."

She lowered her eyes for a minute, as though searching the ground. When she looked up again, it was with a series of savage curses, each more terrible than the one before.

"Get out of the way, bitch!" Sabaat swore good-naturedly. "Go water your flowers, you devil!"

"Court!" proclaimed the crier in the courtroom.

I nearly jumped from the defendant's bench. The three judges were striding down the aisle, and the cry seemed like an alarm against bandits. It didn't inspire reverence for the representatives of justice, but unreasoning terror before a barbarous invader.

"You are charged with the following two crimes: "Possession of a radio transmitter without a permit from the proper authorities, and illegal possession of four revolvers and forty-eight bullets."

The face of the presiding judge was thin and suave like his

voice. As he read from the document in his hand, he kept looking at me with hatred on his face, as though the two of us had been close personal enemies for years.

"How do you plead?" asked the court interpreter in Hebrew from the small, dais where he sat like a peddler who carries all his carefully weighed wares in his mouth.

"I don't need a translation," I said. "I will not take part in the trial, and whatever I have to say I will save for my final declaration."

I sat down again and looked out the window, past the heads of the newspapermen seated to my left. Two acacia trees were pressing against the crossbars of the window. I could still feel in my fingers the warm touch of my parents, who a moment ago had grasped my hand in marvelous silence and then gone back to their places in the audience at the rear of the courtroom. Now I could feel their eyes resting on my back while I stared at the acacias outside. During all the long weeks in prison, the thought of my parents had never once entered my mind. All that time my thoughts had been with the Lechi, and so when the actual moment of the trial arrived and I was ushered into the courtroom amid soldiers and plain-clothes men and made to sit on a bench with Sabaat at my side and three policemen stationed behind me, I felt as though I were simply an extension of the vast world of the Lechi.

Then I saw my parents and suddenly I was just myself again. An agreeable weakness overcame me, wafting back the pleasant incense of childhood days. My parents had come to shield and protect me, just as they used to do when I was little and the children in the neighborhood picked on me. I wanted to bury my head in my mother's lap. Just a minute ago we had stood facing each other, and the old reassuring look in her eyes said, "I'm here. As long as I'm here you needn't worry that they will hurt you."

"Why do you keep looking out the window?" asked Sabaat, bringing me back to the reality of the courtroom.

The interpreter had sat down and the prosecutor rose to his feet. He faced the judges as he spoke:

"On the eighteenth of February of this year," he related, "a police patrol spotted two young men moving back and forth suspi-

ciously in front of a house on Hashomer Street in Tel Aviv. The men were seized. Then the police noticed an antenna on the roof of the building. A call was sent out for reinforcements and the building was surrounded. When the search party reached the attic, the door of which was open, it discovered four loaded revolvers, a radio transmitter still warm from use, and a woman's purse containing identification papers, made out in the name of Shoshana Halevi and containing a photograph of the defendant, who was later found hiding in one of the apartments in the building."

The prosecutor gestured with the upper half of his body, never glancing at the audience, like an amateur actor who thinks it necessary to forget his surroundings before he can fully identify with his role. Apart from his voice, the only sound in the room came from the reporters' scratching pens.

A witness in an army tunic began to present the evidence that had been found in the attic on the night of the raid. From a wooden case on the witness stand he took out a number of revolvers. I tried to make out the gun I knew so well, the one that had been on the table that night by the side of the microphone, but the witness had already moved on to his next exhibit. The microphone itself. Yes, there it was, testifying against me.

The reporters on my left were still bent over their pads. What a terrible sound their writing made, I thought idly. They wrote down what people said so that still other people might read it. And they themselves? They didn't exist. All of a sudden the pens stopped scratching. An air of expectancy filled the room. I looked at Sabaat and at the same moment heard the interpreter inquiring of me, in the name of the presiding judge, whether I wished to make a statement. I had written it all out the night before, on a sheet of smooth, unlined paper. Only now the narrow spaces separating the words and the lines seemed to grow smaller and smaller. I blinked my eyes, trying to make some sense of the animated scribble before me, but the words I knew I had written down were nowhere to be found. The judges were regarding me impatiently; the eyes of the spectators were fixed upon me; the reporters' pens were poised in midair as if to pounce all at once on their notebooks, and I couldn't begin, couldn't read a word.

How overjoyed I had been yesterday at every new syllable

of my declaration! Its outline had been suggested to me in a letter from Gra via the underground mail, but the actual phrasing had been left to me, and all week long I had struggled to improve it, to make sure that every word sounded exactly right. For every original sentence that I wrote two more had to be written. And now it seemed as though it had all been a waste of time.

The presiding judge conferred in a whisper with his colleagues. The prosecutor whispered something to the interpreter who was just turning to me when I began to speak:

“The defendant declares that it is beneath her to reply to the accusations of the court. A plea of guilty or not guilty is meaningful only when the accused recognizes the authority of the court to sit in judgement on her. An accusation can be legitimately made only when the accused has the right to file countercharges of her own.”

When the interpreter was through, I continued:

“I do not recognize your authority to judge me, and so I do not owe you an account of what I did or did not do. I, a Hebrew fighting woman, a member of the Freedom Fighters of Israel, consider you to be intruders who are subjugating our homeland. There is only one body of law which I have accepted of my own free will, and that is the law of the Hebrew underground.”

The newspapermen were writing as fast as they could. The interpreter, having fallen behind, had given up the pretense of perfect accuracy and was racing ahead as fast as he could go. But the judge interrupted him.

“The defendant’s remarks are immaterial,” he chirruped. “Politics bear no relevance to the charges, which have to do with a criminal offense. If the defendant has anything she wishes to say in regard to the crime of which she stands accused, if she wishes to comment on the presence of the revolvers or the transmitter in the attic, or about anything else that took place on the night of her arrest, she may proceed. Political declarations bear no relevance to this trial.”

My response was immediate:

“The reason I do not recognize the authority of this court is not that the particular regulations it seeks to apply in my case are

invalid, but that its very presence in this land is an intrusion that cannot be tolerated by the Jewish people. It is not the law that we oppose, but the makers of that law, and we do not care to distinguish between good lawmakers among you and bad ones. Any intruder in this land is our enemy. We, the Freedom Fighters of Israel, have our own set of emergency regulations: Any British policeman, soldier, or detective in this land is our enemy and there is only one sentence that can be given him—death!”

The courtroom was in an uproar. The presiding judge leaped from his seat.

“Make her stop!” he shouted, pounding his gavel on the table. “Make her stop! Make her sit down!”

The entire audience was on its feet. The judge threw down his gavel and threatened to discontinue the trial. “If the defendant insists on proceeding in this manner, I shall be forced to close the case,” he announced.

I insisted.

The interpreter sat down. The judge turned to his colleagues and pretended not to hear me. My voice was the only weapon left me. I raised it as high as it would go: “Between the Jewish people and the British aggressor there can be only one relationship: that of war! I am here in court not to defend myself, but to carry on that war. I, who belong to an organization sworn to oppose you to the end, stand before you in what you call a house of justice. But in judging me, you are judging the will of the Jewish people to gain its freedom, a will that no power in the world is strong enough to crush. Do you really think that by imprisoning me and my comrades you can achieve such a thing? Can the spirit of man be imprisoned? It is not we who gave birth to that spirit, but that spirit which gave birth to us, and our death will not diminish it.”

The interpreter continued to remain silent. How was it, then, that the judge seemed to know what I was saying? He interrupted me to point out that under the provisions of the emergency regulations there was no possibility of my being sentenced to die.

The newspapermen burst into loud laughter.

This enraged me more than the judge’s remark. “I know noth-

ing.” I said, “about the articles of the law by which I am being judged, nor do I care to know. I do know, however, that there is a provision according to which I could be given the death sentence. Whether or not you have the courage to apply it is another matter. But whatever your sentence is, it cannot be just as long as I am denied the status of a prisoner of war.”

My declaration was ended, but I was not yet ready to sit down. Ever since Chisia’s trial I had known that there was one more thing I would want to say if I were ever accused in a British court. There had been no need to write it down.

“There is one more matter I would like to touch on, that concerning the role of women like me in the underground. When a Hebrew fighting woman is brought before you, you judges are in the habit of observing that she must have been enticed by others to do what she did. I would like to point out to you, therefore, that when it comes to fighting for one’s freedom, it is not necessary to entice anyone. The ideal for which one fights is in itself enticement enough. And if, in spite of this, there is something unusual about women in movements such as ours, it is simply that from time immemorial women have been particularly ready to sacrifice themselves for the creation of a new free life. If this is what you call enticement I welcome the charge.”

“Court!” intoned the court crier.

The judges did not wait for a translation. They rose noisily and headed for the door. While I doodled aimlessly on the back of my declaration, Sabaat looked at me pityingly, as though my fate had already been sealed.

“Court!” shouted the court crier.

The judges returned:

“The accused, Geula Cohen, alias Shoshanna Halevi, is found guilty on two counts. The crimes of which she stands convicted are serious ones. The court offers her a last opportunity to speak in her own behalf.”

The interpreter conveyed my reply: “The accused has nothing further to say.”

The presiding judge bit his lips. A new figure stepped onto the

witness stand, took the oath, and gave his name. Police Lieutenant Curtis. He was a character witness, and he had come to testify about the character of the Stern Gang, known also as the Freedom Fighters of Israel.

The Stern Gang, Lieutenant Curtis testified, was an obviously terroristic organization. It was a constant threat to human life. Many examples could be cited to bear this out: the attempted assassination of the High Commissioner, the murder of peaceable soldiers in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, the attacks on various police stations, and the assault on the barracks of the air-borne division, in which seven of His Majesty's soldiers were cold-bloodedly killed. There could be no doubt, Lieutenant Curtis explained to the judges, that the organization to which the accused belonged was of a criminal nature. Moreover, it showed every intention of continuing its activities in the future.

"And so if you will permit me to conclude, Your Honors," said Lieutenant Curtis, getting to his feet, "the activities and plans of the Stern Gang, also known as the Freedom Fighters of Israel, are a continual menace to the lives and general welfare of the citizens of this country."

For the first time since the trial had begun in the morning, the faces of the judges relaxed. They had undoubtedly been in need of such moral encouragement.

The crier announced that there would be a recess before my sentence was handed down. My parents were allowed to speak to me.

"Now they're going to sentence you," said my father, trying his best to sound calm and factual.

"They promised they wouldn't hang me," I said, trying hard to smile.

"Is there any chance of an acquittal?" my mother asked weakly.

I smiled. So, grimacingly, did my father. But my mother continued: "I told the lieutenant I wanted to testify about your character. Who knows your character better than I do?"

This time I didn't smile. I noticed my younger brother standing at her side.

"I brought him along so that you could see him," she said. "After all, you hardly know each other. Say hello to your sister, Yehoyada. No, shake her hand."

Two years ago, when I had left home, Yehoyada had been three years old. I could remember the day of his birth. Father returned from the hospital and began to recite the Book of Psalms, just as he always did when mother was in labor. Then he began to read the weekly portion of the Bible. He was in the middle of the chapter about Yehoyada the Priest when the news arrived that a son had been born. When my mother returned with my brother from the hospital, his name was awaiting him.

Instead of shaking my hand, Yehoyada groped for Father's hand.

But Father was lost in thought. Suddenly, despairingly, he said, "Four revolvers, the judge said. How many years can they give you for four revolvers?"

A reporter who overheard the question laughed and answered from a distance, "It's not the number of the revolvers, mister, it's the number of the article in the law book."

But still my father asked, "How many years can they give you for four revolvers?"

"Maybe five and maybe fifteen," I said.

"Five?" said my mother.

"Fifteen?" My father was incredulous.

Those were the numbers that had been bandied about in prison. One of the girls had thought five, another fifteen. I couldn't remember who had said fifteen, but I knew it was Chisia who had said five. She insisted it wouldn't be more.

Perhaps she didn't really believe it in her head, but Chisia had a tendency to think with her heart.

"Court!" the crier announced in a voice that sounded like the rattle of a rusty tin can.

The three judges strode pompously to their seats.

For the first time I turned around to look at my parents. Was emotion getting the better of me now that I was about to be sentenced? Was I simply afraid to look at the supercilious face of the presiding judge? It could have been either. The truth was,

though, that I hated him much more than I feared him. Only now hate was no longer enough to support me. Nor were the words of my declaration, nor were any words or symbols at all, no matter how soulful or divine. I wanted to be loved. Only flesh and blood could love. So I turned to look at my parents, who were sitting in the audience behind me.

The newspapermen were poised over their pads. They must have already written the word "Sentence," I thought, underlined it, and followed it with a colon.

The presiding judge had still to rise and announce my sentence. The spectators began to cough uncertainly, impatiently. Suddenly a hubbub broke out among the press corps. At first I thought that it was simply a part of the general tension, but as the noise steadily mounted, I realized that the reporters were genuinely excited over something. Then I heard one say to a companion in a loud voice, "Well, what do you make of it? Dr. Scheib has escaped from the clinic!"

I had never met Dr. Scheib, alias Eldad, personally, but I knew him well nonetheless. "The Doctor," we used to call him, and in reading his writings or posting them on the walls of buildings, we felt as though we were his intimates without ever having seen him. Many of his contributions to our newspaper and our radio broadcasts had been written from a cell within a cell, for "the Doctor" had spent much of his time in jail immured in a plaster cast. In trying to escape from the police station after his arrest, he had leaped from a window and broken his spine. He was carried on a stretcher to the prison camp in Latrun and from there he was periodically brought for treatment to the orthopedic clinic of Dr. Treu in Jerusalem. The last of these visits occurred on the day of my trial.

While Eldad was in Dr. Treu's consulting room, another stretcher was carried into the clinic by three male nurses. Under the white blanket, a pistol in his hand, lay Betsaleli. The "male nurses" who were also armed, elbowed their way past the patients in the waiting room. As soon as the stretcher was laid on the ground, the "sick man" leaped to his feet with his gun drawn and stormed inside.

Eldad was being examined by Dr. Treu under the eyes of a police sergeant. When the sergeant reached for his Tommy gun, Betsaleli shot him in the thigh. Meanwhile Dov, in command of the operation, disarmed the two policemen who were waiting outside by the patrol wagon. With the help of two "nurses," Eldad was hustled outside to a waiting car, which immediately sped off.

Now Eli, who had been sitting all the while in the shoeshine stall across the street, ready to provide covering fire if necessary, could take a deep breath. He waited for the shoeshine boy to give his shoes a last flourishing stroke, paid him for his services, and sauntered off.

Hearing the news of Eldad's escape, I felt an intoxicating sense of delight, as though I had been secretly given my freedom and the judges who sat facing me had been sentenced to defeat. Perhaps this was why the voice of the presiding judge as he announced my sentence seemed so insignificant:

"For illegal possession of a radio transmitter, you are sentenced to two years. For illegal possession of weapons, you are sentenced to seven years. All together, nine years."

I could hear one of the reporters whispering triumphantly to a friend, "What did I tell you? Who was right?"

But the judge hadn't finished:

"The offenses were committed at the same time. The court recommends that the sentences be served concurrently, over a period of seven years. The court feels that the defendant should be given this much special consideration."

As he sat down, the judge ran his hand over his wig. For the first time I noticed the artificial curls on it, almost snakelike in their appearance.

"How many years?" Sabaat asked.

I didn't answer. Someone in the audience had begun to sing "Hatikvah." It was my mother. I felt like crawling into a hole in the ground.

But if I had known then what I learned later—that at the moment my mother began to sing my five-year-old brother was lying at her feet having fainted from hunger or exhaustion—I

would have looked at her with wonder and admiration, instead of staring embarrassedly at the floor. If I had known that then, I would have understood that "Hatikvah" was an outlet for the cry of pain which she restrained herself from uttering in the presence of her daughter for fear of seeming weak and undignified. And yet the pain was there; her little son was slumped unconscious on the floor, and if she didn't do something she would choke. So she stood up and sang "Hatikvah."

Little by little other voices joined in. The policemen made no attempt to interfere. All the while that the audience was singing Sabaat stood beside me with her mouth agape, shaking her head from side to side as though she herself had just been sentenced.

A convoy of armored cars was waiting outside. I was led into a patrol wagon. The driver stepped on the gas and the vehicle lurched forward and drove off. Sabaat swayed in her seat and looked fearfully at the policeman sitting across from her: the barrel of his Tommy gun was pointing directly at her chest. The sight of kind old Sabaat earnestly hunching her shoulders as if to protect her heart from the gun was more pathetic than comic. Soon, however, the policeman unconsciously adjusted his weapon so that it was pointing at me.

The girls rushed to the doors of their cells when they saw me coming. "How many years?" they called out.

"The Doctor escaped," I answered.

I DIDN'T hold top rank in Bethlehem prison for very long. Before many weeks had gone by Dvora Kalfuss returned from the courthouse in Jerusalem with fifteen years, and not long after that four more Lechi girls arrived with life sentences. The four had been arrested together, but they arrived in prison two by two. We had been waiting for them ever since the night of June 18, 1946, when we had heard over the radio about the operation in which they had been captured.

That night, like all our other nights in prison, we had waited eagerly for it to be time for the fifteen-minute news broadcast we were permitted to hear over the radio in the corridor. While we waited, Bracha, Dvora, and I stretched out on one of the beds in our cell with a three-day-old newspaper that the attendant on duty had just given us. We searched it from one end to the other, looking for Lechi names. At the bottom of a page, in an obscurely worded notice, we read: "Two suspicious young men have been arrested in Netanya." The three of us looked up thoughtfully at the exact same moment; I tried to go over in my mind all the people I knew who conceivably might have been the two boys referred to. On the last page of the paper we came across another notice, without any caption at all. It read: "Early yesterday morning squads of policemen tarred over terrorist posters that had been put up during the night." Simultaneously we began to laugh. Tar?

There was a knocking on the wall of our cell. Chisia, Dvora, and Nacha were letting us know that it was time for the news.

The attendant in the corridor was trying to tune in the Voice of Jerusalem. We always worried that it would not be found in time.

Many of the attendants could not even read the numbers of the wave lengths, and whenever one of them stumbled upon the right station we would bless our luck. That night the attendant seemed to take forever while we crowded around the doors of our cells and pressed our ears between the gratings. Suddenly there was a hammering noise. It was the pounding of a gavel, the signal for the evening news on *The Voice of Jerusalem*.

A somewhat unsteady male voice came on the air. As usual, we tried to guess on the basis of the first syllables whether the leading bulletin would have anything to do with us. Tonight we did not remain in doubt for long:

“In a pitched battle that took place last night between the police and a terrorist band that numbered thirty-four people, including four women, eleven terrorists were killed and many were wounded and captured. The battle took place when the terrorists attacked the railroad depot near Kfar Atta.”

That was all we were able to hear. As though turned to stone, we continued to cling to the grating. Who moved first, or how we were able to snap out of our shock, I never knew. The next thing I could remember I was away from the door, my two fists flailing at the air, my eyes staring at the crumpled newspaper on the bed, which was no longer a newspaper but a large white placard of mourning, marked by eleven black stains, surrounded by a border of tar.

I rubbed my eyes. I wanted to shout out loud that I didn't see a thing, but I did see. I saw eleven black stains dripping with blood. I grabbed hold of the two cold iron bedsteads to steady myself. The squeaking of the bedsprings blended in my ears with an Arab melody that came blaring into our cell from the radio in the corridor. All of a sudden I felt as if my whole body were on fire. Red-hot needles were stabbing at my chest, my throat, my eyes. I began to feel again, to breathe—and to cry.

Of the four girls, Frieda and Esther arrived first. We were reading in our cell one evening when we heard noise in the corridor. A heavy door was being opened, there was a rattle of keys

and a sound of hurried footsteps on the stairs. We sprang to the door. Pressed tightly against each other, our faces to the grating, we saw Esther. Frieda was there, too, but Esther, thin as she was, seemed to fill the entire corridor by herself, not just because of her cry of "Uri," which resounded throughout the corridor, not just because of her wild disheveled hair, but because of the death that accompanied her on every side, casting a long, thick, heavy shadow.

Esther and I knew each other well. We had spent many days together in an isolated hut near an Arab village, learning to handle different kinds of weapons, and we had passed many hours talking. Perhaps because of all the words that we had exchanged then, I hardly knew her now in her silence, or perhaps the shadow that accompanied her actually altered her appearance. In any case, she looked entirely different.

"Uri's dead," she whispered to me through the bars, as though imploring me to bring him back to life again. "And Petachia and Boaz . . . and Uri."

"And Adam?" I asked, ready to give up my own life at that moment.

"He's alive, but Uri is dead." Esther's voice was uncomplaining, uncomprehending, and unquestioning. It wasn't the kind of normal voice in which one talks, laughs, or cries; it was a quiet wail in which was concealed a prayer, a prayer that was extinguished in the moment of its utterance.

In the morning we saw that Frieda's hands were bandaged.

"I wasn't wounded seriously," she told us, "but Malka and Yehudit are still laid up in the hospital. Malka's spine is full of shrapnel and bullets, and Yehudit was badly wounded in both arms."

The red bloom in Frieda's cheeks underscored the shiny whiteness of her teeth when she smiled at us bashfully and apologized for her broken Hebrew. She was a recent immigrant; she had arrived in Palestine only several months ago, from the refugee camps. She hadn't really had a chance to learn the language yet. Perhaps now . . .

Esther was silent, even more stricken than she had been the night before. She was wearing the same clothes she had worn then and her rumpled blouse was sticking out of her skirt. We sat down next to her—it was our free period on the roof—and glanced at her sideways with questioning looks.

Esther shut her eyes for a minute; her face grew suddenly old and full of wrinkles, so that there was not a smooth inch left when she began to speak:

The Kishon was very clear and calm that night. Esther and the others sat by the bank of the stream, the mines ready beside them, and waited. A smell of olden times reached them from the water and heightened their anticipation. One by one they rose and walked back and forth with measured steps to help speed the time. The signal was late in coming. Esther sat down again in the wet sand and looked for the Big Dipper in the silvery sky.

A tremendous explosion rent the air in the direction of the depot. The signal! Before the noise died away, the saboteurs were heading toward it. Two men went ahead with the mines. When they reached the dirt road, they quickly knelt, connected the detonating wires, and scooped out a hole in the ground for the explosives. The smell of freshly turned earth filled the night. The two men consulted in whispers and crawled back to their companions.

A blinding light shone in their eyes. All threw themselves flat on the ground. The powerful beam of a searchlight moved back and forth across the level expanse, fitfully, as though tossing with a fever. It passed over them again. They shut their eyes and dug their fingers into the earth. The searchlight lingered for a moment, went out, came on again, and once more disappeared. There was not the slightest bit of cover where they were, not even a bush or a rock. The land was absolutely flat. It was hard not to feel an oppressive sense of loneliness. The two with the mines touched hands. Their job was done. They had mined one of the roads leading to the depot.

The group began to make its way back to the waiting truck,

where all those who had taken part in this operation were to reassemble.

A sound of whispers and hesitant footsteps. The group halted. Hands rested on pistols. The footsteps drew nearer, then stopped, too.

"Are they ours?" someone wondered under his breath. And immediately the same voice called out loud: "Smash . . ."

". . . the enemy," came an answering call. They were ours. "Smash the enemy" was the password for the operation; the approaching group was another demolitions crew that had just mined the road running to the depot south of the British army camp. The two units joined and began to move in a single column toward the reassembly point.

The truck was an old one, entirely covered by a tarpaulin. The driver was ready in the cabin, but the raiding party was still missing.

Isolated shots rang out from time to time in the distance and the searchlight periodically swept the area. But there was no time for fear; new voices were whispering the password.

Now they could all breathe freely. The driver raced the motor and the returning raiders leaped into the back of the truck. At their head was Boaz, who was in charge of the entire operation. Then Esther saw Uri. But Petachia wasn't there. Uri wasn't used to being without Petachia. Now Petachia was gone. Aryeh, too. One of the raiders related how he heard Petachia shout, "They got me. I've been hit." Then he collapsed. Someone else told of seeing Aryeh, running forward to shoot at Petachia's attacker, only to be hit in the chest himself.

But why was the driver waiting? What was Boaz, usually so quick and decisive, staring off into the darkness for? Earlier, when he had given the order to attack, he hadn't hesitated at all! Now, however, Boaz was finding out what it meant to be a leader. He had to make up his mind: Should he tell the driver to wait? Perhaps the two missing men were still alive, possibly crawling toward the truck at this very moment. Or should he give the command to move out? By now the British were out looking for them, and the truck would have to pass right by the army base.

Boaz shook his head. He made a gesture as if to go to the back of the truck, then turned, and leaned toward the driver. "Step on it!"

Esther was unable to get a clear view of Uri's face, but she knew that it must be contorted. The truck sped forward, but she felt Uri straining the other way.

Suddenly Boaz stuck his head outside the tarpaulin and called out, "Get ready, we're coming to the army camp!" The truck slowed down, then lunged dizzily ahead. A hail of bullets thudded against the tarpaulin. In their haste to fling themselves against the sideboards, the men stumbled and sprawled on the floor one on top of another.

The truck stooped. In front was a roadblock of tanks from which dozens of British soldiers opened fire with machine guns and automatic weapons. Esther was hurled against the side of the truck. She tried to spot Uri, but all she could see was bodies, leaping and falling all around. Malka appeared at her side. "Let's jump!"

Esther couldn't move. She watched Malka topple backward against her, groaning terribly. For a moment she lay there beneath Malka, not knowing whether the blood that covered her was Malka's or her own, whether those were her groans or someone else's. Her hands were blood-soaked, her hair—red and wet—was matted against her face. Someone screamed and fell silent, and another kept crying, "Mother!" as if for the first time. Somebody was standing up in the corner and shooting away. It wasn't Uri. Uri's back was broader.

The shooting stopped; the groans continued. Whoever it was in the corner had run out of ammunition. He spun around, bent over, and drew out a pistol from the belt of a corpse. No, it wasn't Uri; it looked like Boaz. Esther saw him leap from the truck, dash through the roadblock, and head for a nearby gully, firing as he ran. Soldiers pursued him. Boaz dived into the water, followed by bullets. He was hit in the back while still in mid-air. His blood spurted into the water and his body floundered in the reddening flow.

His face was pale and gentle when they pulled him out.

“Dead,” said a soldier, drying his hands.

Esther slid from her place. Now she saw Uri, stretched out on the platform of the truck, his eyes open, staring at someone who wasn't there. She threw herself upon him, called him by name, continued shaking his body long after she knew it was useless. His eyes remained open; his neatly combed brown hair fell limply over his forehead. She buried her face on his chest and noticed a tiny hole alongside one of his shirt buttons. Underneath, amid the curly black hairs on his breast, was a neat clot of blood, hardly visible, right at the tip of the heart.

Esther stopped and took a deep breath. She looked at us mistrustfully, and began picking at the hem of her dress. Only on the way back to our cells did she pick up the thread of her tale again:

“They've already all been buried. Was it yesterday? The day before yesterday? I can't remember, but they've all been buried. All eleven of them, anonymously, without names. At night. No one was even at the funeral. Just eleven coffins, one after another.”

She paused. “*Yallah!*” said the attendant. Esther remembered: “There was a boy from the Haganah buried the same day. I don't remember his name—Yechiam Weiss or Weitz. He was killed in an operation the day before ours, when the Haganah blew the bridges along the border. I heard about it when I was in jail in Jaffa. There was a huge funeral that all of Haifa turned out for, they said.

“*Mamnua!*” said the attendant to Esther, who, still lost in thought, started to follow us into our cell. Silently she let the attendant lead her to the cell next door.

Malka, brought to Bethlehem from the hospital with Yehudit, a few weeks later, finished the story:

“One morning in the hospital a delegation from the Jewish Agency came to visit the Haganah members who had been wounded in the attack on the bridges. The delegates circulated from bed to bed—they were all carrying parcels of food—and one of them came over to me. He asked how I was feeling. I was really

touched and I was just about to answer when he suddenly did a double-take and said, 'I'm sorry, there must be some mistake.' And off he went to visit one of his own wounded."

There was no bitterness in Malka's voice. She even smiled as she told about it. But her eyes, which were only human, persistently asked why.

Of course, we were no longer living in the days of 1942-45. Now was supposedly the time of the "Insurrectionary Front," a time of unity and co-operation among the three underground organizations. How then, faced with the dead and the wounded who had fallen in a common struggle, could yesterday's hatreds still manage to survive? Had the hatred been so pathological, so heartless, so unalterable? The man who came over to Malka's bed and then turned his back on her was not heartless: just the day before he had trudged in sorrow after a coffin in Haifa. No, not heartless at all. Had he not come to the hospital to comfort the wounded? Perhaps, in order to be able to love one's own flesh and blood, it was only necessary to have an ordinary heart. In order to love us, too, however, something more was needed. Something that he didn't have. "I'm sorry, there must be some mistake." He had made a mistake; he was looking for someone else. It wasn't his fault that so many of the wounded looked alike. Very confusing, and so many things happening at once; yesterday an operation carried out by the extremists; the day before one by the soldiers of Haganah. . . . How could he be expected to tell them apart? He had made a mistake, but he would have avoided it if he had known how. All very confusing indeed.

He wasn't entirely wrong, as I found out for myself in 1949, when, for the first time since I had joined the underground, I was able to socialize freely with representatives of the organized Jewish community and former Hagahah members. In 1949 the Lechi yielded its identity before the new State of Israel, like the drone bee who, in fertilizing the queen, loses his sting and his life. A dramatic death, but also a pathetic one, because none of us in Lechi were ready to give up the ghost. I personally felt like someone who had just taken a great big gulp of air and couldn't find a way to let it out again. My lungs filled to bursting; I had to do

something. I decided to go back to school. I sat on a bench in a classroom of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and stared at the podium: soon someone would step up there, soon there would be some kind of an explanation. The room was buzzing with students. A smell of gunpowder was in the air, the smell of 1949, a year when everybody was just out of the army and fresh from the front. None of the students were coming from home, yet the longing for home was pervasive.

Someone was pointing a finger at me. On the bench ahead two students kept turning around between whispers to sneak hurried glances at me. I heard my name being furtively mentioned. The old feeling of isolation came over me. This time, though, there was nothing strange or worrisome about it. It brought with it a great joy, a joy from long-gone days, which seemed to rise from the depths within me. It did not come all at once, but gradually, stealthily, as if it were not sure that it would be admitted, and I gave myself up to it entirely. The first time I had ever felt it had been when I was thirteen years old and marching through the streets of Tel Aviv in my spick-and-span Betar uniform: left, right, left, right, under the eyes of a mocking, astonished crowd. I was all by myself, on my way to our meetinghouse. Left hand and right foot, right hand and left foot—I mustn't take a wrong step, musn't bat an eyelid, for I was the whole Hebrew Army, and everyone had to make way, even those who laughed at me. The harder they laughed, the straighter I stood, the sterner I looked, and my heart continued to beat: left, right, left, right. It was then that I began to feel—first shyly, but then with increasing boldness, with increasing pride and happiness—that I was different from the others, better than they. It was then, in 1939, that I had first begun to make my way beyond the pale.

Now, ten years later, I was sitting on a bench amid those who had lived all their lives within the pale. At the outset they simply blinked their eyes at me, but with the passage of time they grew less shy. The first to approach me were the souls-in-doubt. They would take one step forward and two steps back, murmur "maybe" and "come to think of it," but eventually one could understand them well enough: "It wasn't so simple; it wasn't easy

at all to be in our position. It meant belonging to the Haganah, but being always on the fringe of it; priding ourselves on our independence yet accepting the need for authority; belonging to anti-terrorist units, yet being opposed to turning you people in; appreciating what the terrorists were doing, yet hating the thought that so much damned blood had to be spilled. Didn't you ever have problems with your conscience?"

Such individuals were sometimes annoying, but it was the type that came after them that drove me to impotent anger, the back-slapping, understanding type with their kiss of death: "Right or wrong, you meant well, that's all that matters. No one can say you weren't patriots. The least we can do is honor the dead. There's no difference between one man's blood and another's."

"Oh, isn't there?" I wanted to shout. "*There is!* You're pagans, all of you, ritual dancers around Death. Honor the dead? And what about the life that gave birth to that death? And the ideals that gave birth to that life? What about them?"

But I knew perfectly well that it wasn't really at my classmates that I was angry, but at myself for permitting them to put their stamp of approval upon my fallen comrades and to file away their names among the official lists of the dead. I felt so helpless, so unable to do anything about it.

And yet I felt no hatred. There was nothing to hate, nothing for hatred to set itself up against. I had hated the legs that were now sticking out from under the benches around me when they had been used to follow me and spy on me, and I had reviled the hands that now shook my own when I had seen them baldly, matter-of-factly, rip down posters that I had risked my life to put up on the walls of the city. But now that I rubbed shoulders with those to whom these hands and legs belonged, I couldn't go on feeling that way. All the mountains of words that had once stood between us crumbled and dissolved into nothingness. Words that I once could have sworn belonged only to me now rolled smoothly off their tongues as though they had always been theirs. It was all so natural.

Once, however, not too long ago, I was introduced to a person

who had been one of the commanders of the Haganah in those days.

“What, really, was the difference between us?” he asked me. “Didn’t we fight just as hard as you did?”

“You fought,” I replied, “but without dreaming.”

“What? Do you mean to tell me that you were the only ones to dream?”

“You dreamt only at night, and we dreamt the whole day long.”

The whole day long, even when we were most on the alert: in all moments of routine, when we ate, when we made love to somebody—in the same dream. It didn’t remain hidden in some dusky corner of the heart; we took it with us wherever we went, we bedded down with it at night and we rose with it in the morning. It was never far from us, but always with us, alive and imperative. The daily tasks we set ourselves were guided by it, as was every hour of our lives.

“In that case, what do you think gave us the strength to do the things we did?” asked the Haganah man. He didn’t enumerate, but his thoughts were obvious: What gave us the strength to reclaim malarial swamps, to go hungry cultivating the wilderness, to push roads through the desert, to build houses, to fight heroically against the combined armies of Arabia, we who were so few against so many?

“What gave you the strength was the dream that the Jewish nation has been dreaming for thousands of years. That dream has been passed on to us in our blood. But every day the dream gets weaker and our blood turns paler. If we don’t go on dreaming now, our children will inherit nothing but blood, without any dreams at all.” When I looked at him, I imagined that I saw him with a parcel of food in his hand, taking a quick step backward from Malka’s bed and saying, “I’m sorry, there must be some mistake.” And I thought of how Malka too must have been mistaken for a moment, thinking that here, finally, was a token of the brotherhood of all Jewish fighters, and of how she must have fought to control her emotions when the truth became clear. “I’m sorry, there must be some mistake.”

I WAS about to have a visit, a *zayyara* as it was called in the prison argot. Descending the stairs to the first floor to wait for my parents, I saw Fatima standing by the door behind the broad, bare visitors' table. My first encounter with Fatima had been in the Jaffa jail. Visibly pregnant, she had been standing amid a cluster of Arab prisoners, narrating the story of her life. Now she was carrying her new baby in her left arm while another child, a boy of about four, with apple-red cheeks and hair glistening with oil, clung to her legs. The long, wide linen shift he wore completely covered his limbs and trailed along the floor after him. Fatima stood there quietly and impassively. There was no way of telling whether she had already had her *zayyara* or was still waiting for it to begin. As for myself, I didn't know how long I would have to wait. An Arab prisoner coming from the courtyard had whispered that she had seen my parents early in the morning. For some reason their visit was being delayed. It had been months since I had last seen them.

Fatima's baby began to cry. To soothe it she stroked its head. I took a seat, and as I did so all my carefully combed hair tumbled about in disorder. The comic quality of my appearance suddenly struck me. I was wearing my fanciest dress. After breakfast the girls had crowded around me and helped me to get ready. "But the red belt is nicer." "The pin belongs on this side, not there in the middle." "Don't you think a black ribbon would go well with her hair?" It was a scene that repeated itself whenever any of us had a visitor, and really, there was something absurd about going

through all that trouble in order to descend a single flight of stairs, face one's family across a barred door for a period of twenty minutes and then return to one's cell. Still, none of us ever tittered during these elaborate preparations.

Fatima's baby continued to howl and kick. I wondered whose turn among my brothers it would be to visit me today. Last time it had been ten-year-old Avener's. He had brought me a flower he had picked along the road. The attendant on duty had snatched it from his hands and picked at the petals with her heavy fingers to make sure that nothing was hidden among them. I remembered the hateful look my brother had given her and how he had bitten his lips. Perhaps it was at that moment that the bud of underground rebellion first began to blossom within him. At any rate, of all my brothers, it was he who later served as the steady connection between my parents and the Lechi.

People were talking at the end of the corridor. As I walked toward the sound, I caught sight of Fatima's husband, an elderly man in an Arab headdress, holding a small basket woven out of green sprigs. The attendant was settling herself into a rocking chair that stood by the table. When I saw that she didn't mind my presence, I crept closer and leaned against the wall. Fatima's husband stood looking into space as though Fatima weren't even there. When the attendant was comfortably ensconced, he bowed deeply in her direction and greeted her profusely, calling down blessings on herself and her entire house. To Fatima he hadn't said a word. Finally, still averting his glance from her, the old man asked, "And you, Fatima, how are you feeling?"

"The Lord bless you," Fatima replied ingratiatingly.

"And the child?"

"Praise be to the Lord, he kisses your hand."

That was all they had to say to each other. Fatima's husband continued to stand where he was and neither he nor Fatima nor the attendant seemed to think this behavior odd. There was something stark about their silence, and the few words they exchanged went on ringing in my ears.

The old man put down his basket and presented the attendant with a cluster of figs. He took out a handful of candies, all sticking

to one another, and gave them to the child, then emptied the rest of the basket onto the table. There were a few fruits, some slices of fresh Arab bread, and a large number of vegetables. Fatima put her baby on the floor, lifted the skirt of her dress, and with one swift motion swept the edibles into it. The attendant, who had begun to chew on the figs, looked at the little boy hiding behind his mother's back. "Aziz," she scolded, "what are you standing there for? Go kiss your father's hand. Aren't you ashamed not even to have said hello to him?"

The boy trembled a little and refused to budge. Encouraged by the attendant, Fatima urged him forward. "Come, come. Your father is here. Say hello to your father."

Aziz came out from behind his mother, hesitated, and then began to walk uncertainly toward the door. The attendant let him through. He took the hand that the old man extended to him, raised it to his lips and then to his forehead, let it drop, and scuttled back through the door to take refuge again behind his mother.

One of the prisoners was calling for the attendant. The minute she left the room, Fatima's husband thrust himself up against the bars and whispered, "Were you able to hide anything?"

"Not a thing, *wallahi*, I swear to God."

"Not even a penny?"

"Not even a penny, I swear." She laid her right hand over her heart—her left was still holding the vegetables that lay in her dress—and kept it there for a second. Then she bent and scooped up the baby who had been lying all this time on the floor.

The old man's eyes narrowed to a slit. He rasped and spit in disgust. Some of the spittle dribbled over the face of the baby, now asleep. Fatima didn't change her expression; she simply wiped the saliva from the baby's cheek. The attendant returned. The visit was over.

"*Yallah*, Fatima! Back to work."

"Back to work, Fatima, *yallah!*" the old man repeated majestically. He took his empty basket and started down the stairs to the courtyard, showering the attendant with farewell blessings as he went. Fatima was already running down the corridor, her baby in

her arms. "*Yami, yami!*" the older boy shouted, and followed her as fast as his legs would carry him.

Two persons ascended the stairs. One was Milada—the "intellectual" attendant we called her because she could speak a little broken English, a smattering of Hebrew, and could add sums up to several hundred. All this made her very stuck up and gave her finical airs. With her was a detective.

"Your parents are here; it's time for your visit now," she said to me. For a second I couldn't understand what Milada was talking about. My parents? It seemed to me that they had already come and gone, that the visit had already taken place. Just as I was thinking this, they arrived. My father greeted me with his kind eyes in which innocence and age-old sorrow vied together. Then came my grandmother, her eyes puffer than usual, barely open enough to see with, but not too swollen to cry. She wiped them with the corner of her kerchief and pulled my little brother Oholiyav after her. My mother put down the two heavy baskets she was carrying and tried to work her arms through the bars to embrace me.

"*Mamnua!*" said Milada.

My mother withdrew her arms. She took a handful of almonds from one of the baskets and urged me to eat them immediately, in her presence.

"*Mamnua!*" said Milada, taking the almonds and inspecting each one of them.

"What's the matter with you?" my mother remonstrated. "Can't you see they're just almonds?"

"Everything has to be inspected," Milada declared, more for the benefit of the detective sitting next to her than for the enlightenment of my mother.

While my father commenced to tell me how things were at home, my grandmother muttered words of encouragement and benediction, and my mother, between sighs that were really curses, emptied out her baskets. I gave my ears to my father, my heart to my grandmother, and kept my eyes on my mother and on Milada, who was rummaging through the food my mother had dumped on the table. My mother made a sour face as she watched Milada slice open the cake with a knife. "Must you really? All the

way to Bethlehem my only worry was that it wouldn't arrive in one piece. What do you expect to find in it? You might as well taste it, go ahead, take a little for yourself. What do you expect to find? There's nothing in it but raisins and nuts."

She was telling the truth. There was nothing in the cake but raisins and nuts. No mail. The opened cake was placed at the end of the table, by the side of the fruit. There weren't any messages in the fruit either. Nor in the sweets. Mother put a jar of preserves on the table. Milada unscrewed the cap and peered inside. I looked to see if the jar had a double bottom. It didn't. I looked questioningly at my mother: Where was the mail?

"It's grape jelly; I made it myself," said my mother to Milada. "Have some, please; go on, lick your fingers." Nothing would satisfy her except that Milada take some of the jam on the tip of the knife and taste it.

"May the work of your hands be forever blessed."

My mother beamed while Milada took the knife, thrust it into the jar, and began to poke around. I felt as though she were stabbing me personally. I raised my eyebrows at my mother. She smiled reassuringly and reached into the second basket. With tantalizing slowness she pulled out a suit of long flannel underwear. "Don't take it off even if it's warm, do you hear me?" And a pair of shoes.

"What does she need shoes for?" asked Milada. "Where do you think she's going?"

"They're just what I needed!" I said, trying not to show too much excitement. "The ones I have now are worn out. They're just what I needed." From where I stood I could see the slight lump in the lining of each shoe where the mail was hidden. Suddenly, though, my heart stopped beating. The stitching in one of the linings had come loose and a stray thread dangled from it. Suddenly Nacha appeared from nowhere. Before I could grasp what she was up to, she had mischievously grabbed the shoes from Milada's hands, clapped them on her feet, and begun to clog uproariously around the room. "A perfect fit. A perfect fit," she chimed, and disappeared up the stairs with elfish glee, leaving Milada to shake her head compassionately after her.

It was customary for Nacha to circulate freely around the corri-

dors of the building when she should by rights have been locked up in her cell with Chisia and Dvora. Not only the attendants, but even the warden himself, Mr. Thomas, treated her with kid gloves. In part this was a reaction to her youthful charm, but mostly responsible was the fact that she had never been officially identified as a member of Lechi. She had been convicted on a charge of illegal possession of weapons and sentenced to prison, but the prosecution had been unable to establish her true identity. It was never established in court whether she was really Nacha Srulowitz, the girl friend of Yehoshua Cohen and a known member of Lechi, or simply an ordinary young woman named Tsipora Weiss, as she herself continued to insist.

Yehoshua Cohen lived in a rented room in Tel Aviv together with Avraham the Redhead. One evening on his way home, Avraham saw a British patrol heading in the direction of the street on which they lived. The patrol, it so happened, was purely routine, but Avraham didn't know that. He hurried home to warn Yehoshua: "The police are coming! We've got to get out of here!"

The room contained, besides Yehoshua, pistols, ammunition, grenades, and Nacha Srulowitz. Yehoshua and Avraham armed themselves and left by the back window. Nacha stayed behind for a few moments to destroy some incriminating papers. Then she followed, scattering the scraps of paper to the wind as she ran down the lane behind the house.

"Halt!"

A British soldier with a Tommy gun was coming in her direction. The patrol, from the instant Avraham and Yehoshua were spotted, ceased being routine. The neighborhood was quickly surrounded. The scraps of paper escaped, but Nacha was arrested. Meanwhile, Avraham and Yehoshua had taken refuge in an orange grove in the vicinity.

Yehoshua knew the groves in the area like the palm of his hand. He had already lived an almost legendary existence among them, his beard grown long, his body toughened and bronzed, his eyes glowing like fire, his only companion his weapon, his only nourishment the fruit of the trees. Yehoshua became a legend because he emerged unscathed from the black heart of those days—a re-

bellious dreamer still. He didn't leave the city streets for the orange groves because he was tired of the city; it was the city, rather, that had grown weary of him and didn't want any part of him—not alive at any rate.

And Yehoshua wanted to live. He was only eighteen years old in 1942, but he had already seen a great deal of death, both literally—as when, in February, 1942, two weeks after the murder of Yair, the refugee ship *Struma* had been sent to the bottom of the sea with hundreds of passengers aboard—and figuratively. Figuratively dead, as far as Yehoshua was concerned, was the entire organized Jewish community of Palestine, so driven by blind hate for Yair and his followers that it did not even shrink from turning them in to the police to be tortured and imprisoned, while wallowing in the wartime prosperity. Figuratively dead also was the Etsel, which had been deluded into believing Englishmen's promises, and was in turn deluding its own members by encouraging them to volunteer for service in the British army.

Dead, too, in a manner of speaking, were many of Yair's right-hand men, now his heirs. Sought day and night by the police, surrounded everywhere by the hatred of the mob, constantly in fear of a fate like Yair's, they allowed themselves to be broken, lost faith in their mission, and in some cases even turned themselves in to the authorities. Yehoshua's own friends, although they did not go to that desperate extreme, decided to disband, and each of them retired to the safety of his home to wait for the storm to blow over.

And Yehoshua had, by his eighteenth year, known failure, too. Two attempts made by members of Lechi to avenge Yair's death had ended in failure. The first failed when Captain Morton, the man who shot Yair, escaped with his life after being blown up by a mine; the second when Police Chief Saunders escaped being killed in his booby-trapped sedan. Contrary to custom, his Arab valet opened the door of the car first and was blown to bits on the spot. Saunders may never have known that by staying alive he had saved the lives of many other police officers and detectives, for the road to the British cemetery had been mined in advance in readiness for his funeral. Saunders' Arab valet wasn't buried in the

British cemetery. The mines never went off, and were later discovered and removed.

And Yehoshua had known imprisonment. The best of those who had remained loyal to themselves and to Yair were soon sitting in Mizra, Jerusalem, and Acre prisons where they were regularly joined by new victims of police spies and surprise raids. Hideouts and arms caches fell to the police one after another. Only a handful of activists was still at large. The veterans among them could hardly make a move for fear of being arrested, and the newcomers, those who were not yet under suspicion, were mostly recent immigrants and inexperienced at underground techniques.

Not everyone who had been killed was dead, though, to Yehoshua's way of thinking. Yair, who had been killed, lived on—and so did his murderers. And Yehoshua and his few comrades lived to settle the score. He was not a natural leader. He was a better listener than a talker. But since there were none around to command him, he learned to listen to himself. The first command that he heard himself give was: Survive! And he would not have survived long in Tel Aviv. Wherever one went one saw his picture on the walls and under it a price. Spies and detectives were everywhere. So Yehoshua went to the orange groves. There, where the only whispers were those of the trees, and only the heavens peeped through the branches, and nobody squealed but the field mice, he made his home.

A legend, however, needs constant transfusions from reality to keep it alive. At night Nacha would come to the groves and whistle for Yehoshua among the trees. She would bring him a loaf of bread and the latest news: who had fallen, who had been arrested, who had cracked under pressure. And when she returned to the city, she would bring back to the beleaguered band of men a pair of fiery eyes, rebelling with their No! dreaming with their Yes!

And then, on September 3, 1943, Michael escaped from the prison camp in Mizra. There was no longer any need for Yehoshua's burning eyes to light up the darkness. The fireworks of battle, of guns and explosives, would give light enough. The time had come for action. Lechi returned to the streets and Yehoshua put the orange groves behind him. Eventually the police caught up

with him, but not before he managed to get in a few blows of his own.

On August 8, 1944, Yehoshua led a group of "surveyors" dressed in work clothes to Kilometer 4 of the road running out of Jerusalem, to await the arrival of High Commissioner Sir Harold MacMichael's limousine. The car passed on schedule, but MacMichael was only wounded. Nevertheless, the bullet that grazed his skin plowed deep into the pride of the British Empire.

Later that year Yehoshua returned to Jerusalem. This time the plan was to assassinate Sir John Shaw, Chief Secretary of the Mandate government. Yehoshua was sitting with Eli in a small café when a detective happened in. Yehoshua was unarmed because, by late 1944, the central committee of Lechi had rescinded its orders to carry a weapon at all times and to use it rather than willingly submit to arrest. The reason for this reversal was that Lechi was no longer a small band of men on the run who could ill afford the loss of a single fighter through imprisonment.

In any case, had Yehoshua been armed in the café in Jerusalem he might have shot and killed the detective, but he also might have been shot and killed himself. But he wasn't armed. The detective recognized him and lunged. Eli picked up a bottle and was about to break it over the policeman's head when the owner of the café caught hold of his arm from behind. At that very moment three Arab policemen arrived on the scene. Eli managed to slip away, but Yehoshua was arrested, taken to Latrun, and then shipped to Africa with the first planeload of exiles.

A few months before all this happened, Nacha had been apprehended and brought in for interrogation.

"I'm Tsipora Weiss," she insisted. She prepared two statements for her trial: one, in case none of the witnesses should identify her, was for Tsipora Weiss, an innocent victim of circumstance. The other was a militant declaration by Nacha Srulowitz, a member of the Freedom Fighters of Israel. She was not identified, and so she delivered the plaintive plea of Tsipora Weiss. She was sentenced to four years in prison, but she was afforded special treatment since she could not absolutely be considered a full-fledged member of the underground.

Tsipora Weiss for the next four years had no identity; she was anonymous. With all of her privileges, she could not enjoy the simple pleasures of prison life, which were to be oneself albeit behind bars, to think and speak as one pleased, to luxuriate in identifying aloud with one's own past. Tsipora had been born in the moment that "Halt!" rang out in that narrow lane behind Yehoshua's room, and so she had no parents, no brothers, and for four long years no one to send her parcels of food, no one to write her letters, and no one to visit her for twenty minutes once every two months.

"I feel sorry for her," said Milada to my mother when Nacha had run off with my shoes. "She has no one to send her things like that from the outside.

"The poor girl," she added in English to the detective, who was at a loss to understand what had happened. "She's been here for years and no one has ever visited her, not once."

Only that wasn't quite true. Nacha had one constant visitor in prison—Yehoshua. He didn't come to see her at the times allotted for visiting; he didn't have to come to see her at all. He was already there, with her in her cell, before her eyes every minute of the day.

WHEN MY visit was over, I returned upstairs. Nacha had already extracted the mail from the lining of the shoes. Among other things it contained a long letter from Adam. The girls were anxiously waiting for me to read it. Before I arrived in prison, the mail they received had been sporadic at best, so that they rarely had any clear idea of what was going on in the outside world. With my coming, however, the situation improved because Adam regularly took the trouble to write, in a tiny scrawl that covered page after page of onionskin paper, not only a detailed summary of all that had been happening both within Lechi and without, but also a lengthy account of the mood and spirit in the underground at the moment.

Adam's latest letter had been impatiently awaited, for one of the events that had taken place since his last communication was the Black Saturday of June 29, 1946. On that day the British had launched a general attack on the Jewish settlement in the hope of breaking the back of the Insurrectionary Front. A curfew was declared in all the major cities and house-to-house searches and confiscations of arms were carried out in dozens of rural co-operatives. The Jewish Agency building in Jerusalem was occupied by troops and the Agency's officials were placed under arrest. Mass arrests took place throughout the country, many of them accompanied by bloodshed. Internment areas were set up in kibbutzim, and much property was damaged. The members of the kibbutzim reacted with heroism and devotion. They refused to submit to questioning or to co-operate with the soldiers. When

asked for their names they replied, "We are Jews," and as their address they all gave the same answer: "The land of Israel."

But as soon became evident, this marked the beginning of the end for the Front. Despite the fact that immediately after Black Saturday, approval was given for a number of anti-British operations, including the blowing up of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem by Etsel, it was not long before the leaders of Haganah lost courage and backed down. Their claim that they were reversing themselves because of the unexpectedly high number of casualties in the King David explosion was only a pretext. The truth of the matter was that the Front's policy toward the British—mockingly called "the hot frost," by Chaim Weizmann, later the first president of the State of Israel—was doomed from the start.

Adam's scrawl covered more sheets than usual. One portion was particularly urgent:

Michael was arrested. His beard didn't help. The curfew took us by surprise and we didn't have a chance to move any of the members of the central committee out of the city. Gra escaped being picked up by some miracle, but Michael was identified by that bastard Martin and arrested. I was saved by a watermelon. That's right, an ordinary watermelon, green on the outside and sweet and red on the inside. I've never in my life eaten a watermelon that tasted so good.

The story begins with the start of the curfew. Tel Aviv was completely surrounded by rings of poppies, and the city was divided into sectors. Each sector was cut off from the others by cordons of troops, and the British search parties went from one sector to another. Until they arrived, one was allowed to freely move about the sector he was in, but not to leave it. South Tel Aviv, where I was living at the time with Levi, was one of the last areas to be searched. We tried to sneak past the troops and get out of the city, but we were turned back. Then we tried to cross over into one of the sectors that had already been searched, but we were turned back again. That's when I had the idea of going downtown. The downtown area hadn't been searched yet, but I wanted to get to the Great Synagogue.

Perhaps you don't remember, but that's the synagogue in the basement of which we had a whole lot of arms stored away, as well as various other supplies in case it would ever be necessary for any of the "top brass" to use it as a hideout. I hadn't placed myself in that category when I made the initial arrangements, but now it seemed to me that Levi and I could do worse than try to get there. We walked as far as the point separating the downtown sector from the south, and started to look for a weak point in the cordon where we might break through. I found one and managed to cross over to the other side of the line, but when I looked back I saw that Levi hadn't made it. I couldn't leave him, so there was nothing to do but cross back over again, which I did. We were racking our brains about what to do next when we found ourselves, along with a couple of dozen others, surrounded by a tightening ring of soliders.

Hours passed and nothing happened. We were all hungry and thirsty. Levi and I decided to stir up a ruckus, and we began to shout: "What's going on here? We're hungry. We want to go home." It was as though everyone had been waiting for a signal. All the people began to yell in a chorus: "Let us go home. We want to go home." Before long we were moved to an empty lot and told to have our papers ready for inspection. Levi and I looked at each other and then at the tables that had been set up at one end of the lot for the crews of detectives to sit at while we passed in front of them. I glanced up at the sky; I could already see myself up there in an airplane on my way to Africa.

Not far from me several people were crowding around a man holding on to a great big watermelon. "We're hungry!" they were shouting at him. "Open the melon!"

"I won't," he said. "My wife and children at home are hungry too."

"What makes you think you're ever going to see them again?" someone jeered. "Open it now!"

I couldn't see him clearly any more, because the melon was blocking his face. It gave me an idea.

"How much did that melon cost you?" I asked him.

I slipped half a pound into his hand. He looked at me as

though I were crazy, then looked at the money, trying to figure out how many watermelons he could buy with it for his wife and children. He handed me the melon. Now everybody shouted at me to open it; how could I explain to them that I needed it exactly the way it was? I slunk away clutching the melon, with my eyes on the ground to avoid the contempt in their faces.

We were lined up for identification. I hugged the watermelon to my face; no doubt I was still being looked upon with disdain, and I only prayed that the detectives would look at me the same way. I tried to make my expression as pitiful as possible. The line kept moving forward; I and my melon were already quite close to the tables which were piled high with papers and albums of photographs. Among them was one of each of the twenty men who had escaped from Latrun, including Levi and myself. The police and the army officers looked at the people on the line and then at some photographs and then at the people on the line who were asked to show their papers and answer some questions. Suspects went to the right for further questioning; others were directed to the left and told to go home.

The man ahead of me, young, with a tanned face and a shock of black hair, was ordered to the right. The detective didn't even bother to look at his identification papers. I held the watermelon to my cheek with one hand and presented my papers with the other. Perhaps even without the watermelon I might not have been recognized, but the air of shiftless misery that this melon created around me prompted the detective to dismiss me with an impatient wave of his hand. He was looking for terrorists, and had no time to waste on melon-eaters like me.

I hurried to the left. Now it was Levi's turn at the table. I was thinking what a pity that there hadn't been another melon for him when he, too, was waved on in my direction. We looked at each other. It wouldn't have been safe to embrace then and there, so I hugged my melon instead.

The inspection was over. Those under suspicion were hauled off in patrol cars and the rest of us left. Since it was clearly our lucky day, Levi and I decided to push our luck to the end. Pretending to be worried about being stopped all over again on

our way home by a roving patrol, we began to egg on the crowd, shouting: "We're not moving until we get an escort!"

The crowd took up the chant: "We want an escort! We want an escort!"

We could hardly contain ourselves when we reached our room. Having thanked the soldiers who brought us there, we fell all over each other and then all over the watermelon which we proceeded to devour. We were starving, and there was nothing else to eat.

But the watermelon gets only half the credit for saving me. The other half goes to the cordon of soldiers that Levi wasn't able to cross. If he had managed to get past them, we would have reached the Great Synagogue—and we would have been captured. That same day the hideout in the basement was discovered. The arms were taken away and the sexton was placed under arrest. It seems that a British captain—an army chaplain—in the search party decided that if he, a man of the cloth, could be a captain, another man of a different cloth could also be a member of the underground. First he looked in the ark and found only the Torahs, but then he had the bright idea of going down to the basement.

Do you remember—I think you were with me then—when I tried to convince that sexton to dig beneath the floor and hide the guns in the ground? Had he agreed, they never would have found those weapons.

I remembered:

"I've been the sexton of this synagogue for more than twenty years, and never once in all that time has anyone but myself set foot in the basement. The British will never get that far except if God wills it, and if He wills that, He can will that they get further, too."

Old Hillel, sexton of a synagogue in the old city of Jerusalem, thought otherwise. He, too, hid guns for Lechi in his synagogue, but his credo was: "Even if they get as far as the synagogue door, they'll never get inside. A holy place will never abide pollution." And the British never did see the inside of his synagogue.

Many years later, when I was introduced to Hillel for the first time, I asked him how, according to his theory, he explained the British raid on the Great Synagogue in Tel Aviv.

"The British set foot there," he replied confidently, "because nobody believed that they wouldn't. Had even a single person believed that with his whole heart, it wouldn't have happened."

But who might that single person have been? And what did he mean by "with his whole heart"? Hillel clammed up and refused to pursue the subject; for Hillel, a blond Yemenite with a long beard, was a cabalist and a mystic, and whatever he said came wrapped in riddles. Nothing was profane in Hillel's world. Profane was what lacked mystery; one merely had to discover the mysterious spark that inhabited even the most ordinary objects, and immediately they became sacred.

The first time Hillel came in contact with Lechi he saw that spark, and from then on Lechi was like the Holy of Holies to him. It all began one day when a Yemenite boy, a relative of a family that lived in the neighborhood, came to ask Hillel if he would rent him a room.

"I don't rent rooms," Hillel said. "I have enough money to support myself and my family."

The boy persisted and Hillel finally agreed. He noticed that during the day the boy was never in his room, but that often in the evening he would be visited by friends who stayed until late at night. Hillel wondered what they could be talking about all the time.

Once he came across a scrap of paper, a note written in the Holy Tongue. It was full of obscure allusions, only not the mystical kind to which Hillel was accustomed; these matters were clearly profane, but seeking the spark, Hillel found it—and understood. That evening when the group of boys arrived in the room, Hillel was waiting for them. "Necessity makes brothers," he said—and the boys understood. They already had a high opinion of this old man and his family.

From that day Hillel's house changed completely. The attic, previously devoted to cobwebs and dust, became a storeroom for dozens of rifles, carbines, Tommy guns. Hillel was running a muni-

tions warehouse. One Friday night, when Hillel and his family were seated around the table welcoming the Sabbath Queen with candles and wine, Dov entered.

"Pull up a chair and sit down," Hillel invited. But Dov was in a hurry, and apparently embarrassed. Hillel sensed that there was a mystery involved. He rose from the table, leaving the wine and his family waiting for the blessing, and accompanied Dov to the door.

"Tell me," he said.

"I know that tonight is the Sabbath," said Dov hesitantly, "and I know you are an observant Jew. How can I allow myself to profane your day of rest with everyday concerns?"

"Profane it!" said Hillel. "If it is for the sake of Heaven, we are commanded to profane it."

But Dov still wavered.

"Come then," Hillel said firmly, "and I will show you where it is written in the Law. In a holy war one is permitted to do battle even on the Sabbath."

Then Dov felt free to talk. "We urgently need a storeroom for some explosives," he said.

Hillel's attic was full, and so was the attic of the synagogue of which he was the sexton and cantor. But a storeroom was needed and the old man thought fast. "With God's help there will be a place, but it will take thirty pounds to get it ready and I don't have the money."

"You'll get the money, but where's the place?"

Hillel winked one of his tiny eyes. "You'll find out in good time."

Dov didn't ordinarily put up with such evasiveness, but then there was nothing ordinary about Hillel the Yemenite. As soon as the Sabbath was over, Hillel went to have a look at the abandoned ritual bath that lay on the outskirts of the quarter. The stone cistern had once been used for the ceremonial purification of women about to be married, but now it was filled with stagnant water. Hillel cleaned it out by the light of the moon and waited for morning. When the new day came, he bought some cement and some metal rods—he hadn't been a construction worker for seven

years for nothing—and built a reinforced concrete ceiling, complete with a secret entrance, over the cistern.

Within a week the abandoned bath was being used to store gunpowder and Molotov cocktails. For a long while neither Dov nor Danni nor Eli knew what was happening to the suitcases full of explosives that they brought to Hillel's house night after night. They only knew that before an operation they could bring Hillel empty suitcases, which he would return crammed full to bursting with their requisition. A new star had appeared on Hillel's horizon, a star that flashed fire and gunsmoke. He lived by its light, and whenever he heard an explosion or saw one of the enemy's bastions go up in flames, he would wink at it happily.

In the summer of 1948, after the British had pulled out of Jerusalem and the city was besieged by the Arab Legion, Hillel's star shone also on his thirteen-year-old son Uzi. The boy, it was decided, would work in Lechi's storerooms in Jerusalem along with Ariela, Zamir, and Kochava. It was July 25, the eighteenth day of the Hebrew month of Tammuz, and Hillel was fasting. Normally, the regular fast day is on the seventeenth of Tammuz, but that year the seventeenth had fallen on a Sabbath, and although an observant Jew is permitted to talk about explosives on the Sabbath, fasting is forbidden.

So, on the eighteenth day of Tammuz, in the Hebrew year 5708, with Jerusalem besieged by Arabs, in his house full of guns and ammunition, Hillel fasted and mourned for another siege of Jerusalem by the legions of Rome that had begun on the seventeenth of Tammuz in the Hebrew year 3830. Hillel fasted while Uzi and his three comrades made charges in the storeroom. Suddenly, there was a huge explosion. Jerusalem's walls were still standing, but a star had burned itself out. The ammunition in the attic had ignited, killing Ariela, Zamir, Kachava, and Hillel's thirteen-year-old son, Uzi.

Hillel didn't have to go into mourning. He had been in it, fasting and praying since the night before.

NOT EVERYONE in Lechi saw the holy spark that Hillel saw, nor did everyone come to Lechi steeped in the esoteric wisdom of Jewish tradition. Some of us were not even familiar with the Bible. In Bethlehem, for example, there was Yehudit.

“We’d be here today even if there were no Bible,” Yehudit said to Malka as we were taking our daily walk around the roof of the jail.

“Without the Bible none of this would be possible,” answered Malka.

“Facts are facts!” Yehudit rejoined decisively, as though settling the matter once and for all. Yehudit was, indeed, a fact. She had never read the Bible. A recent immigrant from Bulgaria, she had grown up in a totally assimilated home. Yet here she was, a member of the Freedom Fighters. Facts were facts. It could happen even without the Bible. Malka didn’t understand how this was possible. She knew that the fire that burned within her had been kindled by the candles that her mother lit on Sabbath eves, and by the eternal light that burned in her father’s eyes when he sat over a page of the Law.

I stood and listened to them. It wasn’t the first such argument that the two girls had argued, but this time, I knew, there was a special reason for it. It was in preparation for the visit of Chief Rabbi Herzog, “the great rabbi of the Jews,” as Jamila had called him when she told us that today he would be coming to see us.

In fact, similar argument was heard wherever one went in the

Lechi, nor was it limited strictly to the role of the Bible; it concerned our whole relationship to the Jewish tradition. An unending discussion, it may very well have been instrumental in finishing off Lechi in 1948.

Lechi never had a chance to formulate its beliefs into a systematic program, because from its very inception all its energies had to be channeled into fighting a war. In the front lines of battle one worries about first things first. The best fighters among us were those most imbued with a hatred of oppression, a love of freedom, regardless of their particular ideological inclinations. And what eventually happened to Lechi could happen to any organization who sets out on a difficult road without a clear idea of its ultimate destination. Not that we lost our way all at once; it happened gradually, but we were too busy fighting the British to devote ourselves to long-range considerations.

Negatively, the immediate goal of our struggle was the expulsion of the British; positively, it was the achievement of our freedom. Yet, neither of these could be considered ends; rather, they were means toward some further objective. But what? Yair, the only Lechi member who constantly lived with the thought of the postwar future in mind, was no longer with us, and of those who were left, not many had kept his creed alive in their hearts.

Yair was a fighter for freedom, but the freedom that he dreamed about and wrote about in his poems was not simply a freedom from foreign rule, but one that would enable us to create a new, distinctively Hebraic way of life. Such a freedom would liberate us from external subjugation, but would not mean a lack of internal direction. In eighteen principles that Yair enunciated, he tried to define what this meant. Most important was the redemption of the entire Land of Israel on the basis of boundaries the Bible promised to the People of Israel; a complete ingathering of the Jews of the diaspora in a renewed Kingdom of Israel; the restoration of the historical and spiritual autonomy of the Jewish people; and finally, the building of a Third Temple as a symbolic representation of the beginning of the redemptive process. Yair also set forth his ideas on the specific historical mission of a liberation movement such as ours. These included educating the

people to see the need for a war of liberation, laying the groundwork for alliances with all those desiring to take part in the common struggle, campaigning unceasingly against all enemies of Jewish historical destiny, and restoring the Jewish homeland to the Jewish people by force of arms.

Although every member of Lechi continued to think of Yair, even after his death, as the spiritual leader of the movement, of all the principles that he set down on paper only the purely tactical ones—those committing us to an all-out struggle against British imperialism in the Middle East in co-operation with its natural enemies, including, at that time, the Soviet Union—remained part of our program. The visionary aspect of Yair's thought faded into the background.

Thus, to be a freedom fighter, or an anti-imperialist, it was not necessary to be familiar with the Bible. Only when the imperialists were driven from the country and it was necessary to find some sort of content with which to fill the vacuum that they left behind did the problem first become critical. And then it was too late. For a while Lechi groped blindly for solutions, and then everybody simply packed up and went home.

Bethlehem churchbells were ringing. From the roof of the prison I saw the red domes of the city's spires rising toward the sky. I linked arms with Malka. "You're right. Without the Bible none of this would be possible. But how do you explain that those who are forever talking in the name of the Bible and Jewish tradition are not in the vanguard of the fight for a Kingdom of Israel? Not only are they not with us, but they are actively against us. What happened to the Ark of the Covenant which once upon a time accompanied the armies of Israel into battle? Why is the struggle for redemption led by Jews who are secular, rather than religious?"

This was not a recent development, or one peculiar to the Lechi. Ever since the Zionist movement was born, its leaders had been secular Jews, whereas Jews of the orthodox camp, if not indifferent or frankly hostile, were content to lend an occasional helping hand. None of us could answer this elemental question.

Rabbi Herzog, due to arrive at any moment, was also an op-

ponent of ours. As the Chief Rabbi of Palestine, appointed by the secular authorities, his opposition was in a way even fiercer than that of the British, for it was backed by none other than God Himself, and its weapons were the verses from the Holy Torah. I tried to remember the parody that one of the girls had delivered the night before of an appeal by the Chief Rabbi after one of Lechi's operations. It was couched in the medieval Hebrew of the rabbinical texts:

"Return to the fold, ye sons of mischief. Not like the Gentiles is the House of Israel. We are an ethical people, a people of peace. Not by armed might, saith the Lord, but by the spirit. A holy nation is the House of Israel. Blood that is uncleanly shed pollutes the Holy Land. Return to the fold, ye sons of mischief."

We were summoned below. The Rabbi had arrived. Gone from our voices was the mocking tone with which we had anticipated his coming. Looking about me, I saw a transcendental glow come over the faces of my fellow prisoners. It was the same glow that came over us whenever we assembled for our weekly meeting with the prison chaplain and descended the stairs to the cries of the attendants in the corridors: *Al-rabbai, al-rabbai!* The sense of elevation that these meetings afforded us did not stem only from the fact that they enabled all of us Jewish prisoners to be together for a while in the same room, nor was it due simply to our appreciation of anybody who brought with him the smell of the outside world. Involved also was a true sense of release, the joy of finding oneself for an hour in a world where there were no longer prisoners and free men, but only human beings united in worship, and where the material bars of the prison and the material bodies that they encaged dwindled into insignificance before the pure upward flight of the soul.

The first time that I had come face to face with a rabbi in prison had been the week after my solitary confinement, and I had burst out laughing. It was not the laughter of contempt, but rather of disappointment and confusion, triggered by the tension that had been building up in me ever since morning when I first heard that a rabbi was coming. When he arrived, I had nothing

but comic impressions of him; the little Bible clutched in his hands, the half-running gait as he moved toward us, the way he thumbed endlessly through his open book once he had sat down, his shaking hands, his quivering cheeks, the queer mumble in which he spoke. Were the words coming from the book? From his heart? No one was rushing him. Why was he in such a hurry?

No one was rushing him, except himself. He clearly wanted to get through with the business as quickly as he could. We sat in chairs around the table, and he sat at the head of it. But he was present only in the flesh; his spirit was elsewhere, struggling to flee past the bars and be gone. There was no reason for his discomfort. His presence was perfectly legal. Prison regulations acknowledged the existence of an Almighty Being and recognized the need to pray to Him. To satisfy this need, prison authorities were only too happy to open the gates wide to the rabbi for one hour once a week.

This little rabbi must have meant well. After all, he didn't have to come. Plenty of rabbis didn't. Now that he was present, however, he was paying less attention to us than to the bars around him, as though he weren't at all sure he'd be allowed to leave the way he had come. Above all, he didn't want to lose time; the sooner he started, the sooner he'd be through. So great was his haste that he kept stumbling over his words. Fortunately he had remembered to bring his book; he opened it, read a verse, and quickly passed it along to one of the girls telling her to read the next verse. She passed it along to the girl beside her, and so on around and around, all before you could say boo!

When the book reached me, I could only stare at it. The preceding verse waited for the one that followed, the next girl waited for me to pass her the book. I couldn't find the place. Hurry, say something. When I opened my mouth, instead of words an irrepressible giggle exploded. The giggle wasn't mine; it belonged to the pressure that had been building up in me all morning long. Having spent itself, the laugh disappeared into a withdrawn corner of my brain. Silence, and in that silence I passed the book to the next girl. The rabbi's Bible was full of verses, but there were only six of us around the table. When the last girl had read her verse,

the book was returned to him; the circuit was closed. The rabbi rose from the table, mumbled "The salvation of the Lord cometh in the twinkling of an eye," shut his Bible and was gone from sight, until the next weekly visitation.

The next time I laughed in the presence of a rabbi was with Rabbi Goldman who had become our regular chaplain. Then Dvorableh, Bracha, and all the other girls laughed, too. It was a good kind of laughter and came from open hearts.

All week—starting the moment his last visit ended—we waited impatiently for the rabbi to arrive. He recognized the shadows cast by the bars, but he was a man who could distinguish between the living flesh and the dead metal. For him we were flesh, blood, and spirit aching to live, and his infectious joy was a tonic for us. With him we laughed even when there was nothing funny in his words. Rabbi Goldman didn't tell jokes, but he was fond of relating messianic tales from Jewish folklore, and recollections of his stint as an army chaplain. Both the memories and the tales had the power to remind us of the special tang of the times in which we lived.

The rabbi did not share our attitude toward these times, which is to say that he was not a fighter by temperament. The men of Lechi who were in prison did not look forward as eagerly as the women did. It was their nature to see things in black and white, whereas our feminine sensibilities were more receptive to all the colors of the spectrum, and among these one belonged especially to Rabbi Goldman. When he came, he never failed to bring with him the warmth and merriment we craved.

Then there was Rabbi Aryeh Levine. Even more sublime than Rabbi Goldman's laughter were Rabbi Levine's tears. Of all those who visited us in Bethlehem prison, he was the only one who wept. In silent, almost unconscious desperation, we longed for his visits.

The Chief Rabbi entered preceded by Mr. Thomas, who, for this special occasion, wore a military sash across his army tunic. His polished brass buttons glittered brightly and an oily smugness had replaced his usual arrogance. When he gestured to Rabbi Herzog to follow him into the room where we were assembled, he

looked for all the world as though he were serving our distinguished visitor up on a tray.

The illustrious visitor seated himself in an armchair that had been prepared for him. As soon as he had made himself comfortable, Mr. Thomas signaled to us with a nod that we too could sit. The two men exchanged some remarks in an English that was too fluent for me to understand. Rabbi Herzog spoke English well; before becoming Chief Rabbi of Palestine, he had served for many years as Chief Rabbi of Ireland. He said something to us in Hebrew. It was a beautifully spoken Hebrew, the Hebrew of the Bible and prayer book, and we couldn't understand a word of it. In ordinary, everyday Hebrew, the good Chief Rabbi had nothing to say to us. This was a pity, for it was obvious that he did want to say something to us, something quite different from what he was saying. Perhaps in our presence something within him was desperately trying to make itself heard, but whatever it was, it lacked the strength to break through. The Rabbi turned again to Mr. Thomas and murmured to him in English.

We no longer had the vaguest notion what we had been assembled for or what was preventing us from getting up as a group and walking out. An empty silence hung over the room, a silence as empty as we felt; a silence without light, without panic, without despair. Nothing. Rabbi Herzog's silence seemed to annoy Mr. Thomas even more than his unsuccessful attempt to converse with us. This silence was the one thing beyond Mr. Thomas' control and the longer it continued the more his prey threatened to slip away from him. He began to pace around the Chief Rabbi's chair.

And then the chair was empty. We remained behind. In the doorway stood Mr. Thomas, his hand raised in a gesture showing the Chief Rabbi out.

When Rabbi Aryeh Levine came to visit us a few weeks later, we had difficulty understanding him, too, because his voice was choked with tears. He came by himself, without Mr. Thomas. Rabbi Levine, after all, was not a government appointee, or an officeholder of any sort, and required no elaborate displays of

protocol. He was just a rabbi whose practice it was to visit the Jewish prisoners as often as he could, and not only once a year. What was there to get excited about? Mr. Thomas stayed behind in his office.

The rabbi, accompanied by a single bored attendant, came into the room with such perfect silence that one would have thought he had left his shoes at the door. We were seated around a table, and when he sat down at the head, the circuit closed and a current of fire flowed through my body. As he sat, his beard kept shaking as though each of its hairs were a filament directly attuned to his heart. A constant tear stood in each eye: one tear of pristine wonder at the beauty of the world; the other, a tear of ultimate anguish for its sorrow.

He brought no book with him, only the fringes of his gray beard which reached the table and rested there. Between tears he spoke in a whisper about the Biblical heroines Yael and Deborah and about the holiness of a martyr's death. We couldn't understand every word because many were devoured by his sobs, but even those we missed went straight to our hearts and there were converted directly into prayer. And this prayer we understood. It was a prayer for the sorrow of the first man and for the sorrow that was ours, and it was a prayer for the beauty of the last man and for the beauty that was ours. We heard the churchbells of Bethlehem ringing in the distance, their chime ghostly and contorted like the spasms of death, breaking into innumerable fragments in sudden dreadful peals. The bars on the windows dissolved and all the big words shrank and lost their importance. Veils fell away, and we stood before the rabbi as naked and unashamed as the day we were born, and as pure.

AND ALL the time we kept looking for ways to reach the outside world. At the end of every day that went by and found me still in prison I would ask myself, using the same words with which I was greeted by Mr. Thomas whenever he ran into me: "What, still here? Still here."

Not Dvoraleh and Bracha, though. They had been released. Not Chisia and Nacha, either. They had also been released. Dvoraleh's and Bracha's time was up first. Their three years were over. On her last night Bracha exclaimed, "I won't leave!"

She was longing to leave, but she didn't want to abandon me; it was with me more than with anyone else that she had shared not only the day-in and day-out hardships of confinement, but also the joy of the tremendous psychological liberation that she underwent while in prison, in the course of which she mentally crossed the invisible line that divided the entirely free world of the Lechi from the more dogmatic and constrained one of the Etsel. Whereas in prison this crossing-over had been a matter of the intellect and the emotions, now that Bracha was returning to the real world again she would have to make a definite decision: Etsel or Lechi.

"I won't leave!" she insisted that evening between clenched teeth, and buried her head in her pillow. But the next day when her time came to be released, she hid her face on my shoulder and let herself be led down the stairs by the attendant on duty. When I went to the window to wave good-by, I saw her standing in the courtyard, staring off into space. Dvoraleh, however, waved with her whole body, full of joy and life, trying to convey to us the

wonder of the fresh, free air that she was breathing into her lungs.

Next to go was Chisia. The day before she was due to depart she announced, "They'll never let me go!"

Chisia expected to be transferred to the Villa, where suspected terrorists could be held indefinitely under the emergency regulations. After all, neither at her trial nor afterward in prison had she made any bones about being a member of the Lechi. What reason was there to believe that she would be permitted to go home now?

"You'd better look for me from the window that faces out on the Villa," she said as she started down the stairs. But we remained by the window that looked out on the gate and soon we saw her pass through it, and stand on the hillside beyond the wall, waving to us with her small hands.

Then it was Nacha's turn, Nacha who had sat in prison for four years under the assumed name of Tsipora Weiss. She would return to the underground and be Nacha Sruelowitz again. And that left five of us. I was now in a cell with Malka and Yehudit, while Frieda and Dvora Kalfuss were in the room next door.

When anyone asks me today what a group of girls locked up together for twenty-four hours a day, day after day, do to keep occupied, and I tell them what we sewed, embroidered, ate, and read, they look puzzled. "Do you mean to say that it was no different from anywhere else?"

But it was different. All the time you're eating and drinking, you're thinking how glad you'd be never to have to eat another meal in the same place. Every time that you pick up a book, you pray that you won't be around long enough to finish it. Into each sweater that you make, you knit endless plans for escape. Prison is very different from anywhere else, and it's not the walls alone that make the difference, but rather the ceaseless concern with finding a way to get past them. Of all my prison memories, the most abiding is this unending contest with the walls. When the thought of escaping is on one's mind every moment of the day, it seems as if one has only just been imprisoned. Weeks can go by, months, years, but as long as one never stops looking for a way

out, all this time hardly adds up to a single minute. In such a manner I spent fourteen months in Bethlehem prison, and I probably could have spent many more, for the walls as yet had revealed no sign of an exit.

Two of the girls, Nacha and Chisia, did try to make one for themselves; they were caught. About six weeks after Nacha had been brought to Bethlehem, these two hatched a plan to escape. At the time there were no guards on duty on the roof at night, nor was anyone patrolling either inside or outside the walls. There wasn't even anyone in the corridors after dark, for once the lights were turned out the turnkey would say good night and retire to the attendants' room on the ground floor. If the girls could somehow manage to get out of their second-floor cell and into the corridor, they could proceed from there unmolested.

From some of the old-time prisoners Nacha and Chisia extracted the information that the transverse bars of their cell door had been installed during the last general overhaul of the building. It seemed a reasonable deduction that bars had been specially inserted in the walls could also be taken out again. Once they were removed, it would be easy to wriggle through the opening at the top of the door. The girls decided to try it.

Instead of going to sleep each night when the lights went out, Chisia and Nacha went to work digging into the plaster around the bars. After a few nights the bars could be turned in place, and a night or two later they could be pried loose from the wall. For the time being, however, Nacha and Chisia left them where they were; they still had no idea how to get from the second floor to the courtyard outside without passing the attendants' room below.

Near their cell was a washroom, a recent addition to the building. Its walls were made of stucco blocks instead of the Jerusalem stone from which the rest of the prison was constructed. From the washroom window facing the courtyard, a drainage pipe ran to the ground below. The window was covered by a wire screen which Nacha and Chisia decided to work loose. The prisoners were permitted to use the washrooms until four o'clock every afternoon, after which they had to resort to chamber pots in the corners of their rooms. Nacha and Chisia took full advantage of

the time allowed them. On each trip to the washroom they took a small knife with which to chip away at the surface of the blocks. They flushed the fallen stucco down the toilet and covered over the holes with a "plaster" concocted from flour and water. They deliberately loosened the wire on three sides only, leaving the fourth side for the night of their escape. With the two of them working together, they thought, it wouldn't take more than another hour or two to remove the screen and exit through the window.

Finally they were ready. One evening, about an hour after the lights were turned out, giving the drowsy attendants downstairs time to doze off, they removed the bars from their door and squirmed through the opening. Chisia, the weaker and more fragile of the two, descended first. They replaced the bars and headed for the washroom where they set to work on the screen.

An hour went by. The screen moved a little but would not come loose. Two hours. They heard footsteps in the corridor and froze against the wall. An attendant, troubled by insomnia perhaps, had come upstairs to launder some clothes in the shower stall. Yawning loudly, she washed and rinsed while a few feet away, behind the door of the toilet, the two girls stood drenched in sweat. The attendant finished her clothes and left. With deep sighs Nacha and Chisia returned to their work, but they could no longer be sure which was shaking more, the screen or their hands.

Midnight. The screen was still in the wall. One o'clock. It creaked when they pulled on it, but refused to come free. Nacha decided that things would go faster if she worked alone. Chisia, with nothing to do, stood fingering the silver coin that one of the prisoners had given her during the day. Only now it no longer had any value. The last bus to Jerusalem had already left. Even if they removed the screen, made it safely down the drain pipe, climbed over the wall and reached Bethlehem unharmed, there would be no route left for them except to hike through the mountains. Without realizing it Nacha had begun to pound at the wall with her knife. Chisia, standing right beside her, wasn't conscious of it either. Their hearts were knocking louder, and besides, in their mounting desperation it couldn't have mattered any longer.

An attendant downstairs heard the noise and decided to investigate. The corridor was dark. She switched on the light. The cells were quiet; nothing unusual there. From the washroom, however . . .

The next day there were guards on the roof and around the walls, and from then on a light was kept burning all night in the corridors. Instead of sleeping away her shift in the room downstairs, the attendant on duty walked up and down outside the cells, peering and listening through newly drilled peepholes in the doors.

I myself never did find a way out through the walls of Bethlehem prison. One day, though, when Malka had returned from one of her frequent visits to the government hospital in Jerusalem, she produced a sketch of the building and said, "There it is. The hospital. That's where you'll escape from." Malka couldn't escape herself because she could hardly even walk. Her back was still in a cast. All the while she was mentally photographing her surroundings in the hospital, therefore, she thought of me. "It's possible to escape from there," she repeated.

Others had thought of it before. For that matter, others had already accomplished it. How many times had I been asked by the girls to tell them about Adam's escape? And what about Clerchie? Didn't she always tell us not to expect her back whenever she was taken to Jerusalem for a check-up? Her eyes would twinkle happily each time she left, and each time she was returned to us it was as though she were being imprisoned afresh.

The idea of escaping from the hospital was not at all novel, but like any idea it had to wait for its own special hour of grace, and for me the hour finally arrived. The first chance I had to smuggle a letter to the underground, I sent the idea along. Then it was Adam's turn to catch fire. "I wouldn't be surprised," he wrote back in a carefully worded reply, "if you and I are soon married by that same rabbi you're always telling me about in your letters."

Within the walls of our cell the idea burned brightly too, but the only time it was safe to talk about it was during our daily walks around the roof. We never found out for sure if the walls actually had ears, but we had been informed on good authority that they

had. This warning was delivered to us personally by a merry young rabbi named Aharon Shachor, who once came to officiate on the High Holy Days. In the presence of an Arab attendant, Rabbi Shachor opened his prayer book and sang with us some of the hymns that are a part of the New Year liturgy. After leading us through several of these, he asked us to turn in our prayer books to the hymn "Master of the Universe" with which the service is regularly concluded. No sooner had we started to sing than the music died on our lips. The words Rabbi Shachor was singing were totally different from the ones printed on the pages of our books. The melody was the traditional one with which we were all familiar, and the rabbi seemed carried away with the same religious ecstasy he had shown throughout the service. His eyes moved back and forth across his opened book as before, but the words did not come from the book; they came from the world outside, and we listened eagerly so as not to miss the message that they brought us:

Now each of you lend me her ear
For I have something you must hear:
In this wall is a machine
That can't be heard and can't be seen,
And what it does is to record
Your every sound and every word.
And now dear girls, together sing,
Master of the Universe, Holy King.

To get to the hospital, however, one first had to get sick, and with something more serious than a cold or a stomachache; for such ailments there was always Dr. Perlmann. It had to be something serious, and though I tried everything, nothing worked. On Adam's advice I swallowed cigarette tobacco; it would make me feverish, he wrote. And so it did, but Dr. Perlmann gave me some pills and the fever vanished. I complained of migraine headaches and said they were due to sinus trouble, because I once had sinusitis and knew that to be examined for it you had to be X-rayed.

"Very well," said Jamila to Dr. Perlmann, "we'll arrange to have her X-rayed here."

My next idea was to report that I had strange pains in my chest, an uncomfortable feeling in my back, and a constant sensation of nausea. I was given a blood test. The results were negative. The bug in my head, apparently, hadn't shown up under the microscope. Just to be on the safe side, Dr. Perlmann prescribed a series of iron injections for me.

"Why is it taking you so long to get sick?" wrote Adam. "We're anxious to give you first aid."

There was nothing left to do but pray. It worked.

One day, without swallowing tobacco, my temperature shot up several degrees. Dr. Perlmann gave me pills. The fever remained.

"A bad case of pneumonia," Dr. Perlmann decided. "She should be hospitalized."

"We'll make her a hospital right here," fumed Mr. Thomas.

By that time I was practically delirious. Escaping meant nothing to me any more. I simply wanted to get well. But Mr. Thomas was skeptical: "I won't let her leave this building."

Dr. Perlmann was a doctor. The problems of prison administration didn't interest her except insofar as they affected physical health. She went along with the situation as long as she could, but when I lost consciousness completely, she announced to Mr. Thomas, "If that girl isn't taken to the hospital immediately, I refuse to be responsible for her life."

Mr. Thomas *was* responsible for the lives of his prisoners. It was his job to see to it that I lived through the seven years of my sentence, so he had to back down. A heavy detachment of soldiers escorted the ambulance to Jerusalem the next morning.

Dr. Cahana, the Jewish doctor in the government hospital, sat by my bedside all through the night.

"The crisis is over," he said to me, removing the large container of oxygen that was attached to my bed. My chest still ached and my lungs felt clogged, but my mind was clear.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"A Jew," the doctor replied. "I spent the whole night with you together with this oxygen tank." He smiled at me amiably. "When they brought you here yesterday, they either didn't have any ox-

ygen or else they just didn't want to give you any. 'It's not urgent, it can wait until tomorrow,' the head doctor told me. So I went to one of the Jewish hospitals to get some for you. But the important news is that you don't need it any more. How are you feeling?"

"How are you feeling?" I was asked the next morning by an attractive young nurse as she propped my head on a fresh pillow and pressed a white envelope into my hand. No one noticed, neither the prison attendant at the foot of my bed, nor the guards stationed at the door. My bed stood in one corner of a large room. The other occupants were all Arab women—some prisoners, others not. There was no such thing as a special prison hospital in Palestine, and although a room had been set aside on the third floor exclusively for male prisoners, similar arrangements had not been made for the women. Still, the windows—one of which was behind my bed—were barred. An attendant was constantly at my bedside, and in the corridor outside two British policemen were always on duty.

When I opened the envelope, I found two notes inside. One was from Lot, commander of Lechi operations in Jerusalem, and the other was from Adam. He didn't get it. Was I really sick or just pretending? The notice in the newspaper, reporting that I was taken to Jerusalem with a bad case of pneumonia had confused him. You didn't get pneumonia from swallowing tobacco. How had I accomplished this, or was it for real? If the latter, then it was bad business. The wheels for my escape were already in motion. Gra had written to Lot, and Lot, according to Adam, "went right to work as he always does. I'll try to help you from Tel Aviv as much as I can, but I'm depending on Lot. You're in good hands."

In good hands indeed. The message from Lot didn't waste words: "Tamar, the nurse who gave you the letter is one of us and has been working with Nurit for quite some time. You are to keep in touch with us through her and let us know exactly what is happening. Nurit will be in steady contact with her. We already have a sketch of the layout of the hospital, but send us some more if you can and wait for further instructions."

At first I could only send a sketch of the room in which I lay,

for two days went by before I was allowed to get out of bed. Then I was able to sketch the long corridor and the washrooms. The week after I reported on guard details, visiting hours, and the types of visitors. The notes I received led me to believe that the escape would be attempted from one of the washrooms during visiting hours.

"Our plans are beginning to take shape," Lot wrote. "How are things at your end?"

Bad. I was getting better. The police were putting pressure on the doctors to send me back to Bethlehem.

"Do everything you can to remain in the hospital for at least a few more days," Lot wrote.

"Your temperature has gone down and your breathing sounds much better," Dr. Cahana said one morning. "I've been requested to authorize your return to Bethlehem."

My temperature began to rise. My breathing worsened.

"I need to convalesce a little longer, doctor," I whispered hoarsely. "You know as well as I do that the prison isn't a rest home." I coughed.

Dr. Cahana was sympathetic. "I'll do whatever is in my power," he said, adding, "But if you're still so sick, why do you walk around the corridor so much? You'd make my job a lot easier if you'd stay in bed more."

Apparently he presented my case convincingly, although Mr. Broomfield, the general director of British prisons in Palestine and the warden of the Jerusalem prison, didn't like the idea very much. Since I was under his immediate jurisdiction, he came to investigate for himself. "You look perfectly healthy to me," he declared when he saw me.

"If I was, I wouldn't be here," I answered.

"I've been told that you're always walking about in the corridor."

"You've been told correctly. It's because I'd like to get out of here as soon as I can."

"Then why don't you ask the doctor to let you go? He's of the opinion that you should stay here another week."

"It wasn't up to me whether I should be brought here, and it's

not up to me whether I should be allowed to leave. I suspect that it's not even up to Dr. Cahana. The only person to make that decision is yourself."

If Mr. Broomfield still had any doubts, they were now dissipated. He acquiesced, adding, "You gave Mr. Thomas a rather hard time over there in Bethlehem."

"Then I was well. Now I'm too sick to run."

He laughed. "In that case we'll have to see to it that you're still a bit sick when we send you back. I hope that a week won't be long enough for you to recover completely. By the way, I forgot to mention that some of your boys in my prison asked me to send you their regards. Shall I send them yours, too?"

Neither I nor the boys in his prison depended on him to send one another regards. We had channels of our own: the nurses, the doctor, the rabbi, and occasionally even secretly smuggled letters. One had reached me just the day before. It was addressed from death row and written by a doomed man—Dov Gruner.

Gruner did not have to die. He had lived through combat against Nazi armies in the ranks of the Jewish Brigade, had lived—despite a fractured jaw—through the Etsel assault on a police station during which he was captured and, had he cared to ask the British High Commissioner for mercy, he could have gone on living now. But he hadn't asked, so he was going to die. With him were four others. Three of them, Dresner, Kashani, and Elkachi, were Etsel members who had been found guilty of flogging British soldiers in retaliation for acts of violence against Jews. The fourth, Moshe Barzani, was a member of Lechi, who had been caught one evening in Jerusalem trying to toss a grenade into the headquarters of the British Sixth Division.

Gruner's note was only seven words: "Greeting to Geula from death row—Dov." How had it been possible to smuggle them out? The cell of the condemned was never left dark or unattended; not for a moment. During the day light filtered in from outside, and at night the electric bulb was always lit. Regulations. The condemned were not permitted the consolation of darkness. They had to be under constant supervision, for otherwise they might decide to end their lives in a way other than that legally prescribed. And

so they lived their last days in an eternal light, not a divine but a satanic light. Why was it generally thought that Satan dwelt only in darkness?

When Mr. Broomfield left, I scribbled a message to Lot: "I'm ready. They've decided to keep me here for another week."

An answer arrived the following morning. "We're ready, too," it said, requesting that I fix the day.

The time had already been decided: early afternoon during visiting hours. The problem was to decide on which day the guard detail would be most favorable. There were three details a day, each for eight hours and composed of two British policemen and a female Arab attendant. The police were rarely the same, and since they were posted in the corridor, there was little opportunity to observe them. As for the attendants, there was no question about my preference. Najama. If she happened to be on night duty, instead of watching while I slept, Najama invariably slept while I watched. During the day her eyes were generally open, as was her mouth. If she wasn't talking to one of the interns, then it was to one of the nurses; if she wasn't talking to one of the nurses, then it was to one of the patients. The only time she was ever quiet was when she was waiting for me to come out of the washroom, and then only because there was nobody to talk to. Najama didn't know any English, and even if she had, neither of the policemen who accompanied us were particularly loquacious. More than once I had heard Najama pity them for their silence. She felt so sorry for them. Didn't they ever have anything to say to each other?

"I've decided on the attendant," I wrote to Lot, "but I still can't make up my mind about the policemen."

"It doesn't matter," came the answer. "The main thing is that the attendant should be the giddy type. We have a special plan for taking care of the policemen."

Now that we had settled on an attendant and a time of day, the date fixed itself. On Sunday, April 13, 1947, Najama was scheduled to be on duty during the afternoon shift. To be sure, this meant that I would not be taking full advantage of the extra week offered me by Mr. Broomfield to recover my strength, but then

again, the plans for my escape did not really call on me to exert myself very much. On the contrary, I would be expected to make my way out of the building calmly and unhurriedly as I could manage.

There were still three days to go. "Make use of the time until Sunday," I was instructed, "to accustom the policemen and the attendant to the fact that you are in the habit of spending long periods in the washroom."

"What's taking you so long in there?" the attendant asked me again. "You're not washing yourself again, are you? Don't you know it's unhealthy to shower so many times a day?"

That was in the afternoon. The attendant on the night shift said, "It's bad for you to shower in the evenings. You're liable to have a relapse." But while they waited for me in the corridor and listened to the sound of the running water, I stood fully dressed to one side, watching the steady spray and thinking how on Sunday, although the water would be running just as it was now, I would no longer be there to listen to their mild rebukes.

When I returned from my afternoon shower on Friday, I found my mother waiting by my bed along with Mr. Broomfield.

"Do you know where I've just come from?" my mother asked. "From Bethlehem! Not that I didn't know you were here. It's just that I decided to make a special trip to Rachel's Tomb. Whenever I came to visit you in prison, on my way back I stopped at her tomb to pray that she would have mercy on you and set you free. The keeper of the tomb inscribed your name on the grave and prayed for you. But today I went to Mother Rachel and said, 'Enough! I don't want to have to visit here any more. My daughter isn't in prison now, and I want you to see to it that she never goes back. You're a mother yourself. How can you refuse to listen to my plea? Do it for the sake of these tears of mine. Cry them aloud into the ears of God that He may hear.'"

"That will do," said Mr. Broomfield to my mother in Arabic. "Your time is up. You asked to be allowed to see your daughter for a minute and you've already been here for ten. You can see her in Bethlehem. Next Tuesday she's going back."

"If I'm feeling well by then," I corrected.

"You'll feel well," my mother pronounced. "I paid the keeper of the tomb good money to pray for you every day and to ask Mother Rachel to bless you."

On Saturday I showered three times. On Sunday morning, when Najama came on duty, I said to her, "I've decided that you're right. This morning I won't shower at all, but I'll take a good long one this afternoon to make up for it."

"*Wallahi!* Now you're showing some sense," she cried happily.

The nurse who was my contact came to make my bed and asked me to get up while she changed the sheets. When I lay down again I slipped my hand under the pillow and found a folded note and a wrist watch. Two drawings fell out of the note when I opened it.

"Hide the wrist watch on your person," Lot wrote. "We synchronized it this morning with the watches of those who will help you escape. Obey it to the second. At exactly one thirty, you'll see an Arab dressed in European clothing with a red carnation in his lapel walking in the corridor. As soon as you see the carnation, get up and go to the washroom. By the shower, behind the hot water boiler, you'll find a bundle of clothes. In it will be a green dress with a white flower pattern, a long black peasant robe, a pair of shoes, and a black silk veil with which you will cover your head and face. We've sent you a diagram to show you how the veil goes on, but it would be best if you'd practice it a few times this morning with an ordinary kerchief, using the safety pin as indicated in the drawing. It should take no longer than five minutes between the time you enter the washroom and the time you leave. Don't leave until you hear someone crying *Yama! Yama!* outside. That's the signal. The coast will be clear. Then follow the directions on the second diagram. They will lead you outside to the Russian Compound, and from there to the street. Since you're an Arab woman and veiled, the gatekeeper in the Compound won't ask you for your papers or search you when you leave. As you exit through the gate, you'll see a refreshment stand across the street. Next to it will be a woman holding a straw basket to which a red handkerchief will be tied. This will be Drora. To

make sure that she recognizes you, lift the hem of your robe a little as you cross the street so that you expose the bottom of your dress. Drora knows what the dress looks like because she bought it yesterday with Nurit. She will start walking down a narrow lane. Follow her. A taxi will be waiting there for you. The driver is Amichai. It should then be one thirty-seven."

At a quarter after one an Arab in peasant dress, a basket of fruit in his hand, entered the sickroom and after a moment's hesitation headed toward a bed in the far corner in which an old Arab woman lay in a coma. The room began to hum with visitors. Najama looked at each one of them longingly, hoping for an opportunity to exchange a few words. I glanced at my watch; it was exactly one thirty. Looking out at the corridor through the barred window, I saw a red carnation on an Arab in a splendid black tuxedo. "I'm going to take a shower," I announced.

"Now?" Najama interrupted her conversation with two veiled women and favored me with a look of infinite compassion.

"Now," I said, mentally comparing with the sketch the way their veils were secured.

"*Wallahi*, you poor girl!" Najama excused herself from the two women. "Why don't you ever have any visitors? Why isn't anyone allowed to come and see you?"

Najama and one of the two policemen on duty followed after me. Not far from the washroom I saw the man in the tuxedo talking to a veiled old Arab woman. I entered the washroom while Najama assumed her usual position against the wall. I locked the door behind me. It was one thirty-one.

I turned on the shower, removed my pajamas, and hurried to the boiler to look for the clothes. I couldn't find them. My heart began to pound. I ran my hand around the back of the boiler and pressed by face against the wall so as to see behind it. There was a package wrapped in rags. I undid it. A pair of shoes tumbled out first, followed by the rest of my costume. I put on the dress, donned the black robe, and noted that it was one thirty-two. I belted the robe and picked up the silky black veil, remembering to remove the safety pin attached to it. Then my mind went blank. I couldn't remember how the veil was to go on. The water cascaded

noisily in the shower stall and endless diagrams danced before my eyes. It was as though I had blacked out with the blackest of all the Arab veils that I had ever seen.

There was a babble of voices in the corridor outside and I struggled with the veil that now covered my head. Through the mesh I caught sight of my watch: one thirty-three and a half. The noise in the corridor grew louder. I thrust the pin through the back of the veil, jabbing myself in the neck, and shut the clasp. The downpour resounded in my ears a moment longer, and then it was shut out by the sound of my own blood. I closed my eyes and prayed.

As a child, when I used to sit with my mother on a bench in the synagogue on the Jewish holidays, I always marveled at the fact that our prayers were somehow able to reach all the way up to Heaven. Now, however, I felt as though Heaven were all about me. My prayer was a single word. Not a plea for counsel, nor even for help, but simply the name of God Himself, which I called upon with all my might. The sound of the shower was my only answer. People were shouting in the corridor, and then the cry of a woman, in a voice not unlike my mother's as it rose in prayer from the bench in the synagogue, pierced my ears: "*Yama! Yama!*"

It was one thirty-five. I left the shower running, turned on the faucet in the sink, and stepped into the corridor, shutting the washroom door behind me. Najama was gone from her place by the wall, and so was the policeman. Following the diagram in my head, I descended the stairs and reached the main lobby, which was swarming with police and detectives. On my way to the Russian Compound I felt that there was hardly enough strength in my body to drag my feet, but I had to force myself not to run. Veiled Arab women do not run. Veiled Arab women walk slowly and gracefully, as I was doing right now. The Russian Compound was full of tanks and armored vehicles. I threaded my way between them, leaning occasionally against their sides so as to support myself and keep from falling. The sound of water in the shower streamed ceaselessly through my head. The gatekeeper won't ask to see your identification, Lot had written. Arab women

wearing veils aren't expected to show their faces to strangers. I mingled with the crowd going through the gate. Across the street, at the refreshment stand, a girl was drinking something from a glass. A red handkerchief was tied to her basket. Drora.

I picked up the hem of my robe to let her catch a glimpse of my dress. Her eyes were thirstily drinking me in. The owner of the stand was counting out her change, and she must have been swearing at him for being so slow. I followed her along the sidewalk and down a nearby lane. When we were no longer in sight of the street, she spun around and began to cover me with kisses. I couldn't return them because of the veil. A taxi drove up. Amichai quickly bundled me inside. I sat there overwhelmed in my green and white dress, my veil laid aside, but a hazy curtain of black still before my eyes. The last thing I remembered before losing consciousness was Amichai saying, "It's exactly one thirty-seven. Let's go!"

When I came to, I was lying in bed. Two men were standing over me. One was Tsion, the other Dr. Hefner, Lechi's Jerusalem physician.

Tsion placed a cold compress on my forehead and introduced himself: "I'm Tsion, and the bed you're lying in belongs to me. How are you feeling?"

Dr. Hefner bent over to take my pulse.

"Excellent! It's a shame you were out cold, though, or you would have heard the sirens sounding in your honor. Your breathing is fine. Your left lung is a little clogged, but it's nothing serious. A touch of pleurisy after pneumonia isn't unusual. Our free air will cure you soon enough. Our student here will see to that."

Tsion was called "student," I thought, because he was so pale and thin, with a face almost too genteel, too pure. Only later did I learn that he really was a student and that his delicate skin and fragile appearance were but the shadows cast by his approaching death. Within a few months Tsion would be dead of cancer. Meanwhile in the underground, as long as he lived, he went on studying. He had no home. His parents had been killed in Auschwitz and he had arrived in Palestine with nothing but the shirt on

his back. During the day he studied medicine in the Hebrew University on Mount Scopus; his nights belonged to the underground. Today, however, he had not gone to class, but remained to care for me. Dr. Hefner left and Amichai arrived.

"The two Arabs didn't appear for our rendezvous. They must have been caught. How is our little Arab enjoying her freedom?"

"She's still a little weak," said Tsion, blushing a bit as he wrung out the compress.

I sat up in bed to face Amichai. "What Arabs are you talking about? What rendezvous? Tell me how I escaped. I want to know."

When Lot had learned that I really was sick, he hadn't waited for me to recuperate. He immediately set about arranging a contact through the nurse, obtaining sketches of the interior of the hospital, and gathering as much information about the guard details as he could. The crux of the problem would be drawing the attendant away from the washroom at the moment I emerged in my disguise. Someone would have to appear in the corridor at just the right time and distract her attention. The only time outsiders were allowed to come and go in the corridor was during visiting hours. Moreover, since the patients in my room were all Arabs, only an Arab could appear as a visitor without making himself immediately conspicuous. Lechi didn't have any Arab members, but it did have access to Arabs through Elchanan, who was a close friend of Yussef Abu-Gosh, an inhabitant of the Arab village of Abu Gosh near Jerusalem.

As Amichai recounted it, Elchanan was in favor of sounding Yussef out on the idea, and the second time he met with Lot he brought Yussef with him. Yussef thought the plan over and agreed to take part in it. Lot still wasn't satisfied. He wanted an Arab woman to accompany Yussef to the hospital. It would be safer, more natural, less likely to arouse suspicion. The trouble was that the Arab woman couldn't really be an Arab woman. They were kept under lock and key by their own husbands. How could they be expected to help free anyone else? There was only one solution: a Jew disguised as an Arab.

Within twenty-four hours Lot received word from Adam in Tel

Aviv: "We have just the person. She's a Jewish girl from Yemen who can pass for an Arab perfectly."

Adam had found her by accident. In fact, he had practically invented her. She was not a member of Lechi, but her friends Aharon and Tsiona were. Adam had met her at Aharon and Tsiona's home the same day that he heard from Lot. Immediately he decided that she was perfect for the part. The question was how to convince her.

Deviously, Adam lured Rivka into a conversation. He himself was not a Yemenite, he told her, but he had a good friend who was. Unfortunately she was in jail, but plans were already afoot to help her escape. Rivka was thrilled, but Adam was already beginning to regret his mistake. "I really shouldn't have told you about all this. I had no business sharing this with you. Now that I have, now that you know about it, there's no alternative but to include you in the operation."

"Operation? What operation?" Rivka was sincerely alarmed.

"We have no choice. You'll have to play a part in the escape."

"Me?"

"You."

"But I won't say a word to anyone, I swear I won't!"

"It's too late," said Adam. "If you don't take part, our men will have to follow you constantly from now on, night and day."

"But what should I do?"

"Go to Jerusalem and wait there for further instructions."

It was ruthless, but what else could be done? Rivka went to Jerusalem, spent two days with Drora, and on the day of my escape she dressed up as an Arab peasant and was introduced to her "husband," Yussef Abu-Gosh. She hid the bundle of clothes for me behind the boiler, started a conversation with Najama, cried "*Yama! Yama!*" at the top of her voice when the time came, and made for the exit together with Yussef, as fast as they both could go.

Still, without the fistfight there would have been no escape, since the policeman would have remained at his post in the corridor. Lot, Elchanan, and Yussef had puzzled a long time over what to do about the policeman. I never did find out which of the three

deserved credit for the idea because in the excitement none of them thought to remember.

A fistfight. That would bring the police running to break it up. "I have two cousins," said Yussef Abu-Gosh. "They'll do the fighting."

"Suppose they don't agree?"

"They'll agree!" Yussef promised, and that same night he returned with the two of them.

Lot looked them over and liked what he saw.

"You're taking a big risk," he said to them. "You don't have to do it if you don't want to."

"They'll do it," said Yussef. His cousins nodded their assent and Elchanan bobbed up and down enthusiastically in the background. The question of whom the cousins would visit had already been solved by the nurse's report on the various patients in the room with me.

"Salama is an old Arab woman in a comatose state. She is completely unconscious of her surroundings and hardly anyone ever comes to visit her."

Ideal! Salama could be trusted. The plan was shaping up. The object of the visit: Salama. The purpose: to stage a fight. The purpose of the fight: to distract the guards. The kind of fight: bare fists, no quarter asked or given. One detail remained: the fight had to have a pretext. Why should two grown men who had come to visit a sick old woman in the hospital suddenly come to blows? It's easy enough to get into a real fight over an imaginary issue, but to find a real issue for an imaginary fight. . . .

The cousins had some difficulty understanding the problem: "What do we need a pretext for? When the time comes we'll just start punching each other."

But Lot explained that the excuse wasn't for them. It was for the benefit of the patients, and also of the law in case there should be any difficulty with the policemen. They decided to lay the question aside for the time being and deal with some of the other fine points of the visit. Yussef suggested that they should bring the old woman a basket of fruit.

This gave one of the cousins an idea: "I've got it! We'll fight

over the fruit. Suppose one of us says he brought the fruit for the old woman, and the other claims it as his own gift. We can get worked up over it and start to fight. In the end we'll manage to make up somehow, leave the basket behind us, and go."

Only in the end it didn't work out exactly that way. In formulating the original plan, two factors had been left out of consideration: the cold blood of Englishmen and the hot blood of Arabs. The consequence of the first was that the policemen took an unwarrantedly long time before moving in to break up the fight. The consequence of the second was that when they finally did move in, the cousins were so excited that they began to hit the policemen, too.

By that time I was already descending the stairs, crossing the Russian Compound, and following Drora as she turned into the lane. There was no need for the cousins to continue carrying on. It was high time they stopped and left also. But things were going from bad to worse. They didn't know how to stop. The fight had become a pitched battle. Reason yielded to blood. They had a reason to fight, but they couldn't think of one to make them calm down. When the police finally managed to separate them, the two combatants decided that they really didn't have anything against each other after all; they were willing to make up and go home.

"Oh, no, you don't!" said the police as they started to leave. One of the officers had a bleeding nose and the other sported a welt on his forehead. "You have some unfinished business with us."

The cousins were removed to the station house. The forsaken basket of fruit remained on the floor. The hum of visitors rose again to its former volume. "Shame, shame," they murmured, "to make such a fuss over a trifle." On her bed Salama lay as blissfully unconscious as ever, and the water in the washroom flowed steadily as before.

At first the two men were booked on a charge of disturbing the peace in a public place. But when the excitement was over, Najama returned to her post in the corridor. Then the sirens began to wail, and the two cousins were viewed in a different light by the police. They were interrogated and beaten, but they wouldn't talk.

Over and over they insisted that they didn't know anyone named Kula Cohen and had never heard of the *Jamaat Stern*. Their only acquaintance in the hospital was the old woman Salama, the Lord preserve her. Thus far they agreed, but from here their stories conflicted.

"It was I who bought the fruit with my hard-earned money!" said one.

"You're a liar! The fruit was mine," said the other.

The police were unconvinced. They kept asking questions: "How much money were you paid to stage the fight?"

"Money?" The men were genuinely offended. "What do you mean, money? We came to see Salama, the Lord preserve her."

The police alternately bullied and befriended them: "Come over to our side and work for us. What do you want to help the Yahud for? We'll pay you well and we won't press charges. Just tell us for whom you were working."

The cousins couldn't understand. "We're not interested in politics. We don't want any money. We don't want any trouble. We want to go home."

But they did not go home. They sat in jail for many months, and a few weeks after their arrest they were joined by Yussef Abu-Gosh. Having managed to escape from the hospital, he was turned in by the first Jewish friend in whose house he sought refuge. Elchanan was taken into custody for a few days on account of his known connections with the villagers of Abu Gosh, but there was no real evidence against him and in the end he was released.

The three Arabs never betrayed us.

"I'll never understand it," I said to Michael not too long ago. "How do you explain it?"

It was a question I had asked myself countless times, ever since I learned the details of my escape. I knew all about Elchanan's close ties with Yussef Abu-Gosh and about the faith that the villagers had in these two. I knew about their strong local pride and their traditional hostility toward the British, and I had heard a great deal about the long record of friendship between this village and the Jewish kibbutzim that surrounded it. None of this ade-

quately accounted for the loyalty of these three Arabs who withstood coercion and temptation to protect us.

When Michael finally answered, it was as though he were still trying to think the matter through himself.

“If instead of considering it as an isolated incident,” he said, “we view it as an extreme case of a general phenomenon . . .” and so on and so forth giving me, I suppose, an accurate historical perspective on the “phenomenon.” But to this day, whenever I meet Yussef Abu-Gosh or any of his fellow villagers, I cannot look them in the eye without feeling that I owe them a deep personal debt, a debt far greater in a way than any I owe my comrades in Lechi.

AMICHAÏ LAUGHED. "British detectives are peeping behind veils all over the city, and here you are, a dizzy blonde . . ."

There was nothing funny about it. Since the night before, as a matter of fact, I hadn't laughed at all. On the morning of that day I had still been a brunette. In the evening Paula, our underground beautician, arrived from Tel Aviv with a small suitcase full of tubes and brushes and dyes. She busied herself briefly mixing a solution from some jars, then spent what seemed to me a very long time rubbing it into my head. My scalp burned until I cried aloud. I could feel it fizzing, corroding, while the concoction ate its way down to the roots of my hair. I had never realized how deep they went.

"Blacker than night," Paula grumbled, and poured some more of the solution onto my hair. My eyes were shut tight. At last she said, "That's that. Would you like to take a look?"

Someone handed me a mirror. I opened my eyes. Staring out at me was an eyeless, faceless woman with blinding reddish-gold hair that came tumbling out of the glass as though to lunge at my throat.

"Who are you?" I whispered horror-stricken to the mirror image.

Paula embraced me happily. "Fantastic!" she said. "Your own mother wouldn't know you."

Neither would I. I hated being a blonde, hated the detectives who made it necessary. I wanted to be dark again.

I wasn't just an ordinary blonde, either. I was the latest word in

fashion. In front, the hair was combed up in a sweeping pompadour, and in back it hung around my shoulders in a kind of snood. My pale lips shouted with rouge. My dark complexion was powdered white, and my brown eyes were hidden behind a pair of elegant spectacles. They had lenses, too, although these, of course, were plain glass so as not to affect my vision. Not an ordinary blonde at all. I wore high-heeled shoes, sheer silk stockings, and an expensively tailored suit.

"The only thing missing is a lap dog on a fancy leather leash," Tsion said shyly.

"Incredible!" was Dr. Hefner's reaction when he came to see me later in the evening. "Let's hope that your pleurisy has disappeared as completely as the rest of you."

It hadn't. The pleurisy would linger on for a long time to come, but Dr. Hefner was pleased with the results of his examination.

"As far as I'm concerned, she can leave Jerusalem tonight," he said, putting away his stethoscope.

"Not tonight," Tsion told him. "First we have to get her new identification papers. Tomorrow morning we'll take her to one of the photographers in the neighborhood."

Dr. Hefner shook my hand and wished me good luck. "Don't forget to smile for the camera," he said.

The next morning, April 17, 1947, I was awakened by the sound of sirens. Tsion jumped to the window. "The street is full of soldiers. We must have been discovered. Where are you?"

I was already in the hiding place we had decided upon, under the bed, squeezed between a chest full of bedclothes and the wall. The wide mattress overhead covered me like a roof. Tsion climbed into bed and pulled the blankets over him.

"How are you down there?"

"I'm not here."

"Do you hear any noises on the stairs?"

"No." My ribs were beginning to ache.

"Can you hear . . ."

"I can't hear anything."

Only the bedsprings above squeaked every time Tsion turned over.

"Why don't they come?" he hissed.

"Maybe the sirens were just to announce a general alarm."

"What general alarm? The whole British army is standing right outside of this house!"

It was not a general alarm, but neither were the sirens meant for us. They were sounding at that same moment all over the country to drown out news of four Jewish boys who had been hanged that morning in Acre fortress: Dov Gruner, Yechiel Dresner, Mordechai Elkachi, and Eliezer Kashani. The day before, these four had been transferred secretly from their cells in Jerusalem. The next morning they were hung without being allowed to say good-by to their families. Without even a rabbi to hear their last confession. There was only the hangman.

Two more condemned boys, Moshe Barzani and Meir Feinstein, did not make the trip to Acre until five days later. This gave them five more days to think about the surprise they had in store for their executioners. As they mounted the gallows, Moshe and Meir planned to blow up themselves and any British officials who happened to be present.

The surface of their bomb was the peel of an orange; the inside, explosives and metal fragments: a golden apple made by the golden hands of Eliezer Ben-Ami, a member of Lechi who was in a cell next door to Moshe and Meir. The idea of this Samsonian suicide had originated with the two boys themselves during the long nights of waiting and the long days of impotent rage that followed their sentence. On a piece of paper which they managed to smuggle to their comrades in the adjacent cell they wrote: "Get us two hand grenades."

One for their hangmen—one for themselves.

Immediately baskets of food for the condemned boys started to arrive from the other prisoners. Morning, afternoon and night, the donations came. They included oranges. Morning, afternoon and night the prison guards inspected the baskets in the main office before passing them on to the condemned. To make the work easier for them the prisoners would send the food already cut into pieces, slicing into the rinds of the oranges along the sections of the fruit. Little by little, as the guards relaxed their scrutiny, they

began cutting into the rinds less deeply. The peels that contained the explosives were only superficially notched, but the guards barely glanced at them.

Moshe and Meir were both natives of Jerusalem, but they had never met in the outside world. Moshe was a member of Lechi, Meir of Etsel. A mutual acquaintance—Death—introduced them, and when Death makes an introduction it is not simply face to face, but heart to heart.

The night before their execution they were visited by Rabbi Goldman who stayed up with them the whole night. He spoke about matters of life and death: about life which is death, and death which is life.

“The rabbis of old used to say that each man is brought into this world for the purpose of fulfilling some task. Some men fulfill what is given them to do in twenty years, some in seventy, and others never at all. For those who never fulfill their task at all, life is a perpetual death. For those who fulfill it and go on living, life no longer has any purpose. That, too, is a kind of a death. But in lives such as yours, my sons, death can get no footing at all, for even your death is turned into life.”

The boys beamed. Rabbi Goldman beamed, too, and began to relate to them the most marvelous things from the books of the rabbis and the Book of Books.

“My grandfather wrote commentaries on *The Song of Songs* and *Ecclesiastes*,” Meir joyfully declared.

“My grandfather wrote a book, too,” Moshe exclaimed, then hesitated. “It’s not a book you would have read, though. It was written in Bagdad and it’s about mysticism and cabala.”

“*The Gift of Judah!*” Now it was Rabbi Goldman’s turn to become excited. “Of course I have read it!” he said, and seeing that Moshe could hardly believe him for joy, he added: “Your grandfather tells a wonderful story in that book about walking through a grove of date trees in Bagdad. He reached out his hand to pluck a date and heard a human voice say to him from the fruit: ‘I am the unredeemed soul of the false messiah Sabbatai Zevi. If you recite the proper blessing over me before eating me, I will be redeemed.’ Your grandfather blessed the date and ate it, and the soul of Sabbatai Zevi was granted its redemption.”

Rabbi Goldman, in his exaltation over the miraculous transmigration of the soul of Sabbatai Zevi, which had yearned for the Salvation of Israel but had burned its wings in the flame of an alien faith, knew nothing of Moshe and Meir's plan. Even if he had noticed at that moment the red flame that shot from their eyes, he could hardly have guessed that it was kindled by the mysterious affinity the two boys saw between a date from Bagdad and an orange from Jerusalem.

"I'll wait in the cell next door until morning. I want to be with you until the very end."

He wanted at least one friendly face to appear among the cold, hard stares of the hangmen when the boys mounted the gallows. The condemned begged the rabbi to bid them farewell and go, and the rabbi, thinking that they wanted to spare him the horror of the execution, was overcome with emotion and refused. The harder they pressed, the more adamant he grew. He would stay to the end.

And so he waited in the next cell for the morning to arrive.

Moshe and Meir didn't wait any longer. Although it was no longer possible to avenge the death that awaited them, it was still within their power to cheat it of its moment of triumph. One of the bombs would have to remain in the basket of fruit. It was a pity to waste it, but there was nothing else to be done. The other they placed between their chests, joining their bodies in an embrace. Meir had only one arm to put around Moshe; the other had been amputated after it was mangled in the assault on the railroad depot in Kfar Atta. Moshe, however, had two arms. One he put around Meir and with the other he held a burning cigarette against the fuse of the bomb. . . .

When the guards arrived, they found the two boys together in one heap, and Moshe's left arm lying by itself in a corner. The burial took place according to the prescription of Jewish law: each one-armed body had a grave of its own, and Moshe's dismembered limb was placed in a separate coffin.

Five days after my escape I was in a taxi being driven from Jerusalem to Raanana, a small town on the coast between Haifa

and Tel Aviv. I was not the only blonde in the car. Three others were sitting with me.

"I never realized that the underground had so many brunettes until we had to start looking for these blondes," someone joked as we climbed into the taxi. The car raced along the road. On my finger was a gold wedding ring, and on my knees a bawling year-old baby. He had his reasons for crying. His mother was sitting by the driver in the front seat, and for some reason refused to rescue him from this strange lap. He didn't care a fig that my new identification papers listed him as my son, and that my "husband," Tsion, sitting at my side, was his "father."

The taxi stopped at the entrance to Raanana. The trip had been uneventful. Good-bys were exchanged, and I was taken to the house of some Lechi sympathizers, who would care for me until I was well. My recuperation was spent in dreaming about the day when I would again stand before a microphone and broadcast from the underground. One day a note from Gra arrived, informing me that a new radio station would soon be ready.

"'What happened?' Those were the last two words spoken by the announcer of our station before it fell. And so now, with the same words, the Voice of the Hebrew Underground resumes its broadcasts." As I leaned to speak into the microphone in front of me, I saw in my mind's eye the startled face of Sergeant Seidel: Yes, Sergeant Seidel, what happened? What really happened?

My pleurisy finally left me and I moved from Raanana to Bnei Brak, where I stayed with Gideon and Karni. For the first time since I had left my parents, I was living in a real house. It made me homesick. A meeting was arranged for us at a mutual friend's place. At first my family didn't recognize me. One day a former teacher of mine sat next to me on a bus, and he didn't recognize me either. To him I was a perfect stranger. The rabbi who married Adam and me in the presence of a handful of people had no way of knowing, of course, that neither the groom's black mustache nor the bride's gold hair were genuine articles. The good rabbi was totally confused when, just as the ceremony was drawing to a

close, an uninvited guest burst into the room and whispered something to Adam. The rabbi was still wondering while Adam snatched me away from under the canopy and we disappeared down the stairs several steps at a time.

I became a recruiting agent again, but my fancy high heels kept tripping me up. I gestured with manicured hands and shook a coiffured head; I pleaded and urged in carefully chosen words: "Come, the underground is waiting for you. Come join us. Together we are strong." But all the time one simple thought kept plaguing me beneath my elegant straw hat: When will I be dark-haired again?

Nights were spent in the radio station. "This is the Voice of the Hebrew Underground! This is the radio station of the Freedom Fighters of Israel!" But the voice that issued through my rouged lips did not sound convincing to me. The words seemed painted and pretentious. I looked blonde, but tried to talk brunette.

And there was a great deal to talk about. This was the underground's most active year, one in which both the Lechi and the Etsel functioned more intensely and successfully than ever before. Twice a week Lechi radio went on the air to announce a growing list of almost daily operations: army bases and police stations attacked; military trains blown up; scores of British soldiers and detectives killed; railroad tracks, bridges, telegraph lines destroyed; refineries and pipelines in flames; British prisons raided and their prisoners freed.

The war was still being waged from the underground, but now it spilled over into the streets and forced the British to bare their claws and show their true colors. Tens of thousands of survivors from the gas chambers, who had made their way to the shores of Palestine in leaky ships, were assaulted with tear gas, beaten with clubs, and deported to Cyprus or sent back to the hellish harbors of Europe; sometimes even left to founder in mid-sea. Jewish boys were hung in the prisons; innocent Jewish pedestrians were gunned down in the streets by British bullets; Jewish settlements were besieged all over the country, and curfews and raids occurred day after day.

“This is the Voice of the Hebrew Underground! You are listening to the voice of the Hebrew Underground!”

The voice gathered strength and grew louder. Gradually, the British were being thrown on the defensive. Their tanks and armor were being used less to terrorize the Jewish community than to protect themselves. Their army bases more and more resembled ghettos and beleaguered forts. The peril in which they found themselves increased from day to day. Finally, the situation became unendurable. The government of Great Britain took stock, added up the profits and the losses, calculated the odds, and decided to dump the whole problem into the lap of the United Nations. Following the report by the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, which recommended that the country be partitioned into separate Jewish and Arab states, the British announced that they were planning to evacuate.

Evacuate? So soon? For a moment Lechi was stunned! But only for a moment; it quickly recovered its voice: “We don’t believe it!”

“You’re lying!” we accused the British. “You’re not planning to leave at all!”

But they had already started to pack.

For years, backed by the firmness of our convictions and the justice of our cause, we had been preaching to the skeptics: “They will leave!” For years the logic of historical experience and political facts had led us to insist: “They will have to leave.” Now that this was actually taking place before our eyes, we had every right to declare triumphantly to the false prophets whom we had always opposed: “See, we were right. They are leaving. We were right from the very beginning. They had to leave.”

But we couldn’t. The words stuck in our throats. The British were leaving, but somehow it wasn’t the way we had expected. We hadn’t joined the underground simply to fight a few skirmishes with a foreign invader. Even if the enemy had announced his withdrawal not only from Palestine but from the entire Promised Land, from the borders of the Nile to the banks of the Euphrates, it would not have meant the end of the war of Redemption that we were fighting. Liberating the homeland had never been for us

simply a question of ground under our feet, but one of divine imperatives over our lives as well.

Together with Yair we had taken the oath: "We are soldiers of Israel for life," and we had sworn that there could be no life for Israel without a Kingdom of Israel, the meaning of which was perpetual sacrifice on the fields of holiness and creation. Together with Yair we had sung, "Only death can free us from the ranks," and the death we had in mind was our own, not the enemies'.

Only now the enemy was dead and we were still alive and being called upon to abandon those ranks and join forces with the Establishment, the organized Jewish community.

Break up and go home. We weren't ready for that. Where was there to go? In our ecstatic vision of Redemption it had always seemed to us that victory in war would coincide with the fulfillment of the dream of ages. Somewhere beyond the realms of cold reason, we had believed that, when the last British soldier left the country, messianic times would arrive. Now, however, the British were going home; the veil had fallen, but no Messiah stood behind it. We were first bewildered, then panic-stricken, and in our panic we clutched at the last straw of hope: If the Messiah was not yet in sight, it could only be because the veil hadn't fallen after all.

"It's a lie; they're not leaving!" we proclaimed to the people. But the people were no longer listening to us. All ears were now turned to the United Nations in New York, which was soon to declare the establishment of a Jewish state in a partitioned Palestine.

"It's a trick; don't be taken in!" we warned the leaders of the Jewish community. With their typical opportunism and their ingenious ability for adjusting to any situation, they were already moving to fill the power vacuum that the British would leave. They enjoined us to dissolve.

"Come back home," they requested, in a tone that left little doubt as to whose home it was.

No, it was not the home we had envisioned and yearned for. It was not so much the house itself, narrow and cramped though it was, which made us feel ill at ease. It was the character of our landlords. We knew them well and had known them since we first

left them and their docile masses to go to war. They were not great architects of aspiring temples hewn out of rock. They were designers of apartment houses built on sand, strictly functional structures whose sole purpose was to keep away thieves, highwaymen, high winds, and dreams. We undergrounders felt more at home in prison than in such houses, for in a cell at least we could dream as we pleased.

We were requested to come home. They did the requesting. Somehow the rudder of history had slipped from our hands. All the time that Lechi had been concentrating on mobilizing the forces of the nation against the British, political ambitions for the future had never once crossed our minds. So confident had we been of our ability to control the course of events that we had deliberately refused to prepare for the inevitable struggle for power in the future Jewish state. Now we were being asked to make ourselves at home in that state without any possibility of refashioning it according to our own ideals. Victory over the British had brought about the liberation of a portion of the Jewish homeland, but at the same time it had vanquished Lechi completely. Our breaths were drawn deep for an extended campaign, and when we were suddenly called upon to exhale—to relax—we choked. The leaders of the organized Jewish community, on the other hand, accustomed to quick short breaths, now found themselves in control. True, the compromise being offered the Jews fell short even of their modest expectations and they, too, were caught off balance, but only temporarily. They steadied themselves, put their former hopes behind them, took what was offered, called it "the realization of the Jewish dream," and appointed themselves its trustees. And ours too!

Even under less bitter circumstances it would have been painful to say good-by to the underground. When we first joined Lechi, most of us had thought of underground life as a temporary costume which we should be only too happy to take off as soon as it was no longer necessary. But the costume began to fit and it became suffused with the blood and sorrow of our lives. Removing it was like amputating a limb from one's body. It couldn't be compared to a soldier coming home from the wars and removing

his uniform. A soldier in a regular army is on a stage; far below stands the audience, applauding him for his bravery; there is always that contact. The underground, by its very nature, was an off-stage performance, and the curtain that separated us from our audience was woven of blackest anguish and most radiant hope on a loom of vision and unflagging faith.

“This is the Voice of Hebrew Underground! This is the radio station of the Freedom Fighters of Israel!”

The voice had lost its timbre, its fight. I stood before the microphone as before, only my voice was weaker, too; and each time I broadcast it grew less substantial. One night, on November 29, 1947, it was drowned out completely. I stood with my friends on a rooftop in downtown Tel Aviv and emptyheartedly watched the delirious crowds dancing in the streets below. Over Kol Yisrael, soon to become the official government station, an announcer was victoriously reporting the news that the General Assembly of the United Nations had approved, by the necessary two-thirds majority, the partition of Palestine and the creation of a Jewish state—a Jewish state without Jerusalem, without Hebron and Bethlehem, without the Gilead or the Bashan or the lands beyond the Jordan.

For a moment I failed to understand why I felt so apart from it all, why I did not wish it was I broadcasting the historic decision, but then I knew. My voice could have nothing to do with it. The announcer's words could never have been my own. My own words remained integral, they could never be partitioned. The joy of the crowds below could not be shared by me, for I felt only the infinite grief of a slaughtered dream, a dream that could not be divided without being mutilated at the same time.

Anyone could draw boundaries in the ground, but a land that had a soul of its own and had been sanctified from above, had its frontiers not on earth but in Heaven. Heaven had made those frontiers and Heaven alone could change them.

“A Jewish state!” Thousands sang in the streets.

“Long may it live!” The dancers circled wildly.

I stood on the rooftop, outside the circle, and breathed into my nostrils the smoke belching from the stacks of the departing British ships. The black roots of my hair were thirsting to live again

and drive the golden impostors out. My feet began to keep time with the dancers and my empty heart beat with their cadence. But I would remain outside. An ancient, heady melody that had started long ago would continue to resound far beyond these voices and frontiers.

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

JERUSALEM,
Tu Bishvat 5722
January 20, 1962

Dear Geula,

This morning at 9:15 I arrived with bated breath at the final page of your "story" – with you feeling "an abyssmic pain of a slain dream", following the announcement of the partition of the land and the establishment of the state of Israel, "a state of Israel without Jerusalem, without Hebron and Bet-Lehem, without the Gilead and the Bashan", and you are "standing outside the circle" while "the thousands are exulting in song and the bodies are dancing round".

I remember that night of the 29th of November. I was staying at a hotel in Kalya on the north shore of the Dead Sea. They awakened me from my sleep and told me of the UN Assembly vote. Shortly thereafter all the Dead Sea workers came to the hotel and joined with the hotel guests in a joyous dance, one of tidings and victory. I did not rejoice and stood as a mourner at a party. The next day, too, when I returned early to Jerusalem – all the Jews of Jerusalem were dancing in the streets, among them Jews of Meah Shearim also. The Jewish Agency building and its courtyard had filled with celebrating and happy people. Again I did not participate in the joy. However my sorrow and anxiety were different from yours. You felt a disappointment and emptiness ("my heart is empty" you write) because what had come to an end was the Bound Altar upon which you had ascended by yourselves and from which many did not return whole and I, I was fearful for the expected Bound Altar for us – not to individuals but for the entire people in the coming weeks and months. I had no doubt that we are standing before a war of life and death not with a foreign regime but with a people of the Arab peoples.

And reading now, more than fourteen years after the night of November 29, 1947, the finale of your somber story, I felt all the depth of your pain, your disappointment and alienation what that happiness caused. This while not agreeing now as at that time with your position and that of your comrades.

I read your book out of an internal decision to forget during the time of reading all that I know of that period and to ignore my own political outlook of those days (and now I recognize even more how correct it was) and to see the things that you retell through your eyes and to relive your experiences as if I were in your place. I was successful in this while reading most of the book. I became one of the members of Lechi of those days, dazzled as you by the great and faithful love and the deep and mistaken hate. Not through my merit did I become while reading as one of you but through the merit of the “fighter” who tells “her story” with amazing strength, with the exuberance of internal truth, burning, lighting and igniting, branding all experience as if in tongs of electrified iron. I experienced those things that you retell as if they occurred to me, as if I was one of the group. But there are portions – though not many – of your book that altogether prevented from me any small identification with your emotions and all my efforts of the soul to disregard my oppositionist stand were inadequate.

*For in those days you reveal in all the cruelty of the truth the abyss between you and us, not only in comprehending the diplomatic and international background of our struggle but also regarding the grasp of the centrality in the establishment of Israel in the land of its forefathers and the centrality was the **uniqueness** of our national renaissance that has no comparison in its strength among all the nations of our time or in the former generations. This, just as all our history, from the time of our Patriarch Abraham until our own times, is singular with no comparison in the chronicles of all the other nations.*

***The secret of our people’s reestablishment and its foundation–stone** was not the liquidation of the foreign regime but the **Return to Zion** – that is to say immigration, settlement, Hebrew labor, guard duty, defense, reviving the Hebrew language and the accumulation of forces in all conditions and*

with all means. For the liberation of such countries as India, Burma, Ceylon, Ghana, Nigeria and others, that is the liberation of nations who were settled in their own countries under foreign rule, it was enough to destroy or remove the foreign rule. Not so with Israel. In our land many foreign regimes were replaced or done away with: Roman, Byzantine, Persian, Arab, the Crusaders, Seljuk, Mammeluke, Turkish – and no Jewish state arose. In 1948 also, when the foreign rule left here, we were a minority and without partition an Arab state would have been established **through the length and breadth of Eretz-Israel**. The sole alternative to a Jewish state in a portion of Eretz-Israel was, following the termination of the Mandate and the British regime in 1948, an Arab state in all parts of the country, with or without a Jewish minority. Those of the Arabs who aided Hitler to exterminate the six million Jews of Europe could easily have been capable with the aid of Hitler or his henchmen of destroying the hundreds of thousands of Jews then in this land.

Whereas Jabotinsky was wont of saying that in the Jewish state there would be a minority of two million Arabs, but he did not see or show how there would be more than two million Jews in this land **before** the establishment of the Jewish state. In Jabotinsky's eyes, only a Jewish majority on both banks of the Jordan River is what is meant by a "Jewish State". Likewise Jabotinsky's disciples, among them the head of the Irgun and the Lechi, did not see nor showed how. All the disciples of the Revisionist movement as well as several of those Zionists that upheld "Political Zionism" did not see the real and true obstacle that prevented the resurrection of Israel in its land, This obstacle was not the "foreign ruler" but the "foreign **presence**" in the land of our forefathers and **the lack of a Jewish presence**.

The "institutions" and "members of the Hagana" who are ridiculed in your book – and it fell to my lot to head these "institutions" and the "Hagana" for 15 years prior to the establishment of the state of Israel – felt with all their hearts and souls all those years that what was most important was the **Return to Zion**, that is immigration, settlement, Hebrew labor, etc., as I wrote previously. In my article "Two Paths" in early

1933 published in my book "From Class to Nation" (page 425) you will find the difference I noted then between "pioneering Zionism" and "demonstrative Zionism". The first does not place its trust in external forces but rather knows to fight for easier and supportive political conditions and places its hopes in the will of the Jewish people and trusts in Hebrew production and initiative in the labor section and settlement, in the absorption of immigrants and the formation of an internal Jewish military force which demands of itself. The second sees the center of gravity as an external governmental power and its demands are directed primarily to the outside. This was Revisionist Zionism. Whereas the Lechi did not continue the Revisionist line of Jabotinsky it saw the elimination of the foreign ruler as the way to redemption and everyone who fought that rule, even Hitler, was a possible ally.

When Yehoshua Cohen – our joint friend – told me that Yair demanded either in 1940 or 1941 to cooperate with Hitler in his war against the main enemy – against England, I was shaken to my very core and if I had not heard this from a faithful member of Lechi as Yehoshua, I would not have believed it. Your book verified Yehoshua's words even though Yehoshua is accepted by you and me in any case. Who wrote about the victory of the Allies who destroyed Hitler the following words: "Victory? Over who? Hitler may have died but with him died millions of Jews. If this really was out war – then it was Hitler who was victorious...".

The opinion of the "institutions" and the "Hagana members" was radically different: "we will fight the White Paper as if there was no World War and will fight Hitler at the side of England in this World War as if there was no White Paper". And if, heaven forbid, Hitler had won – and he who viewed not Hitler but England as the main enemy in World War II expected by the political logic Hitler's victory – not only would the six million Jews of Europe have been murdered but all the 18 million Jews of America, Europe, Asia, Africa and Australia. And if the "foreign ruler" would have remained faithful to the solemn and international obligations it gave the Jewish people – to ease immigration and Jewish settlement so as to establish a Jewish

state throughout the area of Greater Eretz-Israel – not one of us, that is of the “institutions” and the “Hagana” would have opposed the “foreign ruler” just as Jabotinsky did not oppose it in his appearance before the Peel Royal Commission of Inquiry in 1937.

But before the outbreak of World War II it became clear to me that there is no chance whatsoever that England would be faithful to its obligations to the Jewish People. In my talk before Hagana members five days after the war's outbreak on September 8, 1939 I pointed out that “as human beings and as Jews we are interested in the destruction of Hitler and the Nazi regime and not less than the English themselves we are interested in England's victory over Hitler's Germany. But we have an additional central concern, **our central concern**, – Eretz-Israel. England's victory in the war with Germany does not, by itself, assure that Eretz-Israel will belong to the Jewish People. This time we must strive to the creation of the fact: **the fact of a Jewish state!** This goal must direct and channel all our actions and steps. This goal must from now on beat throughout our being, our behavior, our internal efforts and our external relations” (You can find these words in my book “BaMaaracha”, Vol. III, pgs. 13–14).

But let me return to your book. Only in a few instances does reading your book return me to the great and deep dispute that was between us. While reading the greater part of your book I was totally captive heart and soul to the magic of your proud, cruel and courageous story and I saw before my eyes the wonderful images of your companions in the Bet-Lehem jail, only one of whom I got to know well before reading your book and before our meeting in Sde Boker – that is “Tzipora Weiss”, the wife of Yehoshua Cohen.

I read your book with pounding heart, excited and stirred, proud and admiring, and in several instances it appeared to me that I was a partner to the acts and the doers. The storm of the soul of those who ascended the Bound Altar carried me away too, and I bowed my head with all honor and respect before the death of the heroes, the two Eliyahus in Cairo and Moshe Barazani and Meir Feinstein and others. And I well felt what

was for you the little note that contained the words: “Geula – hello from death row – Dov”.

It is impossible to read your book – and it matters not who the reader is – without a shiver of sanctity and awe.

Even those who disagreed and still disagree even today with the political path of Yair and his comrades, as I do, that it was limited, short-sighted and ignored the main element, must share the feelings that you succeeded in expressing so powerfully even to the cruelty of complete dedication to your mission.

I did not know Yair personally and I am not sure if the image that I conjure up from reading memoirs of Lechi members and the two volumes of collected writings is correct, but I have no doubt that he was one of the finest and prominent personalities that were during the Mandate period. And I honor and respect with all my heart the poetry and the steel of his tempestuous soul and his unending commitment to the redemption of Israel – even if I negate completely his mistaken path.

I have no doubt that “A Story of a Fighter” will be a proud remembrance to the fearless fighters that sacrificed themselves in the belief in Israel’s salvation. It is also a supreme document of the nobility of the story teller herself.

Sacred is the pen that wrote this book.

*With deep appreciation,
David Ben-Gurion*

TOP SECRET

19th February, 1946.

Inspector-General.

Subject:- Seizure of Stern Group Broadcasting
Apparatus.

I have to report that commencing at 7.30 pm on 18.2.46 a combined operation was conducted in the upper Karton Quarter with a view to seizing the broadcasting apparatus used by the Stern Group. Forces taking part were as follows -

6 Sections, P.M.F.

1 P.M.F. Baton Party - 20 strong.

4 A.C.s.

D.I.B. Details.

Royal Corp Signals Technicians.

1 Coy 8th Parachute Bn in support.

2. Simultaneously with the commencement of the broadcast these forces moved off from Sarona and at approximately 7.40 pm the area including Hashomer and Rambam Streets was cordoned by troops and six search parties commenced operations.

3. At the outset of the search a person was observed by Sgt. Seidel to enter No. 3 Hashomer Street and run up the stairs. He was followed by Sgt. Seidel, who on the way encountered two persons; these persons were detained and a party ascended to the roof. The individual first observed entering the house was found loitering in the centre of the roof and he also was detained.

4. On the roof was a penthouse containing two rooms separated by a party wall; a fourth person left one of these rooms and he was placed in detention and the room searched. Nothing was found in this room. Prior to entering the second room, the door of which was on the opposite side of the penthouse the roof of the penthouse was searched and a ladies red handbag was found containing an identity card in the name of Shoshana HALEVY, a complete Hebrew script of a broadcast and nine very small notebooks containing writing in Hebrew. The door of the second room was locked and unoccupied it was forced and inside was found, in addition to other items, 1 U.S.A. type transmitter with earphones, speech amplifier and home made microphone. On the table in this room was four loaded pistols, 1 bag of bullets, 3 match box bombs and a quantity of literature. The roof itself was liberally strewn with 'match box bombs'.

5. All rooms in the house were then searched and persons found therein interrogated. 1 young female, who eventually admitted that her name was Geula COHEN and that the handbag found on the roof of the penthouse was hers, was arrested in the house. Fifteen other persons found in the precincts were detained for interrogation making a total of twenty.

THE PALESTINE POST

7 Years for Girl Broadcaster

Script Found in Handbag

Palestine Post Staff

Quite matter of fact, and in a low, restrained voice, Geula Cohen, pretty, dusky 20-year-old Yeminite girl, told the Military Court in Jerusalem yesterday that she belonged to the "fighters for the Freedom of Israel," an organisation which had been "set up to fight you." She challenged the Court's right to try her, since it had been constituted under laws of a "foreign power," and in reply to the President's remark when she began to read her statement (in lieu of defence) that he was not interested in politics, she said that were it not for British politics, she would not be standing in Court.

The accused, who admitted that she was a broadcaster for the Stern Group, was sentenced to seven and two years to run concurrently (with special treatment) on charges of possession of four pistols and revolvers and 48 rounds of ammunition. And of having had under her control a wireless transmitting apparatus without a valid permit, in Tel Aviv, 3 Rehov Haashomer, on February 18, 1946.

Except for the reading of her statement she took no part, and expressed her complete lack of interest in the proceedings of the trial refused defence counsel, and told the Court not to bother transcribing the testimony, which was entirely in English.

When, in the course of her address she referred to being tried under Defence Regulations in which the penalty was death, and the President assured her it was not, she smiled: "So you are not going to sentence me to death, well, that's all right."

GIRL ESCAPES FROM HOSPITAL

Palestine Post Staff

A 21-year-old girl broadcaster for the Stern group, Geulah Cohen, escaped from Jerusalem Government Hospital at 3 o'clock yesterday afternoon by jumping from a lavatory window.

In June last year she was sentenced by a Jerusalem Military Court to seven and two years imprisonment, to run concurrently (with special treatment) on charges of possessing four pistols and 48 rounds of ammunition, and of having had under her control a wireless transmitting apparatus without a valid permit, in Tel Aviv on February 18, 1946.

Ten days ago she was brought to hospital with pneumonia. It is understood that two persons dressed in Arab clothing came to the hospital during visiting hours yesterday afternoon, and put down some baskets with fruit in the ward in which Cohen lay guarded by a policewoman and a British constable. The two persons, who appeared confused as to whom they wanted to visit, went outside shortly afterwards, a noisy argument broke out in the corridor and the two police guards went to see what had happened.

JERUSALEM

MONDAY, APRIL 14, 1947

LATE
Edition

POLICE SEARCH FOR ESCAPED GIRL

Palestine Post Staff

The Police and Army are still carrying out extensive inquiries into the disappearance of Geulah Cohen, the 21-year-old Stern Group broadcaster, who escaped from the Jerusalem Government Hospital on Sunday afternoon.

A girl confederate of Cohen walked into the hospital with Arab dress over her European clothes, it is now learned. She left the Arab dress in a lavatory and walked out of the hospital. In the meantime, two Arabs from Abu Ghosh village put some baskets of fruit and food in Cohen's room and then began an argument outside.

Walked Out

Cohen, in whose locker drawer was found a plan of the hospital exits and guard posts, managed to go into the lavatory during the argument and put on the Arab clothing in which she walked past the guards.

