

# STILLPOINT

A novel of war and peace

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement. And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered.  
Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline. Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance, and there is only the dance.  
I can only say, there we have been: but I cannot say where.

T.S. Elliot



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A novel of war and peace



Colin Mallard, Ph.D.

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by

Colin Mallard, Ph.D.

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***Notes to the reader.***

This book is a work of fiction. The following events are facts: The destruction of Palestinian villages by the Stern Gang, the Carmeli Brigade, and other paramilitary groups, the attack on Haifa, the siege of Acre, the typhoid epidemic, the encroachment of Settlements on Palestinian land and the conditions in Gaza. So too is the sanctuary at Boston University's Marsh Chapel. Statistics quoted are also factual. For those interested a bibliography is provided at the back of the book. All characters are fictional, except for brief references to David Ben Gurion, Brigadier Beveridge, chief of the British Medical Services, Colonel Bonnet of the British Army, Dr. McLean of the Medical Services and Mr. De Meuron, the Red Cross delegate.

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All quotes from Lao Tzu are taken from the book, *Something to Ponder, reflections from Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching*, by Colin Mallard.





“Stillpoint” is dedicated in fond memory of

**Pierre Elliot Trudeau**

15th Prime Minister of Canada

Dreamer, Gadfly

And inspiration

And to my friend

**Madhukar Thompson,**

the craziest wise man I ever knew.

His unexpected departure was a loss for  
those of us who loved him.

Madhukar loved this book in its early stages.

I think he'd be pleased with the result.

Lights along the way



Acknowledgments.

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for his insight, and suggestions.

But then there was bread and sunshine too.

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my deepest thanks. Without you, this book would not be what it is.

From the bottom of my heart. Thank you.

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## **Alphabetical list of characters appearing in more than one chapter**

**Abdullah**- Hard line Iranian guerilla.

**Ali**- Father of Nadia, Halal and Jalal, grandfather of Mera

**Amal**- Nasir's older brother, fought with the guerillas.

**Aziz**- Friend of Nasir who provides refuge.

**Benjamin**- Brother of Josef who was killed by Nasir. Married Rachel.

**Bokhari**- Sufi sage, spiritual master to Nasir.

**Cole**- Republican Senator who led attacks on Tremaine.

**Durrah**- Mother of Tariq, friend of Nasir and Samara.

**Emerson, Richard**- President who dies early in his term of office.

**Gabir**- Nasir's uncle who tended the sheep.

**Goldhirsh, Joseph**- Israeli Foreign Secretary.

**Hafiz**- Member of Nasir's unit who yearned for peace.

**Halal**- Ali's son who worked in a garage. Brother of Nadia and Jalal.

**Hana**- Omar's wife, friend of Nasir and Heatherington.

**Harith**- Hard line Iranian guerrilla.

**Heatherington, Chris**- British medical officer in Acre, married Nadia, Mera's father.

**Herzog, Samuel**- Hard line Prime Minister of Israel.

**Jalal**- Son of Ali, brother of Nadia and Halal. Member of same fighting unit as Nasir.

**Joan Merrill**- Secret Service agent assigned to protect Tremaine.

**Josef**- Jewish soldier killed by Nasir, engaged to Rachel, brother of Benjamin.



**Kersey, Doug**- US Secretary of State

**Khalil**- Guerilla fighter, friend of Nasir.

**Lacey**- Wife of President Emerson.

**Levin, Michael**- Prime Minister of Israel.

**Levin, Rebecca**- Wife of Prime Minister of Israel.

**McCloud, Kevin**- Ex green beret, friend of Travis.

**McManus**- Admiral, member of Joint Chiefs.

**Mera** - Granddaughter of Ali, daughter of Nadia and Heatherington, wife of Morgan.

**Makarios, Jonathan** - Aide to Tremain.

**Mikel Antebi Husseini**- Israeli peace activist.

**Morgan, William**- (Bill)Vice President to Tremain.

**Nadia** - Daughter of Ali and Natalia, married Heatherington, mother of Mera.

**Natalia**- Wife of Ali and mother of Nadia, killed in attack on village.

**Nasir**- A Palestinian guerrilla who sought peace and became a sage.

**Nevis, Peter**- Ex green beret, friend of Travis.

**Omar**- Physician, Hana's husband, friend of Nasir, Ali, Heatherington and Mera.

**Rachel**- Wife of Benjamin, engaged to Josef before his death in 1948

**Ramirez, Jennifer**- Was once mistress to David Tremain.

**Robert Sandusky** - Secret Service Agent, assigned to protect Tremain.

**Salim**- Nasir's older brother, brain damaged by blows from a rifle.

*continued on next page*

## **Alphabetical list of characters cont'd**

**Ted**- Son of Mera and Morgan, killed in a gang shoot out.

**Sandra Tremaine**- David's wife.

**Tariq**- Member of a Palestinian guerilla unit. Friend of Nasir, son of Durrah.

**Travis, J. P. General**- Chairman of Joint Chiefs.

**Travis, Mildred**- Wife of General Travis.

**Tremaine. David**- Vice President who becomes President upon Emerson's death.







Try this coat

flesh on the white bones  
of history.

try on this coat  
wear it for a while  
listen!  
see how it feels.

imagine

you were there  
living it  
the joy  
sorrow and injustice.

laughter and tears  
tumbling down.

see with the eyes of others  
live what others live.  
would it change us?  
melt our hearts and set us free  
of.....blindness.

understanding is freedom

but first  
the mind must open  
an empty mind  
zen mind  
a beginners mind...knowing nothing.

Now!





## The Bus

It was Monday morning, the day after Tishah B'Av. Above the mountains to the east, a fiery sun burned in a cloudless sky. In the shadow of tall buildings, the street was a hive of activity. Local merchants opened their stores, sliding back the iron grates, removing shutters, and wheeling out display carts loaded with produce. Along the street traffic was heavy, impeded by trucks unloading fruit and vegetables from the kibbutzim. Haggling was a way of life in most Mediterranean cities, and Tel Aviv was no exception. Another busy day had begun.

The bus, filled with passengers on their way to work, pulled onto the street and joined the traffic. Its klaxon horns added to the din of early morning. Through an open window a young girl, red hair ruffled by the wind, watched mesmerized by the activity of the shopkeepers.

Above the cacophony of sounds, doves tumbled in play. With a thunderous roar, the bus blew apart. A bright sheet of orange flame shot upward; metal fragments and body parts flew in all direction. The force of the blast shattered windows up and down the street.

A dreadful silence ensued, followed by moans and screams. Lurid yellow flames and black smoke flickered

and floated in the twisted shell of the bus. Nearby, two cars lay on their sides, another spun slowly on its roof. Next to the shell of the bus, a large truck leaned at an odd angle, crushing the car beside it. The driver was dead, his head bowed on his chest.

People in the street ran in every direction, some toward the bus. A woman got there first, climbed up the side and pulled herself into the burning wreckage looking for survivors. Within moments others joined her, and as quickly and carefully as possible, they removed the injured before the flames could reach them.

The red-haired girl lay pinned beneath a twisted seat, a shard of metal protruding from a bloody shoulder. Two men carefully pried and pulled at the seat until the girl was freed. A woman bent down and together they lifted the girl off the metal spike. She groaned and passed out as they lifted her over the side to waiting hands and safety. Climbing out of the bus, the woman knelt beside the injured girl. Blood was pumping from the wound, and she knew it would have to be stopped quickly. Ripping pieces from his shirt, a man handed them to her. She glanced up and found herself looking into the green eyes of her husband.

Bunching the piece of shirt, she stuffed it into the bloody wound and quickly bound it tightly. In the distance, sirens wailed. The woman looked around to see where else she could help.

That evening, just before sunset, a well-dressed man on a busy street flicked open his phone and like any other business man in that section of the city, he went unnoticed. What he said did not. With the phone to his ear he waited. He heard a click, and a woman's voice came on the line. "Good evening," she said. "May I help you?"

"Listen closely. That bus this morning—it was the work of



Hamas. We will never allow a dishonorable peace. We are not afraid to die. Allah is great!”

The man snapped the phone shut, turned and hurrying away dropped it in a litter bin. Joining a crowd in front of the synagogue, he adjusted his yarmulke and entered the building.





Samara

Samara adjusted the yoke on her shoulders and set off along the path. The fierce heat of day had yielded to the approach of evening. She loved the daily walk to the springs. It was always a welcome break from looking after her brothers and sister. While she was gone, her mother would prepare the evening meal, and her father would be home by the time she returned.

She followed the trail as it wound along the shore and over the low-lying hills. The ocean sparkled in the slanting sunlight. Beneath the bending palms, small waves brushed the shoreline. The trail turned and followed a shallow valley that led to the foothills. Already the grasses were brown and parched from lack of rain. Clumps of sycamore and poplar dotted the hillsides, offering sharp contrast to the barren terrain.

Samara climbed steadily until she reached a curve where the trail turned south. She walked through a series of knolls before ascending a steep incline. She crested the hill and paused. Below, the trail sloped gently to the well, its pool of water shimmering in the light. Around the water's edge, a sea of green grass offered pleasant relief from the barren land. A cluster of palms stood at the abrupt end of a ridge that extended from the mountain. Beside the palms a steep valley cut into the hillside and vanished from sight.

She could see the old man sitting on the rocks at the edge of the pool, his sheep gathered at the entrance to the valley. He'd been there every evening for the past week. At first she was afraid of him, but as she got to know him, her fear subsided. Each evening he drew water and filled her pots. He wore the traditional clothes of a herdsman, and his hair and close-cropped beard were white. Black bushy eyebrows protruded below a white head of hair. His skin was dark, like hers, but weathered. His eyes seemed to sparkle and emanated both strength and gentleness. She'd learned to avoid the eyes of men, but she could not avoid Nasir's. When he spoke, his voice was soft, rich and soothing. He said he'd lived in the hills all his life. His ancestors had built the well and taken care of it for generations. With the changing seasons he moved the flock from place to place, visiting different wells.

She'd talked with him every evening when she'd gone for water. After their talks, she would hurry home before darkness swallowed her surroundings.

The evening before, she'd told her parents of meeting the shepherd at the well. Her mother stopped eating and looked quickly at her father. Samara caught the look and asked, "Do you know him?"

"What does he look like?" her father asked.

She described him. "Do you know him?" she persisted.

"Yes," her father answered. "Eighteen years ago, not long before you were born, Nasir arrived one evening at sunset. He seemed exhausted. We gave him water and shared a meal. After we'd eaten, we sat around the table relaxing. He looked at me and asked whether I trusted him. I thought it an odd question from a stranger, but I realized I did trust him. Nasir looked at us and told

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us we were in great danger and must leave for several days until it passed. We asked him to explain, but he wouldn't.

"We packed some food and a few belongings and he took us far into the hills. We walked until dawn. Just as light crept into the eastern sky, he helped us through an opening into a deep cavern. Water skins hung on wooden pegs and sheepskins surrounded the charcoal remains of a cooking fire.

"For three nights we remained in the cave. In the middle of the fourth, we returned home. We arrived at first light and could see at once that something was terribly wrong. Only the almond and sycamore trees remained standing and one small shed where I kept tools and supplies. A door hung on its hinges between two empty holes that had once been windows in an otherwise undamaged white wall. It was the only thing standing of what had once been our home. Craters gouged the earth, and a strange smell hung in the air.

"Nasir assured us we'd be safe. We asked him if he knew what had happened. 'Israeli war planes' was all he'd say. For seven days we worked to rebuild our home. Using the stones and bricks scattered from the explosion we rebuilt walls and framed in the roof using the wood from the fallen trees. It was a lot of work for the three of us and we were exhausted at the end of those long days.

"I was furious over the destruction of our home. We'd done nothing to deserve it. For the first time, I felt an urge to join the guerrillas. I wanted to strike back; I wanted the Israelis destroyed. I wanted things to be the way my father and his father had described them, before the Israelis had taken so much of our land. A long-standing hatred had simmered inside me all those years. Now it boiled over, a silent, barely controlled rage. I wanted

to leave, wanted to kill. Your mother begged me not to go, but I wouldn't listen.

“That evening, Nasir went with me to gather water at the well. We filled the pots, and then he told me to sit down. He sat opposite me. For what seemed like a long time he fixed his eyes on mine. At first I was impatient and didn't want to sit, but I couldn't break the hold of his eyes. Eventually I was filled with a strange peacefulness. I think he'd been waiting for this, for only then did he speak.

“It is not your destiny to go to war. Your wife is pregnant, though she doesn't know it yet. Your first-born will be a girl, a lovely girl. She'll bring you great joy and, like all of us, she has a destiny to fulfill. You'll have three more children and must care for your family. Not only must you provide for their physical needs; you must also nurture them with a loving heart. That love is the gift required of you in this lifetime. Like a pure well, it is not to be contaminated with bitterness and hatred. Do you understand?”

“He'd spoken quietly and, in the silence, his words touched my heart. I did understand. In that moment I saw that only love and understanding could end hatred and the terrible bloodshed of war. As if reading my mind, he said softly, ‘We're all brothers, all children of the Exalted One. Even the Israelis: there are no exceptions.’

“The next evening, before he left, we gathered as we had the night he came. ‘Suffering comes from wanting things to be other than they are,’ he said. ‘It is Consciousness Itself, that gave us birth; it is that which brought us together. Each of us is part of a great cosmic dance about which we know very little. Everything unfolds in its own way, in its own time. Out of the

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all-encompassing silence the divine dream emerges, and like the characters in a play each of us must play a part.’

“Then he said, ‘I’ll not see you again. One day I’ll meet your daughter by the well. When she tells you of our meeting, as she will, tell her of these events. After we meet, a new stage in your lives will come to pass. No matter what happens, never forget that you are deeply loved by some who walk the earth today and some not yet born.’ Then Nasir stood and embraced us. I walked with him as far as the well and watched him disappear into the hills.

“A week later a man called Aziz arrived with three donkeys loaded with tiles for the roof. Two goats accompanied him and two chickens rode on the donkey’s backs. Nasir had sent him. He stayed with us for several weeks and by the time he left the house was all but finished.”

Now, as Samara approached the well, her mind was in turmoil. She felt as if the very stability of the world she’d known was threatened. How could Nasir know the things he knew? She looked up and saw him walking to meet her. Reaching her, he took her hands and looked into her eyes. The turmoil subsided.







Boston University

Tremaine flew to Boston to meet Howard before giving a talk in the evening at Marsh Chapel. It was three o'clock on a sunny afternoon when the car pulled to a stop in front of the university. Tremaine and two agents walked quickly through a crowd of students and into the building. No one recognized him. He went straight to Howard's office.

Tremaine and Howard sat across from each other in comfortable leather chairs, two steaming mugs on the table between them. The smell of fresh coffee permeated the brightly lit space. In one corner a large wooden desk occupied a spacious alcove, while next to it a wall of glass framed the Charles River as it slipped silently to the sea. A red scull with a single rower sliced the calm surface of the river heading upstream. Tremaine was pleased to be with his old friend and former professor. Howard's eyes, alert and soft, held a touch of irrepressible humor. His short hair was white, but he was as slim now as in 1967 when they first met.

"When someone canoes down an unfamiliar river, he must be alert and thoroughly aware," Howard was saying. "It's foolish to blindly hope things will be fine. Waterfalls are dangerous. Global warming is a large and dangerous waterfall and I'm afraid we're

asleep in the canoe.”

“So how do we wake the sleeper?”

“There’s a story I heard many years ago,” Howard said. “People were at a party and the room was filled with the sound of voices and laughter. A fire burned in the fireplace and in the centre of the room stood a large glass coffee table with dangerously sharp edges. From time to time guests bumped into the table and cut their shins. They seemed strangely unaware of what had happened. Some tried to steer them away only to be pushed roughly aside.” Howard paused and took a long sip of coffee.

“They must have been sleepwalking.”

Howard laughed. “You stole my punch line.”

“People don’t want to be woken up.”

“You’re right, and as with Socrates and Christ, there can be unpleasant consequences for those who try. Normally I wouldn’t advocate waking people up but in this instance it seems the danger of doing nothing exceeds the risk of action. Global warming could render our planet uninhabitable. The sleeper must wake up.”

Tremaine watched as a small sailing dingy came about, narrowly missing one of the sculls. “How do we wake people up, that’s the question. There’s a Zen story I think points in the right direction. ‘A man went fishing and caught a fish. The fish was so small he threw it back in the water, and for the first time in its life the fish realized it had been swimming in something.’”

A smile spread slowly across Howard’s face. The two men sat quietly and watched the sculls and sailboat on the river.

“The students are the key,” Howard said, breaking the silence. “There are brilliant minds out there, and many still open. Students want to learn, to understand. Their minds are not yet closed by

life; they haven't fallen asleep."

Again, silence ensued as the two men sipped their coffee.

"Your talk this evening is about green energy and self sufficiency?"

"Mainly. I want to talk briefly about the power of large corporations and lobbyists, which is manipulating the media and eroding our democracy. But the environment is at the forefront. I want America to be a global leader in green energy technology and green manufacturing. I think the majority of Americans want the same thing."

"What about the use of Canadian oil? It's touted as a secure source of energy."

"Oil from Alberta's tar sands?"

Howard nodded.

"At what cost to the environment? And it's certainly not as secure as generating energy ourselves. No one has exclusive rights to the sun, wind, or tides. We'll not be dependent on anyone but ourselves."

"When war broke out in 1939," Howard said, "British industry changed quickly. They had to make tanks instead of cars. We have to take the same kind of urgent action to produce green energy."

He glanced at his watch. "Rose is expecting us for supper at five. I'll take you to the chapel afterwards."

"I've company with me," Tremaine said, nodding toward the door, and the secret service agents on the other side.

"I thought you might, so Rose is making extra. How many are there?" Howard asked.

Tremaine kept a straight face. "The last time I counted there were about twenty."

"What?" Howard was startled. "Twenty?"

Tremaine relented, laughing. "I only brought two with me."

Beyond the window two eight-man sculls were challenging each other. The wind had come up, making the river choppy. The sailing dingy was heeled over as far as it could go.

"I think we've lost the ability to dream," Tremaine said, "to imagine possibilities."

"That may be true but perhaps it's because the problem of global warming seems almost too frightening for us to contemplate, too complex. We're afraid things have spun out of control, beyond our power to do anything. We want government to intervene and have forgotten government is made up of people like us. We've closed our eyes hoping things will work out.

"You and I have been fortunate enough to live and work among students, so we know the importance of open minds and the ability to reason, to think for ourselves. It is that characteristic that makes students so important.

Tremaine looked at his professor. He remembered the same inevitable logic when he sat in his lectures so many years ago. What he'd mistaken then for a childlike innocence he now understood as the 'beginners mind,' something prized by all Zen masters: a mind uncluttered by preconceptions.

Howard stood up and put the mugs on a tray. "Time to go," he said.

After supper the four men drove to the university and entered the chapel from the rear. An arched corridor joined it to the School of Theology on one side and the School of Philosophy on the other. A most appropriate arrangement, Tremaine had always thought. Designed in the tradition of European churches, it had stained glass windows and high Gothic arches.

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Tremaine looked over a sea of faces as Dr. Menzies, the President of the University, began to introduce him. Floodlights lit the stained glass in brilliant colors and gave the building a festive air. Was that a hint of sandalwood he smelled, or was it part of a memory from another time, another world? He hadn't been at the university for thirty years.

On October 7th, 1968 at 5:15 in the morning, he'd awakened to the urgent tolling of chapel bells. He flew down the stairs and into the cool night. Police cars lined the deserted avenue in front of the chapel and in the open quadrangle in front of it, more than a dozen unmarked cars were parked haphazardly, some with their doors still open. A small crowd clustered around the entrance to the chapel. Sprinting across the empty street, he pushed his way to the top of the steps. Light spilled through the open doors. Blocking the entrance were members of "Boston's Finest."

The chapel was packed and a woman's quiet sobbing hung in the tense silence. The center aisle was clear and at the end of each pew federal marshals blocked the way. Tremaine watched as three agents emerged from the stairs behind the altar. They half-lifted and half-dragged a young man down the aisle toward the open doors. It was Charles, the soldier to whom Tremaine and four other students had offered the sanctuary of the church. Charles' shirt was torn and a shoe was missing. One of the marshals held him by the hair, pulling his head back. Two more flanked him, holding his arms pinioned, fingers forced back as if they would break. Their faces were flushed with exertion. Charles' black, neatly cropped mustache and hair accentuated the pallor of his face. His dark eyes were large and frightened. A woman's voice began singing "We shall overcome," and more

than a thousand voices joined in. The entrance was cleared and Charles was quickly propelled down the steps and forced into the back of a waiting car. Quickly police and marshals filed from the chapel. In moments their cars roared to life and sped into the night, tires screeching.

It was over in minutes. The refrain of the song filled the air and joined with the tolling bells. For five days Charles had sought sanctuary in the church, refusing to join his unit scheduled for Vietnam. He didn't believe in killing. Tremaine and his fellow students, in the tradition of the medieval church, had taken it upon themselves to grant him sanctuary in the university chapel.

Dr. Menzies concluded his introductory remarks and gestured Tremaine to the podium. "Please welcome Dr. David Tremaine, President of the United States." Thunderous applause filled the chapel. With a jolt, Tremaine returned to the present and walked to the podium.

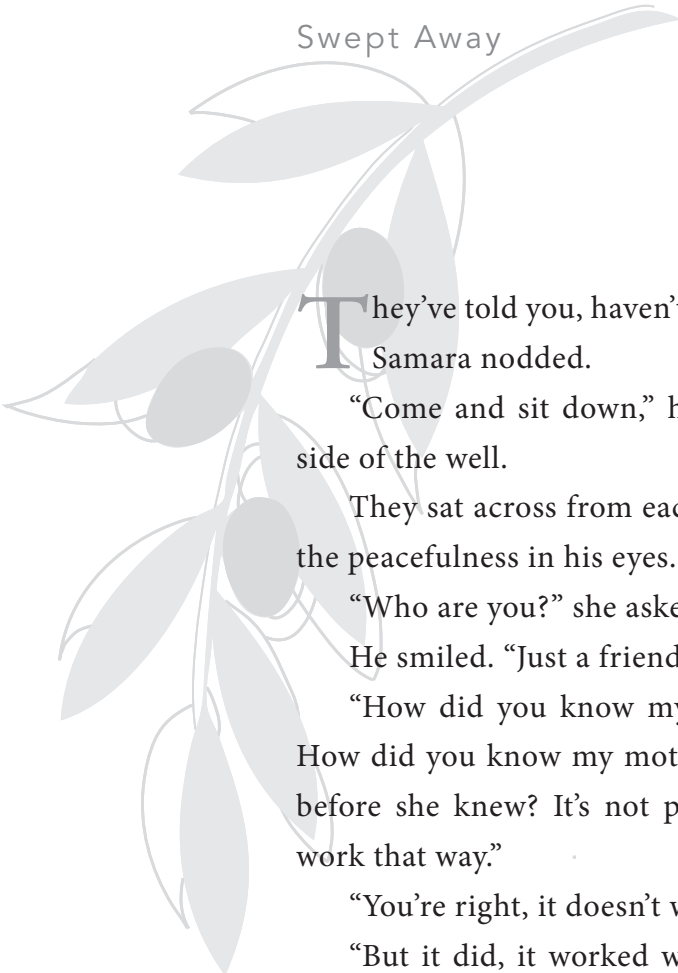
It was well past midnight when the chapel emptied and Tremaine and Howard walked to the car. Howard turned and extended his hand to his friend. "Thank you," he said, "It was as though someone had breached a giant dam. I feel a sense of hope, something I've not felt since the time we set out to end the Vietnam War. The young people are the key. Without them it's not possible."







## Swept Away



They've told you, haven't they?" Nasir asked gently.

Samara nodded.

"Come and sit down," he said, leading her to the side of the well.

They sat across from each other, and again she felt the peacefulness in his eyes.

"Who are you?" she asked.

He smiled. "Just a friend."

"How did you know my parents were in danger? How did you know my mother was pregnant with me before she knew? It's not possible, the world doesn't work that way."

"You're right, it doesn't work that way," he agreed.

"But it did, it worked with my parents. How did you know?"

"Sometimes it just happens. Surely you've known things at times and not known how?"

"Do you know anything about me, Nasir?"

"Some things."

"What?"

"That you're a kind and generous person and probably a good cook." He rubbed his nose to hide a smile.

"Nasir, you know what I mean. Tell me, please."

"One day you'll leave your home."

“Of course I will, Nasir. Anyone would know that.”

“One day you’ll leave your home. You’ll leave the ocean here to live beside another one on the other side of the world. Your home there will reflect the peace that comes on the other side of suffering.”

“How do you know this?”

“I can’t explain it.”

Samara was quiet, not knowing whether to take him seriously or not.

“Who knows, Samara, maybe you’ll go to the other side of the world, maybe you won’t. You’ll find out.”

Samara watched the sheep as they grazed in the mouth of the valley. She didn’t know what to think.

“Samara, these things aren’t important. What happens in life, happens. We call it the will of Allah; but it’s a poor description, because all there is and all that happens in life is the expression of the divine, in the world of form: hills and trees, suns and moons, rivers, rocks and people.”

“Do you have regrets, Nasir? Do you wish you’d done some things differently?”

“When you live in the moment, here, right now, there are no regrets for what might have been. Enjoy the present, Samara. Be thankful for the past as the tree is thankful for the seed that gave it life, for the winds that caressed it and the waters that quenched its thirst.”

They watched rays of the sinking sun paint the side of the valley in burnished gold.

“Let’s fill the pots so you can make it home by dark,” Nasir told her in his soft voice.

He walked with her to the top of the hill, carrying her yoke.

Carefully he set the pots down and stood looking at her. “Have a good evening,” he said. “Give my greetings to your parents.”

When she got home, Samara gave her parents Nasir’s message. She hugged her brothers and her sister as she put them to bed.

She sat for a long time with her parents at the table that night. The certainty with which she’d viewed life was shaken; the world had become a mystery. The light from the lamp cast a warm glow and helped ease the uncertainty lodged in the back of her mind. She kissed her parents and went to bed. Outside a bright moon cast a tapestry of shadows across the uneven ground. In the silence, she could hear the sound of the poplars, their leaves stirred by a vagrant breeze. She’d grown up here, and she loved the isolation.

In the morning, she got up early and helped prepare breakfast. Her father arrived with milk from the goats, just as breakfast was ready.

By mid-afternoon the heat was intense, and they napped. When Samara awoke, it was already late. Her mother was baking bread for supper. Samara splashed water on her face and emptied the pots, ready to go for water.

Kissing her mother, she set out, the pots swaying as she walked. She turned away from the shore and headed into the hills. At the top of the incline she looked back at her home with its whitewashed walls and orange-tiled roof. Nestled in the convergence of low hills it was surrounded by stands of trees, gardens, and the sparkling blue ocean.

Her eye caught a movement on the hill above her home. She saw a cloud of dust. As she listened, she heard the sound of a revving engine. Something was moving fast. Then she saw it: a military jeep with four men inside. With a squeal of brakes, it

pulled up beside the house. Above the ocean, two jets screamed inland. They came in low, guns blazing. She saw flashes of flame from their wings. In horror she watched her father racing up the shallow valley from the fishing boat. She saw the puffs raised by bullets hitting the dirt and watched helplessly as they reached him and cut him down, his body jerking with each impact. The strangers dived behind their jeep.

As if in slow motion, she saw a rocket detach from the belly of the lead jet. Trailing fire, it slammed into her home with a loud explosion and burst of flame. The roar was deafening; the concussion from the explosion knocked her down. Her ears were ringing as she pulled herself to her feet. The warplanes were gone. All that was left was the thunderous roar from their engines, the twisted frame of the jeep and the smoldering rubble where her home once stood.

She saw two more jeeps coming down the hill. When they reached the ruins of her home, four men jumped out carrying rocket launchers and hid among the trees. She watched for a few minutes, terrified. Then, with a deafening rush, small rockets lifted into the air. Streaming flame behind them, they vanished beyond the hills.

She picked herself up and ran as fast as she could. As she started up the steep incline, she saw Nasir coming toward her. She flung herself into his arms, sobbing uncontrollably.

“Are you all right?” he asked, looking her over. Then he held her tightly.







Halal

A cold wind came roaring out of the northeast, sweeping ashore. It was the first storm of the season. By early afternoon it had dropped to fitful breezes playing with the leaves of autumn. In mid-afternoon big flakes of snow rocked back and forth like feathers before settling on the ground. Mera put the groceries in the car and walked the short distance to the bakery on Main Street in Camden, Maine. She bought coffee and sat at one of the small tables reading the local paper. When she'd finished she bought a loaf of bread at the counter and turned to go. As she pushed the door open the wind caught it, jerking her into the street.

The snow that had covered the sidewalks a short while ago was gone, whipped sideways by the freshening gale. It covered the northeast side of every lamp post and telephone pole, and the side of Mera's red Toyota Camry. Winter was determined to put an end to autumn, removing all trace of the colored leaves that had lingered in the quiet days of the last week.

Drifts were already plugging the road and she had to punch through them. Snow, flying in every direction, made it even harder to see. When Mera came to the driveway the farm was almost hidden, obscured

by nightfall and the driving snow. The light in the yard lit up the house and barn as she approached. She could see Ali had just finished shoveling snow.

He came over and opened the car door for her. She looked at him, his face red and snow frozen to his eyebrows. She loved her grandfather. In his eighties, with a tall lean frame, now slightly stooped, he was still a very active man. He was always helpful, and when her husband Morgan was in Washington, Ali took over the chores.

Arms loaded with groceries, he carried them into the house, stamping the snow off his feet on the porch. "I'll put the car away," he said, "be back in a moment." The door slammed behind him.

Twenty years ago Morgan and Mera had bought this old farm, the kind where the house and the barn were connected by a series of outbuildings. One of them had been a stable and Morgan and Ali had spent a summer converting it into a home for Ali. Over the years Ali had added skylights to it, and large windows on the south side. Mera loved what they'd done. Ali had lived there ever since, his home filled with light.

She heard him on the porch, stamping his feet. He pushed the door open and snow burst past him, vanishing in the heat.

Ali had prepared mushroom risotto. "To warm you up," he said with a laugh. He'd lit a roaring fire in the living room and they ate in front of it. The quiet comfort of each other's presence contrasted with the fury of the blizzard that howled through the eaves of the barn while snow piled up in the swirling yard.

"Grandpa," she said when they finished eating. They were seated in comfortable armchairs on either side of the fire, cradling cups of tea. Light from the fire flickered over their faces. "You told me a long time ago about your son Halal. I was thinking about



him the other day. You never told me what happened to him.”

Ali had known this day would come. He'd told Mera as a child the stories of his home, the village where he'd lived and the people who'd made up his family. His beautiful bedtime stories were woven together at the edge of sleep whenever he visited his granddaughter. She'd always asked for more and he couldn't turn her down. Years of stories had made him feel like Scheherazade recounting the “One Thousand And One Nights.” As long as he could weave their magic Mera had been enchanted and he'd avoided drawing attention to the deaths that a young mind would have difficulty comprehending. “Why do you want to know about it, why now?”

“I'm going there.”

“Going where?”

“To visit your village and meet the people who knew you.”

“It's changed,” he said. “It might not even exist anymore. And as for the people who knew me, they'll be long gone. But why, granddaughter. Why now?”

“I don't know why, it's just time. I loved your stories, I went to sleep and dreamed of the people you talked about. It's as though I know them well—the hills, the towns and the ocean where they lived. Halal and Jalal were my uncles and I don't know what happened to them. And Grandma Natalia, I loved her as well, she was so beautiful and kind. I know they died but I don't know what happened. Now I want to know. Can you tell me?”

Ali sat unmoving and silent. Mera was beginning to think he'd fallen asleep. And then she heard his voice, like a whisper barely audible over the moaning wind. “You're right, Mera, the time has come.”

He would never forget the last day he saw his youngest son. “Halal moved to Haifa when he was seventeen. It was over fifty years ago. As a child he was always repairing things and by the time he was thirteen there was nothing he couldn’t fix. He was a natural. Bicycles, cars, irrigation pumps; anything! My cousin lived in Haifa and one of his friends, Salman, owned a garage. Business was good, and Salman needed another mechanic. Halal was perfect for the job.

“Salman and his wife Noor took Halal into their home. He was like a son to the childless couple. I got to know them well and Salman and I always found time for coffee whenever I went to town on business.”

“What happened to him, Grandpa, when he went to Haifa?”

“He died,” he said sadly, “he died.”

“I know,” she said. “How did he die? What happened?”

Ali wiped the tears from his eyes. After all these years he could still see his son’s beloved face when he said goodbye to him that morning at the garage. In the beautiful white harbor city of Haifa in a world forever gone, his son had died.

“He was killed by a car bomb, Mera.”

Ali sat still and this time Mera did not rush him but watched his face intently. She loved this courtly old gentleman, her grandfather, the kindest man she knew. How could anyone hurt such a man? she wondered.

Ali’s attention had turned to the events forever etched in his mind. “It was October of 1948,” he said, “harvest time. Oranges were ripe and we took them to the market in Haifa. An irrigation pump had broken and Halal always repaired the pumps so I took it with me.

“The garage sat back from the road six meters from the sharp face of a hill leading into the mountain behind. The building was

made of concrete, open at the front and back, with a flat roof square to the walls. To one side was a gas pump, and on the other a tidy white stone house where Salman and his wife Noor lived.

“It was early evening when I arrived, cool with a fresh breeze coming from the Mediterranean. Noor had prepared a meal and we ate together. Afterward we sat around talking before going to bed.

“The next morning Noor and I sat drinking coffee in the little courtyard at the front of their home. It was a cool cloudless day. Afterwards I went to see how Halal was doing. Maher, the older mechanic, was helping and the three of us chatted as they reassembled the pump. Once his help was no longer needed, Maher went back to the motorcycle he’d been working on.

“Halal had worked for Salman for almost a year, Maher had been with him for fifteen. The older man had seen at once how gifted Halal was and set out to show him everything he knew. Despite their age difference they’d become good friends. As Halal finished the pump we talked about his life in Haifa and a young woman he’d recently been seeing. He’d already met her family. He told me how much he liked them. When he was finished we loaded the pump in the truck and went to find Salman. We found him, a pair of brown bare legs protruding from under a British military jeep. I tapped him with my foot and asked him if he was ready for coffee. He slid from under the jeep and, wiping his hands on an oily rag, turned to Halal and gave him instructions while pointing to an old Austin Seven parked to one side. Someone had used a brush and painted it yellow. Now faded, and the paint chipped, it was covered with dust and innumerable dents. I recognized it as belonging to members of the kibbutz several kilometers away. I mentioned to Halal that perhaps we could meet the young lady he’d spoken of, when he was finished for the day. I can still see

him standing there with a big half-shy smile on his face. It was the last time I ever saw him.

“Salman and I walked to the coffee shop, a favorite of ours about ten minutes away. We found seats outside in the courtyard beneath a cluster of low palms. The sun topped the mountains to the east and its warm light flooded the courtyard. I asked Salman what had been happening in the two weeks since I’d been there. I was concerned because I knew tensions had increased between local Palestinians and the new Jewish immigrants, who were arriving by the thousands from all over Europe. The Palestinian Jews, those who’d been our friends and neighbors for years, were not a problem. But the new immigrants were aggressive. They seemed to think they were entitled to the land and we were trespassing on it.

“Salman was worried. He told me that two weeks earlier, just after my last visit, things had suddenly taken a more sinister tone. One night some tires were stolen from the garage and the next night, sometime after midnight, he’d heard a muffled thump and when he looked outside a small fire was burning near one of the trucks parked in the yard. He went out to see what it was and found a burning tire on the ground. It was late, quite late, people had gone to bed. He was just going back in the house when he heard a sharp whistle from somewhere in the darkness up the slope. He looked up in time to see what looked like balls of fire bouncing down the hill. He counted seven and watched as they launched into space from the cliff behind his home, landing in the yard amongst the trucks and cars waiting to be worked on. The balls of fire turned out to be the tires stolen the night before. With help from neighbors they put out the fires before serious damage was done.

“I asked Salman who he thought was doing it. He said he didn’t know for sure, couldn’t prove anything, but since the flaming tires had come from farther up the hill, he suspected the Jewish immigrants who lived higher in the hills.

“This was just the beginning, he told me. Things got worse. A week later he was repairing some pumps for one of the new Jewish settlements to the east. He’d promised to deliver them that day but it took him longer than he expected. It was evening when he finished. He wolfed down the meal Noor had made and drove to the settlement. It was dark when he turned up the hill that passed through the centre of a large Palestinian neighborhood. The road was steep and he had to gear down when suddenly just ahead of him the road burst into flame. He could see the fire was coming toward him. He turned quickly and pulled over on a small dirt road lined with houses just off the main street. As he pushed the door open he heard people shouting. He ran to join them. When he arrived, some were trying to smother the fire with blankets and carpets, others threw buckets of water on it.” Ali paused for a moment and took a long sip of tea. Firelight flickered in the cosy room and wind howled outside.

“A river of gasoline and oil which had flowed down the hill towards the Palestinian homes had been set alight. The fire had ignited the tar in the road and the heat was getting intense. We heard rifle shots and a young lad beside me was hit in the shoulder. I pulled him to safety but a few moments later one of the women with us was killed. Every time we approached the fire more shots rang out. We were forced to watch as the fire spread to two of the homes. Fortunately, it was a calm night with no wind to fan the flames or it could have been much worse. By morning two more houses and a truck had burned.

“Someone was sent to the British garrison at the docks but no one came until morning. I asked Salman what the British had to say about it.

“He said he didn’t know because he’d left and gone home to Noor, afraid to leave her alone.

“I asked him why the British hadn’t helped. The only thing he could think of was that since they were due to leave they were in the process of disengaging.

“When we finished our coffee we started walking back to the shop. Without warning there was a deafening explosion. The force of it knocked us off our feet and shattered the glass up and down the street. We ran as fast as we could and when we rounded the bend we could see a dark cloud lifting into a blue sky. The garage was gone, as was Salman’s home. The force of the explosion had lifted the trucks in the yard and thrown them into the road.

“I talked with Maher shortly afterwards. He’d been working on a bulldozer. He told me that when Halal had finished the Jeep he drove the Austin into the shop. A few moments later he heard him yelling, ‘Get away, get away.’ Then there was a blinding flash and a deafening roar. The bulldozer took the brunt of the explosion and saved Maher’s life. But the blast killed Halal, as well as Salman’s wife.”

“Did you find Halal’s body, Grandpa?”

Ali, suddenly aware of where he was, looked at the shocked face of his granddaughter. Tears were in her eyes.

“No, Mera,” Ali said quietly. “We looked but there was nothing left. Nothing left to bury. He was too close to the explosion.”



