Novel:

From Palestine, a Violinist

|

Second Edition

Improved and updated.

By

Gordon McAllister

An inspired novel

in the Arab/Israeli conflict

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Gordon McAllister



Colombian writer, graduated in Business Administration at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, he also has a specialization in Marketing at the Universidad de los Andes and a diploma in Change Management at the same university in Bogotá.
For forty years, he held various executive and managerial positions in different companies in the industrial and commercial areas, and in the automotive, food and mass consumer product distribution sectors.
He earned a Diploma in: Short Story, Short Story and Literary Chronicle, (Creative Writing), at the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, Bogotá. Further, he earned a Diploma in Novel 1, at the Escuela de Escritores, (Madrid), and has attended several literary workshops on creative writing and novels, at Casa de Arte y Armonía in Bogotá.
Since 2007 he is dedicated to literature - Genres: essay, short story, poetry and novel.

He was First Place winner of the XXIII CONCURSO DE CUENTO RAMÓN DE ZUBIRÍA, (2018), of UNIANDINOS in Bogotá, with the story: DE AMORES, TRAGEDIAS Y REVOLUCIONES.
- He was also winner of the First Place in the XXV CONCURSO DE CUENTO RAMÓN DE ZUBIRÍA, (2020), of UNIANDINOS in Bogotá, with the story: LA HEREJÍA DE LOS MONJES GUERREROS (The Heresy of the Warrior Monks).

His publications are:
Books of Essays: (5).
Story Books: (2).
Poetry Books: (2).
Novel Books: (6).
New books currently in process: (3).

April 2024

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CHARACTERS OF THE NOVEL

Akram Abushihab:
Muslim, Palestinian,
Uncle of: Khaled Abushihab
And friend of
Bonifacio Bonfante:
Christian, Colombian, friend of
Joseph Levi
Jewish, German, friend of above

Akram Abushihab:
Husband of Fadhila Mubarak
Brother of:
Abdulah Abushihab
Muslim, Palestinian
Husband of Nazli Abushihab
Parents of Khaled Abushihab

Akram and Abdulah. Abushihab
Children of Mustafa Abushihab (Father) and
Samira Daher (Mother) –
Daughter of Hamahi Daher Sister of Mehmet Daher

Samuel Weissenberg - Jewish, German
Husband of Myriam Weissenberg
Parents of:
Sarah Weissenberg . (Nickname : Gretel Müller). Friend of:
Vania Scott
Isaac Kravitz
Jewish. German
Widower of Samara Jacobsen (First wife).
Husband of Sarah Weissenberg (2da. Wife).
Isaac Kravitz and Sarah Weissenberg
Parents of
Myriam Kravitz wife of: Khled Abushihab

Preface

A real-life anecdote:

Between 1973 and 1978, in my early youth, I worked with my father in a family business dedicated to the manufacture of aluminum windows and doors, as well as various aluminum and glass metalwork. Our products included facades, enclosure elements and architectural finishes for the construction sector. Through that business, I acquired the necessary experience to subsequently develop in the sector with some solvency.

By 1980, I was called to oversee sales management at *Poliglass Ltda*, a company specializing in the production of architectural laminated glass for the construction sector. I had a team of about five salesmen, and we served architects and builders in Bogotá and other nearby cities, on issues of glass and aluminum.

Our team included an architect in charge of the technical aspects of the company. Although he spoke Spanish well, his accent was quite unique, and I immediately guessed he was a foreigner. As we got to know each other, I learned that his name was *Nayib Abushihab,* an immigrant of Palestinian Arab origin, born in the West Bank region of Palestine.

The press reports that reached Colombia in those days about the Middle East region were terrible. They would communicate it as a never-ending conflict, with the media, press, radio and TV, biased in favor of the Jewish cause and condemning the Palestinians as true terrorists. For this reason, one's first impression of the conflict was that Jews were the victims of heartless Palestinian terrorists who wanted to exterminate them.

Nayib Abushihab was a quiet man, always wearing a bright smile on his face, and seeming genuinely kind. He had arrived in

Colombia with his family, as refugees, fleeing the war in his country.

Soon after arriving he had already adapted to our customs. He grew fond of tamales and beans, and a typical Colombian dish called *Bandeja Paisa*, consisting of a combination of seven to eight ingredients on the same plate: beans, white rice, a fried egg, a portion of ground beef, a pork sausage, half an avocado, a slice of ripe plantain, a chicharron and a corn arepa.

After such a thorough lunch, it was usual to find him napping from 1:30 to 2:00 pm on a small sofa in his office. By 2:10 pm, he would be refreshed, with his hair neatly combed, his faced washed and ready for the afternoon's work.

We became good friends; often in the mornings, we would go out to visit the construction sites where our personnel worked on installations. *Nayib* would also accompany our salesmen on visits to costumers when some technical issues required it.

He had dark brown skin, and big black eyes that looked inquisitively through thick tortoiseshell glasses. His smile never failed to be present on every occasion, especially given his fondness for jokes of all kinds. He had a great love for jokes and always carried a black notebook with a whole repertoire of jokes to brighten up any occasion.

It was clear that *Nayib Abushihab* was far from being a terrorist. We realized that being Palestinian, did not equate to being a terrorist. *Nayib* was a dedicated professional, a loving husband, and a father of two beautiful children.

Meeting *Nayib Abushihab* inspired me to start this novel. I was also inspired by my youth in Cali, where I had several classmates of Jewish origin, such as Isidoro Corkidi. I also remember that my sister had close friends from the Jewish community, including Francine Gabrieloff, who lived in both Cali and Aventura, Florida, and Puppy Horovitz.

Additionally, over the years we had learned of the Sephardic Jewish ancestry of both our maternal and paternal surnames. In a later chapter we will see in detail the subject of the expulsion of the Sephardic Jews from Spain on account of a decree of the Catholic Monarchs in 1492.

Finally, instead of feeling any aversion, we found that we always had Jewish friends we could be very close to.

The combination of all these factors motivated me to write this novel.

Gordon McAllister

Introduction

February 2024

A while ago, at a family reunion, I expressed an opinion that sparked strong discussion. The young people in the group came up with all sorts of arguments against my position.

Their opinions seemed very respectable; however, I couldn't present my opinion because tempers flared, and the intense criticism from them made it impossible for me to continue speaking. In other words, I was silenced....

Their main thesis against my proposal was the intolerable occupation of Palestine by the Jewish people, which they believed justified the violent actions of the terrorist group *Hamas*. They accepted this occupation as a given, without any new considerations.

Curiously, some older people present at that reunion, once the discussion was over, told me, almost secretly, that they understood and to a certain extent agreed with me when they had listened to my reasoning.

I want to listen to others, and, while remaining impartial, use this writing to express my views without fanaticism.

An attack orchestrated many decades ago...

Four months earlier, on October 7, 2023, there was an unexpected and terrible attack executed by an armed group that for many decades has ruled the Gaza Strip with an iron fist: the dreaded *Hamas*. A paramilitary organization that declares itself jihadist, nationalist and Islamist, being admired, protected and hidden by the Palestinian inhabitants and that presents itself as the only official government of the Gaza Strip.

The events of October 7th were a deliberate and premeditated attack directed specifically against the civilian population of Israel. Around 1200 individuals were killed,

including civilians, policemen and soldiers, and even children and babies, while many Israeli citizens and citizens of various nationalities were wounded, in a number that is still completely unknown. Moreover, far from being a skirmish of war, it was an attack riddled with viciousness by the Palestinian aggressors, even raping women and burning alive many defenseless villagers in their own homes.

In addition, a group of some 240 people, not only Israelis but of various nationalities, were kidnapped by *Hamas* terrorists and, as of today, February 2024, are still being held captive by the terrorists.

In response, soon after, an equally terrible armed operation was launched by the official Israeli army, with the clear objective of exterminating the Islamic group and preventing further attacks against the Israeli population. However, there was an aggravating factor: the collateral impact on the civilian population of Gaza, resulting in a very high death toll.

One wonders: Is the Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, justified to some extent in making such a response and yet, is it not a disproportionate response?

I leave it to the reader to answer this question.

I for one, before venturing an opinion and having the world come crashing down on me, prefer to review the background of such an attack, and its deeper intricacies.

An attack orchestrated by Iran for several years.
Decades:

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran has expressed a manifest intention to completely exterminate and erase the people of Israel from the face of the earth. This

intention goes to the extreme of justifying and using any means to carry out its terrible threat.

Giving arms and military support to various terrorist groups, such as *Hamas, Hezbollah* and the *Huties* in Yemen, has been the path followed by the Iranian regime to carry out the plan of hatred and extermination against the people of Israel.

In all these years, Israel has dedicated itself to the economic, social, cultural and technological development of its people, bringing it to the level of a first world economy. Parallel to this, they have also benefited from the economic support of thousands of Jews around the world, who have contributed greatly to this development.

It contrasts to observe that the aid received by the Palestinian people settled in the Gaza Strip, coming from the governments of various countries, has not been channeled to the socioeconomic development of the Palestinian population. Rather, it has been expressly directed to the strengthening of their war power and the procurement of all kinds of weapons with the clear objective of attacking the people of Israel in the near future, and that future is today.

Iran, Hamas or Hezbollah are not seeking any agreement that would lead to an understanding with Israel to settle a conflict, and only desire the disappearance of the State of Israel and the extermination of the Jewish population.

And it is time to remember the words of the president, Golda Meir, when she stated:

"One cannot negotiate peace with someone who comes with the sole intention of murdering you."

On the other hand, it is very curious that brothers of Arab blood such as, for example, the multimillionaire oil countries like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, etc., have not proposed to help the socioeconomic development

of their brother, the Palestinian people, and such help and financing is conspicuous by its absence.

In short, the people of the Gaza Strip have been ruled, dominated and used for the sinister purposes of *Hamas*. It seems that their own Arab brothers do not want to get involved in this problem, especially when the main sponsor of *Hamas* is Iran. This has resulted in misery and neglect as the denominators of their existence.

This state of permanent misery has one, exacerbated the bitter hatred of the Palestinians against their prosperous neighbors, the Israelis, and two, generated the support of the Palestinian people for their armed wing *Hamas*.

Throughout history, Iran has permanently sought leadership and geopolitical influence in the region, not only in the Middle East but also in the Caucasus region of Central Asia, which is not accepted by the Arab states, nor by Turkey or Azerbaijan, let alone by the peoples of the Caucasus.

It is important to remember that Iran was once ancient Persia, with a population of Persian ethnicity, sharing no common ancestry with the Arabs, and thus, having no Arab blood in its veins.

On the religious side, 89% of Iranians belong to the Islamic religious faction of the Shiites, unlike the Arab Muslims who mostly belong to the Sunni sect, reaching a figure of 1.2 billion followers.

But back to the initial question: Is the policy pursued by Israeli leader Benjamin Netanyahu of seeking to eliminate any *Hamas* presence in the Gaza Strip understandable and justified, even despite the collateral damage seen among the affected Palestinian civilian population?

Unfortunately, those affected are innocent people, such as children, the sick and civilians who have nothing to do with the war.

It is imperative to mention that Hamas has used the civilian population as a shield, employing this macabre strategy for two main objectives. On the one hand, by hiding behind civilians, they aim to protect themselves from the retaliatory attacks by the Israel armed forces. On the other hand, if attacked despite this human shield, they seek to portray the Zionist enemy as demonic to the world, highlighting the civilian casualties caused by these attacks.

After the attack of October 7, 2023, Hamas and Iran were already expecting retaliation, and had budgeted to sacrifice the lives of their brothers-their own people, to gain followers for the Palestinian cause, globally. (And they have succeeded with flying colors).

An age-old conflict:

Today it is rather lightly asserted that the direct culprits of the conflict have been the Israelis, given their occupation of the land of Palestine.

To understand the origins of the millennial conflict between the Philistines (Fislistinos ... Phalestinus ... Palestinians), and the Jews, we must look much further in time. This requires going beyond the *Yom Kippur war* in 1973, the *Six-Day war* in 1967, and even the independence and formation of the Republic of Israel in 1948. We need to delve back several centuries to the ninth century BC, or even earlier, and to recognize that the occupation of the territory where Israel and Palestine now stand was already in dispute, and these ancestral conflicts involved not only the Jews and the Palestinians.

For the sake of truth, we must also mention the Macedonians with Alexander the Great, the Persians, the

Assyrians, the Romans, the Ottomans and the British. Whenever these powers arrived with the intention of conquering the territory, both the Philistines, (Palestinians), and the Jews participated in the conflict, defending the same land together.

It is erroneous for people today to accept the tendentious assertion that the conflict is recent and that it is due to the occupation of Palestinian territory by the people of Israel. This is false, even if it is considered today as an incontrovertible truth in the absence of historical knowledge.

On the contrary, since several millennia ago, the people of Israel have been well established in this territory and their presence in this area is nothing new.

To truly understand the origins of the conflict, we must go back to the time of the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, as mentioned in biblical texts. This period predates the modern 20th century, where some biased perspectives place the origins of the conflict and the supposed occupation of the territory by Israel. These narratives often convince the uninformed public of the justification's terrorist organizations use to attack the people of Israel.

Before venturing unfocused opinions, I suggest we conduct some research and examine historical records. There are many sources available for this, including Wikipedia. Let's consider one such source:

"In the tenth century B.C., and up to the beginning of the ninth century B.C. B.C., and until the beginning of the IX century B.C., the territory of Judah consisted of small rural settlements, most of them without fortifications, with a population of about 20 000 inhabitants. B.C., the territory of Judah consisted of small rural settlements, most of them without fortifications, with a population of about 20,000. Several archaeologists, however, have pointed to evidence of early urban development at various sites.

Jerusalem, the capital of the kingdom, possibly did not emerge as a major administrative center until the late eighth century B.C.; before this, archaeological evidence suggests that its population was too small to support a kingdom, although this is disputed.
At the end of the 9th century B.C., an unidentified Aramean king (scholars believe it was Hazael of Aram-Damascus) erected a monumental inscription at Tel Dan. B.C., an unidentified Aramean king (scholars believe it was Hazael of Aram-Damascus) erected a monumental inscription at Tel Dan, where he recounts that he defeated King Jehoram of Samaria and a ruler of the House of David (identified with the biblical Ahaziah of Judah).
In the 8th century BC, Jerusalem became the religious and administrative center of the Kingdom of Judah. Archaeology shows a dramatic growth of its population in the middle of the century, the reason being the fall of the Kingdom of Israel to the Assyrian Empire as its inhabitants fled south. The Assyrians took several towns in Judah and besieged Jerusalem, but were forced to retreat to defend their territory because of the war with Babylon. Taylor's Prism describes Judah as one of the tributary states of the Assyrian Empire.
By the end of the century, astral symbols such as the moon or the sun were no longer used on the seals, and in their place were placed only the names of their possessors, which has been interpreted as a testimony of the transition from Canaanite polytheism to the monolatry of Yahvism. Although the inhabitants of Judah did not believe that Yahweh was unique, he was the only one that Judah should follow, making the passage from monolatry to monotheism. Some scholars date the beginning of monotheism to the 8th century B.C. and see it primarily as a response to Assyrian imperialism. According to the Bible, this political and religious reform was imposed by King Josiah.
In the seventh century B.C. Judah prospered as a vassal state under Assyrian rule, but in 605 B.C. this was defeated and the ensuing competition between the XXVIth dynasty of Egypt and the Neo-Babylonian empire for control of the eastern Mediterranean led to its

destruction in a series of campaigns between 597 B.C. and 582 B.C., eventually Judah became a province of Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar taking a percentage of Judah's population into exile."[1]

Given the above, I have taken the liberty of refraining from expressing an opinion on the reason or unreasonableness of the current offensive of the military forces against the Hamas terrorists, let alone justifying their military actions.

My personal vote is for a future of understanding between the parties, somehow achieved with the secure participation of several countries that have no conflict of interest in the region.

While it is true that one cannot negotiate with those who are determined to kill, it is equally true that lasting peace has never been achieved through force of arms. This is a human dilemma that one day we will be forced to resolve.

Gordon McAllister.

Given the recent events in the Middle East, it has been necessary to add several more texts to the original book.

Both the preface and the introduction to this book were written in February 2024. The following new article has been added between April and May 2024.

The original novel was written and completed in late October 2022, and the first edition was presented to the public at the Miami Book Fair in November 2022.

This is the new second edition, corrected, improved and updated.

Gordon McAllister.

[1] https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reino_de_Jud%C3%A1

Continuation of warlike actions in the middle east:

April 2024

Unfortunately, the warlike events in the Middle East region have continued these days with great deployment.

Last night, international media reported an Israeli retaliatory attack on Iran, with explosions in the central region of the country. The Iranian press and authorities have minimized the effects of these explosions.

On April 14, 2024 Iran had carried out a direct attack against Israel using kamikaze drones, cruise missiles, in the amount of about 300 devices. While 99% of these were apparently neutralized by the so-called missile shield deployed by Israel, with the help of the United States, the United Kingdom and France, it is nonetheless a direct affront against the people of Israel, which they believe must be responded to.

The reason for this attack, according to the Iranian regime, was a retaliatory response to the bombing of the Iranian Consulate in Damascus by Israeli aircraft on April 1, 2024. The attack resulted in 16 deaths, including the significant loss of three high-ranking Iranian military commanders.

Among the deceased Iranian commanders was one of the most important for Iran: Mohammad Reza Zahedi. This man, one of Israel's most wanted, was responsible for numerous tragedies in Israel.

Let's look at a Wikipedia article about this commander considered a high-level criminal by Israel.

> *"Mohammad Reza Zahedi November 2, 1960 - Damascus, April 1, 2024)1 was a senior Iranian military officer in the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. He previously commanded the*

Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Aerospace Force and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps Ground Forces and was one of the top commanders of the Quds Force at the time of his death. He was killed in an Israeli airstrike on the Syrian capital Damascus during the Israeli-Hamas war.

In 1998, Qasem Soleimani, the new commander of the Quds Force, appointed Zahedi as head of the Quds Force's Lebanese Corps, responsible for providing weapons and technical expertise to Hezbollah. According to Arash Azizi, Soleimani's appointment of Zahedi to this post along with the appointment of Hossein Sheikholeslam as Iranian ambassador to Syria also in 1998 were an indication of Soleimani's determination both to strengthen Hezbollah in Lebanon and to renew Iranian-Syrian diplomatic-military collaboration.

Zahedi's first term as leader of the Lebanese Corps lasted until 2002. In this capacity, Zahedi was instrumental in enhancing Hezbollah's ability to attack Israeli forces occupying southern Lebanon and in planning the Hezbollah offensive in the spring of 2000 that resulted in the defeat of the Lebanese Israeli ally. Militia forces and the final withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from Lebanon, which ended the conflict in southern Lebanon in favor of Hezbollah." [2]

For a broader context, we must refer to the *Quds Force*. It is an elite Iranian military establishment, expressly dedicated to supplying weapons, supplies, missiles, drones and so on, to the terrorist militias of Hamas, Hezbollah, the Huties of Yemen.[3]

[2] https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohammad_Reza_Zahedi

[3] https://www.bbc.com/mundo/articles/cg34ww4801jo#:~:text=Pie%20de%20foto%2C%20La%20Fuerza%20Quds%20se%20encarga%20de%20suministrar,y%20grupos%20aliados%20de%20Ir%C3%A1n.

One of the main commanders of this *Quds Force* was Zahedi. He planned and developed the strategy for Hamas' attack against Israel on October 7, 2023, which led to the terrible consequences we have witnessed.

A characteristic of the Iranian regime is to act covertly and then deny any responsibility. When the consequences backfire, they resort to dramatic displays and elaborate propagandistic schemes to cover up their malicious activities in the covert war.

Let's clarify the issue as follows:

Iran directly funds Hamas, Hezbollah and Huties terrorist groups. In other words, Iranian commanders are behind this operation in support of terrorist groups attacking Israel.

On October 7, 2023, the Hamas terrorist group infiltrated Israeli territory and executed the largest attack ever seen in Israel, using not only ground forces but also Iranian-made missiles.

Israel launched a widespread operation against the Hamas terrorist organization in its territory and the Gaza strip, only to discover a shocking reality: the extensive war infrastructure supplied by Iran to Hamas was far superior to what was originally budgeted. Not only are there weapons of all kinds and missiles, but subway engineering works that were unimaginable, with a network of tunnels hundreds of kilometers long, all financed by Iran in preparation for a full-scale war against Israel.

Iran in the eyes of the world does not appear at all... The world press does not judge them, but it does judge the Israeli army for daring to attack Hamas.

Israel continues its military operation against Hamas despite global criticism due to the collateral damage suffered by

the Palestinian people. This operation is also part of Israel's policy of defending its citizens.

Following this, Israeli aircraft raided the Iranian consulate in Damascus to neutralize the commanders of the Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthi terrorist advisors.

Then, in retaliation, comes Iran's drone and missile attack directly against Israel....

The analysis is as follows:

1. The U.S expresses support for Israel but advises against allowing the conflict to escalate.
2. Russia expresses support for Iran but also advises against letting the conflict escalate.
3. It is imperative to consider that is an arsenal of nuclear weapons in the middle... both of the *partner* countries and of Israel. With respect to Iran, it is still a mystery, although it is almost certain that they lack these types of weapons. However, for several years Iran has been experimenting with nuclear energy, carrying out secret underground tests of uranium enrichment to be able to manufacture atomic weapons.

Everyone from the United States, Western countries, Russia, China, and beyond understands that atomic weapons in the hands of an unstable, fanatical regime like Iran pose a serious global threat. They recognize the risk of Iran potentially supplying atomic weapons to the most radical terrorist groups, a possibility that cannot be permitted.

Everyone is hoping that the war in the Middle East does not escalate to greater levels of aggression. However, it is widely understood that Israel holds the responsibility of ultimately stopping a country with an extremely dangerous regime like Iran.

Israel's response to Iran, which took less than five days, has been quite intriguing. A missile reached the strategic Iranian city of Isfahan and exploded just meters away from the main site of Iran's largest nuclear research laboratory, missing its target. Despite this, Iran immediately declared the skirmish between Israel and Iran to be over, and Israel concurred.

All indicators suggest that Israel's high-stakes military operation, directly threatening Iran and its entire nuclear program, has achieved its intended effect. By warning of a potential nuclear bomb attack on Iranian soil, Israel has successfully halted Iran and its allies in their hegemonic intentions.

At the beginning of May 2024, news reports indicate that Israel had entered the city of Rafah with tanks and controlled the Gazan side of the border crossing with Egypt, a necessary passage for humanitarian aid supplies to the Gaza Strip. Israel did this to finish neutralizing the last strongholds of Hamas forces who, fleeing from the north, had sought a last refuge in Rafah.

Regarding the international sphere:

In the United States, anti-Semitism had apparently taken over American universities in several cities, with extreme protests. However, authorities have found that the main activists of these demonstrations are outsiders, not students, who have infiltrated the protests and have already been neutralized by the police.

In Latin America, countries with left-leaning regimes, such as Venezuela, Nicaragua and Mexico, have sided with the Hamas terrorist group against Israel.

In Colombia, the regime of the former communist guerrilla Gustavo Petro, given to extreme exits, has reached the point of breaking the very old and friendly diplomatic relations between Colombia and Israel, praising and defending the

actions of Hamas, to the displeasure and rejection of much of the Colombian population.

Gordon McAllister - May 2024

— O -



A map to keep in mind and avoid misunderstandings.
Kingdoms of Judah and Israel.
IX century BC. - (Before Christ).
This happened in the Iron Age. [4]

See: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reino_de_Israel
See:
https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reino_de_Jud%C3%A1

[4] Photo: From Kingdoms_of_Israel_and_Judah_map_830.svg: *Oldtidens_Israel_& _Judea.svg: FinnWikiNoderivative work: Richardprins (talk)derivative work: Richardprins (talk) - Kingdoms_of_Israel_and_Judah_map_830.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0,

https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=43115371

Chapter 1.
The old Palestinian and a strange letter

Many years ago, the elderly Palestinian, Akram Abushihab, emigrated to South America, leaving his heart in Palestine. He sought prosperity, which had been so elusive in what was one his homeland-a homeland never entirely forgotten.

Someone had once told him that perhaps he might still have a nephew living in poverty, or perhaps his nephew had already passed away in the conflict-ridden Palestine. His nephew might have survived but could have been disabled by one of the many rocket and missile explosions that frequently crossed the sky of Gaza, where no one was completely safe. Despite trying for a long time, he never managed to get any news of his nephew.

Akram remembered that his older brother, Abdulah, had inherited their grandfather's *Stradivarious* violin. However, Akram, chose to pass it on to his nephew instead. It was the only valuable family possession, and now, perhaps his nephew, Khaled Abushihab, still had it.

He had not heard from him again until now, more than sixty years later. As he held the letter in his hands, distant memories stirred, filled with nostalgia and ancient images, bringing tears to his face.

Someone had finally read him the letter written in English, which mentioned a concert in the United States and whose *First Violin* or *Concertmaster* was precisely that Khaled Abushihab.

Yes, apparently his nephew had survived... But another thing that piqued his curiosity was the name of the sender: a certain Myriam Kravitz; surely a Jew, because of her *Ashkenazi*

surname, one of those from Central Europe. However, this letter was postmarked Washington D.C. and that generated more questions.

***

Several weeks before...

Bogotá, Colombia

At that moment, the old Palestinian, an amateur writer, was correcting a paragraph, part of a novel in the making, written by him, and reading it aloud:

"...these were the pressing moments of the "intifadah", the insurrectionary uprising that had tempered the soul of the young Palestinian, who for the time being was safe from the tragic consequences. However, the terrible explosions of the warheads fired with murderous precision by those Israeli enemies, had blinded the life of his first wife, and left his youngest son invalid and half paraplegic, and in addition, had also taken his father, his mother, his dearest brother, to better horizons of celestial dimensions.

That fratricidal war gave pagan burial to the dreams and hopes of so many Palestinian brothers, who ended up in the streets of Gaza, unable to find any sense of purpose for their lives, wandering aimlessly, pushed towards some bad destiny, prefixed with delusions of vain hopes.

On the other hand, I knew of good reference, of some Israeli acquaintances, Jews who had suffered in the same way, the serious consequences of the retaliations of the Palestinian militants of "Hamas", who, with viciousness, sent bombs to the populated areas of Israel, murdering parishioners who had nothing to do with the hatred sown in the hearts of those deranged contenders.

After several years and so much suffering, the young Palestinian, facing the uncertainty of change, had fled to distant lands beyond the horizon, to find a reason for life and progress..." etc. etc. etc.

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Those fragments of fiction were perhaps a reflection of his own history, marked with traces of blood in the chinks of his subconscious mind.

Being based for a long time in the new world, the old Palestinian, Akram Abushihab, reviewed his almost finished writing. Wearing his thick tortoiseshell glasses, he looked throughout the text, finding hidden errors placed there in a surreptitious way by those little sprites of literature. These mischievous beings played jokes even on seasoned writer, causing the flow of the subject to stumble with mistakes. Only the eagle eye of the reserved critic could highlight these errors unforgivable mortal sins, which he might have missed in his first attempt to capture the ideas without thoroughly checking the hidden paths of ortho-typography.

Thus, the old Palestinian continued, revising and correcting his writing with great effort, immersed in reading and oblivious to the grayish twilight that crept through the window of his office in the Teusaquillo neighborhood of Bogotá.

In his distant memories, an old *Stradivarius,* once belonging to his deceased brother, was the only link to a nephew he had ever known. After sixty-one years from his last time in Palestine, old Akram had no friends or relatives left, except for this stranger- if he was even still alive.

Surprised, however, he now read the heading on the envelope of a letter that had been left under the door. It was addressed to an unknown woman of Israeli origin, postmarked by the Washington, D.C. post office, and he had a feeling that it brought news from Palestine.... Bad?... or perhaps good news?

“Myriam Kravitz," Akram read, "Who could it be?

“But I'm sure it's a Jewish name... I know that," thought Akram.

"Also, this envelope comes from Washington... I find that intriguing... and I have no idea who the sender might be... Myriam Kravitz...."

After a few minutes, Akram had already torn open the cover and what he found at first glance surprised him even more... It was two *American Airlines tickets,* in his and his wife Fadhila's names, and a few dollars; plus, a letter in English, which would surely explain everything.

Akram did not speak English and had to wait to learn the contents of the letter.

At the end of the following week, he would meet with his friend Joseph Levy, who was about to arrive in Bogotá. Akram understood that Joseph had studied at *Yale University,* and he had to know English.

However, plans did not unfold as expected. Things got complicated, and they were unable to meet with Joseph, so he had to wait a little longer to learn the contents of the letter.

Three weeks later, Akram had a business trip to Barranquilla and took the letter with him, as he was to meet another friend by the name of Bonifacio Bonfante, who would read it to him.

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Many years before, in '56, Bonifacio Bonfante told his Jewish friend, Joseph Levy, about Akram Abushihab, since he was planning on introducing them.

"Look Joseph, Akram is an immigrant of Palestinian origin who, according to what he told me, was born in 1932 in Jericho. Today he is a well-to-do man who seizes every good business opportunity both in Bogotá and on the Atlantic coast. If you see him, you might think he's lying about his age. He appears younger than he is-tall and erect, with a commanding

presence. He is always clean-shaven and neatly dressed, but without vanities, you will see".

"When I invite him out, he has no problem going to the Country Club of Barranquilla and behaving perfectly, then going to lunch at a popular restaurant in the *Barranquillita* market and feeling comfortable in both places. He is also very kind, always smiling, and immediately makes you feel at ease when you meet him."

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Many years later, Joseph Levy himself occasionally looked the elderly Palestinian man with admiration and affection. Dusk had fallen, and he watched him sitting in his rocking chair by a window, with a good book in his hands, which he seemed to do often when he was not writing. He seemed to let time pass without bothering himself with vain illusions and dreams of yesterday that no longer meant anything to him.

Joseph already knew that Akram was a happy man, that he thanked life for his fortune, for as he said, how little he needed to feel satisfied, and of that, very little was enough to make him satisfied. A cup of coffee, a small nutritious snack and a book that motivated his interest, were all it took to make his kind and peaceful eyes shine.

However, something in him showed a slight trace of nostalgia or perhaps the sadness of having lived through some ancient tragedy, half hidden by the passing of time.

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Chapter 2.
An immigrant in Barranquilla

Many years before
Year 1954

An old 7,500-ton motor vessel of Lebanese origin, sailed under a Greek flag, with a woman's name inscribed on its port side: *Karima*. It was sailing on an intercontinental voyage between the port of Haifa in Israel and some unspecified port in America.

Karima was the name of a real girl, a love lost in the time of one of the many wars between Israel and Palestine. The owner of the motorboat, an Arab with an unpronounceable name, had named her *Karima* so as not to lose the habit of referring to her every time he had to name his ship and thus keep his memory intact. He had not been overcome by nostalgia, but neither did he want to lose the memory of her image in the corners of the chest of oblivion.

On board, gazing at the horizon with growing expectation, came young Akram Abushihab, who was full of hope as he traveled to America on the motor vessel. He was sure that, upon first sighting land, he would encounter the image of a gigantic statue that was shown in photographs and that the articles of dreams of progress named as "*The Statue of Liberty*".

"Freedom, that's why I came from Palestine," young Akram commented to another passenger he had just met, and continued: "Tell me, what is freedom worth if it means starving to death in a place like Gaza, where there is no possibility of a dignified life or even the hope of progress? Worse yet, it's in the midst of war, with skirmishes that could end your life at any

moment, bullets flying from unseen sources- just as happened to many of my relatives and acquaintances."

In Palestine, Akram had had many difficult experiences. Survival had become a daily priority, not only because of how complicated it was to obtain the means of subsistence, but also because of the constant danger in a place where the conflict between Jews and Palestinians had become a normal part of life. This couldn't be considered true living; life was meant to be something more.

Now he was traveling to America. However, he soon learned that, although the ship had been bound for America, they had not specified to which part of America it was bound, and he had no idea how big America was, nor that there were several Americas, namely: the north, the center and the south, apart from the America of the rich, the poor, the dreamers and those who no longer dreamed and had abandoned themselves to a fate they considered to be a bitch.

In 1954, Akram, at the age of twenty-two, brought with him a grand image of what awaited him, which, although shocking, was different from what he had imagined.

When he disembarked, he found a strange port, with buildings painted in outrageous colors. The sticky heat clung to his back, and the oppressive humidity made it feel like he was breathing water, making it difficult to catch his breath. The canicular sun blazed down at 2:00 in the afternoon, creating an urgent thirst for any liquid, even if it wasn't drinkable. Strangely enough, the place was full of peculiar people who were not affected by the infernal heat.

However, days later, now more accustomed to the tropical climate, he began to feel an immense joy, because this was truly "*the promised land*". But it was not the one promised by that biased God, who they said, only protected the Jews. It was the promised land in the tourism brochures and prosperity

articles where the "*American dream*" was promised. And although it was not that one, the America of there, the one of the north, but this other one, the America of here, the south, it was full of surprises and hopes for a future full of possibilities. It had fertile lands, mostly kind people, greenery everywhere, and a spirit of determination among those who promised progress and fought with everything they had.

After a short time, Akram learned that the place where he had arrived was called Barranquilla, which was the city where the motorboat named "*Karima*" had docked.

Akram brought a light suitcase loaded with few rags and many dreams that weighed nothing but inflated his imagination hoping for easy riches promised. He would soon find out that it was not so easy, however, he was already used to fight his way through life to make his dreams and projects come true.

Then, he arrived at a precarious boarding house, where they spoke a language that was curious and not at all clear to his ears. He was accustomed only to the language used by all the so-called "*majitos"*, no matter where they came from, whether they were from Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Iraq or Turkey.

For the inhabitants of that strange place, all the newcomers were "Turks" or "majitos" and were believed to come from the same region. The coastal people had some reason for this confusion because the countries mentioned were so young. Before existing as independent homelands, they had all been part of the so-called *Ottoman Empire,* which had existed before the 1300s. This empire, which eventually became known as the ancestral homeland of the Turks, existed before the establishment of Turkey. The Turks, however, preferred to forget their Ottoman past because the Ottoman Empire had participated in World War I, failed, and lost. Only Turkey remained, once it became a republic, after gaining its independence on October 29, 1923.

It is worth mentioning that in the *Ottoman Empire*, in force from 1299 to 1922, the official language of the dominated countries, mentioned above, was a mixture of Arabic, Turkish-Ottoman and Persian languages, and in this dialect, they were all understood.

After several days he could understand that he was in a country called Colombia, in a coastal city on the Caribbean Sea. The atmosphere was filled with the exuberance of the "Caribbean rumba", where the lax customs and overflowing happiness were a way of life. Equatorial heat, lively music, and half-African songs with drum rhythms, created an exotic scene for him. People danced with abandon, and it was common to have a permit called "*la parranda*" and "*mamar ron*", to enjoy the parties without any restrictions.

It seemed to him that this atmosphere would brighten his life and help him forget the harsh conditions of the wars, the hardships and the dead ends experienced in his homeland. It was exactly what he was looking for, a land of peace, prosperity and joy. Then he would send for his beloved Fadhila.

Fadhila, of Lebanese Syrian origin, was not yet twenty-one years old, but she had a maturity that many envied. She was determined, a dreamer and an enthusiasm for life. She was the one who had encouraged him to seek new horizons in that dream land they called America, even if it was the South.

Her name was Fadhila Mubarak, and she was a relative of some immigrants who had arrived in America, long before, towards the end of the 19th century, escaping from the Ottomans' excesses.

She was a beautiful young woman. Petite, with exotic features, abundant black hair, large light green cat eyes, olive skin and a look that seemed to have come from some strange dream dimension or had escaped from one of the tales of *the*

Thousand and One Nights, where she had been a princess in some Arabian legend…

Fadhila would pursue the dreams of her ancestors and encourage Akram, the love of her life, to embark on this journey full of hope and good omens.

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Chapter 3.
A fabric store in Bogotá

Year 1955

Eight months after his arrival in Barranquilla, Akram Abushihab already understood the Spanish language and made himself understood, always with the special accent of the "*majitos*". He had already made several Colombian friends, along with other Arabs, including Egyptians, Lebanese, Jordanians and Syrians, as well as others from the Syrian Lebanese community in Colombia. Even though they were Palestinians like him, they were all recently arrived immigrants.

Apart from his cultured Colombian friend from the coast, Bonifacio Bonfante, his other coastal friends were not so cultured. They always made jokes about his way of speaking, imitating his accent. They would say to him: "*Hola Majitu quiridu, - ven jálame la valija Jaime*", or also, "*Majitu quiridu, le vendo corbata barata*" and then burst out laughing. He would celebrate the simplicity of their jokes and thank them for their closeness and friendship.

He never felt lonely again in the months that followed. There was always something to do in his free time: a game of chess or poker, or a game of parqués or dominoes, or simply sitting in a rocking chair on the porch of his house, with a glass of corozo or tamarind juice, chatting with friends. They enjoyed those sunsets adorned with a thousand hues from the unique trees, as the midday heat gave away to a cooling evening breeze.

Soon, the scars of his war days in his country were healed, with the balm of the peaceful life of Barranquilla and an honest job, managing a beach tavern, which provided him with enough income to keep him from having afflictions.

After the first year, some friends from the Syrian-Lebanese colony told him about some very good opportunities for business ventures in the capital of the country, a much larger and dynamic city. Although the ship he had arrived on did not reach the United States, this was also a land of opportunities. With a capital city like Bogotá, it offered the potential to develop successful businesses and forge a prosperous future for those who wanted to give the best of themselves.

Months later, Akram Abushihab, determined to make his way in the new homeland took an Avianca *Super Costellation* plane from Barranquilla to land at the *Techo* airport in Bogotá. The year was 1956.

In his letters Akram wrote to Fadhila:

¨Look Fadhila, the Bogotá that I found as soon as the plane had landed, is a city, not so big, located on a plateau covered with an emerald, green color, with meadows, trees and flowers that I had never seen in Palestine. Although it has a cold climate, which sometimes makes your bones ache, it is really like the spring months in Palestine, between March and April, and it is very pleasant. The climate in Bogotá is practically the same throughout the year, except for small differences in rainy and sunny seasons; but just looking at the fertility of the Colombian countryside, shows you that this is a land of a thousand opportunities and good future, and with these fertile lands, at least the food will be assured. I know you will love it".

"But, on the other hand," Akram continued, "I want you to know that Bogotá is definitely a cold and somewhat hostile city, full of people dressed in strict black, very educated, perhaps too refined for my taste, except for those of the common people. However, this is a place of progress that promises a bright future, with very hardworking people, and that is what has interested me most, and I know that you will also like it.¨

In those days, Akram rented a place on Carrera 9ª, near 11th street in Bogotá, right in the area where his fellow Palestinian and Arab countrymen also had textile businesses.

Several friends lent him merchandise on consignment, while he managed to stock his store with his own merchandise, a goal that became a reality after a few months.

Fadhila, excited about the upcoming trip to the new world, wanted to know everything and pestered Akram with questions that required him to go into minute details of daily life in that country.

Akram, being rather sparing of words and absent of narrative eloquence, had to strive to meet his beloved's expectations.

To a question from Fadhila about the location of the store, Akram wrote:

"The store, located on the 9th street is situated in a narrow alley filled with cars, almost all of them black, emitting a bluish mist from their exhaust pipes. The unpleasant smell of fuel mixed with the burnt oil makes you sneeze and reddens your eyes during peak traffic hours. There are many horse-drawn carts with bags tied to their haunches to catch the manure, though not always successfully".

Akram would also tell Fadhila, among other things, about the food. For instance, he would talk about the milk soup that had caught his attention.

"My dear Fadhila," Akram wrote, "some foods here are very strange. For example, there is a soup made of cow's milk with onion, garlic and chopped coriander, containing a couple of eggs, and served with pieces of bread soaked in the soup. Some call it "*bread soup with egg*"; while others refer to it as "*Changua*", and they eat it for breakfast. I discussed this with our fellow countrymen, and for us, accustomed to having breakfast with goat cheese, olives, almond bread rolls, dates, pomegranate tea and yogurt, it was surprising to see that they have this soup

or a beef rib and potato broth with coriander for breakfast. It's quite new to us".

"Also," Akram continued, "they have sweet, hot chocolate mixed with milk and served in a cup. They add pieces of cheese that melt with the heat, and to the "*cuncho*", which is what they call the final residue of the chocolate in the cup. On top of the cheese, they also add pieces of bread. They eat the bread once it's soaked in the chocolate and call it "*sopitas*" *(little soups)*. Very curious people, these bogotanos. These are some of the cultural differences you will encounter when you are here".

"Another curiosity," Akram wrote, "is the abundance of a tiny, nearly invisible insect that often catches you on the streetcar. It travels by jumping on the floor until it finds the warmth of a leg, and then comes an itch that drives you crazy until you get home. When you finally find it, you can have the satisfaction of slaughtering it with hatred, crushing it between your nails. They call it "Flea", and in Arabic, it's something like "برغوث", which in Latin alphabet is read as "Birghuth".

"And the strangest thing", Akram added, "is a custom of eating a very large ant that is fried. They call it "*Hormiga culona*". I tried it once when a friend brought a bag full of them. It tasted like a raisin with a strange flavor somewhat like toasted almonds with a slight hint of honey. Despite my initial hesitation, the taste wasn't bad at all, and I ended up eating several of them".

Fadhila would respond and ask him:

"What about the war over there? Tell me about the war and the skirmishes between the people. Is it similar in any way to Palestine?"

He would respond:

"Look Fadhila, there are no wars here in the strict sense of the world, but there is a strong confrontation between

different political factions, namely the *Cachiporros* (the liberals) and the *Godos* (the conservatives). The population is dominated by a politicized police force under the orders of a conservative government, called the *Chulavitas*. Apart from this, there is always a tantrum or two from some enraged citizen. For example, I once saw an energetic old man, in the middle of a string of profanities, with his face red as a tomato, get into a fight with a herd of horses pulling the streetcar that almost ran him over".

"Several years ago, in 1948, there was a delicate revolt, when the people rose up in arms in an attempted revolution, to protest the death of a political leader loved by the people, named Jorge Eliécer Gaitán. It was a revolution that was promptly crushed, met with blood and fire by the government of the day.

* * *

Finally, his love arrived.

After fourteen months, following a long flight on *El Al*, the Israeli airline, from Tel Aviv, with stopovers in Munich, Paris and Madrid, and then on Avianca from Madrid via Lisbon, the Bahamas, and Barranquilla to Bogotá, Fadhila Mubarak, his longtime love, arrived.

Within eight days of their arrival, they had already celebrated their wedding in the presence of members of the Arab community.

At first, they lived in a small room at the back of the same premises, which served as a tiny apartment with a bathroom and a shower.

"My love," said Fadhila on that occasion, "don't worry about everything we are missing. Little by little we will get settled in. Two blocks from here there is a store, I think it is called "*Almacenes Tía"*, and I am going to buy a portable stove that will help us until we can buy a proper one. I've also seen some pots

that are very cheap and some tableware. This way, if we have visitors, we will be able to take good care of them".

In those first days after Fadhila's arrival, they settled in as best they could and started with the most important thing at that time: their diligent work.

As the days went by, the store gained prestige and their income improved. However, most of it went to their savings. It was a stable income that allowed a rapid development of their economic situation and soon prosperity came to their lives.

Akram and Fadhila understood that success was the result of hard work and not luck. It took many years of work and effort. They would always focus on taking care of their store and building a customer base that would appreciate them for their good service as a starting point, fair prices, friendly treatment and honesty.

It took not just one year, not two, or three, but many more years of putting their hearts into every sale, every action, every payment to their suppliers, and consistently meeting their obligations with the banks. They worked tirelessly to earn a solid reputation that would serve as a standard for introducing them to new customers and suppliers, and for maintaining strong relationships with the friends they made along the way.

And time went by, many years perhaps, and the reputation of the Old Palestinian Akram Abushihab and Fadhila Mubarak, his wife, grew. They gained the respect of their peers, including many Jews with whom they had mutually respectful business dealings. They were no longer in Palestine and there was no reason for conflict. Whether Palestinian or Jewish, they were now Colombianized foreigners, which gave them a sense of equality with others. Additionally, being foreigners, they enjoyed a certain special deference from the locals.

Over the years, they had already managed to get their own house in a respectable neighborhood like Teusaquillo. They

bought a car- not the latest model, but fairly new- and a recreational farm in Villeta, near Bogotá. Their family was complete with three children, two boys and a girl, all now married with their own children and established professional careers. While they weren't very wealthy, they had achieved a stable economic situation and were able to live in peace. Their children, Colombian by birth, spoke Spanish without a Palestinian accent, accustomed as they were to the refined language spoken in Bogotá.

Although Akram did not attend the mosque as regularly as he did in his homeland, almost always, at the end of the afternoon, he would take a moment to thank Allah for all that he had accomplished.

Fadhila, for her part, often met with her friends from the Syrian-Lebanese community for prayer and conversation. Her children were always given the freedom to make their own religious decisions.

On those cold Bogotá nights, in the warmth of the fireplace of his house, watching the fire that burned and crackled incessantly,
Akram pondered and squeezed his memory to try to remember. But no matter how hard he tried; he did not have all the facts registered in his memory. Many years ago, he had simply come to America, fleeing from the ancient conflict in his beloved homeland. In the Palestine that he remembered, there had never been peace or opportunities for progress for him and his wife. That is why they decided to seek new horizons, far away in this new land across the sea.

Akram and Fadhila did not know exactly where the conflict had begun. Perhaps its origins lay in the ancient history of Palestine, in a time marked by the nebulous obscurity of the past. The starting point of the atavistic conflict between

Palestinians and Israelis was lost to them, hidden in a history they did not fully understand.

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Chapter 4.
Our friend Bonifacio Bonfante Merino

A few months before...
Beginning of 1955
Barranquilla, Colombia

At 6:30 pm, the evening breeze swept by, bringing a refreshing calm that called for reflective peace and rest, allowing life to pass without worries. Life perhaps, inconsequential, but at the same time, too meaningful to be affected by trivial concerns. For this reason, the customary saying of the locals was: "*Cógela suave*", referring to taking life without anxieties or worries.

The rocking chairs creaked under the weight of the parishioners and, although their timbers complained a little, they stoically supported a weight that exceeded their capacity and resistance, thrown to the sway of an uncertain balance.

Sun, heat, jokes and laughter, refreshing drinks, and hot flashes from June to August. Intense breezes in January and February, light conversations among the townspeople, and profound discussions among writers, novelists and poets. Rains and streams almost always in April and May. Endless parties, simply because it was Friday or Saturday night, and an overflowing peace that soothed the hearts. That's how Barranquilla felt in those years.

"Hey, "*Cuadro,"* said Bonifacio Bonfante, the coastal man, in an intemperate voice, "and why is it that you came from Palestine?"

"There was a war," Akram answered, "a millenarian war between our people and the Jews, a bloody, never-ending conflict… In '48 when the State of Israel was formed and proclaimed by *the League of Nations*, my parents died. We knew that a time of confrontation and enormous difficulties was coming, and that was only the beginning. By then, the dead were already counted by the hundreds on both sides, not to mention the thousands who had perished over millennia of cruel confrontation."

"But haven't they always been neighbors? I don't understand why they haven't been able to live in peace, seeing that it is such a small land with scarce resources, where everyone should help each other."

"Look, Bonifacio, this has always been a problem of ethnicities and divergent religions. People get killed over these issues, believing they are different from one another, and that's where conflicts begin".

"You live here in a paradise," Akram continued "with extensive and fertile land, and people who share similar characteristics. Everyone here is Colombian, they all come from the coast. It only takes minutes to become a part of the community. That doesn't happen where I come from."

"No kidding, what a difficult thing to do," Bonifacio said.

Through the years, Akram had come to see Bonifacio Bonfante Merino as a coastal man who looked almost European, despite being born in Ciénaga Magdalena, Colombia. He was a man of good size, slightly overweight, with a nervous temperament—someone who could never relax and whose

mind always worked at high speed. He was a great intellectual, always brimming with ideas and projects.

Akram knew that Bonifacio had Italian ancestry on his father's side, coming from the province of *Caltanisetta* in Sicily, and Spanish ancestry on his mother's side, from the region of Castile.

Surely that was the origin of the strange name they had given their son, half Italian, half Spanish and half from anywhere.

And that is how Bonifacio felt, a citizen of anywhere. The reason for this was that, from a very young age, he always read everything. He was never given toys as gifts, only books, and more books. By the end of his adolescence, he had already amassed a good library with a considerable number of volumes on many different subjects. Over the years, it grew to become perhaps the best private library on the coast and its surroundings. Furthermore, Bonifacio, being perhaps the most widely read man in the city, gradually became a reference for all things intellectual and knowledgeable.

From Bonifacio, Akram learned that his parents had fled from hunger and misery in Italy shortly after the end of World War I, seeking new horizons in the Americas, like many immigrants of Italian origin who had arrived and settled on the Colombian coast.

Bonifacio had befriended Akram when the latter had just arrived from Palestine and was looking for any job, however modest, to cover his basic needs. Bonifacio had offered him a job as the manager of a small beach tavern in the town of Puerto Colombia, near Barranquilla. The tavern sold beer, rum, and fried fish with coconut rice, tomato, and patacón. Despite Akram's limited language skills, tourists managed to make themselves understood, as asking for a beer and something to eat was easy to communicate. Akram quickly learned the ropes

and embraced the job with enthusiasm. Every day, he thanked Allah for the good fortune of being in a place with friendly people and a peaceful life.

Bonifacio's extensive library was well-utilized by Akram, who used it to practice and understand the language. With a constant supply of books that Bonifacio lent him, Akram, an avid reader, devoured everything he could get his hands on. This enriched the content of their evening conversations.

"Keep it," Bonifacio often told him, when Akram tried to return a borrowed book, "so you can build up your own library someday."

Over the years, Akram built his own extensive library, forming friendships with the best booksellers of the time. These connections allowed him to acquire imported books when they were otherwise impossible to find in Colombia.

Under the influence of his friend Bonfante, Akram soon became interested in international politics and avidly read everything he could get his hands on. Once, during one of their evening talks in the cool Barranquilla air, Bonifacio and Akram discussed the topic of Bonifacio's family's immigration.

"If I remember correctly," Akram asked, "in your parents' homeland, there was also a terrible conflict after World War I, right?"

"True," Bonifacio commented, "in Italy, there was a political confrontation that led to a civil war. At the end of World War I, the country's economic situation was very critical, and the Italian left took advantage of that to try to impose Bolshevik-style communism as a government regime. The general strike by the workers, combined with a bankrupt economy, soon led to the situation getting out of control, with no solutions from the government of the time."

"Salvation would come from a former socialist named *Benito Mussolini* who in 1919 was already proposing an alternative

to the ideas of capitalism and communism. His proposal was the so-called fascism, and we already know the disastrous result of such policy. It eventually involved Italy in the Second World War, but on the side of the losers, along with Germany."

"My parents' emigration," Bonifacio continued, "was at the end of the First World War when they decided to travel to America and arrived in Colombia, because they foresaw that events would become more and more terrible in Italy."

"They arrived in the city of Santa Marta in 1926 when my father was only 24 years old and my mother 18 years old, and then they moved to Ciénaga, where I was born. In 1932 my father was hired by the *United Fruit of Colombia*, in an administrative position. However, on December 6, 1928, the terrible massacre of the banana workers took place. The army opened fire on a demonstration of workers demanding better working conditions, killing more than 1,800 of them. Until that day my father worked for the banana company and resigned for reasons of conscience."

"Then he found a job in a hardware store in Santa Marta, keeping the accounting records, where he worked for five years. After that, my parents decided to move to Barranquilla where they settled permanently. By then, I was one year old."

Bonifacio continued.

"I grew up there and was trained in the business world under the guidance of my father, who was dedicated to importing wines and liquors and opened a wholesale distributor. I did my high school at San José Jesuit School and graduated in 1949. By then, I had already begun to venture into business, helping my father with his. This gave me the experience to continue with such business in the international arena."

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For many years, Akram maintained his close friendship with his erudite coastal friend, Bonifacio Bonfante. Bonifacio, who always ran his business of importing and distributing liquors, frequently traveled to the capital for business dealings. He would always take the opportunity to meet with Akram for a coffee, a good beer, a whiskey, or even a pineapple or cañaduz guarapo—or why not? A "Kola Roman"—when they met on the coast in the middle of one of their endless chats.

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Chapter 5.
Historical research in the making

Year 1999

More than forty years had passed since Akram had met Bonifacio. At that time, Akram regularly traveled to Barranquilla for his fabric and cloth business, ensuring his warehouse in Bogotá was stocked with imported merchandise.

On a hot Saturday afternoon, the two friends were at restaurant in Barranquilla, chatting about the history of Israel and Palestine. Several years earlier, Bonifacio Bonfante and his wife, Myladys Contreras, a native of Cartagena, had taken a tourist trip to the Middle East, visiting the Holy Land, Egypt and Jordan.

Bonifacio told him that, during a visit to Jordan, while in the town of Al Balqa', northeast of Amman, on the banks of the Jordan River, they had caught a glimpse of the border area between Jordan, Israel, and Palestine, specifically in the West Bank region, on the other bank.

Bonifacio, in his own words, recounted the incidents of the trip to his friend:

"I was curious," said Bonifacio, "standing there at the border, I saw a group of well-armed Israeli soldiers in a defensive posture. At that moment, I knew I had to start learning about the conflict between Israel and the Arab countries in the region."

"After a while, I had already begun to delve into the details of the conflict, among a sea of papers, books, videos and old archives."

"At that time, there was a negotiated peace between Jordan and Israel, but a certain degree of tension was still palpable between the two countries. This was especially true at the point on the Jordan bank where we stood, directly opposite the so-called Zone B on the Palestinian side. It was an area where the presence of Jews was forbidden, except for Israeli troops who would frequently make security rounds under any pretext."

"It should be noted," Bonifacio continued, "that the security operations carried out by the Israeli military were a response to decades of confrontation with the Palestinians, particularly in recent times, which had been plagued by terrorist attacks perpetrated by the Palestinians."

"Similarly, it's important to acknowledge that the experience of the Palestinians, cornered and vilified by the Israelis, has been bleak, which contributes to their bellicose spirit."

"True," said Akram, "but let me tell you something that I experienced firsthand. It all starts with an Arabic word: Nakba, which refers to the disaster of the Palestinian people. In 1998, Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat established May 15 as Nakba Day, in memory of the catastrophe that occurred after the end of the British mandate in Palestine and the founding of the State of Israel. This event led to the expulsion of Palestinians from their lands and the expropriation of their properties by the Israelis, forcing them into exile."

"About 700,000 Palestinians were exiled and forcibly displaced, all to comply with the United Nations Resolution No. 181, determining the partition of Palestine into two territories, one part for the Jewish people and the other for the Palestinian people."

"However," said Bonifacio, "the stories told by the Hebrews also have a strong dramatic content, and I am not

saying that what you mentioned is dramatized, not at all. What I want to highlight is the suffering of the Jews, who have endured murders, acts of terrorism, and massacres against their fellow countrymen, not only in the Middle East but also around the world."

"I believe that no one comes out of this conflict unscathed." Bonifacio continued. "At the beginning of my research, I thought that the Arab-Israeli conflict was a matter that went back to perhaps the 19th century, with the convening of the *Zionist Nationalist Political Movement*, which proposed the establishment of a Sovereign State for the people of Israel in Palestine. However, I soon realized that this conflict goes back several millennia and is much more complex than it initially appears, based on the data collected in recent years".

"Generally," Bonifacio continued, "the unsuspecting observer has the belief that the people of Israel have invaded land that has always belonged to the Palestinians, which is incorrect. Both Palestinians and Israelis have inhabited that territory for several millennia."

"You know," Akram interjected, "I agree with you because I know that the region has been in dispute for millennia".

"Yes, you've said it", Bonifacio continued, "this was a conflict that had been going on for many millennia since its true origin, according to the very ancient legends recorded in sections of the Jewish bible, in the Old Testament, in the so-called *Pentateuch*, also known as *the Torah."*

"After that trip to Jordan, upon my return to Colombia, I took the opportunity to discuss the details of my observations with representatives of the Israeli Embassy and members of the Office of the Palestinian |Authority in the country. This allowed me to confront their divergent points of view, offering me a more complete picture of the complex reality."

"Also, while the history of the Palestinian people is quite complex, as you know since you are from there, so is the history of pain and tenacity of the Hebrew people. I have read about their history, and that has helped me form a good understanding of the thinking and motivations of the Jews."

"Let me tell you a little about it," Bonifacio continued, "for I have found much information in very old documents that recount the stories and legends of the Jewish people, going back many centuries, perhaps too far back in time."

"For example, in that ancient book, the Old Testament, a story of pain and suffering is told, highlighting the terrible condition of slavery endured by an entire people in Egypt during the most ancient times, perhaps around the 13th century BC. It is believed to have been at the time of the reign of *Ramses Meriamon*, better known as *Ramses II,* who was the third descendant pharaoh of the XIX dynasty of Egypt, who ruled between 1279 and 1213 BC."

At that moment, Bonifacio made a remark to Akram.

"Forgive me Akram, for I know I am speaking as if I were dictating a lecture, and I may bore you. But these explanations are key to understanding the tragedy of the Jewish people and the implications this had on the conflict between Jews and Palestinians in the following centuries."

"Don't worry, go on," Akram replied.

Bonifacio continued his explanation:

"To understand the spatial-temporal characteristics of the Jews' presence in Egypt, it is necessary to refer to the Hebrew books such as the *Pentateuch*, *Genesis* and *Exodus*. It should be noted that Hebrew religious history is based on these books, qualifying them as sacred books. However, they are not historical books but rather legendary accounts. Nonetheless,

they allow us to glimpse what could have been the ancient history of the people of Israel."

"Furthermore," Bonifacio continued, "if we wanted to be more rigorous, we should mention that there are other books in Judaism such as the Tanach, which is composed of three great sacred books, namely: The Torah, (Law), The Nevi'im (Prophets) and The Ketuvim (Writings). But we are not going to delve into those depths; suffice it to say that these books contain many of the legends and customs of the Hebrew people. And I say this not to impress you, but in case you are interested in studying the history of Judaism and its foundations in more depth.

"But let's continue," said Boniface. "In the book of the *Pentateuch*, in *Genesis 15:13*, there is an account, which, I repeat, is understood to be part of the religious belief systems of the Jews. It states that God told Abraham that the Jewish people and their descendants would live in foreign lands and suffer vexations for a period of 400 years. Additionally, in the same *Pentateuch*, but in the book of *Exodus 12:40* it is stated that the children of Israel lived in the land of Egypt, for 430 years as foreign slaves, until Moses managed to free the Jewish people with 'the help of God'."

"The flight of the Hebrew people from Egypt is situated around the year 1250 BC. Leaving the city of Ramses, they fled to another town called Succoth, where they established what would today be known as a refugee camp. It was an encampment of huts, made with the little they had at the time or could transport during their flight through enemy territory."

"The word *Sukkot* gave rise to a Jewish celebration feast with the same name, meaning "*Feast of the booths*" or "*Feast of the Tabernacle*". This feast commemorates the hardships endured by the Jewish people during their forty years of wandering in the forest, highlighting their struggle to survive in harsh and

insufficient conditions. According to the book of the Tanakh, the Tabernacle was a kind of precarious altar, ordered to be built by Moses, using the minimal materials available to the Israelites during their time in the desert. Despite its simplicity, it held tremendous significance in the scared history of the Jews."

"The *Sukkah*," Boniface continued, "a Hebrew word derived from the term *Sukkot*, refers precisely to a provisional hut, made of branches, wood and cloth, to spend the night in the desert. Additionally, *Pesach*, is another Jewish festival commemorating the liberation of the Hebrew people from slavery in Egypt. These stories are also found in the Pentateuch, in the *book of Exodus,* in the Old Testament"/

"Now," Bonifacio stated, "*The Pentateuch* or also called *the Torah*, refers to the first five books of the Bible, in the Old Testament, which are *Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deutoronomy*, where it is believed that the teachings given directly by God to the people of Israel are found...."

"But this is debatable," Bonifacio remarked. "Look, Akram, I try to respect the religious belief systems of pious people, whether they are Jews, Muslims or Christians. However, above all, I am pragmatic and consider the opinions of expert scholars and academics. They suggest that these ancient books were written by the scribes of the time, who complied the millenary verbal traditions of the Hebrews in their different tribes. These traditions were originally transmitted from generation to generation and were intentionally attributed to divine origin to give them greater strength and credibility. While they claim and believe that these texts were dictated by God, I frankly believe this very debatable, as do many scholars".

"But" Boniface continued, "I might venture that perhaps it was not a question of wandering in the desert, which sounds terrible, but rather that the Jewish people at the time were nomadic people. They had a habit of moving their camps to

different parts of the region and did not stay in one place for long."

"In short," said Bonifacio, "we must understand that the terrible history of the Jewish people has forged their steely resolve. Since the middle of the last century, they have been determined to defend their presence in the land of Palestine, a land they believed they have as much right to as the Palestinian settlers. For this reason, they would never accept the abolition of the already established State of Israel or the intentions of their Arab neighbors to annihilate their race."

"However," Akram interrupted, "it is also necessary to understand the anger of the Palestinians when they have been expelled from their land and forced into exile by those consider foreigners who have appeared on their territory, perhaps without access to the information you mentioned."

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At this point Bonifacio paused to comment:

"Hey Akram, I feel sorry for you; I might be overwhelming you with so much information... Is this topic too dense? Should we shorten it to make it easier to digest?"

"No! Not at all, this information is clear, and I find it very interesting. But let's stop for today because Fadhila is waiting for me for dinner; it's our anniversary, and I was supposed to pick her up at eight o'clock. Let's leave the subject here and continue tomorrow."

"Okay, let's stop there and tomorrow afternoon we'll continue. I am flattered that this topic, which could be a bit monotonous, is of interest to you."

"We'll talk tomorrow, my dear friend."

"Yes, we will talk tomorrow and thank you very much for this talk."

"Oh, and you know what? Happy anniversary and give Fadhila a big hug for me."

"Thank you very much Bonifacio."

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Chapter 6.
A millennia old conflict

Present time.

Akram Abushihab and Bonifacio Bonfante met to continue their ongoing discussions about Bonifacio's research on the Middle East conflict.

On this occasion, they were in a café across the National Bookstore in Barranquilla, located at the corner of Carrera 53 and 75, in the Prado. They chatted over a good cup of coffee.

"Let me tell you what I have managed to find out about this story", said Bonifacio; "I'll begin with the people of Canaan and their inhabitants, the Canaanites and the Philistines, who were neither Israelites nor Jews, but ancestors of the Palestinian Arabs. They inhabited the left bank of the Jordan River, a region that today encompasses the West Bank and Israel and has been a land disputed by both sides since that time. Moreover, let us place ourselves between 1300 and 1250 BC to have a sufficiently credible frame of reference and understand a history that is riddled with legends and contradictions. Currently, in the lay academic world, we hear conflicting claims; some support these legendary accounts, while others do not accept them as real."

Bonifacio continued his explanation:

"Legends state that between the years 1300 to 1270 BC, twelve tribes of Hebrews, led by Moses, arrived in the *land of Canaan* from Egypt and engaged in fierce battles with the local inhabitants, the Canaanites and the Philistines (Arabs).

"The Bible says that by order of the God of the Jews, the Israelites were commanded to attack and exterminate the Canaanites. This task was entrusted to Joshua, an important Israelite leader. Following this mandate, and with the help of his God, Joshua managed to demolish the walls of the city of

Jericho at the sound of trumpets, where the Canaanites were stationed. This led to a massive slaughter, sparing no one—neither women, elders, nor children. The entire population was wiped out as a divine punishment for their allegedly shameful customs and indecorous behaviors."

"I was born in the town of Jericho, and that's where my family comes from," Akram interrupted, "and I can affirm that this story is very biased because I have never heard that people of bad class and customs that could be described as truculent lived there. What I do know is that people like us have lived there, people who struggle to survive and spend their lives working to support their families. Good people with healthy customs. That is what I know from being from there."

Akram added, "It is very difficult for a modern person to accept, even if the Bible says so, a legend in which a supposed divine mandate is used to justify a horrendous crime. Today, such actions would be classified as crimes against humanity by the *International Court of Justice in The Hague.* Now, it has been said by some biblical researchers that, apparently, the impregnable walls of Jericho were indeed demolished, giving some support to the biblical legends. But being more objective, the city of Jericho is located 263 meters below sea level, at the bottom of a great geological fault and of great tectonic activity, between the *African and Arabian plates*. For this reason, it would be more understandable to consider the theory that, just as the Israelites blew the trumpets, an earthquake of apocalyptic dimensions occurred along that geological fault due to the friction of tectonic plates. This natural disaster would logically result in the collapse of the walls of Jericho, without any divine intervention."

To corroborate this, let me show you an article by journalist Pedro Huergo, published on July 11, 2018, on *Enlace Judío's* website:"

"More than 90 years ago-there is hardly anyone left alive to remember it- Israel experienced a devastating earthquake that caused significant damage and many deaths. This was the last major earthquake in recent memory.

At two minutes past three in the afternoon on July 11th, 1927, during the British Mandate of Palestine, the Syrian African fault, known for its historical seismic activity in the land of the Children of Israel, trembled once more. The epicenter was located near the ancient city of Jericho, north of the Dead Sea, resulting in the deaths of three hundred people. Few if compared to the earthquake of 1837, in which four thousand people died.

The cities of Jericho, Jerusalem, Shchem (Nablus) and Tiberias-situated along the Syrian African fault-were the most affected. Israel, located at the intersection of two tectonic plates, remains a seismic risk zone.

History records indicate a significant seismic activity in the region. The book of the prophet Amos, mentions an earthquake that required King Uzziah to repair the First Temple. In 31 A.D., a devastating earthquake killed 30,000 people, according to the historian Flavius Josephus."

"To conclude this point," Bonifacio stated, "we have to acknowledge that many legends often have a rational explanation rooted in real events, which can be verified though scientific investigation."

"At the same time," said Akram, "it is clear from historical records that there were already strong clashes between Hebrews, Canaanites and Philistines (Palestinian Arabs) for the possession of land."

"But let's stop here," said Bonifacio. "I have an errand to run at customs before they close. I need to nationalize a shipment from Europe—some 'Chianti Classico Gallo Nero'

wines from Italy. How about we continue our discussion tomorrow?"

"Yes, perfect, "answered Akram, "I also have to see some clothes at a Jewish friend's place; he's offering them to me at a good price. I'll see you tomorrow."

And they said goodbye.

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Chapter 7.
Historical references continue

Akram and Bonifacio met again in Barranquilla, this time in a café in the *Buena Vista* area. After exchanging greetings and catching up on recent events, they got down to business.

"Hey Bonifacio," said Akram, "why don't we continue with yesterday's topic so as not to lose the thread, don't you think?"

"Yes, sure, that's fine with me," said Bonifacio, and continued:

"You know, it is difficult to find a single truth to determine what the real foundations of ancient Palestinian history are. For example, long before the thirteenth century, BC, one of the Canaanite tribes, the Jebusites, is credited with founding a city called 'The City of Peace', under the name Ursalim. This name later evolved into Jerusalem. The name Ursalim has a deeper meaning: 'Ur' means city, and 'Shalim' is the name of the god of twilight in Canaanite mythology. Therefore, it is believed that Jerusalem was founded by the Canaanites".

"I have heard" Akram interrupted, "from both Jews and Muslims, each claiming to be the founders of Jerusalem. It is not known exactly which people were the real founders."

"Well, maybe so, "Bonifacio answered. "There is no consensus on the matter. I've even read that Jerusalem was founded 3,000 ago by King David, which doesn't make much sense. However, Jewish legends says that in 1040 BC, Jerusalem was conquered by King David, suggesting its foundation many centuries earlier."

"On the other hand, however," Boniface continued, "several archaeologists, including the prominent British

archaeologist *Kathleen Kenyon, claim* that the founding of Jerusalem is attributed to a *West Semitic* people*,* around the 26th century BC."

"Now, according to Jewish tradition, Jerusalem was founded by certain ancestors of Abraham, named Shem and Eber, descendants of Noah. The word *'Semitic'* derives from the name *'Shem",* referring to the descendants of Shem's bloodline, from which both the Arab and Hebrew populations originate. When we talk about Semitic languages, we refer to languages such as Aramaic, Arabic, and Hebrew. This common linguistic ancestry indicates that Arabs and Hebrews share similar ancestors. It is perplexing that, despite their shared origins, they have been unable to resolve their differences, especially considering they have faced other foreign invaders from whom they needed to defend their land."

"Wait a moment, let me comment on something," said Akram. "Just as you mentioned, there are those who believe that Jerusalem was founded by a grandson of Noah named Canaan, whose descendants, the Canaanites, were the original inhabitants of the territory that today stretches from Lebanon to southern Israel and from the Jordan River to the coast. Nowadays, some malicious voices claim that those Canaanite settlers had licentious customs. This is a convenient way to discredit the ancestors of the Palestinians, denying them the right to defend themselves and, as in the case of Jericho, perhaps providing a justification for their extermination."

"It is true," said Bonifacio, "I have also read those comments. But let me continue with the thread of the conversation."

"The Babylonian captivity: the region of Palestine," Boniface stated, "in the following years was invaded and dominated by various foreign settlers such as the Assyrians in 721 BC, and the Chaldeans in 587 BC, who razed the kingdoms

of Israel and Judah. With the invasion of the Chaldeans into the kingdom of Judah came the Babylonian captivity of the Jews. Exiled from their land, they were taken as slaves to Babylon by the Chaldean king, Nebuchadnezzar II the Great. Not only did Nebuchadnezzar enslave the Jewish people, but he also destroyed their temple and conquered their territory, including the city of Jerusalem. This exile and enslavement occurred in 587 BC, according to some scholars, although there is no total consensus on the exact dates. However, considering that Nebuchadnezzar II reigned from 604 BC to 562 BC, these dates are likely accurate."

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"Well," Bonifacio interrupted himself, "you'll probably want to take a break, perhaps you're getting tired from all these explanations. If you agree, let's rest for today and continue tomorrow".

"No, not at all," Akram replied, "I'd rather we continue until we've rounded off the subject. But let's take advantage of this break to go to the bathroom, shall we?"

"Of course," Bonifacio answered.

A moment later, with fresh coffees in hand, Bonifcaio and Akram continued their discussion on the Kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Bonifacio resumed the conversation:

"The new generations have accepted the belief in the Jewish invasion of Palestine, based on the exodus of Jews from Europe to Palestine after the Second World War, around 1946. Some even trace it back further to the late nineteenth century with the Zionist movement led by Theodor Herzl, which included the declaration of the reestablishment of the State of Israel by the Zionist Political Movement."

"Well," said Akram, "I was convinced that the problem between Israel and Palestine had started, just as you just mentioned, with the *Zionist Political Movement* in the 19th century and that Jew *Herzl."*

"Precisely," said Boniface, "that is why it is necessary to go back to the ancient history of Israel to have a more complete overview of what has been the presence of the Jewish people in the region of Palestine. However, it should be noted that the term *'Hebrews',* used to refer to the Jews, originated from the notion of them being strangers. It signifies '*the people who come from beyond the Euphrates'*. There was always the perception that they were outsiders, even though they had lived in the region for many centuries. This perception helped to foster animosity towards Jews. By the 12th century BC (1200 BC), the kingdoms of Israel and Judah already existed as enclaves of the people of Israel, according to archaeological evidence from the ruins of Israelite civilization found in the northern and southern regions of Palestine."

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At that moment, Akram interrupted the conversation, called the waiter, and ordered beers for both of them. The waiter soon arrived with a couple of "Aguila" beers, and they took advantage of the break to wet their throats.

After the pause, they were ready to continue. Bonifacio continued his discussion.

Other invasions:

"Let me tell you about other details and invasions that happened during the time. According to archaeological studies, the city of *Shechem* was the first capital of the Kingdom of Israel. It was home to the Israelite tribe of Manasseh and was located

near what is now the city of Nablus in the Palestinian region of the West Bank. *Shechem* was an important trade center in the region, with its construction dating back to 4000 BC. Additionally, there are records of the Egyptian pharaoh Sesostris III fighting against the people of *Shechem* in the 19th century BC. The Palestinian Arabs, descendants of the Canaanites and Philistines, had already established themselves in the land of Canaan between 3000 and 2500 BC. Legends mention the first skirmishes between Palestinians and Jews occurred around 2000 BC when a tribe of nomadic Semitic Israelites, led by Abraham, arrived in Palestine."

"But let us move on to more recent times and mention an invasion that affected the region of Palestine and the kingdoms of Judah and Israel by the Macedonian king, Alexander the Great, in 322 BC. Following Alexander's conquest, the Seleucid Empire, an empire of Hellenistic Greek origin that stretched from the Caucasus to Central Asia, the Near East, and the Middle East, dominated Palestine from 300 BC to 63 BC. In 63 BC, a Hebrew leader named Judas Maccabeus led a rebellion against the Seleucids, briefly liberating the region and reestablishing the reign of Israel in Palestine. However, that same year, the Roman Empire took control of Palestine, maintaining its dominance well into the new century. Around 300 AD, the Byzantine Empire, based in Byzantium (modern-day Istanbul), also came to dominate Palestine. By 638 AD, at the end of the Byzantine era, the Arab-Islamic era began under the leadership of Omar Al-Khattab. This period of Arab dominance lasted for nearly one and a half millennia. In between, the region saw the Crusades beginning in mid-July 1099 AD and the Mongol invasions between 1260 and 1300 AD. The struggles for power in the region were constant and fierce."

"Hey," said Akram, "why don't we take a break and get another couple of beers? I also need to go to the bathroom and I'm getting hungry. How about some sausages with *arepa and eggs*?"

"Sounds great," said Bonifacio, "I'm already hungry too, and besides, I also have to go to the bathroom."

"I'm going to ask for them on the corner, to Doña Rosa Pumarejo's restaurant, which has the best *egg arepas* in Barranquilla," said Akram.

"Let me handle it," said Bonifacio, "I'd better ask for them. With your *majito* talk, we might end up with a pot of *tubule* instead of chili. The *arepa de huevo* is meant to be eaten with hot chili made with long onion and cilantro, not with *tabule*."

Akram laughed heartily at his friend's witticism.

After a while, and each of them satisfied with their beers, Bonifacio continued with his explanations.

"Well, let's wrap it up. Around 1299, the Turkish-Ottoman Empire came to dominate the region and remained in control until 1923. During this period, the relationship between the Ottomans and Jewish settlers was very good, as the Ottomans valued the Jewish entrepreneurship in business and trade. However, towards the end of World War I, the Ottoman Empire, alongside the German and Austro-Hungarian Empires, faced its downfall after losing the war.

Following the war, the League of Nations, an international body created by the Treaty of Versailles to restore peace and relations between nations, entrusted the administration of the region of Palestine to the British Mandate. This marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of the Hebrew and Palestinian peoples in the region."

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Chapter 8.
Joseph Levy, an Ashkenazi Jew

Back in Barranquilla, Bonifacio had a Jewish friend named Joseph Levy, with whom he frequently met for long discussions about historical and geopolitical issues. On one occasion, Bonifacio introduced Akram Abushihab to Joseph Levy. They immediately hit it off, despite their ancestral racial and religious differences, which meant nothing to them in the warm, cheerful atmosphere of Barranquilla. Their bond was further strengthened after sharing three well-aged rums and several laughs at Bonifacio's coastal anecdotes.

Joseph Levy, an Ashkenazi Jew of Polish descent, was a tall, wiry man, almost cadaverous in appearance, with a pale face that never managed to achieve a golden tan, even under the relentless Barranquilla sun. He always wore a white shirt with a starched collar that remained inexplicably sweat-free despite the torrid climate, and black pants that, although he changed them daily, always appeared the same. This gave him the look of a Scientology follower or perhaps a member of the *Hasidic* Jewish community, known for their orthodox and peculiar customs. However, Joseph did not practice Judaism, nor did he speak *Yiddish*, the language of the *Ashkenazi* Jewish communities from Central and Eastern Europe, where his family originally came from.

Bonifacio had once told Akram the story of how he had met Joseph Levy. "As a young man of 24, Joseph Levy emigrated with his parents from Berlin in the middle of the Cold War, just days before the construction of the infamous Berlin

Wall began. The Soviet authorities were about to ban people from moving to the western side of divided Berlin, under penalty of death or, at best, long years of imprisonment for treason. On August 13, 1961, the construction of the wall began, stretching 43 kilometers to divide the city in two and extending 160 kilometers to isolate West Berlin, surround it and separating it from East Germany. This effectively confined the population to its Soviet controlled prison in East Germany, in the ironically named German Democratic republic, which was not democratic at all but rather a Soviet prison city. By then, Joseph Levy and his parents were already flying away to America, to the freedom of the West, Creole and Latin America."

"And how did you meet Joseph?" asked Akram.

-Look, Akram," said Bonifacio, "as you can tell, it's easy for me to make everywhere because I am very extroverted. In Joseph's case, it's quite the opposite; he's a very introverted guy."

"One evening," Bonifacio continued, "near the customs headquarters here in Barranquilla, I found him sitting on the platform, dressed in his usual curious outfit of black pants and a white shirt. Although he looked distinguished and neat, he was in an attitude of lamentation. He had just been mugged; he was shot in the forearm. Although it was a minor wound, the thieves stole some important money he had set aside for paying customs duties on merchandise he was nationalizing through the *Roldán y Compañía* agency. This was the same company I did business with, as they handled customs for my father and me, helping us import wines from Europe and Argentina.

"That day of the robbery, I took him by the arm and led him to the nearby offices of the customs company. There, he was given water and a moment's rest while he recovered and recounted the details of the robbery."

"It is worth mentioning," Bonifacio continued, "that Joseph Levy was no fool, and by the way, those Hebrews are fucked up. A few days later, he already had two thugs from the underworld, investigating and chasing the culprits, and just a few weeks later, he managed to get the money back in full. The robbers appeared shortly after, in a ditch in the area of the Barranquillita market, with their faces haggard, stiff as wooden sticks and smelling of rotting meat of several days. The motives for the murder were never known and the case was shelved.

"It is worth mentioning," Bonifacio continued, "that Joseph Levy was no fool, and by the way, those Hebrews are quite clever. A few days later, Joseph had already hired two underworld thugs to investigate and track down the culprits. Just a few weeks later, he managed to get money back in full. The robbers were soon found in a ditch near the *Barranquillita* market, their faces haggard, bodies stiff as wooden sticks, and smelling of rotting meat. The motives for the murderers were never discovered, and the case was shelved."

"From that incident, Joseph and I became good friends, and we've even done some business together. He's an effective and impeccable businessman. Moreover, Joseph is a history buff and loves researching geopolitical issues, topics that have always interested me, as you know."

* * *

Bonifacio Bonfante, eager for Akram Abushihab to meet Joseph Levy, arranged a meeting at *La Nena Lela Trattoría* on the 99th Street. After the usual introductions and some conversation about family, business, and national and international politics, they delved into the topic of the history of Israel and Palestine.

The talk between Bonifacio Bonfante, Joseph Levy and Akram Abushihab went as follows:

¨Well Joseph," said Bonifacio, "we would like to know your point of view about the Arab-Israeli conflict, since you as a Hebrew must be clear about this issue. Besides, I know you have researched it quite a bit.

¨We would very much like to hear your opinions¨, Akram continued.

¨Well, look," said Joseph with his guttural accent, characteristic of German-Jewish origin, "I can give you a brief executive summary of the details of the conflict and its different events since the modern era. I must admit that my opinion may be biased due to my Hebrew background, so I would also like to hear your perspective, Akram. ¨

¨Well, go on then," said Akram.

¨For the time being," said Joseph, "I can tell you that the conflict between Arabs / Palestinians and Jews has very deep roots from ancient times. I would say that the main causes of this conflict are, on the one hand, the ethnic and religious differences between Jews and Arabs, which is not the case with Christians. On the other hand, the conflict is exacerbated by the marked scarcity of territory, which is also tremendously arid. These factors make living conditions difficult and create intense territorial pressures."

"However," said Bonifacio, "I believe there is another more relevant factor. In modern times, the main driver of interracial hatred is the great success of the Jewish people in transforming the land with various crops and establishing modern industries and technologically advanced companies. This prosperity rivals that of the most developed countries, while the areas where Arab-Palestinian settlers live remain underdeveloped and devoid of opportunities for progress. It's worth mentioning that Israel's development has been significantly financed by the wealth of Jewish populations worldwide and through economic and financial commitments

from global governments and Jewish businessmen in leading positions, especially in countries like the United States. Consequently, the flow of money into Israel to support its tremendous development has largely come from abroad, both from businessmen and foreign governments. For instance, the British government's approval of Israel's independence to create a Jewish State and the substantial financial and military aid provided by the US government have been crucial.

In contrast, the Palestinian people have always been the poor, uncomfortable neighbors, often forgotten and left to their fate. The immense wealth and capital from oil-rich Arab nations have done little to help their Palestinian brothers, which is a sore point. Compare the significant development in Arab regions like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates with the dire poverty in the Gaza Strip. One wonders why these wealthy Arab nations don't promote the economic development of their impoverished relatives."

¨Actually," said Joseph, "you are right, that socioeconomic class difference between Palestinians and Israelis has been a triggering factor in the conflict.¨

¨I have a folder," Joseph continued, "where I have recorded my research notes on the conflict, and I can share their contents with you. ¨

Bonifacio then spent several days reviewing Joseph Levy's notes. He drew up a summary of the main points, as he saw them, to present to Akram, who showed great interest in the subject.

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Chapter 9.
A historical summary

Bonifacio Bonfante prepared a summary of Joseph Levy's notes, including the most important points in the development of the conflict.

The following is the summary he gave to Akram Abushihab.

Summary of research notes on the Arab-Israeli conflict in contemporary times, prepared by Joseph Levy.

1. Emergence of Zionism as a nationalist political movement.

During the 19th century, in response to the relentless persecution of Jews in Europe, Zionism emerged as a nationalist political movement. This movement was founded by *Theodor Herzel,* a Jewish journalist of Astro-Hungarian origin.

From this movement came the development of Jewish migration to Palestine. This led to the birth of the State of Israel, with the consequent rejection by the Palestinian people.

2. The Balfour Declaration.

A key event occurred on November 2nd, 1917, during the First World War, with a public statement by the British Minister of Foreign Affairs, *Arthur Balfour*, addressed to the leader of the Jewish community in Great Britain, Baron *Lionel Walter Rosthschild.* In such statement, Balfour expressed full support to

the future creation of a state of Jewish people in the region of Palestine. The text goes as follows:

Immigration Office

November 2, 1917

Dear Lord Rothschild:
I have great pleasure in forwarding to you, on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the following statement of support for the aspirations of the Zionist Jews which has been referred to and approved by the Cabinet.
'His Majesty's Government view favorably the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavors to facilitate the attainment of this objective, it being clearly understood that nothing should be done which would prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.'
I would be grateful if you would bring this statement to the attention of the Zionist Federation.

Arthur Balfour [5]

This declaration of support for the Zionist cause was widely rejected by the entire Arab community and led to the start of riots, massacres and anti-Zionist and anti-British demonstrations in Palestine.

3. The end of the British Mandate and Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel:

The "League of Nations," the precursor to today's "United Nations," was an international organization created under the "Treaty of Versailles." According to Article 22 of the treaty, territories once occupied by the defeated German and

[5] https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Declaraci%C3%B3n_Balfour

Ottoman empires, including Palestine, were to be administered under Mandate by Great Britain.

This Mandate began on September 29th, 1923, and ended at midnight on May 14th, 1948, when the British opted to leave the territory. Just a few hours earlier, the Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion, in a congress held for that purpose at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, made the famous Declaration of Independence and proclaimed the foundation of the State of Israel.

4. The Wars:

The main conflicts that have occurred in the region and have been classified as wars are the following:

1. The 1948 War
2. The Suez Canal War in 1956.
3. Six-Day War (1967).
4. Yom Kippur War (1973).
5. The Intifadah, (1, 2 and 3).
   Author's note: (These wars will be discussed in detail later).

5. Various other conflicts:

There have also been numerous minor clashes and retaliations, acts of revenge, and a clear animosity between Palestinians and Israelis, often guided by the doctrine of *"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth."* This ongoing hostility has hindered efforts to create an atmosphere conducive to dialogue between the parties. An example of this can be seen in some of the skirmishes that have occurred.

1. Nabi Musa riots of 1920: Jerusalem pogrom.

   During the so-called *Administration of the Occupied Territories*, exercised by a Franco-British coalition, immediately after the end of World War I, there was a great revolt, in which some Arab and Jewish inhabitants were killed, and hundreds were wounded.

   This confrontation took place between April 4th and 7th of 1920, sparked by public harangues from Arab leaders against the growing migration of Jews to Palestine. This migration was motivated by Herzl's *Nationalist Zionist Political Movement*.

2. Riots in Jaffa:

   Great Britain already administered de facto the region of Palestine since 1917. Later, in the period before the *British Mandate*, in 1921, there were several violent incidents between Palestinians and Jews in which some British military detachments were also attacked.

   These events took place in the city of Jaffa between May 1st and 7th, 1921. Violent riots erupted following a *Labor Day* parade organized by the Hebrew Communist Party, during which participants were urged to overthrow the *British Mandate* regime. Tensions escalated into clashes between Hebrew and Muslim factions. Subsequently, armed Arab men carried out a massacre, attacking the Jewish population, including the elderly, women, and children, even in their own homes.

3. The Western Wall uprising and the Hebron massacre:

   At the end of August 1929, serious riots erupted over a dispute between Arabs and Jews regarding access to the Western Wall, the holiest site for the Jewish community. During these clashes, 116 Arabs and 133 Jews were killed, and more than 330 people were wounded on both sides.

The cause of this confrontation was a series of acts of sabotage by Arabs after the authorization to open a passage for pedestrians and animals across the square where the Western Wall was located, along with other nearby construction works. These activities affected the sacredness of the area for Jewish rites, and the British authorities did not take action on the matter. The revolt spread to the Jewish commercial area, eventually triggering the Hebron Massacre on August 23, 1929. During this massacre, hundreds of Arabs attacked Jewish businesses and homes in Hebron, murdering their inhabitants. This violence caused the Jewish community to flee and go into exile, abandoning their properties, which were immediately expropriated by the Arabs.

This situation would be reversed several years later, in the 6-Day War of 1967, when the area was occupied by Israeli forces and the properties returned to the Jewish settlers.

It is necessary to mention the notorious Palestinian Arab nationalist and religious leader, *Amin al-Husayni*, as a first-class anti-Zionist commander and main instigator of the masses of Palestinian Arab hooligans, who provoked the massacres of Jews, as in the case of the *Hebron* massacre. He was a Nazi ally in the Second World War, acting as organizer of some Nazi troops in Yugoslavia.

He was protected by the leadership of the Arab League, which prevented his extradition when Israel requested it to avoid his being tried for war crimes. However, he was not allowed to hold significant positions as an Arab leader afterward. He died in exile in Lebanon.

4. The Deir Yassin massacre:

Between April 9th and 11th, 1948, and because of the so-called *Operation Nachshon*, about 110 Arab inhabitants of the Arab locality of *Deir Yassin* were killed by the Israeli forces. This

operation aimed to open a supply route between Tel Aviv and the besieged Jewish community of Jerusalem, which was isolated and blockaded by Arab-Palestinian forces, preventing the passage of food and causing the community to suffer from hunger. In the path of this corridor was the village of *Deir Yassin,* which was attacked by Israeli forces, resulting in the massacre of its residents.

5. The Haifa refinery masacre:

   On December 30th, six Arab workers seeking employment at the British-owned Haifa refinery were killed in a grenade attack by members of the Jewish paramilitary group Irgun. In retaliation, a large group of Arab workers attacked Jewish workers, killing 39 and wounding 49. Subsequently, the Jewish paramilitary group *Haganah* retaliated by attacking two Arab towns, resulting in the *Balad al-Shaykh* massacre.

6. The massacre of Balad al-Shaykh:

   On December 31st, 1947, an attack by the Israeli paramilitary group *Haganah* on the village of *Balad al-Shaykh* killed between 20 and 70 Arabs. This was in retaliation for the murder of the 39 Haifa refinery workers.

7. The Safed massacre:

   This massacre occurred during the riots of August 29th, 1929, at the time of the events of the Hebron and Jerusalem massacre, when 20 Jews were killed and 80 more wounded in the city of *Safed*, at the hands of a mob of Arab-Palestinians, incited by the aforementioned Muslim leader *Amin al-Husayni.*

8. The Ein al Zeitun Massacre:

   The *Palmaj*, an elite corps of the Israeli paramilitary group *Haganah*, carried out a massacre in the town of *Ein al Zeitun*,

where between 30 and 70 Arab prisoners were killed, in revenge for the events of the massacre in the town of *Safed*.

9. Operation Hiram and the Eilaboun massacre:

During the Israeli War of Independence, the so-called *Operation Hiram* was carried out by the Israel Defense Forces.

Although a truce had been signed between the parties since July 18th, 1948, it was violated by the *Arab Liberation Army*. Along with a contingent of the Syrian army, they took control of a strategic high point called *Sheikh Abden,* in Israeli territory, on October 22nd. From this position, they fired on *Kibbutz Manara* and passing traffic on October 24-25, killing several Israeli settlers. In response, the Israel Defense Forces launched *Operation Hiram,* which lasted two and a half days. By October 30th, they had regained control of the Upper Galilee region. However, this operation also resulted in massacres of Arab settlers, including the *Eilaboun* massacre, where 14 Arabs were killed, and the forced displacement of at least 50,000 Arab residents, who became Palestinian refugees in neighboring Lebanon.

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In the following years, several regrettable events in Europe, particularly in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, and many other countries, directly affected and influenced the events that would later unfold in the region of Palestine and Israel.

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Chapter 10.
A Jewish family
Adverse circumstances

November 1939
Warsaw, Poland, under German occupation.

This was a well-to-do, middle-class German family with healthy habits, well-regarded by their neighbors as good people. The father, named Samuel, was an avid reader with a large library and friends of good intellectual standing. Those who knew him well would say he was a man of science in every sense. He was currently a professor at the University of Warsaw.

The mother, Myriam, was a diligent housewife who skillfully managed the household affairs. She maintained an a very organized household economy, ensuring that there was always money available for daily needs, though without major luxuries, thanks to the conservative savings base she had patiently built. She was dedicated to fulfilling her responsibilities, always focused on her daughter's education and providing unwavering support for her husband.

"She is the best woman in the world," said the father, an opinion shared by Sarah, his only daughter.

However, there was a cloud that overshadowed the family's destiny. In those days of 1939, belonging to the Jewish religion was a significant handicap, leading them down a perilous path that threatened not only their family stability but also their physical safety. They had recently emigrated from Germany to Poland when things became difficult in Germany, and the risk for Jews had become imminent.

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Year 1939
An ordinary day…

"Mother, when are we going to the zoo?" said Sarah. "I have a school assignment that requires me to make some field observations of animals."

"I don't know, daughter," answered Myriam, "things have started to worsen, and it seems that the Germans are taking new measures that restrict our free mobility."

"Well, then can I go to gymnastics practice this afternoon?"

"I don't know my daughter, let's wait for your father to arrive and see what news he brings us and if you can go," she responded.

At around 1:00 pm, Samuel arrived. He didn't bring good news... Sarah asked him about the trip to the zoo and his gymnastics practice.

"Look, daughter," he said, "it is better that we stay at home because the news is not good, and there are rumors that the Nazis are raiding Jewish villages and arresting people without any justification. Remember last year, when we had to flee Germany after the terrible experiences of the 'Night of Broken Glass'? We came to Poland hoping to find refuge and protection from the Nazis. How wrong we were!"

Sarah's father remembered that, on *Kristallnacht*, mobs of Nazi sympathizers in Germany had destroyed thousands of Jewish residents' properties and humiliated them. Now, with similar threats looming in Warsaw, they would have to be cautious to avoid such atrocities being repeated.

The girl's name was Sarah Wiessenberg. Up to that moment she had been a completely happy child, living in a harmonious home with loving parents who gave her a good

education and guidance, within the good customs of the Jewish people.

She was five years old with curly, medium-length light blonde hair, a fair complexion, light blue eyes, and graceful movements typical of a well-fed girl in excellent physical condition, thanks to sports like basketball, athletics, and artistic gymnastics. She pranced around all day like a fawn in the forest, constantly talking, asking questions, and never sitting still in mind or body. When she spoke, she would sharpen her eyes, concentrating her attention as if she wanted to seize every opportunity to devour the whole world in one bite. Her teachers had already determined that Sarah possessed superior intelligence, scoring around 140 IQ points.

But dramatic changes had come to her life with the occupation of Polish territory by German military forces.

A few months earlier:

September 1st, 1939, marked the fateful beginning of the German invasion of Poland. The following day, Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. This moment signaled the start of an ordeal for the Jewish inhabitants of Warsaw, mirroring the persecution faced by Jews in Germany. It was the beginning of their tragic journey toward the extermination chambers.

This was a consequence of the Nuremberg Laws, drafted by Wilhelm Frick, Minister of the Interior of the Third Reich. These laws established the foundation of an anti-Semitic and racist policy adopted at the *Congress of the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP)* held in the city of Nuremberg, Germany. Signed and promulgated in 1935, these laws even stripped all Jewish inhabitants born in Germany of their citizenship rights.

In those days, terrible emotional clouds darkened the horizon for people of Hebrew ethnicity and Jewish religion. Adhering to the guidelines of an ancestral culture with millennia-old traditions originating in ancient Egypt, they were now condemned like a plague of infectious rats by a pack of fascists. These fascists, clad in egocentric uniforms adorned with self-imposed badges and medals, had minds clouded by delusions of grandeur about an Aryan race they considered superior. According to them, this race could never mix with beings of inferior condition, except to enslave them and drive them to the deepest depths of human misery, if not simply exterminate them as a virus of dreadful origin and catastrophic destiny.

The Germans justified their aggression not only with their delusions of racial grandeur but also with a desire for revenge for the humiliation Germany had suffered under the draconian terms of the *Treaty of Versailles*. The victors of the First World War had sought to corner and subjugate Germany, even seizing ancestral territories that were considered part of the German Prussian Empire, which had existed since 1701 and was dismembered in 1918. These territories were divided to suit the French, English, Russians, Americans, and other victors of the war.

Now, a long-simmering hatred, painfully stored in the heart of former Germania for many years, as boiling over like a great inflamed cauldron. This cauldron was primed and ultimately ignited by Adolf Hitler's National Socialist Party, leading to an explosive outburst of aggression and vengeance.

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December 1940.

Almost a year later, misfortune had already struck the home of Samuel Weissenberg, Sarah's father. Samuel, a research professor in the field of theoretical physics, had been working

at the University of Warsaw. He and his family lived in the upper middle-class neighborhood in the city.

One evening, Samuel Weissenberg returned home from the University at an unusually early hour, his face etched with frustration and anguish. He turned to his wife and remarked:

"Myriam, they did not let me enter the university. They told me that as of today I was strictly forbidden to teach classes; that they already had a replacement for me, they did not even give me a letter of dismissal or a recommendation."

With a lump in his throat, he continued: "Those who gave me the news of my dismissal were not the directors of the campus, but some German soldiers, on guard at the door of the alma mater. They did not let me take my belongings and personal documents out of my desk. They simply threw me out. And as if that were not enough, I do not know if you read the communiqué that they pasted at the entrance of this building."

"No, I didn't read it," Myriam replied, "what does it say?"

"It is a communique instructing us, the Jewish residents, to avoid going to sport centers, theaters, parks and any recreational sites. All such activities are now forbidden to us."

"So," asked Myriam, "it means we will never touch the floors of the Opera, or the movie theaters?"

"Exactly," Samuel added, "and it seems that the situation for us, as Jews, is becoming dire. They are forbidding us any possibility of means of subsistence, and I don't know how we are going to survive."

Myriam stood quietly. Then, she finally responded: "And you know what? The Gabrieloff family had their restaurant closed under the false pretext of not complying with sanitary norms. Now I feel that we are being cornered, because all of our Jewish friend mention that they are being treated just as badly."

Samuel added, "They told me that the Jacobsens' girl has not been allowed to return to school since last week, just like

Sarah, and we don't know if these measures by the Germans are permanent or temporary."

"Some say that this is just the beginning," said Myriam, "and the situation is really going to become more chaotic for us every day, just as it has for Jews in Germany. Starting with the *Night of Broken Glass,* between November 9th and 10th last year, they have systematically stripped away all their rights, even though Jews are also German citizens. It's as if their citizenship means nothing."

"Yes," Samuel added, "the stories coming from Germany are depressing. I don't know what will happen to us here in Poland now that we are a German-occupied country".

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Their hands were sweating, and their hearts raced with a cloudy fear that wrinkled their spirits and tightened their bellies. They had never experienced this fear of an uncertain fate before, and not knowing what would happen the next day disturbed their souls and clouded their vision. Sometimes, at moments when the terror was most intense, their upset stomachs turned, leaving their legs trembling. The fear they felt was worse than the actual bad news of an impending tragedy that seemed impossible to avoid.

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And how soon the tragedy of apocalyptic proportions came. At the beginning of 1942, during the Wannsee Conference, the leaders of the National Socialist Party decided to implement the policy of the so-called "*Final Solution of the Jewish Question*", which aimed at the extermination of all members of the Jewish race without distinction. Consequently, in the first stage of the so-called "Operation Reinharl", a complex of buildings, barracks, sheds, and ovens was

constructed 62 kilometers from Warsaw, named "*Sonderkommando Treblinka", (Special Command of Treblinka)*. This facility was designed to execute the Jewish population systematically, with transfers by train to gas chambers followed by the cremation of corpses. The camp began operating in July 1942.

From that moment on, orders to relocate the Jewish population were issued, leading to the deportation of thousands of people to the northeast, to the *Treblinka* extermination camp and other similar facilities built in Germany for this purpose. *Treblinka,* located in Poland, would become the bloodiest of these camps.

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Chapter 11.
The terrible night

March 1942
Warsaw, Poland.

Suddenly, there was a clatter of footsteps in the hallway, followed by a loud banging on the front door. It was 9:30 pm., and at that moment, they were cleaning the kitchen and organizing the house, before retiring to rest.

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The fear of what might happen had finally ceased to be a mere possibility and suddenly transformed into the terror of an imminent, tenebrous reality. The worst was already unfolding, and the monster of inescapable fate had arrived at their door. There was no way to escape, no place to hide, no chance of disappearing. The mundane routine of their home, in what had been an ordinary night, had exploded into a new, irrepressible destiny that thrust them hopelessly towards death. Their only faint hope was the possibility of a life beyond this terrible chaos, in a celestial realm of eternal peace, justice, love, and perhaps some happiness.

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But this did not come as a surprise. It was something they had been expecting for several weeks and it was only a matter of time before they showed up.

Authoritarian shouts with strong guttural accents filled the corridors around the entrance to the apartment. Other shouts in Polish, more understandable, urged them to open the door and leave immediately.

"Open the damn door, we know you are there, open it now!"

"Who is it at this hour? What do you want?" Samuel Weissenberg answered in a terrified voice that tried in vain to sound firm.

"Open up now or we will break down this door! Come out with your hands up, everybody!"

The sound of bullets hitting the floor echoed in a nearby apartment, followed by a scream of pain…

Throughout the building, fists and kicks pounded on the doors of neighboring apartments, accompanied by shouts and expletives that flooded the atmosphere, forcing people to leave without discussion or questions that would remain unanswered.

Myriam Weissenberg looked out of the window and caught a glimpse of three large trucks on the street. Armed German soldiers and Polish policemen were emerging from them and entering the buildings on the block.

All was confusion and anguish at that moment. With a final blow, the apartment door gave way, the doorknob and butt plate shattering into a thousand splinters. The door flew open, revealing weapons aimed with deadly intent at anyone who dared to oppose the orders shouted from their angry mouths, making their black military uniforms tremble with rage.

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The soldiers, too, perhaps felt fear—the fear of committing something tremendously reprehensible, like harming innocent people who could well have been their own relatives. They had no way of turning back, as they were executing orders from their superiors, orders that were impossible to disobey. They had to proceed, and perhaps at night, amid the sepulchral silence in the barracks when the lights were turned off, they faced their own thoughts plagued with

regret. They would have to confront the demons leading them into a deepening depression.

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Pushed from above, all the neighbors rushed down the stairs. An octogenarian lady with mobility problems clumsily tripped on an upper step and fell face-first, bouncing down the steps until she lay motionless on the floor below with a nasty open wound on her head. Her eyes were open, frozen in an expression of terror. It was unclear whether she had died at that moment; no one could spare a moment for pity or to help her, given the terrible screams of the German officers and Polish policemen, who were urging everyone to go out into the street immediately.

Arriving downstairs, the Weissenberg's saw their neighbors gathered on the block, some still in their nightclothes, as they hadn't had time to change. The soldiers had given them only a few minutes to collect minimal belongings and valuables.

Out on the street, illuminated by the streetlamps, the faces of their neighbors- haggard with anguish and fear, announced the horrors to come, each step leading closer to a deadly outcome.

They were then taken by truck to their new home in an uncertain location, where they would be confined to a 75-square-meter cubbyhole shared with seven other people. This was in the restricted area of the infamous Warsaw Ghetto, alongside many other Jewish families. Here, they were registered and assigned an identification to be used in specific places.

They were peremptorily ordered to wear the armbands that identified them as Jewish inhabitants of the Ghetto. It was unthinkable to take them off, for that was synonymous with

suicide, since, if they did so, they would be executed immediately by the Nazis, without trial.

Iniquities had descended upon that place of dread, bringing food shortages and difficulty in obtaining necessities like soap, toilet paper, or toothpaste. The absence of work opportunities made it impossible to meet the family's economic needs. As the weeks and months passed, living conditions in the ghetto became increasingly dire, and unmet needs grew more critical. There were days when the only sustenance available was a watered-down vegetable soup, provided once a day by the Jewish leaders within the Ghetto to the incarcerated population.

Soon the deportations began to the west of the country, toward the German border. The Polish policemen who also guarded the Ghetto were peremptorily obliged to fulfill a daily quota of 6,000 convicts. They were responsible for identifying the streets and houses whose occupants were selected to leave, board the trucks, and go to the station to be loaded onto a freight train with an uncertain destination. Although they were told that the transfer was to work areas in factories in Germany, unbeknownst to most, the final destination was the notorious *Treblinka,* in Poland itself.

For this trip, thinking that they were going to get work in German factories, as they had been told, the distinguished Jewish ladies dressed in their best clothes to make a good impression in what they believed was a good job opportunity awaiting them. They carried their luggage with only the essentials, but they made sure to include the jewelry and money they had, sewing these valuables into the hems of their dresses. Little did they know that this was the first place the guards would search when classifying clothes after stripping the new arrivals of all their belongings upon reaching *Treblinka.*

Once off the freight trains, men, women, and children were separated and formed into long lines. They were stripped

completely naked, losing any semblance of modesty they might have had. Thus naked, they were herded into large, sealed rooms, each with a capacity for about 400 people. These rooms were connected to the exhaust pipes of large trucks that filled them with carbon monoxide or, at times, with Zyklon B gas (crystalline hydrocyanic acid). The screams of agony were silenced within minutes. The prisoners tasked with clearing the chambers then loaded the corpses for cremation. From there, the poor condemned souls would soon ascend in black clouds, wrapped in a final flight to paradise.

"There goes my mother," a prisoner once said sarcastically. He was one of those who managed to avoid death by serving as a slave in the camp. He had come to understand the meaning of the black clouds that grew over the sky of *Treblinka* day after day for many months, visible from miles away.

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Days earlier, still in the Ghetto:

"What do you mean, they're going to die, mother?"

"And why do I have to leave them and go?" Sarah Weissenberg asked.

"Daughter, I want to be realistic with you and tell you the whole truth. We are trying to do what is best for you, but in this city, all our chances of survival have been exhausted. We already know that, just because we are Jews, we are all doomed to die in the coming days. What we want is to save you. May at least one member of our family survive and continue our story."

"But mother, I don't want that. What I want is to stay with you, no matter what happens," Sarah answered with tears in her eyes.

"No daughter," said Myriam, "we will not allow that. You must save yourself and we have already made all the arrangements for you to escape from this hell. In a few hours they will come to pick you up and take you to a safe place far from the Ghetto."

"Father," insisted Sarah, "then you must help me so that I am not sent away. I beg you…"

"No, daughter," said Samuel. "Everything is already prepared and ready for you. Someday you will understand that this is the best gift we could give you—the gift of life. You will continue to live and have the opportunity to develop a life full of good things. You will build a future where you can help change this terrible world, we have had to live in. You have the chance to build a new world, and this is the gift we offer you so that you can move forward."

In the early morning, men came to take the girl away. They had already prepared the passage from the inner side of the wall, inside the Ghetto, and on the other side, other people were waiting for her. That was the last time Sarah saw her family. From that day on, the girl would no longer be called Sarah Weissenberg.

At the age of ten, Sarah Weissenberg bitterly mourned the separation from her family and resented the sadness of never hearing from them again. Many years later, inquiries by the Israeli authorities aimed at rescuing the legacy of family members who had disappeared in the German concentration camps provided some solace. These efforts to compile a census and record the names of all the victims eventually helped Sarah reconnect with the memory of her lost loved ones.

As for Sarah's parents, exactly seven days later, in the evening hours after 9:30 pm, he expected raid arrived. Polish thugs in their police unforms fulfilled their orders to complete

the quota of the prisoners to be handed over to the Nazi soldiers at the train outside the ghetto each night.

When the police discovered the absence of the girl, who was already registered in the official lists, they questioned the parents about her disappearance. They simply replied that she had been gone for several weeks, and they did not know where she had gone.

"Where is the girl?" asked Myriam one of the Polish policemen who were now collaborating with the German occupation forces.

"Where is the girl?" The guard asked again with a threatening expression. "It says here that in this apartment there must be a girl named Sarah. Where is she?"

"She doesn't live with us anymore," said Samuel, "she's been gone for days."

"We haven't heard from her in days," said Myriam, "she went out one morning to buy groceries and never came back."

"He's lying, you damned Jewish witch, but don't worry, there's no hurry. We'll make them talk," one of the officers snarled.

Turning to another uniformed man, he ordered, "Guard, take these two to the command. This pair is going to *the miracle room;* soon they will know that even the mute learn to speak sooner rather than later. It is a truly miraculous room," the officer said sarcastically.

The fact that they were elderly did not elicit any respect or mercy from their captors. Both were beaten to a pulp. The mother was tortured in a room specially equipped for the purpose, forced to sit naked on a bed of burning embers. Despite the intense pain and her screams of agony, she said nothing beyond what had been originally agreed upon. Similarly, the father's nails were pulled out, his feet were beaten, his head

was repeatedly submerged in water until he was nearly drowned, and electric wires were connected to his testicles. He was tortured with hot irons burning his arms, yet he too revealed nothing compromising. Finally, exhausted from their efforts, the executioners sent them to the station, bound to *Treblinka*, leaving the work of extermination and disappearance to the Nazis.

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Year 2015
Jerusalem, Israel

Many years later, at the *Yad Vashem Memorial Center* in Jerusalem, in the hall of names and photos of millions of Jewish Holocaust victims, the names and pictures of Samuel and Myriam Weissenberg, Sarah Weissenberg's parents, would be inscribed.

On that day in 2015, Sarah Weissenberg took her daughter Myriam to visit the Memorial Hall, a place dedicated to the eternal remembrance of her grandparents. As they walked through the solemn halls, Sarah recounted the harrowing events of the Holocaust. She shared their family's story with Myriam, ensuring that the memory and lessons of this dark chapter in history would live on through the generations.

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Chapter 12.
The suffering of the Jewish people in Europe

World War II: 1939 - 1945

Shortly afterwards, the three friends, Bonifacio Bonfante, Akram Abushihab and Joseph Levy, were reunited. Now they touched on the difficulties suffered by the Jewish Diaspora in the countries of Europe where it was present in those years.

Joseph Levy began, mentioning the information he knew:

"The exodus to Israel was understandable," he said, "because of the suffering of the Jewish people, especially in Europe. Faced with so much infamy, it resulted in an inevitable mass exodus of the Jewish population to the region of Palestine, their ancestral home."

"The mettle achieved by the Jewish people," Joseph continued, "originates from a past lost in the annals of a millenary history. Throughout these millennia, we have faced all sorts of humiliations. The history explains our tenacity to confront, in more recent times, all the inequities inflicted upon us by adversaries and executioners in different regions of the planet. We Jews, have often been regarded not as 'God's chosen people', but as groups of thugs, strange, almost alien, and practically spurious, deemed necessary to exterminate simply because we are neither Christians nor Muslims."

"A history of contempt. This has been our history in many countries around the planet, including Russia, Spain, Portugal, Germany, Czechoslovakia, France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Romania, and the former Yugoslavia (Serbia, Croatia

and Slovenia). It has been a common policy in these states, either by offering us to Nazi death squads or by initiating various wars of annihilation. This does not even account for the so-called *pogroms* and other programs of alienation designed to subjugate, torture and discredit the Jewish people, such as those in Germany and Russia before the Second World War. Much has been said about the Holocaust and the culpability of the Nazis, but we should not overlook the fact that many people in neighboring countries were also collaborators. They handed over and identified Jewish parishioners to be captured by the Nazis, sent to concentration camps, and ultimately exterminated. Furthermore, these accusers took advantage of the situation, seizing the property of Jews who had been forced to abandon their homes."

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We didn't do it…

"It wasn't us," said the damned. "It was the German Nazis, and we're not even German, so don't blame us."

And he made an angel's face, exonerating himself from the guilt that was eating him up inside, for he was as guilty as the next man. Yes, guilty of that murderous discrimination, hidden under the pretext that in war anything goes, just to survive.

And it was not only the case in Germany but throughout almost all of Europe—the guilty Europe. It was the Europe of neighbors who closed their doors in the faces of those fleeing from abomination. It was the guilt of those who peeked from behind curtains, pretending not to notice, as they watched their Jewish neighbors being taken away, neighbors with whom they had spent half their lives. Then, they rushed to force open the doors of their homes to take possession of the belongings left behind.

And this came about because of envy of the earnings and achievements of Jews who worked tirelessly from dawn until late at night. The rage stemmed from knowing that Jews, through their struggle, achieved financial success, while those envious individuals failed to do so and only complained about the hardships of life that seemingly offered no opportunities for success. These were the people who ranted behind the backs of Jews and then, when the Gestapo arrived, stepped forward to give incriminating statements to further sink them. They were the damned citizens of so many countries, as guilty as those who pulled the trigger or closed the doors of the crematorium ovens, trying to erase all evidence of their sin.

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"It is also important to mention the several cases of discrimination and extermination in different countries in Europe," Joseph Levy continued.

Czech Republic:

It is worth mentioning the expressions of anti-Semitism in the Czech Republic, which represent one of the darkest chapters of its history. Many Jewish settlers were pushed by the Czechs and sent to their extermination in German concentration camps. Approximately 81,000 Czech Jews perished there, highlighting the extent of collaboration and the tragic loss of life during this period.

Republic of Romania:

In Romania there was a population of approximately 750,000 Jews, who were accused, imprisoned and sent to the clutches of the Nazis due to the prevailing anti-Semitic mentality, especially during the time when Romania was allied

with Nazi Germany. Of that population, between 350,000 and 400,000 Jews were sent to extermination camps. Today, only about 10,000 Jews remain in Romania, a stark reminder of the devastating impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish community there.

Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia:

The former Yugoslavia, now made up of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia, was home to a population of 74,000 Sephardic Jews. They began to suffer the consequences of Nazi Germany's occupation during World War II, aided by the Ustaše, members of a Croatian nationalist terrorist organization that directly collaborated in the deportation of some 40,000 Yugoslav Jews to Germany for extermination in the gas chambers. The Croatian state itself issued discriminatory laws and regulations against the Jewish population, ordering their deportation to the extermination camps in Germany.

Kingdom of Belgium:

During the German occupation of Belgium, approximately 25,000 Jews were deported to Nazi Germany for extermination, facilitated by the complicity of a group of Belgian collaborators. However, not everyone in Belgium was complicit in these atrocities. There were also groups of Belgian settlers who formed armed resistance movements against the Nazis and protected the Jews, demonstrating courage and humanity in the face of persecution.

Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic:

During the occupation of Lithuania, out of a population of 250,000 Jews, a total of approximately 136,000 were sent to extermination camps in Germany.

The Netherlands:

In the German occupation of the Netherlands, with the help of Dutch collaborationists, a total of approximately 107,000 Jews were sent to the Auschwitz camp in.

Republic of France:

France, as well as Switzerland, were two countries that served as shelter for thousands of Jews fleeing from the rest of Europe at the time of the Holocaust. It is estimated that 75% of the Jewish immigrants managed to save themselves on French soil; however, approximately 77,000 Jews were deported from France to Germany. This was facilitated by an organization called the Carlingue, known as the French Gestapo, composed of a group of 30,000 French collaborators, including civilians and policemen, who sold out to the Nazi occupation regime.

Arab countries in the Middle East:

Likewise, in the Middle East, many Arab neighbors have historically adopted policies aimed at the extermination and annihilation of the Jewish people, refusing to recognize Israel's right to exist as a nation. However, it is worth mentioning that noy everyone shares this view, and today there is a greater understanding and a move towards peaceful coexistence in some areas.

"In addition to the above," commented Bonifacio, "I want to relate other equally painful facts. The incidents mentioned are not the only killings or criminal affronts against the Jewish people because of their race and religion. We can briefly bring up some equally reprehensible facts, among many others."

-But it's a little late, let's rest for today," said Bonifacio. "Let's rest for today and leave this topic for next week, shall we?

They all nodded in agreement, and with that, said their goodbyes.

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Chapter 13.
Spain (Year 1492).

Present time.

A week later, they found themselves in Bogotá due to their various business dealings. Seizing the opportunity to contribute to their discussion, Bonifacio invited Joseph and Akarm to meet at the *Casa de España,* located in the Teusaquillo neighborhood, right across from the park with the same name.

It was past noon, and everyone was hungry, so they decided to order lunch. They chose a bottle of Rioja wine to share. Bonifacio ordered Riñones al Jerez, Akram opted for Cochinillo Silvando, and Joseph chose Caldo Gallego with a Spanish omelette. After savoring their meal and exchanging recent news, they delved into the main topic of their meeting: the conflict.

Bonifacio began:

"Allow me to refer to the topic that was left pending from our last meeting. To provide some context and summarize this history, let's begin by situating ourselves in the year 1492 in Spain and Portugal."

In that year, there was a forced displacement of the entire Jewish community from Spain and Portugal, ordered by the revered Catholic Monarchs, Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile. These sovereigns, who ruled the Crown of Castile (1479-1504) and the Crown of Aragon (1479-1516), are often celebrated in the New World as benefactors of the expeditions that led to the conquest of America. However, under their mandate, they ordered the expulsion of all Jewish inhabitants, regardless of age, gender, condition, or status, from the sacrosanct Christian territories. This decree forced the Jews to

flee to the deserts of North Africa, mirroring the fate of the Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain and Portugal under the pressures of the Inquisition."

Bonifacio continued:

"Today, after many centuries, perhaps too many, the current governments of Spain and Portugal have attempted to make amends for that ignominy and repair the damage. They have granted citizenship, both Spanish and Portuguese, to the blood descendants bearing Spanish and Portuguese surnames of *Sephardic* origin, allowing them to return to the Motherland. Perhaps a little late, isn't it?"

"In my case," Bonifacio continued, "given my surnames Bonfante and Merino, and having studied the genealogy of my Spanish ancestors, I found that I also had Sephardic Jewish ancestry."

"According to my research, a Jew who lived in Spain between 1216 and 1255 had the surname of *Merichave,* which was later shortened to Merino, my mother's surname. Let us remember that Jewish lineage traditionally follows the maternal bloodline. Additionally, records indicate that in the very Christian region of Castile, before the displacement of the Jews, there lived a Rabbi with the surname *Merino*, who held the position of mayor, as documented in ancient Israeli records written in the Principality of Asturias.

Bonifacio Bonfante continued telling his story, trying to corroborate what he had mentioned with proven historical facts:

"In the year 1492, within the walls of the Alhambra fortress,
located 1.7 kilometers east of the city of Granada, a decree was issued. Known as the *Decree of the Alhambra or Edict of Granada*, this mandate compelled the Jews residing in the Iberian Peninsula to go into exile outside of the country, with a deadline set for July 31st, 1492.

"Now then," Bonifacio continued, "this is not a story or a hidden passage of history. It is of vital importance, even for general knowledge, which is so scarce nowadays. Thousands of people from all over the world, especially from Latin American countries, are applying to obtain Spanish or Portuguese citizenship due to their Jewish ancestors. They should understand the origins of this new policy extension by the governments of these countries. It is essential to learn what the terrible *Alhambra Decree* meant, as it drastically altered the lives of many Jews at the time. Today, the history can provide an advantage for the descendants of the Sephardic Jews. Next, I am going to give each of you a copy of the decree, so that you can read it if you are curious enough to do so."

ALHAMBRA DECREE
YEAR 1492 - Granada, Spain.

"Kings Ferdinand and Isabella, by the grace of God, Kings of Castile, Leon, Aragon, and other dominions of the Crown—to Prince John, the Dukes, Marquises, Counts, religious orders and their Masters, lords of the Castles, Knights, and to all Jewish men and women of any age and to whomsoever this letter concerns, health and grace to you. It is well known that, in our dominions, there are some bad Christians who have Judaized and committed apostasy against the holy Catholic faith, the majority being influenced by the relations between Jews and Christians. Therefore, in the year 1480, we ordered that the Jews be separated from the cities and provinces of our dominions and that separate sectors be allotted to them, hoping that with this separation would remedy the existing situation. We also ordered the establishment of the Inquisition in this dominion. Over the course of 12 years, the Inquisition has found many persons guilty. Additionally, we are informed by the Inquisition and others, of the great harm that persists due to Christians relating to Jews. These Jews are

allegedly trying in every way to subvert the Holy Catholic Faith and hinder believing Christians from adhering to their beliefs.

These Jews have instructed these Christians in the ceremonies and beliefs of their laws, circumcising their children, giving them books for their prayers, declaring to them the fast days, and gathering them together to teach them the stories of their laws. They inform them when the Passover festivals are and how to observe them, provide them with unleavened bread and ceremonially prepared meats, and instruct them on the things they should abstain from in relation to food and other practices according to the laws of Moses. They make it clear that there is no other law or truth outside of this. These actions, as revealed by the confessions of these Jews, have led to the perversion of the faith of many Christians, causing great harm and detriment to the holy Catholic faith. Recognizing that the true remedy for these harms and difficulties lies in severing all communication between Jews and Christians, and thus ensuring the purity and preservation of our holy faith, we have decided to take decisive action."

And thus, based on the confessions of these Jews, it is clear that their actions have perverted many Christians, resulting in great harm and detriment to the holy Catholic faith. We recognized that the true remedy for these harms and difficulties lay in interfering with all communication between the said Jews and Christians and sending them out of all our dominions. We contented ourselves with ordering the said Jews out of all the cities and towns and places of Andalusia where they had apparently affected the greatest damage and believing that this would be sufficient so that in those and other cities and towns and places in our kingdoms and our possessions it would be effective and they would cease to commit the aforesaid. However, we have been informed that this measure has not been entirely effective, and many of the said Jews, found guilty of crimes and transgressions against the holy Catholic faith, continue their offenses. The influence of Jews seems to persist, increasing their wickedness and objective harm wherever they reside and converse; and because there is no place to offend more than our holy belief, as those whom God has protected to this day and those who have been influenced, it is the duty of Holy Mother Church to repair and

reduce this situation to the former state. Due to the frailty of the human being, it may happen that we may succumb to the diabolical temptation that continually fights against us, so that, if the main cause being the so-called Jews if they are not converted, they must be expelled from the Kingdom.

Because when a detestable and powerful crime is committed by some members of some group, it is reasonable that the group should be acquitted or annihilated. The lesser by the greater will be punished, one by the other, and those who, throughout their contact, may harm others should be expelled from the group of people. Despite lesser reasons, this will be harmful to the Republic, and the danger and contagion of their crimes make this necessary. Therefore, the Council of eminent men and gentlemen of our kingdom and other persons of conscience and knowledge of our supreme council, after much deliberation agreed to rule that all Jews and Jewesses must leave our kingdoms and never be allowed to return.

We further command in this edict that Jews and Jewesses of any age residing in our dominions or territories depart with their sons and daughters, servants and relatives small or great of all ages at the end of July of this year and that they dare not return to our lands and not take a step forward to trespass. Any Jew who does not accept this edict and should be found in these dominions or return shall be liable to death and confiscation of his property. And we have ordered that no person in our reign regardless of his social status including nobles who hide or keep or defend a Jew or Jewess either publicly or secretly from the end of July and subsequent months in their homes or elsewhere in our region at the risk of losing as punishment all their fiefs and fortifications, privileges and hereditary property. Let the Jews be allowed to dispose of their homes and all their belongings within the stipulated period therefore we provide our pledge of protection and security so that at the end of the month of July they may sell and exchange their properties and furniture and any other articles and dispose of them freely at their discretion. During this period no one shall do any harm, injury or injustice to these persons or their property which would be unjustified. Whoever transgresses this shall incur the punishment of those who violate

our Royal security. We give and grant permission to the aforesaid Jews and Jewesses to carry with them out of our regions their goods and belongings by sea or by land excepting gold and silver, or coined coin or other article prohibited by the laws of the kingdom. So that we order all councilmen, magistrates, knights, knights, guards, officers, officers, good men of the city of Burgos and other cities and villas of our kingdom and dominions, and all our vassals and persons, to respect and obey with this letter and with all that is contained in it. They shall give the kind of assistance and help necessary for its execution, subject to punishment by our sovereign grace and by the confiscation of all goods and property for our royal house and that this be notified to all and that none pretend to ignore it. We order that this edict be proclaimed in all the squares and places of assembly in all the cities and in the principal towns and villas of the dioceses and be made by the herald in the presence of the notary public. None or no one do contrary to what has been defined, in the case, they will be subject to the punishment of our sovereign grace and the annulment of their offices and confiscation of their goods. And we order that it be evidenced and proved to the court with a signed testimony specifying the way the edict was carried out. Given in this city of Granada on the Thirty-first day of March in the year of our Lord Jesus Christ 1492. Signed I, the King, I the Queen, and Juan de Coloma, secretary of the King and Queen who has written it by order of their Majesties. [6]

Bonifacio continued with his explanations:

-From that edict, and after the mentioned term, persecutions of the Jewish settlers began, both by the Spanish Holy Inquisition and Spanish residents, who, according to their Christian ideology, could inflict penalties and punishments on the Jews within their territory without fear of retribution. Consequently, many members of the Jewish community fled

[6] https://www.fau.edu/artsandletters/pjhr/chhre/pdf/hh-alhambra-1492-spanish.pdf

and sought refuge in Portugal. However, in 1497, *King Manuel I* of Portugal, under pressure from the Catholic Church and the Spanish monarchy, established a decree requiring all Jews residing in Portugal to either convert to Christianity or leave the country. Years later, this gave way to the *Passover Massacre of Lisbon* in 1506, when a group of Portuguese religious fanatics murdered a large number of Jews residing in the city of Lisbon. It is believed that around 5,000 Sephardic Jews were killed in the carnage.

Bonifacio continued:

"Today, many people celebrate the *Discovery of America,* which took place in the year 1492. Yet, it is never considered, in colleges, schools and educational centers, that in that same year of 1492, this degrading *Decree of Alhambra* was signed, with which the minimum sense of respect for the Human Rights of an entire people was transgressed.

"It is worth mentioning that today, the history of Iraq is well remembered, particularly the massacre of approximately 5,000 Kurdish inhabitants in the city of Halabja on March 16, 1988, using chemical weapons. This atrocity became one of the reasons for which the Iraqi tyrant Saddam Hussein was taken to the gallows. In stark contrast, the terrible Easter Massacre of 1506, in which 5,000 Jews were killed in Lisbon, Portugal, by fanatical Portuguese Christians incited by the Christian Holy Inquisition, is seldom mentioned outside of forgotten texts. This significant and tragic event remains largely overlooked in the broader scope of history."

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Bonifacio continued:

"Changing the subject, I now want to recall and revisit the notes in Joseph Levy's summary that refer to the Israelis'

defense plan designed to prevent further persecution of their people in the future."

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Joseph Levy's notes contained information about Hebrew paramilitary organizations that were created for the defense of their people. Information that could be useful for Akram Abushihab, once Bonifacio lent him the notebooks so that he could read them.

These organizations would begin to operate especially when the Jewish Diaspora began to settle in Israel after World War II, and the Jewish authorities could no longer allow their people to continue to be subjected to the humiliations suffered in Europe.

Hebrew paramilitary organizations:

Since the *pogroms* in Russia in the 19th century, Jews had begun to establish armed defense networks in the form of paramilitary units that would later form their lines of defense in Israel, called *IRGUM, HAGANÁ and TZÁHAL.*

IRGUM is the abbreviation of the phrase HaIrgun *HaTzva'i HaLe'umi BeEretz Yisra'el*, which translated from Hebrew reads: *National Military Organization in the Land of Israel.* It was a Zionist armed organization defined as Plan B or second defense, more radical and aggressive than its predecessor the so-called *HAGNAH,* (The Defense). *IRGUM* expressed the Zionist thought of Zeev Jabotinsky, its first commander, that *"every Jew has the right to enter Eretz Israel, and only a Jewish Armed Force would guarantee a Jewish State and only strong reprisals would deter the Arabs and the British."*

The word *ERETZ ISRAEL,* referred to a very old Judeo-Christian term meaning: *The ancient kingdoms of Judah* and *Israel* and the *Promised Land*, and according to Christians, the *Holy Land.* The promised land was also another reason for Jews to

consider that they had a full right to exist in what they consider their own land. However, many of the extreme terrorist like methods used by *IRGUM* were severely criticized both by international organizations and by many prominent exponents of the Hebrew community.

Haganah: The *Haganah* was another Hebrew paramilitary organization, precursor to the creation of the Israeli Military Forces. *Haganah* was created by members of the *Kibbutz* and *moshav* as a response to the different attacks led by Arabs against the Jewish population. Attacks such as the The Tiberias massacre, the Arab revolt of 1936, the Safed massacre, the Jerusalem pogroms of 1920, the Jaffa riots of 1921, etc.

TZAHAL: Tzava Hahagana LeYisrael, named with its acronym צה"ל, *Tzáhal)*, is the generic name for the Israeli Armed Forces, the official army.

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Chapter 14.
The *Theodor Herzl* ship
(Aliyah Be)
Clandestine immigration to Israel.

Israel
Year 1947
He had barely been saved…

With the twilight approaching, Isaac Kravitz, a young aspiring writer of German Jewish origin, sat at his desk in his assigned room at Kibbutz Ramat HaKoves. Nearby was a green meadow, with the desert visible in the distance.

The soul cracks open with unspeakable suffering as one witnesses the incinerated deaths of close relatives. The heart breaks under the infernal fire of the Nazi uniform, standing before the hermetic doors of the crematorium furnace. A part of the soul also dies in the merciless bonfire, rising toward the sky like the smoke from charred bodies, ascending to heavenly heights to cry out for justice and compassion that never truly arrive.
Then remain the indelible memories and the feeling that none of it has happened, only shadows of feverish nightmares and delusions of poetic certainties that no one will be able to declaim again, because the lyrical beauty of the sublime feeling will also have died.
Oblivion accompanies the relentless passing of years, and memories fade away into the tiny chest of forgetfulness, where remnants of hastily passing dates linger. Perhaps vague, lost images of nebulous silhouettes of a few acquaintances remain—a mother, a father, a son, a brother, a girlfriend, a husband, a wife, or a cherished close friend. And the rest? Nothing else remains of the war; only hatred, conflict, and ignominy. Not even a fragile word of forgiveness is accommodated to a future without memory.

Months before
Year 1946
New York, USA.

After the glorious celebrations in Europe and America for the end of the Second World War, where Nazi Germany and Japan were defeated, the feasts had ended. The images of streets filled with festoons and confetti had faded, and the work of reconstructing cities, lives, minds, hearts and souls that wished to build a new present and the next future to come, had already begun. On a sunny spring day in 1946, Hannah Klein went out to buy some fruit. That's when she saw her coming.

Walking in the opposite direction on the same sidewalk, on *Clinton Avenue*, past the corner of *Washington Avenue*, near the *Fulton* Station in the borough of Brooklyn, NY; Hannah Klein ran into her friend Tania Kravitz.

She has a worried look on her face, Hannah thought fleetingly as she looked at her friend.

Tania Kravitz had received devastating news: her brother had been declared missing after falling into the sea from the ship *Theodore Herzl.* He had tried to save a friend who had been murdered by Moroccan thugs surreptitiously mixed among the staff of Jewish immigrants. They were attempting to reach the port of Haifa in Israel, traveling as stowaways across the Mediterranean from the port of Marseilles in France.

The *Theodore Herzl* was a ship known as a promoter of the
Aliyah Bet, a term referring to vessels that transported illegal Jewish refugees to Palestine.

Aliyah, meant ascension, and referred to the Jewish immigration to Palestine. *Bet,* meant secret or clandestine. These were ships that transported Jews to Palestine clandestinely,

defying the orders of the British authorities, who prohibited the indiscriminate exodus of Jews from Europe. This occurred during the period when Britain still administered the region of Palestine under a United Nations mandate, following the end of the war.

Tania, deeply worried, shared her distress with her friend Hannah Klein when they met on the street. She spoke of the uncertainty surrounding her brother's disappearance. He had managed to survive the Nazi holocaust by hiding in the forests of the Swiss countryside and then in the south of France. Now, after finally securing passage to Palestine, he had gone missing just as he was about to reach the "*Promised Land*".

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The young man's name was Isaac Kravitz. By 1944, he had managed to escape the clutches of the Nazi forces that had terrorized central and western Europe. During those dark days, the Nazis loaded hundreds of trucks and trains with thousands of tons of what they considered to be merely Jewish meat, bound for the ovens of concentration camps. There, they produced great columns of smoke from human origins, being they deemed unworthy of the term "human". To the Nazis, these individuals were simply living flesh to be piled up and set on fire, a virus that needed to be exterminated once and for all.

By the end of November 1938, Isaac Kravitz, then a teenager, had half-learned from a reliable source about the beginning of the pogroms against the Jewish people, starting with the infamous *Night of Broken Glass*. This marked the onset of the purge and violence unleashed against anyone who followed the religion of King David, King Solomon, and their God, Jehovah.

In 1942, Isaac, then a boy of just 16, was living in the southern German town of *Memmingen*, his birthplace, just under 110 kilometers from the village of *Dachau.* At that time, rumors became more pressing that the Nazis had been building a concentration camp in *Dachau* for several years. Jewish prisoners from various parts of Europe were being transferred there to be interned and exterminated in the crematorium ovens set up for that purpose, from which thick plumes of smoke could be seen from afar.

On a tragic and terribly disturbing night, Isaac and his friend Shmuel Levy hid in the bushes of a vacant lot near his home. From their hiding spot, they watched as Nazi soldiers arrived on their neighborhood block. They witnessed Isaac's father, mother and younger brother being taken prisoner, loaded onto trucks, and then disappearing forever from his sight and his life.

Isaac's sister, Tania Kravitz, had been sent to America a couple of years earlier to live with their aunt and uncle in New York due to the imminent threat of attacks to Jews in Germany. Unfortunately, Isaac and his younger brother could not be sent because their family lacked sufficient funds to do so.

Shmuel Levy, a friend of Isaac, was a distant relative of Joseph Levy, related in the fourth degree of consanguinity.

That night, a German guard noticed movement in the vacant lot and alerted other guards, who rushed to the scene. They observed the two boys, Isaac and Shmuel, running towards freedom like souls carried by the devil. The guards chased them for several blocks until they reached the bank of the *Iller River* at the edge of town. In the moonless night, under the chilling presence of an early winter cold from the north, the boys managed to disappear into the darkness of the icy waters.

Unable to stay long in the icy waters of the *Iller River,* Isaac and Shmuel emerged after two kilometers and continued

cross-country, moving among trees and bushes, protected by the darkness. Ghostly shadows sometimes offered them cover and sometimes did not. They could hear the distant barking of German shepherd dogs, which sniffed their tracks, trying unsuccessfully to locate the fugitives.

The two young men endured many hardships to reach the boarder with the tiny Principality of Liechtenstein. They managed to outwit the German guards and their rabid canine servants, crossing the dividing line. However, they were still not safe, given Liechtenstein's policy of collaboration with the Nazis despite being a neutral state in the war. The possibility of being returned to Germany remained a constant threat.

They continued for a couple of days and crossed the border into Switzerland, another politically neutral country. However, not all refugees fleeing the Nazi regime were accepted, as Swiss officials often stated, "our lifeboat is already full." Furthermore, those who were accepted were not allowed to work on Swiss soil to avoid competing with the local labor force. Consequently, they had to support themselves or pass through Switzerland and continue their way.

They had to continue their journey without a moment's rest, enduring long nights with damp clothes and freezing experiences that were impossible to forget. They hid in the dark forests, ruined farms, and wetlands rarely visited by humans.

This was the case for Isaac Kravitz and Shmuel Levy, who, in their desperate attempt to escape execution, had to make their way to the French border. However, France was another country fraught with danger as it was under German occupation at the time.

Once on French soil, they experienced a tenuous and uncertain freedom. They lived in hiding in the homes of other Jewish fugitives or with members of the French resistance, whom they had contacted after crossing the border. For several

years, they moved from place to place, blending in with the local population, until 1945 and the end of the war.

And since dreams of peace and progress never die when they are recurrent, the two young men had made their dream of emigrating to Palestine, the "*promised land*",a priority. They began to envision themselves as part of the history of the dreamt-of country, which someday, not too far away, would be called Israel. However, by 1946, the situation was fraught with uncertainty, and the ideological and ethnic differences between Jews and Palestinians were still irreconcilable. The Ottoman Empire had ceased to exist since 1918, and the peoples who once belonged to it had fallen into disarray. The British and French governments, responsible for administering these territories, failed to bring order to a region engulfed in widespread unrest.

"You know Shmuel," said Isaac, "yesterday I was told that this Friday a ship is sailing to Palestine, and by paying a bribe of 30 francs there is a possibility to embark hidden in the cargo it holds."

"But we don't have any money," Shmuel replied. "Besides, I understand that it is forbidden to travel to Palestine, and ships sailing to that destination are considered illegal by the British authorities. It seems that many people have already emigrated to Palestine, prompting authorities to restrict travel to quell the protests of Palestinian inhabitants. These residents feel that their homeland is being invaded by Jews migrating from all over the world.

"Curiously enough," said Isaac, "I have been told that those who promote these clandestine voyages on this Jewish ship called the *Theodor Herzl* are some guys of Moroccan origin, who do the business and manage to ship you to Palestine."

Shmuel replied: “Ah, well, I don't know. Let's try, but since we don't have any money, we'll need to do it at dawn and make sure we don't get caught.”

“All right," said Isaac, "we'll go tonight. We swim to where the anchor is submerged and climb up the chain to the ship. It's the least guarded spot, away from the deck guards. I've already checked everything and know how to do it.”

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Twelve days had passed since an uneventful crossing, except for the hunger they had endured. The scarce food they carried with them had long disappeared, leaving them with nothing to satiate their gnawing hunger.

As they were about to arrive at the coast of Palestine on a late and rainy dawn, marked by a winter storm full of thunder and lightning, the two Jewish stowaways, Isaac Kravitz and Shmuel Levy, were discovered in the hold of the ship by the surreptitious Moroccan crooks.

They were taken by force to a hidden place on the third deck, where neither the captain of the ship, the crew nor the passengers could find out. They were confronted by a dark-skinned Arab with a menacing appearance, a cloudy gaze, sallow skin and a feline facial expression. Without any official authority, he passed a grim sentence: they would be shot and thrown into the sea immediately, without trial. This would mark the end of their hazardous journey.

Covered with thick rags to muffle the sound, the guns were ready to fire. The incessant thunder of that stormy night further dulled any noise the guns might make.

The muffled shot of a *Mauser Kar* rifle launched a 7.92x57 mm caliber bullet, piercing Shmuel's skull and lodging in a plank of the deck. He was killed instantly despite the desperate

resistance of his friend Isaac, who managed to kick the would-be executioner in the testicles, leaving him writhing in pain.

It was an opaque and misty hour of that uncertain dawn, intermittently by endless flashes of lightning, which framed the scene to follow. In the center of a group of three menacing and poorly armed Arabs, Isaac Kravitz was hoisted onto the plank that would serve as a scaffold at the edge of the deck. They were ready to shoot him...

When, to everyone's surprise, as soon as he was released, young Isaac jumped into the void without waiting for the bullets. He threw himself into the waters of the Mediterranean Sea, disappearing into the darkness that reigned at that moment. Neither the Arab assassins, nor the captain, nor the crew, nor any passenger knew the name of that audacious young man. He was a simple stowaway, his name absents from the passenger records, and they would never hear of him again. He had simply vanished.

In France, some people who knew of his adventure learned that the young men who had left for Palestine secretly, on the *Theodor Herzl*, never arrived.

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Chapter 15.
At Kibbutz Ramat HaKoves

The following year...
Year 1948
State of Israel.

On a sunny late summer day at Kibbutz Ramat HaKoves, the landscape was vibrant with various shades of green from the forcibly harvested crops. This land, once barren, now thrived under the bright sunlight.

There she was, Samara Jacobsen, a newcomer from free Europe. It was her first week on the kibbutz after arriving from France in those post-war days, and that was when she became aware of his presence.

At that moment the girl looked at him with admiration, almost thinking to herself that what she felt was love at first sight.

She observed a young man, perhaps not yet 25, with tanned skin and a tall, broad-shouldered frame. His muscles, clearly honed by work in the kibbutz fields, complemented his Nordic features, a testament to his Scandinavian roots. She later learned he was the son of an Ashkenazi Jewish father and a Danish mother, also Ashkenazi. His cool, calculating gaze bore the subtle lines etched by the harsh experiences of war in Europe. His agility of thought and action showed a man well-versed in overcoming life's toughest obstacles. He wore a T-shirt with the initials of the Kibbutz, military camouflage pants, and the half-boots of the Israeli armed forces. It became clear to her that this young man, currently on active duty, was spending a few days of rest in the assigned *Kibbutz*, before returning to his military duties.

The young man lit a cigarette under the shade of an Acacia tree, when the girl approached him.

"Do you have another cigarette?" asked Samara.

"Yes, of course," he answered politely, taking out the pack again, he offered her a cigarette and helped her light it. Their fingers brushed, and in that instant, he looked at her with a certain shyness. For the first time, he noticed her light honey-colored, almond-shaped eyes and delicate, attractive features that reminded him of Grace Kelly, the novice actress whose photos had just begun to appear in magazines.

This girl, who was asking him for a cigarette, had large, distinctly Jewish eyebrows and cinnamon-toned skin, reminiscent of the girls he had seen in France. Her intelligent, almost defiant expression met his gaze directly, revealing a strength of personality evident in her voice. She carried the elegance and poise of a French girl on vacation in Israel, with her French accent subtly giving her away.

"What is your name?" Samara asked.

"Isaac, Isaac Kravitz, and you?"

"I'm Samara Jacobsen," she replied and added, "how long have you lived in Israel?"

"I arrived a year ago," answered the young man, "I came from France in those days when travel was clandestine."

"Ha don't tell me you came on one of those ships labeled *Aliyah Bet,* which were clandestine and forbidden."

"Yes" Isaac replied, the ship was named *Theodor Herzl."*

"Yes, the *Theodor Herzl*... quite the famous ship," said the girl. "I recently arrived from France, and finally my dream of living in thc *Promised Land* is coming true. I know there is a lot to do here, but that's what we are here for, right?"

From that day on, Samara Jacobsen and Isaac Kravitz became friends.

For a couple of months, they both lived in Kibbutz Ramat HaKovesh, an agricultural settlement near the town of Petah Tikva, just 21 kilometers from the center of Tel Aviv. Although he spent many days on duty in the barracks, he would always return on weekends.

During that time, their lives were deeply intertwined with the routine of the kibbutz. The settlement cultivated a variety of vegetables, including lettuce, Swiss chard, spinach, carrots, and onions. Additionally, it had poultry farms for producing chicken meat and eggs, as well as dairy cattle for manufacturing dairy products. The kibbutz had also begun planting rubber trees, a venture that would later lead to the establishment of the *Duram Rubber Products Company*, a major manufacturer of rubber items. Years later, its subsidiary*, Duram Mask AC Ltd.,* would produce rubber masks designed to protect against smoke and chemical spills, whether accidental or due to chemical terrorism.

In the late afternoon, during his days of rest at the kibbutz, Isaac would meet with Samara to watch the horizon. They enjoyed the trees against a generally clear sky and the view of the Israeli countryside, with its deep green sown fields. Further in the distance, they could see the gold and ochre hues of the desert sands and rock formations.

Not many weeks passed before one day, as they walked together along a path in that idyllic place, Isaac decided to take Samara's hand. Without saying a word, he simply did not let go. She didn't speak either, and they continued walking in silence. Words were superfluous in that moment, and happiness was felt in the current of vital energy that united their souls.

As they arrived back at the villa in the semi-darkness of the night, Isaac stopped and Samara by the waist with both hands, pulling her close and kissing her mouth. They spent that night together for the first time, hardly sleeping; their happiness was so overwhelming that rest seemed impossible.

The next day, they became a couple.

Shortly thereafter, Samara Jacobsen also entered the Israeli military forces to perform her military service, having already become an Israeli citizen.

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At that time, the government leaders had just made the Declaration of Independence of the State of Israel. Additionally, British forces had left the territory, and a terrible revolt by the Arab-Palestinian population had been unleashed in the region.

— O -

Chapter 16.
Something like a kibbutz...

Centro Las Gaviotas, something like Kibbutz.

During that time, when Bonifacio Bonfante, Joseph Levy, and Akram Abushihab were gathered, Akram asked:

"But would you like to know more about the Kibbutz?"

Joseph replied: "Let me give you a more concrete fact that appears on a Wikipedia page[7]":

"A kibbutz 1 (voice with invariable plural,2 from Hebrew: קיבוץ, "grouping") is an Israeli agricultural commune. Although collective enterprises exist in other countries, in none did voluntary communes play the role that kibbutz have assumed in Israel; indeed, kibbutz were essential to the creation of the State of Israel. They are rare economic organizations (like the Spanish collectivities) and stem from one of the most important communal movements in history. They were founded at a time and in a place where independent agriculture was not practical, their members were forced by the need to develop a communal way of life and were inspired by their own Zionist socialist ideology. The kibbutz members developed a communal way of life that attracted the interest of world public opinion. The first kibbutz was called Degania and was founded in 1909."

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Emergence

In 1909 a group of Jews from Russia arrived in Palestine with the second great immigration wave (Aliyah or Aliyah). After the failure of the Russian Revolution of 1905, they founded a settlement called Degania, the first kibbutz.

Ideology

[7] https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kibutz

They were mainly inspired by the ideas of return to the land of Aaron David Gordon and the socialist Zionism of Dov Ber Borokhov and Sirkin Gordon, himself inspired by Leo Tolstoy. They all insisted that "A people cannot be free unless it produces its sustenance by itself, beginning with agricultural production." The Jews had not engaged in agriculture since the beginning of the second Diaspora, after the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. In Europe, agricultural occupations were forbidden to them. Even where they were not, such work was impractical because Jews were frequently expelled from their countries or regions, and agricultural work requires a high degree of rootedness. Therefore, the Jews were mainly engaged in trade. In Sirkin Gordon's opinion, the redemption of the Jewish people had to pass necessarily, not through the formation of a state or the return to the land of Israel, but above all through the return to agricultural activity. Dov Ber Borokhov, in his turn, affirmed that the Marxist revolution could take place in the Jewish people when the Jews could occupy, in their own State, all the stages of the productive pyramid. The normal productive pyramid in those times had at its base most of the population engaged in agricultural activity, in the middle a smaller group in industrial activity and at the top an even smaller group engaged in the production of services. In the case of the Jewish people, the pyramid was inverted, and according to Borokhov, it was necessary to normalize it to carry out the revolution. The agricultural activity of the kibbutz was seen by its members, deeply influenced by socialist Zionism, as a necessary step towards the socialist revolution.

Basic postulates of the kibbutz

Emphasis on agricultural work.

In the early days, extreme situations were reached, members of the kibbutz who did not want to study agronomy and preferred to do other things were kicked out of the kibbutz. However, over the years the options were expanded. Today, the kibbutz that survive as traditional kibbutz and that continue to maintain some of the other postulates are mostly those that

have built successful industries, as is the case of Jatserim and its international irrigation technology industry.

Collective ownership.

The means of production as well as services and other goods belong to all members. At first there were extreme situations in some kibbutz where even underwear was shared, and all kinds of arguments arose because of members who had received gifts from outside the kibbutz. But soon after, members were allowed to have certain personal property and were given a monthly budget for personal expenses.

Own work.

To avoid surplus value, the kibbutz members were to be the owners of the means of production and the ones who provided the labor force. In the early years this led to clashes between the kibbutz and David Ben Gurion's government, as the kibbutz refused to be a source of labor for non-kibbutz residents. Today almost all kibbutzim have salaried workers from outside the kibbutz, including foreign workers.

Equal wages.

Both the salaries for personal expenses and the other resources are distributed among the kibbutz members according to the guideline of "each one gives according to his means and receives according to his needs". It does not matter whether the member is the kibbutz Mazkir (general secretary), the dishwasher or a pensioner, everyone receives in proportion to the number of children to support or other indicators of their needs (of course this does not apply to outside workers). In some cases preference is also given to members with more vetek (seniority) in the kibbutz.

Job rotation.

It is considered very important that the top positions in the kibbutz rotate among various members.

Democratic decisions.

Important decisions, including all matters concerning changes in the postulates or their application, must be made by the assembly of members, in which all members who so desire may participate.

Cultural secular Judaism.

While there are a few religious kibbutz, most kibbutz follow a secular cultural line and emphasize the agricultural, communal and socialist meanings of the various Jewish holidays over their value as connectors between God and man or guiding Jewish life. Although today it no longer has the same force, kibbutzes have their own Pesach Haggadah. The festival of Shavuot is one of the central holidays in the kibbutz, especially picturesque, where its role as a harvest festival is enhanced, and the workers in each section of the field offer the first fruits of the season to feast all the members. The secular line of the kibbutz is even more marked in the kibbutz traditionally associated with Kibbutz Artzi and Hashomer Hatzair.

(Article taken from Wikipedia:
https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kibutz).

At that moment, Bonifacio Bonfante took the floor.

"It seems crucial to me that our Latin American countries consider the example of the Israeli kibbutz. This cooperative system of creating productive communities could be key to developing the conditions necessary to overcome poverty."

Bonifacio then told Joseph and Akram about an entity in Colombia called *Centro Las Gaviotas*. In it, one of his friends, Carlos Alberto Gomez, had served as Manager of the Solar Energy Program and then oversaw a development plant for water treatment and energy generation technologies appropriate for remote tropical regions. *Las Gaviotas Center* had a rural

headquarters in the Colombian Orinoquia in the Department of Vichada, in the Eastern Plains and was the closest thing to a Kibbutz. A group of about 200 people lived in the kibbutz, where significant developments had been made in agriculture. They planted and cultivated *Caribbean* pine trees to extract *rosin*, an amber resin used as a base for paint manufacturing. They also engaged in research and development of technologies for water and energy management, producing hydraulic pumps, rams, windmills for extracting water from underground wells, *Pelton* turbines, and 1-kilowatt microturbines. Additionally, they implemented a solar energy program for water heating. The director of the *Las Gaviotas Center, Paolo Lugari,* was a visionary who foresaw a broad future for humanity through the development of kibbutz-type centers. This philosophy echoed the words of Leo Tolstoy: *"A people cannot be free if it does not produce its sustenance by itself, starting with agricultural production.* Paolo Lugari envisioned a prosperous future based on communities engaged in agricultural and industrial activities, producing goods and services for the benefit of both society and their members.

At this point Joseph Levy intervened to comment:

"Going back to Leo Tolstoy's phrase, this maxim could be applied to all men if we take into consideration that no one will be totally free if he does not produce his own livelihood by himself (also understood as his own enterprise). That is our case dear friend, we are all entrepreneurs and we have managed to secure the companies that provide us with sustenance and wealth, and in this way, we have achieved our own way of making a living.

Akram then added:

"This implies that when you work for others, you cannot be totally free, as you are under the orders the orders of those who control the means of production-unless it is a cooperative or a community work entity. In this regard, I believe in the free

market and free competition within the parameters of a capitalist and democratic economy, as I have observed during my years in the West. While I acknowledge the problems that a capitalist economy entails, I still believe that a community work cooperative for the benefit of all its members is the ideal.

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Chapter 17.
Death in the *Negev* Desert.

End of 1948.

It was a cold afternoon, with a winter blizzard raising billows of dust from the sandy wastes of the Negev Desert. The 6th Mechanized Division of the Israeli military forces were stationed a little north of the Red Sea coast, where Samara Jacobsen was on duty.

Also present were the combat forces of the Arab guerrillas, whose commandos, through indiscriminate attacks, demonstrated their malicious intent to expel the Jews from those areas.

For many months, perhaps several years, frequent skirmishes had erupted between the Israeli forces and the *United Arab Commandos*. These commandos, coming from surrounding countries, launched attacks on Israeli positions with murderous guerrilla tactics, using random shots, homemade bombs, mortars, and bazookas. Their actions created anguish and dismay not only among the military positions but also in the villages of civilians and Jewish settlers living in the region.

However, in response, the Israeli forces carried out a series of military operations in the Negev Desert, evicting Palestinian settlers from the area. They forced the settlers to retreat westwards towards the Sinai region or the Gaza Strip, thereby consolidating the territory to create a secure border for central Israel. This effort was in line with the distribution established by UN Resolution No. 181, which allocated that region to Israel.

At that moment, a powerful explosion shook the Israeli military camp, raising a chaotic cloud of smoke, debris, and dust. The air filled with a pungent smell and echoed with screams.

Many were wounded, and many lay dead. Blood and anguish filled the camp on that gray afternoon, thick with anxiety, an ominous sign of the painful outcome that was already foreshadowed.

The next day the news reached the Jerusalem Command.

Lieutenant Isaac Kravitz received a note regretfully informing him of the death of his fiancée, Private Samara Jacobsen.

It was a brief note without further preamble or emotional fuss. That was just an everyday thing, and everyone was used to it. Well, almost everyone, I would say...

At first Isaac Kravitz found it difficult to assimilate the blow. Apparently, he took it as something already expected. Many times, he had said goodbye to Samara, each time fearing it might be the last. This time, it was indeed the final farewell, just as he had dreaded, but the reality hit him with a horrible surprise. A period of depression followed, slightly alleviated by his military duties.

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A wound in the soul was more painful than an ugly burn on the face... It seemed that the entire environment was affected, not only emotionally but also physically. His vision became dark, and his mind struggled to react. The sun appeared to hide for many months, or so it seemed, and on the rare sunny days, a sense of nostalgia plagued him, as he could no longer share them with his loved one.

The absence hurt deeply, and the future without her seemed unbearably sad. The worst moments came during rest, when daily activities ceased, and the demons of the spirit returned, stirring memories that played out on a canvas of pathetic appearance, veiled by a thick mist. Those dark days

dragged on painfully slowly, and the desire to share with others had vanished. Each day passed, accompanied by a lonely and melancholic emptiness.

Isaac Kravitz never returned to *Kibbutz Ramat HaKoves*; he did not want to go back to the memories and began to think about a new life beyond the horizon.

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A few years later he requested his discharge from the army and set out to travel out of the country to settle in the United States, in the city of New Jersey, at the end of 1952. The change of environment would help him overcome the grief of his loss, or so Isaac hoped.

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Chapter 18.
U.N. Resolutions No. 181 and 194

Palestine
February 1949
Israel's War of Independence:

This new tragedy occurred several months after the war of '48 began.

Women were howling, children were hiding and peering through cracks, and older men were disjointed and terrified, their ears still ringing. An explosion had shaken the entire neighborhood.

"That man was a good guy," someone said, "without enemies or grudges. He was a man of peace, and his wife, a true *Malaika*, a heavenly angel. How is it possible that this happened?"

"Apparently it was a grenade that fell on them from above," said another of those present.

"But... how did it happen?" asked Akram Abushihab, still in disbelief, "that's impossible, what do you mean it was the neighbors?

"What kind of neighbors do we have? What do you mean, those scamps on the second floor are arms dealers? And we hadn't noticed."

"Yes, apparently, they have many weapons and war supplies hidden there, a friend of mine told me so," said another neighbor.

"What do you mean there is a whole arsenal on the second floor of our parents' house?" Akram insisted on asking.

"Who came up with the brilliant idea of leasing the second floor to those terrorists? Would it be you Abdulah, who recommended those *Hamas* bastards?"

"No, not at all," Abdulah answered, "those were my father's things and he was the one who made all the decisions. Now that he's gone, there's no way to question him, so you can just be quiet."

At that time, Akram Abushihab was a young boy of sixteen, and his brother Abdulah was just a bit younger, having recently turned fifteen. The two were barely eleven months apart but looked like twins with their jet-black hair and big, dark eyes that effortlessly charmed the girls. Despite their young age, they were as stout as wooden closets and stood tall and slender like mature and elegant fir trees.

In the second year of the war in Palestine, Akram's parents were killed in an accident, leaving him and his brother Abdulah orphaned.

The father, named Mustafa Abushihab, lived with Samira Daher Abushihab, his wife and two children, in the Gaza Strip. They were among the victims of the war because, when the Declaration of Independence of Israel was announced, they lived in a good house on the side that corresponded to Israel. Without any chance to dispute it, they were forcibly evicted from their home and sent into exile to the Gaza Strip, the area assigned to the Palestinian population.

They were crammed into the second floor of a rented two-story house, which was devoid of luxuries and precarious in appearance. They had sublet the second floor to Arab revolutionaries belonging to *Hamas*, who threw outrageous parties and traded in weapons and explosives.

Akram could never accept that his parents had been killed by the irresponsible carelessness of their *Hamas* neighbors. These neighbors had mistakenly dropped a fragmentation

grenade from the second floor in his parents' yard while they were hanging freshly washed laundry. The shrapnel killed them instantly. They had been killed by what was supposed to be friendly fire.

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Bonifacio Bonfante had studied the details of the Arab Israeli conflict in depth, especially the Israeli War of Independence of '48. He meticulously kept his notes on the conflict fresh and well-organized in blue notebooks, recording all the material about the conflict that came into his hands.

Through Bonifacio's recounting, Akram was learning the details of the most significant conflicts, which he had suffered in his own youth without fully understanding he political context. Now, eager to fill in these gaps, Akram seized every opportunity to go to the *Meira Delmar Public Library* or the *Pilot Library* in Barranquilla, and when he was in Bogotá, he frequented the *National Library*. In this way, Akram learned about the geopolitical events of the year 48, the year his parents died.

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Summary of the conflict:

Following Israel's Declaration of Independence came the declaration of war against Israel by several of its Arab neighbors, including Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Transjordan and Lebanon.

Let us recall that this declaration of independence ultimately meant the forced displacement of 700,000 Palestinian civilians, evicted from their lands and homes, under the pretext of complying with UN Resolution No. 181,[8] which divided the

[8] The Question of Palestine and the General Assembly

territory between the Israelis and the Palestinians. The result of this confrontation was that Israel annexed several additional territories to those originally held during the British Mandate. In turn, Egypt took possession of the Gaza Strip, and Transjordan, re-founded under the new name of Jordan, annexed the West Bank region and Jerusalem. These 700,000 displaced persons were forced to relocate from both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, causing immense pain and hardship for the Palestinian people.

Resolution No. 194 of the United Nations Assembly was never complied with by Israel. The following article illustrates very well the atmosphere and the intentions, at the time regarding UN resolution 194.

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resoluci%C3%B3n_194_de_la_Asamblea_General_de_las_Naciones_Unidas

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The General Assembly is the chief deliberative organ of the United Nations and is composed of representatives of all Member States. The question of Palestine was first brought before the General Assembly in 1947. In resolution 181 (II), the Assembly decided to partition Palestine into two States, one Arab and one Jewish, with a special international regime for Jerusalem. After the 1948 war, the Assembly, in its resolution 194 (III) of 1949, established the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine to assist the parties in reaching a final settlement, while reaffirming the rights of Palestinian refugees to return and restitution. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was established by the General Assembly the same year.
https://www.un.org/unispal/es/data-collection/general-assembly/#:~:text=The%20question%20of%20Palestine%20se,r%C3%A9special%20international%20regime%20for%20Jerusalem%20C3%A9n.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 19412 was passed on December 11, 1948, near the end of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. The resolution expresses appreciation for the efforts of UN envoy Folke Bernadotte after his assassination by members of the Lehi. It addresses the situation in the region of the British Mandate of Palestine, establishing and defining the role of the United Nations Conciliation Commission as an organization to facilitate peace in the region. The resolution consists of fifteen articles. The most cited are:

Article 7: protection of and free access to the Holy Places
Article 8: demilitarization and UN control over Jerusalem
Article 9: Free access to Jerusalem
Article 11: calls for the return of refugees

Many of the articles of the resolution were not enforced by any of the parties involved in the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. Due to its charged nature, there were multiple reactions to the resolution. Since Assembly resolutions are not binding and serve only as advisory statements, there was no compliance with Resolution 194.

Article 11 - Refugees

Article 11 states:

The resolution states that refugees who wish to return to their homes and live in peace with their neighbors should be allowed to do so as soon as possible. It also mandates that compensation should be paid by way of indemnity for the property of those who choose not to return, as well as for any property lost or damaged. Such compensation should be made by the responsible governments or authorities, in accordance with the principles of international law or for reasons of equity.

The exact meaning and timing of the implementation of the resolution has been disputed from the beginning. Since the late 1960s, Article 11 has been increasingly cited by those who interpret it as a basis for the right of return of Palestinian refugees.

Israel generally tends to oppose this reading, pointing out that the text merely states that refugees "should be allowed" to return to their homes in the "as soon as possible" and this recommendation applies only to those "who intend to live in peace ... with their neighbors. The only exception was at the Lausanne Conference of 1949, where a common protocol was accepted by the Israeli government and the Arab delegates on May 12, 1949. After Israel had become a member of the United Nations, it offered to repatriate 100,000 refugees. This offer was rejected by the Arabs, and subsequently withdrawn by Israel. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's prime minister insisted in an interview with members of the Conciliation Commission that, while Israel could not count on the dedication of all Arab refugees to remain "at peace with their neighbors" - a consequence, he argued, of the Arabs" unwillingness to remain at peace with the State of Israel - resettlement was not an obligation for his country.

As a result, the Israeli government did not comply with this mandate and forcibly expelled the ancestral Palestinian residents of that region without providing them the right to compensation.

And let us repeat: Israel interpreted this resolution as valid only for those displaced persons who wanted to live in peace with their Israeli neighbors and would allow the return of some 100,000 Palestinians, which was rejected by the Palestinians and in the end this resolution was never implemented.

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Chapter 19.
Consequences of Resolution No. 181
1948 Palestinian uprising

Cairo, Egypt.

The Palestinian insurrection of 48...

What had happened?

The insurrection that year began at the headquarters of the *League of Arab Nations* in Cairo, where a heated meeting was taking place among its members.

Someone by the name of *Yasir Arafat*, a Palestinian university student and an activist against the British mandate and the growing Jewish presence in Palestine, shouted in high-pitched tones above the prevailing din....

¨We don't accept it. We will never accept it!". Then he added: "Let them know, we will never allow those bastards to set up a state and a country in our own land!"

"We will never allow the State of Israel to exist," others shouted angrily.

They were the Palestinians and Arabs present in that room, filled with the pain of their homeland and frustration at the events that had unfolded in those days.

On that date, May 14, 1948, the proclamation of the birth of the State of Israel was announced by one of its top leaders, President *David Ben Gurion,* with the approval of the government of the British Government, which had been the administrator of the region under a mandate from the United Nations until that very day.

The spirits of the Palestinians and Arabs continued to be inflamed in the face of what was an accomplished fact. At that time, the existence of the State of Israel had just begun. The

Jews had gotten away with presenting their proclamation of independence, hours before the withdrawal of the armed forces of Great Britain, in charge until that day of the administration of the region of Palestine and several areas of the Middle East. Everything indicated that it was a hoax orchestrated between the government of Great Britain and the Jews, to hand over the administration of the region to the latter, who, officially, had founded the State of Israel.

The young *Yasir Arafat* insisted amid his pain...

"How is it that today they have already declared their existence as a state and as a homeland for so many damned Jewish immigrants who have appeared in our beloved land?"

"Yes," another followed. "We had already said it and it was known that with the arrival of so many Jewish immigrants from all over the world, it was to be expected that one day they would take our land, and the damned English have backed them up."

"Death to the Jews," shouted others, tearing their clothes and brandishing their weapons in threat, in the face of what they considered an attempt to appropriate a land that was not theirs, or so the Palestinians believed.

"Nakba!!!"

"It's the *Nakba!"* shouted the conference attendees in anger.

"Yes, the *Nakba!*" someone else shouted.

The word *Nakba* referred to *disaster*... for them the terrible disaster of the Palestinian nation.

The following day, a bloody street war broke out, plagued by attacks with long and short weapons, homemade bombs, explosives and any other lethal devices that the Arab Palestinians, encouraged by the members of the *Arab League,* could use against Hebrew settlers.

This conflict would come to be known by Israelis as the *Israeli War of Independence*, or *Israel's war of liberation*. It was the first in a series of armed conflicts that would unfold in the region over the following years, continuing into the 21st century. However, as we have seen, the roots of this conflict extend back many years, even several millennia.

Six months before...

November 29, 1947
New York, USA
United Nations Headquarters.

With the aforementioned Resolution No. 181, signed on November 29, 1947 at the UN headquarters in New York, it was proposed to divide the land administered at that time by Great Britain into two States: one Jewish and one Arab-Palestinian. The proposal included placing the cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem under international control.

The vote was as follows:

The 33 countries (58%) that voted in favor were: Australia, Belgium, Belarus, Bolivia, Brazil, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Costa Rica, Denmark, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, France, Guatemala, Haiti, Holland, Iceland, Liberia, Luxembourg, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Norway, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Sweden, South Africa, USSR, Ukraine, United States, Uruguay and Venezuela.

The 13 countries (23%) that voted against were: Afghanistan, Cuba, Egypt, Greece, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey and Yemen.

Ten countries abstained (18%): Argentina, Colombia, Chile, China, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Honduras, Mexico, United Kingdom and Yugoslavia. Thailand did not attend the plenary session.

Months later, in May 1948, the Civil War broke out in the Palestinian territory between Arabs and Israelis, when the creation of the State of Israel was proclaimed.

The Palestinians and their allies, the members of the Arab League, never accepted the partition of land proclaimed in Resolution No. 181.

The result was that Israel, by force, took control of the territories assigned to it, while the Arabs remained in the territories assigned to them, namely the Gaza Strip and the West Bank region. However, due to the armed conflicts in the region, the Israelis continued to maintain military control of these areas, which brought many consequences.

For many years, the West Bank was defined as no man's land because the Palestinians had not accepted the resolution. The Israelis later took advantage of this ambiguity to develop settlements of Jewish settlers in the territory, despite it being expressly prohibited by international law, which forbids settlements in occupied territories during times of war. The Israelis argued that this prohibition did not apply, claiming that those territories had always remained no man's land and, therefore, open to settlement.

Forty-four years later...

Regarding the West Bank region, on September 13, 1993, the so-called *Oslo Agreement* was finally signed with the presence of the Palestinian representative, Yasser Arafat, on behalf of the PLO (*Palestine Liberation Organization*), and representing the State of Israel, President Yitzhak Rabin, and U.S. President Bill Clinton as guarantor and sponsor of the meeting.

According to the *Oslo Agreement*, the West Bank region would be provisionally divided into three zones, pending a new agreement, as follows.

Zone A, would be administered exclusively by the *Palestinian National Authority*, and would be the site where the Palestinian population would be settled. Zone B, would also be administered by the *Palestinian Authority*, but militarily controlled by Israel. Finally, Zone C, would be administered and militarily controlled by Israel. This area had been where Hebrew settlers had been living, creating significant discontent among the Palestinian people and increasing tension in the region.

While the Arabs and Palestinians were a reckless and aggressive group, perhaps with their reasons for being so, the Hebrews were equally aggressive and engaged in sufficiently bloody acts of war, whether to defend themselves or to attack their enemies, according to their own justifications. Throughout history, the Jews had suffered attacks in various countries where the Jewish Diaspora existed, and in response, they had formed paramilitary organizations for the self-defense of their compatriots.

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March 2022

Many years later, as the three friends gathered for their traditional discussions on geopolitical issues, Akram recalled the talk about Israeli settlements on the Palestinian side of the West Bank. He had waited to do some research before introducing the subject to his friends.

At that point Akram Abushihab took the floor:

"Now, let me bring up the issue of the settlements that Israel has established in the West Bank area, in violation of the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly."

I am going to present you an article that appeared on the UN website: [9]

[9] See the following link:

"ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WAR CRIMES, SAYS UN EXPERT".

9 July 2021 - Peace and security

A human rights rapporteur says the settlements are driving the longest occupation in modern times without action by the international community. A new approach based on international law is the only way to bring a just end to this perpetual occupation, he says.

The UN Special Rapporteur about human rights in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967 has called on the international community to classify Israeli settlement building as a war crime under the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.*

Michael Lynk stated that Israeli settlements violate the absolute prohibition on an occupying power moving part of its civilian population into occupied territory. The international community qualified this practice as a war crime when it adopted the Rome Statute in 1998.

"For Israel, settlements serve two related purposes. One is to ensure that the occupied territory remains under Israeli control in perpetuity. The second purpose is to ensure that there will never be a genuine Palestinian state," Lynk told the Human Rights Council in Geneva.

"These are exactly the reasons why the international community agreed to prohibit the practice of settler implantation when it created the Fourth Geneva Convention in 1949 and the Rome Statute in 1998," explains the rapporteur.

He also said that Israeli settlements are "the engine of Israel's 54-year occupation, the longest in the modern world." There are currently about 300 settlements in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank, with more than 680,000 Israeli settlers.

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https://news.un.org/es/story/2021/07/1494152#:~:text=At%20currently%20there%20are%20close%20international%20and%20diplomacy%20moderns.

Lynk stated that the illegality of Israeli settlements is one of the most settled and incontrovertible issues in modern international law and diplomacy. Its illegality has been confirmed by the United Nations Security Council, the General Assembly, the Human Rights Council, the International Court of Justice, the International Committee of the Red Cross, the High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention and by many international and regional human rights organizations.

"It is a tragic paradox that while Israeli settlements are clearly prohibited by international law, the international community has been remarkably reluctant to enforce its own laws," he said.

"In December 2016, the UN Security Council reiterated its long-standing demand in Resolution 2334 that Israel must immediately and completely cease all settlement activities. However, since the beginning of 2017, the UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process has reported to the Security Council on 18 consecutive occasions that Israel has taken no steps to comply with its obligations under Resolution 2334," he exposed.

Action plan

In his report, the special rapporteur calls on the international community to adopt a plan of action that includes:

Fully support the work of the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court as it investigates whether Israeli settlements violate the Rome Statute.

Calling on Israel to fully dismantle its settlements

Develop a broad list of accountability measures to bring Israel into compliance with international law if it continues to defy the international community.

Ensure full accountability of Israeli political, military and administrative leaders responsible for serious violations of international law in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Call on all UN member states to implement the 1980 Security Council mandate, in Resolution 465, not to provide Israel with any aid that can be used in connection with the settlements.

"The time for criticizing Israeli settlements has passed," Lynk said. "Former Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon said last week that it is the lack of international legal accountability that has allowed Israel to ignore successive UN resolutions. A new approach based on international law is the only way to bring a just end to this perpetual occupation."

The UN Human Rights Council appointed Michael Lynk in 2016 as special rapporteur about human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory since 1967. The mandate was originally established in 1993 by the then UN Commission on Human Rights.

Special rapporteurs are part of what is known as the Special Procedures of the Human Rights Council. Special Procedures, the largest body of independent experts in the UN human rights system, is the general name for the Council's independent investigative and monitoring mechanisms that address specific country situations or thematic issues in all parts of the world. Special Procedures experts work on a voluntary basis; they are not UN staff and do not receive a salary for their work. They are independent of any government or organization and serve in their individual capacity.

"Well, I'd like to know what you think," said Akram.

"The truth," said Joseph Levy, "I have never agreed with settler settlements in the West Bank region, and it seems to me that our government has acted maliciously in disregarding UN resolutions. I hope that one day we will see a group of workers dismantling these settlements or handing over the homes to Palestinian settlers for their use and enjoyment," Akram added.

"I also agree with Joseph," said Bonifacio.

For today I propose that we stop the meeting and continue later, shall we?

"Yes, of course," said the others, and they said goodbye.

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Chapter 20.
A Jewish girl with a German name.

Year 1952
Princeton University,
New Jersey, USA

The year was 1952. The traditional graduation ceremony was taking place on the expansive front lawn of Princeton University's *Nassau Hall*, which was packed with students, faculty, parents and invited visitors.

At that moment the voice of the master of ceremonies was heard again over the loudspeakers of the University:

"Now we name the graduates with honors, *(Summa Cum Laude),* from the Faculty of Physics." He continued "Miss: Gretel Müller."

The suppressed expectation burst into a thousand sounds when the name of the outstanding candidate was announced, and a thunderous round of applause filled the entire space of the *alma mater*. The girl, sheathed in her black gown and wearing her black biretta, made her way to the stage to receive her diploma. Shen then presented the diploma in front of the camera recording the events and walked to the student body. Vania Scott, (Vania Gutemberg), her best friend, stood up to greet her and congratulate her with a big hug (Vania's last name, Scott, was the name given to her by her new adoptive family in the United States).

"It's a pity that my parents were not present today to celebrate my degree with them," said Gretel, as a tear rolled down her cheek.

"They are here with you," she said as she touched Gretel's heart.

It was a sunny autumn day. The girl named Gretel Müller, of German descent, was graduating with honors (Summa Cum Laude). Gretel was a young woman of medium height, with eyes reminiscent of a clear, azure blue sky, and a lively and energetic personality despite her young age (22 years old). She was already working as an assistant to Professor Freeman Dyson, emeritus professor at *Princeton's Institute for Advanced Study*. Also, shortly before, she had been working as an assistant to the Nobel Prize winner, *Val Logsdon Fitch*, in the Chair of Physics at that University. She was specifically in charge of collaborating on research into the unification of the theories of gravitation and electromagnetism and exploring the fundamentals of quantum physics.

After the event, Gretel told Vania Scott, her best friend, who, like her, was also adopted, had Jewish ancestry, and had managed to flee to America during the purges in the *Warsaw Ghetto*, "You know what? Tomorrow, I have an appointment with the lawyer to start the paperwork with the court to change my name."

"And why do you want to change your name?"

"Because I want to get my original name back with the surname of my blood family, of Jewish blood. Sarah Weissenberg was my real name, and because of the intricacies of the war I had to acquire the name given to me by my adoptive parents in America. But I will always be proud of the Weissenberg name of my real parents."

"You are so strong and admirable for doing that, they would be very proud of you, very," said Vania.

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Meeting Gretel Müller, (Sarah Weissenberg).
New Jersey, USA
End of 1952

Recently arrived in the United States, Isaac Kravitz came highly recommended to the home of an American family of German descent named Müller. The Müllers received him with great affection and acceptance, knowing that he was a young German Jew, knowing that he was a young German Jew coming from Israel. They learned of his recent tragedy- the death of his girlfriend, the loss of his family in the concentration camps, and his current desire to forget his past hardships and build a new life in this land of opportunities.

But it so happened that on the first day, at the home of his sponsors, the newcomer had a somewhat unpleasant impasse.

Isaac was unaware that a young German girl also lived in the house, in addition to the middle-aged couple, the Müllers, who were the owners. The girl was their adopted daughter.

It was a very hot afternoon in New Jersey and Gretel Müller had been playing a demanding softball game at the university she attended. She came home ready to enjoy a relaxing bath in a full bathtub. The bathroom door was closed, but unbeknownst to her, she had forgotten to lock it.

That morning, Isaac had an interview with a publishing company and arrived home in high spirits but with an urgent need to go to the bathroom. He greeted the Müller family and went up to the second floor, entering the bathroom unexpectedly and heading straight to the toilet to urinate.

To his shock, he heard a woman's voice from the corner of the bathroom, asking for an explanation. He hadn't even noticed that the bathroom was occupied and that someone was in the tub.

"Aren't you used to knocking on the door when you enter a bathroom?"

Between shock and horror, he turned to look to find the image of a naked girl lying in the bathtub.

"I'm sorry, I never expected to find you here," he answered feeling ashamed.

He hadn't even finished performing his urgency and was already torn between finishing quickly or stopping and withdrawing immediately.

The girl, feeling contradictory emotions, between anger, amused, embarrassed and ashamed, did not know what to do, whether to continue to scold him, tell him to get the hell out or let him finish urinating.

"I was about to burst… what do I do?"

"No... well, it's over now, lest you really burst..." said the girl hiding a sly and amused half-smile.

Isaac practically couldn't even finish properly, and he managed to wet his pants a bit as he tried to finish in a hurry and get out of there like a soul chased by the devil.

And again, another mistake by Isaac. As he was leaving, in his confusion, he forgot to close the bathroom door. He had advanced clumsily about ten meters when again he heard another scream from the bathtub:

"Hey, can you close the door for me? Can't you see I'm in naked and I don't want anyone else to come in?"

Again embarrassed, flushed, nervous and even more disturbed than before, he went back to try to close the door. As he was about to do it, he was confronted by the image of a beautiful girl, standing completely naked, who had already gotten up from the bathtub and was reaching for a towel.

"I really don't know what to think. Whether you're impertinent or just clumsy..." said the girl as she covered her nudity.

He left in a hurry without saying a word....
In the following days, whenever they met in the living room or dining room, Isaac couldn't bring himself to look Gretel in the eyes. However, he found it practically impossible to erase the naked image of her from his mind. Gretel, aware of the boy's inner turmoil, found the situation extremely amusing and tried to catch his eye to uncover his truth.

However, later on, through her adoptive parents, Gretel learned of Isaac's tragedy with the death of his girlfriend and his terrible experiences in Nazi Germany. This newfound understanding changed her view of him to one of compassion and respect.

From that moment on Isaac liked her... and he couldn't get her out of his mind.

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Chapter 21.
Delivering the
(Dog Tag)

Dog tag is an informal but common term for a specific type of identification tag worn by military personnel.

August 1953
New York, USA

Since the middle of the previous year, Isaac Kravitz had been associated with a publishing company, and he already had enough income to support himself financially. He had moved out of town and was living independently in a small but very cozy apartment at 98 *MacDougal St.,* in the heart of the *Greenwich Village.*

He had a friend named Absalon Lewinsky, of Polish origin, who was a co-worker at the publishing house. Absalon instructed him in the trade, and after a few months, Isaac became an expert in
handling equipment and tasks such as layout, reading reports, content corrections, editing, editorial coordination, editorial design, graphic resources and elements, printing, marketing and promotion of publishing materials.

Absalom Lewinsky was also a survivor of the war and they had hit it off immediately with Isaac as soon as they met.

"How I wish you would tell me your survival story. I hope we will soon have the opportunity to drink a few beers outside the office," said Isaac.

"Sure, these days we'll make it possible," said Absalom. "I also want to hear your story.

One of the lines handled by the publishing house was that of student textbooks for universities and colleges. For this reason, Isaac Kravitz had close relations with several universities, among others, Princeton University in New Jersey, where he had to attend frequently.

It was not only a sales task, but also a matter of contacting and maintaining relations with the different professors, with whom the publishing house was close to, since the books and texts of these professors were edited and published there.

At Princeton University, Isaac Kravitz met Gretel Müller again, although he later learned that this was not her real name but Sarah Weissenberg. She was the student assistant to an eminent professor on the physics faculty, with whom Isaac's publisher had extensive relations. By obligation Isaac had to relate to the girl, for she was the interlocutor between the professor and the publishing house.

One day Isaac invited her for coffee in the university cafeteria.

"And tell me, Isaac, are you still in the habit of going into the bathroom when girls are naked?" said Gretel with a wide and mischievous smile.

"Well, you know what?" Isaac answered, "the truth is that after having seen you naked it's been more than enough for me, and I don't feel like meeting someone naked other than you."

He was looking straight into her eyes, and for the first time he saw her blush and look away. It was very difficult for Gretel to stop smiling, no matter how much she tried not to. Now they both had a secret to share, beyond their shared

experience of being orphans and having lost relatives in the Nazi concentration camps.

Shortly after, one day, Isaac was sitting in the waiting room of the faculty building when a girl hurried in, staring at him. Distracted, she ran head-on into a student coming from the opposite direction. To his surprise, the girl was Sarah, and with the impact, she dropped some books she was carrying.

Isaac hurriedly got up from his chair and went over to where she was to help her pick up the books from the floor.

Troubled by her clumsiness and the sudden encounter, Sarah tried to prevent Isaac from helping her. However, at one point, he dropped one of the books before she could take it, and it fell to the floor again. They both bent down at the same time to pick it up and, wham, they bumped heads. It was impossible for either of them not to burst out laughing.

"You know what?" Isaac said, "I think the Universe is conspiring for us to be sweethearts or spouses, or at the very least, it has the slightest intention of getting us to go out to dinner tonight… Don't you think so?"

"I don't think so," she answered smiling. "What I think is that it seems very dangerous to go out with a guy who goes into the girls' bathroom when they are naked... maybe he is a sexually depraved."

"'"Could it be that the Universe is daring you to discover the truth? That's why I insist we go out to dinner tonight so you can find out."

"But how intense! Then at 8:00 pm at my house," she said trying to hide her excitement.

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Eleven months went by and Gretel (Sarah Weissenberg) and Isaac Kravitz became inseparable. They never missed an

opportunity to enjoy their time together, balancing Isaac's work and Sarah's curricular activities at the university. Then one night, what had to happen happened...

“Sarah," Isaac told her, “It’s been more than five years since my girlfriend died in Israel, and since then I haven't had a relationship with anyone, not even a deep friendship. Except for you. I've shared everything with you, and you know me inside out. We've been the best of friends, but there's always been this little feeling that maybe we could be something more. What do you think?"

"I've been waiting for you to say something like that for a long time, but you never made up your mind," Sarah replied, her voice soft but earnest. "I even wondered if, after seeing me naked, you found something about my body unappealing and that's why you never took the next step. But now you're saying you want us to be more than friends? Do you really want to be boyfriend and girlfriend?"

Isaac took a deep breath, his eyes meeting Sarah's with a glimpse of vulnerability. "Sarah, seeing you that day only made me realize how much I care about you. It had nothing to do with finding you unappealing—in fact, you're beautiful in every way. I've been afraid of ruining what we have, but the thought of not trying to be more than friends feels even worse. Yes, I really want to be your boyfriend. What do you say?"

-Of course I want to be your girlfriend, silly," Sarah laughed.

Shortly thereafter, one night in New York, after a spectacular dinner at the apartment of Tania Kravitz, Isaac's sister, Isaac accompanied Sarah to her hotel. Upon arriving at the front desk, Isaac asked her to wait a moment before going upstairs.

Isaac removed something from his neck and offered it to Sarah.

"Look, Sarah," said Isaac, "I'm going to give you my dog tag, which is my most precious keepsake from my time in military service in Israel, surviving several battles. Think of it as an engagement ring. I want you to wear this dog tag as a reminder of my commitment to marry you within six months. So, Sarah Weissenberg, will you be my wife?"

Sarah stood stiffly with her mouth open. She never expected to receive that news at that moment, although, to tell the truth, she was already counting on the fact that they were going to spend the rest of their days together.

"Of course I do, my love, of course I accept," she said with tears in her eyes. "But I hope you don't go into the bathroom with any other girl from now on, because I'll kill you."

They both laughed and went up to Sarah's room, ordering a bottle of wine to celebrate. That night, they made love and spent the night together, despite contravening Jewish law.

Five months later they were celebrating the two ceremonies of their marriage, the *Kiddushin* and the *Nissu'in or* chuppah. [10]

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[10] In Jewish law, marriage consists of two separate acts, called erusin (or kiddushin, meaning "sanctification"), which is the betrothal ceremony, and the nissu'in or chuppah, the actual Jewish wedding ceremony. The kiddushin changes the interpersonal status of the couple, while the chuppah produces the legal consequences of the change of status. In Talmudic times, these two ceremonies usually took place a year apart; the bride lived with her parents until the actual marriage ceremony (chuppah), which took place in a room or tent that the groom had prepared for her. Since the Middle Ages, the two ceremonies have been celebrated together and in public.

Chapter 22.
The Absalom Lewinsky Story

After several unsuccessful attempts to find time to get together, as they were always so busy with publishing matters, the day had finally arrived. It was a Friday night, and they were in a bar in the *Greenwich Village* area of New York. They were enjoying their beers: a *Heineken* for Absalom Lewinsky and a *Budweiser* for Isaac Kravitz.

"Well, Absalom, why don't you start by telling me what city you're from?" asked Isaac.

"I was born in *Bialystok*, in northeastern Poland, 60 kilometers from the border with Belarus," he answered.

"Well, go on with your story...."

"My story begins in a small town is the capital of the *Podiaquia volvodate*."

A *volvodato* is similar to what is known in the West as a province or country.

"There, I worked for the town magazine, which had a weekly edition, covering local gossip and daily affairs, and occasionally featuring some international news that came our way. In that magazine I began to love letters, editing, proofreading and typography."

"But let's continue with the story."

"Bialystok was a rural town with just under 3,500 inhabitants at the time, mostly peasants and a few relatively impoverished landowners. Half of the population was Jewish and the other half Christian. The relationship between the two communities was very good, despite the fact that, by 1939, discrimination against Jews had already begun in Germany and

the large cities of Poland. Jewish businesses were closed, synagogues burned, and Jews were prohibited from attending cultural and educational centers. They were also required to wear the infamous yellow star in a visible place on their clothes, both on the front and on the back.

Absalom continued:

"At that time Poland was divided in two. The west of the country was under occupation by the Germans and the east by the Russians. It is worth mentioning that there was a non-aggression pact signed between Russia and Germany and they had divided the country."

"Our relationship with the Russians was relatively good; they practically did not interfere with the population, allowing us to continue our normal activities without mistreatment. This was in stark contrast to the areas controlled by the Germans, as we found later. However, in 1941, the aforementioned agreement was violated by Germany, leading to the German attack and invasion of Russia."

Absalom made a long pause, and then he said:

"The first thing that happened was that the Germans took eastern Poland, dislodging the Russian troops, who retreated eastward."

"Up to that point, we had not experienced any major difficulties. However, everything changed overnight when the new invaders arrived and overwhelmed the townspeople."

"From the second day of the German occupation of our town, the arrests of the Jewish population began. They were transported in ox carts to larger cities, where they were loaded onto trucks or trains and sent to *Auschwitz* or *Treblinka*. These camps, still under construction, required slave labor with forced labor before the prisoners were eventually exterminated.

The wagons were scarce, with a capacity of approximately seven people each. Due to the urgency of

completing the operation of sending the Jews away, they had to run night shifts and transport people 24 hours a day."

"The rural road along which the wagons traveled was a bridle path through thick woods. The guards escorting the prisoners were well-armed, and attempts to escape were always unsuccessful, as the fugitives were mercilessly shot. Rumors constantly warned us of our final destination, and we were already certain that if we reached that destination, death awaited us."

Absalom continued.

"I was hiding in a barn when I heard that my parents had been sent off in one of those wagons, without anyone being able to do anything. I never heard from them again. At that time, I was with my best friends, supposedly trying to organize a civil resistance against the Germans. How naïve we were!"

That was when we were apprehended, and like many others, we were soon mounted on one of the wagons, accompanied by an armed guard with a murky look and a murderous face. It was a dark night, like the jaws of a wild beast, without moon or stars, with an overcast sky torn by lightning and thunder. Soon, it began to rain torrentially."

"Just at that moment, as we passed through a dense forest, it became impossible for the guard to be fully aware of us, distracted by the downpour and the heavy swaying of the wagon. At one point, my friends and I exchanged looks and silently agreed to jump on the count of three. An instant later, we were running through the bushes, scratching our faces, arms, and legs on the branches and thorns of the path. We stumbled over all kinds of obstacles that were impossible to see in the dark, while the boom of guns and whizzing of bullets passed millimeters from our heads.

One of my four friends was hit by a bullet; we only heard his anguished scream and then nothing more. We kept running.

Another was shot on the knee, and, with a scream of pain, he was left lying where he fell. We never heard again from him either."

"My remaining friend and I kept running for at least an hour. Exhausted and out of breath, we eventually slowed down but continued walking briskly in the darkness, with no fixed direction, just trying to get as far away as possible, no matter where we ended up.

It was about 3 a.m. when we saw a light in the forest, it was a small country house. The moon had risen and illuminated the white walls of the house.

My friend and I commented that perhaps we were far enough away from the town and the road to risk resting, but we agreed to spend the night in the shelter of the forest, near a house we had spotted, and wait for the next day to seek help. Although our clothes were soaked, exhaustion and the adrenaline rush we had experienced soon led us to fall asleep on the ground, out in the open.¨

¨The next day, three hours later, as it was getting light, we decided to knock on the door of the house. A very old man answered, barefoot and in his underwear, with a surprised look in his face. He eyed us with a certain distrust, as if expecting something bad. He spoke Polish, which gave us some peace of mind. After the introductions, he told us that we were his first visitors of the year, as nobody ever passed through that place unless they were lost, or a poacher being pursued by the law. The old man knew nothing about wars, Germans, Russians, or anything to do with the outside world. He was a perfect hermit, having been away from civilization for a long time, except for his monthly trips to a nearby village to exchange provisions for furs. He fed on game and maintained a small garden where he grew his vegetables. ¨

Albsalon stopped, then he said: ¨Hey Isaac if you like, let's stop for a moment and order another beer."

¨Sure, let me get the beers. Your story has piqued my interest."

After taking a couple of sips, Absalom continued.

"The old hermit gave us something to eat, and after we told him of our misfortune, he offered to help us. He allowed us to stay in his little house for a short period of time while planned our next steps and figured out how to get to a safe place.

After a week, the old man showed us a route through the forest that bordered some roads without exposing us in the open fields. By following a new cross-country path, we were able to advance through totally unpopulated areas and reach the vicinity of the town of *Suwałki* in the extreme northeast of Poland, a few kilometers from the border with Lithuania. In that remote area, it was very unlikely for German troops to be present. Although we encountered a few settlers, they were innocent peasants who offered us help without hesitation."

"We walked for long days, and at night we slept in barns and stables, in the company of cows and lambs, on top of bales of fodder. These places, though humble, felt like first class hotels to us because they provided safety and protection from the German troops, given our precarious situation.

After a long time, we were able to stay with an elderly couple who gave us coffee, potatoes and bread. The neighbors provided us with new clothes, allowing us to discard the rags marked with the yellow star that identified us as Jews.

Three days later we had already crossed the border with Lithuania. We entered the town of *Kaunas*, a place with very old buildings that reminded us of medieval times. We stayed another day, and at sunset, we took a free shuttle, thanks to the generosity of the driver, who transported us to the Lithuanian

port of Klaipeda on the Baltic Sea. At that moment, we felt that this was our salvation."

"The sea route was our path to freedom, leading us to Sweden. We knew that Sweden was a neutral country during the Second World War, and we wouldn't risk being handed over to the Germans.

We secured sea transport as cabin boys, earning our passage to Karlskrona in Sweden and receiving meals in return. After arriving in Sweden, my friend and I parted ways. He wanted to embark for Great Britain and try to find a transport to the United States. As for me, I was determined to travel to Palestine. I needed to find a ship to take me to Spain and then from there to Morocco. Finally, another transport took me to the port of Haifa in Palestine."

"Back in Palestine," Absalom continued, "I worked in a small publishing house as an assistant copy boy, and sometime later I became an editor. When I was three years old, I had the opportunity to come to the United States and here I am."

"You've come a long way, thank you for sharing your story," said Isaac, "maybe later I'll have a chance to tell you, my story."

"It's my pleasure dear friend," he answered.

It was already quite late and the next day they had to get up early for work, so they finished their beers and said their goodbyes.

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Chapter 23.
The Sinai War or Suez War:

Once again Bonifacio, Joseph and Akram met. This time, Bonifacio wanted to discuss one of the wars-the Suez Canal. To initiate the conversation, he brought the topic to the table.

He began by saying: "In the years of war and conflict between Israel and Palestine, many fighters have been killed. Every family, both on the side of Israel and the Palestinian side, has terrible stories of loved ones lost in the confrontations. Today, I would like to discuss the Suez Canal War."

At that moment Akram remembered an old story he had almost forgotten, about his mother's family and a tragedy that had befallen them.

It turned out that Samira Daher Abushihab, wife of Mustafa Abushihab and mother of Akram and Abdulah, had a half-brother named Mehmet Daher. Mehmet and Samira shared the same father, Hamadi Daher, but had different mothers. Hamadi, an officer in the Egyptian armed forces, died when the Suez Canal War broke out, as did his son Mehmet. That war had deeply affected Akram's family and remained present in his sad memories.

1956
Suez Canal, Sinai Peninsula
Egypt.

Bonifacio began: "Four days before the outbreak of the war, everything was euphoria in Egypt. The street celebrations were unending, an apotheosis in support of the Egyptian government's strength for storming and taking control of the administrative facilities of the Suez Canal. Previously under

British and French control, the canal was seized without firing a single shot, and the officials in charge were evicted."

"This led to an immediate response from Britain, France and Israel, with international repercussions of major proportions. Soon after came the armed response with a corresponding battle. The Egyptian soldiers were still celebrating, and the attack took them by surprise."

Bonifacio paused, and then continued: "The confrontation with Israeli forces began on October 29, 1956, at 3:35 a.m. Israeli paratroopers, who had landed in large numbers under the cover of darkness, started firing shells. These heavily armed soldiers crossed the border and entered the Sinai Peninsula.

The initial defense of the Egyptian lines was handled by a small arms brigade that was not adequately prepared to repel the Israeli attack. The Israeli forces, supported by ground troops arriving from Israel, had launched their assault against Egypt in the Sinai Peninsula."

At that moment Akram interrupted him.

"Bonifacio, I am sorry to interrupt you, but I would like to add something."

"In those days of the war, I was told that a random rifle shot shattered the carotid artery of Officer Hamadi Hussein, my mother's father, when it struck his neck. He collapsed, mortally wounded. This happened during the Israeli forces' attack."

"To our family's further tragedy, days later, British forces arrived in the region with the supposed mission of maintaining order and controlling the conflict between Israel and Egypt. During a crossfire between the British and Egyptian forces, Mehmet Daher, my mother's brother, was also wounded and died a few days later in a field hospital. Fortunately, my mother had already passed away and was spared from that sorrow."

"I had no idea about this loss. The conflict must have felt very personal for you," responded Bonifacio.

Then, Akram asked Bonifacio: "You know the Arab-Israeli conflict well, why don't you tell me in detail what happened with the so-called Suez War? What happened?"

Bonifacio replied:

"Since you asked, I'll give you some insight on the Suez War and its background. The Sinai War, also known as the Suez War, was a confrontation that took place in 1956. It was triggered by the forced nationalization of the Suez Canal by Egypt, led by President Gamal Abdel Nasser, and the subsequent chain reaction from Great Britain, France, and Israel."

"It should be noted that the Suez Canal was built through a partnership between Great Britain, France and Egypt. This monumental work connects the Red Sea with the Mediterranean Sea. It involved excavating a canal 162 kilometers long with an average depth of 20 meters to unite the two seas.

This canal has shortened maritime transport by 8,000 kilometers for oil, raw materials and goods coming from the Red Sea region, the Indian Ocean, or the Pacific Ocean to Europe. It avoids the need for a very long journey around Africa to reach Europe via the Atlantic."

"The work was carried out during the government of Mehmet Ali, the Ottoman governor for Egypt. Ferdinand de Lesseps, a French businessman, oversaw the work. The Canal was inaugurated on November 17, 1869, by the new governor Khedive Ismael, grandson of Mehmet Ali."

Bonifacio continued his explanation.

"The financing for the monumental Suez Canal project was provided by Great Britain and France, at a cost of 17 million pounds sterling, while Egypt supplied the labor. Approximately 1.5 million Egyptian workers were hired, most of them at

poverty wages and many as unpaid slaves. It is said that the cost in lives was significant, with estimates ranging from 20,000 to 100,000 dead, most of whom succumbed to cholera. This was the human cost borne by the Egyptian labor force."

"Egypt was a very poor country at that time, with a population that was dying of hunger. At one point it had to sell, for a pittance, its shares in the company that managed the canal. They did this to defray some expenses required by the nation in social programs. For many years, Egyptians had to watch as the nations managing the canal reaped immense profits from its operations, while Egypt received no financial benefit. The canal, operated by foreigners, generated substantial income in Egyptian territory, yet the country saw none of this wealth."

Bonifacio continued:

"Seeking to improve the economic situation of his people, President Nasser proposed to undertake the construction of the Aswan Dam to neutralize the immense floods that periodically inundated the fertile lowlands of the country, when the Nile River overflowed its banks. President Nasser first sought financial assistance from the United States and Great Britain but was denied the support. During the times of the Cold War, Nasser had publicly sympathized with the causes of socialist countries, such as the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union, causes strongly opposed to the countries of the West. Nasser himself had a socialist mentality, being an important leader of the League of Arab States that sought the destruction of Israel, a key ally of the United States."

"At this point President Nasser sought and found help from the Soviet government headed by Nikita Khrushchev. They assisted Egypt in the construction of the Aswan Dam. In addition, and perhaps emboldened by the closeness with the Soviet government, Nasser planned the nationalization of the Suez Canal, taking it by assault and force."

Bonifacio, encouraged by the interest shown by Joseph and Akram, continued with his explanations.

"On the night of July 26, 1956, Gamal Abdel Nasser gave orders to militarily storm the facilities of the Suez Canal Management Company and proceed with the control and nationalization of the Canal. This was a fact that was announced to the people of Egypt, at the end of the radio address, to the delight and celebration of all Egyptians."

"The reaction of Great Britain and France, under the leadership of British Prime Minister Anthony Eden, was not long in coming. In the aftermath, at a meeting held in Sévres, France, to which Israel was invited, the decision to confront Egypt militarily was taken.

Israel then took Egypt by surprise and attacked the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula. France and Great Britain then deployed their military forces under the guise of being guarantors of peace in the region. However, they also dominated the Egyptian forces with 80,000 troops, 100 ships, and 7 aircraft carriers, attacking the fledgling Egyptian army with overwhelming force."

Bonifacio continued.

"The reaction of the international community was very strong, with the total condemnation by the United States and the Soviet Union, who pressured Great Britain, France and Israel to declare an immediate cease-fire, which took place on November 5, 1956. Subsequently, the United Nations decreed the presence of peacekeepers, known as the Blue Helmets, who remained as guarantors of peace in the Sinai area. Israel then withdrew to its borders as they were before the conflict."

Taking a deep breath, Bonifacio said: "This concludes the narration of the Suez Canal War. Surprisingly, one of my nephews, a Colombian, served in Egypt as part of a battalion

supplied by Colombia to reinforce the peace corps under UN orders."

— O –

Chapter 24.
The Six-Day War

June 5, 1967
Six-day war
Sinai Peninsula

Akram, Bonifacio and Joseph were still together, and at that moment Bonifacio commented:

"Since we are on the topic of wars that have taken place in the framework of the conflict between the Arabs and the Israelis, why don't we mention the Six-Day War, shall we?"

"Yes, of course," said Joseph.

"I know this war quite well, so let me introduce the subject," said Joseph.

"In 1967 the League of Arab Nations, with the leadership of Egypt, followed by Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Palestine, decided to jointly attack Israel seeking its extermination and destruction. However, as a response to the increasing threats by Egypt's president announcing to attack and destroy the State of Israel, on June 5, 1967, Israel began a forceful military offensive against Egypt. They began with an air attack that completely dismantled the Egyptian air force, seizing control of the skies. Subsequently, they destroyed the Egyptian military forces on the ground."

"Then, as a response to the joint attacks by Jordan and Syria, the Israelis destroyed their offensive, defeating them militarily. As a result, Israel emerged victorious from this conflict, annexing several new territories such as the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank region, the city of Jerusalem and the Golan Heights."

"An inflammatory speech filled with phrases of hatred and death against the people of Israel was delivered that day by

Gamal Abdel Nasser, the president of Egypt. Broadcast to the four winds by Egyptian radio, the speech called on the people to start celebrating a triumph that would never come to fruition."

June 5, 1967

Joseph continued

"It was mighty Egypt, the greatest of the Arab nations, that, like the Ishmaelite Goliath, was preparing to wipe a miserable flea like Israel off the map. Egypt saw Israel, descendant of David, as a fragile enemy that would be easily defeated and had it in its sights with utter disdain."

"A few days later, amidst another speech proclaiming a non-existent triumph for the Egyptians, the reality was starkly different. The speech ironically highlighted the desperate flight of Egyptian soldiers, who were trying to escape certain death in the face of a terrible and unexpected attack by the Israeli armed forces. These forces had already taken combat positions inside Egyptian territory, invading the Sinai Peninsula and taking control of the vast region."

"Days before," continued Joseph, "Gamal Abdel Nasser had asked the UN to withdraw the peacekeeping forces because he was preparing to attack and destroy Israel. However, the Israelis, anticipating his plans and taking advantage of the absence of UN control in the area, launched a preemptive air strike, destroying the entire Egyptian air force. This paved the way for a ground attack by Israeli forces, leading to a total and undisputed defeat of the Egyptian military. Gamal Abdel Nasser was forced to acknowledge this devastating loss to his people in another speech, this time filled with depression and defeatism. Nasser never recovered from this defeat and died three years later, still mired in depression."

"Prior to the attack, in light of Nasser's plans, King Hussein I of Jordan, determined to partake in the anticipated success of the Egyptian advance, sent his forces into the city of Jerusalem and launched attacks in the West Bank. However, these attacks were immediately repelled by Israeli forces, who seized control of Jerusalem and the West Bank, territories that Jordan lost in a total defeat. The Jordanian army withdrew from the area and acknowledged their defeat.

Similarly, the Syrian military forces, having also committed to the war against Israel alongside other Arab states, were repelled by Israel. After defeating Syria, Israel took over the Golan Heights as a protective measure against repeated Syrian attacks, where missiles were frequently launched at Israeli civilian settlements in the region.

This confrontation lasted only six days, but it was enough to change the entire geopolitical map of the Middle East."

***

Vania Scott dies.

Let's remember the following: Gretel Muller, (Sarah Weissemberg), and her friend Vania Scott, (Vania Gutemberg), had met in New Jersey USA, at Princeton University. Vania was studying chemical engineering, and Gretel was studying physics. Both were orphans, their parents having been murdered in the gas chambers of *Treblinka.*

Vanya was of Irish Jewish ancestry on her father's side and German Jewish ancestry on her mother's side. Both of her parents were from the city of Mainz, Germany, on the Rhine.

After finishing her studies, Vanya decided to travel to Israel and settled there. She lived in the city of Rehovot with her boyfriend, Hermann Gabrieloff, and they both worked at the *Weizmann Institute in* pharmaceutical research.

One day in early June 1967, Sarah Weissemberg received news of the death of Vania Scott and traveled to attend her friend's funeral in Israel. Vania had been killed when she was hit by an explosive device, which landed in the laboratory, just at the time of the confrontation in the Six-Day War.

In those days, despite mourning the death of her very dear friend, Sarah found it difficult to escape the festive and triumphant atmosphere in Israel, due to the success of the operations carried out by the Israeli military forces, a country she was already beginning to consider as her own. She learned that the Israelis had completely defeated the joint forces of Egypt, Jordan and Syria, and had conquered large tracts of new territory under their control.

After the funeral and visiting a few friends, Sarah stayed a few more days in Israel to get to know the country better and was delighted with the country's buoyant development, promising to return someday to settle there, in the *Promised Land.*

— O –

Chapter 25.
At Kibbutz Ein Gedi in Israel

Two years later...
Year 1969
City of Ein Ged, Israel

A few years later, in Israel, while taking advantage of the weekend to rest at Kibbutz *Ein Gedi*, Sarah, told her husband:

"You know Isaac, despite the storms and hurricanes, the sun will always rise again in Israel... always...."

"That is true," said Isaac, "Despite the wars and conflicts that our people continually face with the Palestinians and the rest of the world, we have always found a way to move forward. Our development has placed us on par with developed countries. I believe this is due to the tenacity we've gained by enduring so many tragedies. Despite everything, we have risen again and continued our path with fortitude, always thinking of the future and the welfare of our people."

***

Since late 1969, Sarah Weissenberg and her husband, Isaac Kravitz, had emigrated from the United States to the "*Promised Land*". Isaac was an entrepreneur, running his own publishing company, and Sarah held a chair in Physics at the *Weizmann Institute of Science* near Tel Aviv. The Institute was one of the most renowned scientific institutions in the world and Sarah was one of its most esteemed professors. Living there brought back memories of her dear friend Vania Scott, (Vania Gutenberg), who had passed away some time before.

Years earlier, in August 1961, a beautiful baby girl was born and named Myriam Kravitz, in honor of Sarah's mother. From the moment she was weighed for the first time, she already stood out for her physical strength. At birth, she weighed 3.56 kilos and had to be delivered by cesarean section.

From her earliest years she proved to be a lively, intelligent and very strong little girl, who challenged herself to do every one of the chores and games that boys her age did. She was no slouch at all and often got into fistfights with boys older than her, earning their respect. Many preferred not to challenge Myriam Kravitz, knowing they would likely lose. At the same time, the girls admired her and followed her lead.

On the other hand, she was a girl with a deep sense of justice and always sided with the underdog when problems arose. Although her superiors had some reservations about her, given her tendency to reject authority when she was not convinced of the viability of the orders, they nonetheless recognized her leadership skills and often relied on her from a very young age.

"Next week I must go to Tel Aviv to the airport to pick up my sister, Tania, who is visiting from New York. Will you come with me?" Isaac said to Sarah one day.

"Yes, of course! You hadn't told me that Tania was coming. Let's pick her up. It's great that she's visiting, and she'll finally get to meet Myriam. She's going to be surprised at how amazing she is."

***

Many years later, around 1990, Isaac Kravitz sat in the garden of his house in Kibbutz Ein Gedi, under a parasol, in front of a small table with a laptop computer, dedicated to his literary work. He often looked up to gaze at the twilight horizon,

though his mind was lost in the raptures of his imagination. He was writing a philosophical essay about Consciousness.

He wrote:

The Consciousness of the Infinite...

"Life can be terrible, brutal, challenging and demanding… yet, simultaneously, it is also beautiful, pleasurable, formative and didactic.

And without being aware of it, it seems that we ourselves, from our own State of Higher Consciousness, are the ones who design the reality. A reality that always surprises us.

But that is the path of the evolutionary process that we have undertaken and that we are fully complying with, whether we want it or not.

Although no... it is not a destiny prefixed by a strange mind... It is our own decision, even if we do not intend it... or understand it.

And perhaps, far away, in the background, behind the last of the parallel universes mentioned by Hawking, there is a "someone" who is subtly smiling. He does not mock us but rather pities us. Sometimes, he is glad that we move on, but he cannot intervene. Maybe it is true that this "someone" is called Jehovah... Who knows! Or perhaps that is the Consciousness of the infinite Universe... and most likely, it is our own infinite Consciousness.

Isaac Kravitz

— O -

Chapter 26.
The promise of Palestine

For Jews, the celebration of "Yom Kippur" is the Day of Atonement, repentance and forgiveness from the bottom of the heart. It is the holiest day of the Jewish annual calendar, and it is the last and most important of the Ten Days of Repentance according to the Jewish religion.

Year 1973
Jenin, northern West Bank, Palestine
Yom Kippur War.

"Run Khaled, something has happened in your house. It's urgent!"

A friend of Khaled Abushihab came to warn him of a tragedy that had occurred.

In those days, despite midst of the *Yom Kippur War*, no one expected the terrible events of war to reach the very doors of their homes in the village. The skirmishes were supposed to take place on the front lines far from the homes, up north on the Syrian border in the *Golan Heights*. Yet, the frontlines were not so distant, only about 115 kilometers away.

An Israeli-made B300 anti-tank missile, whose effectiveness was being tested in the confrontation between the Israeli army and Syrian forces during the Yom Kippur War, had hit a sector of the northern West Bank city of *Jenin*. This area was occupied by Palestinians and, according to the Israelis, controlled by Palestinian terrorist forces. However, this was not entirely true, as it was often home to simple families of Palestinian parishioners who had nothing to do with the

conflict. The more radical and fanatical armed Palestinian factions would often carry out their terrorist skirmishes and then hide among the civilian population to go unnoticed. In the event of an attack, they would compromise their own civilians, using the resulting casualties as a pretext to blame the Israeli forces before world opinion.

The missile had hit an old five-story building that was dangerously close to the home of the Abushihab family which had been seriously affected.

Kahled arrived a little late that day, only to find tragedy in his path. In his walk he caught a glimpse of smoke from his ruined house and began to imagine the worst.

Among the rubble, lying in the open, amidst the dust that rose in swirls in the rushing breeze, he found him still alive.

He approached the dying body of his father. Abundant amounts of blood were flowing down his forehead and out of his left side, staining what had once been his clean clothes. Apart from the blood, a piece of metal stood out his flesh, at the level of his liver. The femoral artery had been compromised.

His father's name was Abdulah Abushihab, brother of Akram Abushihab. At that moment, with much pain, Khaled's father said his last words:

"Listen Khaled my son, I don't want my last words to be filled with hatred towards the one you consider the Zionist enemy. I don't want you to take it out on others for this attack. The best way to honor our memory, is by doing the opposite, that is, that you find in the depths of your soul, words and actions of love towards everyone, especially towards those you consider our enemies, they are the ones who need our love the most.

Today is "Yom Kippur", the day of forgiveness for the Jews and it should be the day of forgiveness for all, including us Palestinian Muslims. Now take my hand and feel my blood on your hands and upon this blood I want you to promise me that you will become a light of forgiveness and love in this land. This will be my legacy to you and to all those around you. I

leave you no inheritance or wealth, except for that old Stradivarius violin I have given you, but I want you to know that this promise I am forcing you to make will be the best inheritance I can give you. Now I want you to promise me out loud.

"Yes, father, I promise," said Khaled Abushihab, choking back the tears that became a latchet in his throat.

That was the most important promise he would ever make in his life. Before the spilled blood of his progenitor, he swore to himself that he would fulfill it to the letter, even if it tore him apart.

Next, Khaled's father fixed his eyes high up in the sky. Khaled saw the reflection of the blue sky in his pupils as a slight, enigmatic smile appeared on his face. Then came a last sigh, his body remained motionless, and his eyes glazed over. He had already left his body, departing for new horizons with good wind and sea. He had nothing, owed nothing, feared nothing, and nothing would be claimed from him. He had been a good man like few others, without wealth and poorer than a church mouse, but with a heart of pure gold that shone from within.

The deceased Abdulah Abushihab was the brother of Akram Abushihab, who at a very young age had left for America in search of new fortune and perhaps golden horizons. However, Khaled did not know the whereabouts of his uncle, whom he thought was missing. To him, is father had been his only living relative, and now he was dead. Khaled was completely alone, orphaned of both father and mother. After that event, Khaled decided to travel and settle in the Gaza Strip, a place where, at that time, he still had some friends. However, it was not a good decision.

Four months earlier, *Nazli,* his mother, had died following an armed raid by Israeli soldiers in pursuit of a group of *Hamas* terrorists through the streets of *Ramallah* in the West

Bank. *Hamas* had blown up a school bus carrying a group of Israeli students.

Without taking any precautions, the Israeli soldiers had fired their long weapons at a group of terrorists, who, in their flight, tried to camouflage themselves among the civilian population that crowded the market square at midday.

Nazli, a name whose meaning was an allegory to the delicacy of a woman, was Abdulah's wife and Khaled's mother. She was lying in one of the alleys of the vegetable section of the market, when one of the Israeli shots pierced her chest, opening a terrible hole in her back and taking her soul to a higher dimension. In the afternoon, her husband, Abdulah, had to go to the dirty place that served as the town morgue to examine the body.

As he stood in the ruble of his former home, Khaled realized that now, with his father's passing, he no longer had any family left—neither close nor distant relatives. He was utterly alone.

Khaled had heard that a paternal uncle, whom he did not know, had long ago left for America to an unknown place. However, he had no idea where or at what coordinates to find him. Moreover, he had never heard from his uncle again, except that his name was Akram Abushihab and that the year of his departure was around 1954. Everyting else was unknown to him.

Khaled Abushihab was about fifteen years old when he saw his parents pass away. A lonely fate awaited him, and nothing could mitigate it, except for the old violin that his distant uncle had given him as a gift when he was a boy, and which Khaled treasured as his most precious possession.

No diamond, no tinsel, no jewel could have equaled the value that his violin had for him, an antique *Stradivarius*, with an excellent sound, although somewhat damaged by the passage of time.

At a very young age, Khaled, always struggling with poverty and without a teacher to guide him, could only produce shrill shrieks from his violin. Despite this, he persisted, spending countless hours practicing. His efforts resulted in much torture for his own ears and those of his neighbors, who endured the discordant notes coming from his attempts to master the instrument.

But little by little he improved. As the months went by, Khaled's ear began to refine through a slow and arduous journey toward musical mastery. The path was elusive and difficult, but through intense persistence, he managed to make progress, even though he had little time to practice. Following the death of his father, and with no family or friends—most of whom were dead or had fled the Palestinian tragedy—he faced many difficulties just to achieve a basic level of survival.

With the little money he earned through hard work and the many weeks he spent hungry, saving food and watching his bones become more and more noticeable, he finally gathered the courage to buy a change of decent clothes. Even though they were second-hand, he reserved them for special occasions: attending free concerts on the Israeli side. He would sneak into these events, hoping for a bit of luck to find a front-row seat and listen to the true masters of classical music who visited the area. In these moments, he allowed himself to dream—that maybe, someday, effort and good fortune would smile upon him, enabling him to play in a proper concert hall. This was a far cry from his current reality: playing in the middle of his destitute room in a dilapidated building in the Palestinian refugee sector, constantly interrupted by the shouts of neighbors who urged him to silence his soul-stirring violin.

In addition, Khaled had to impose a strict discipline on himself to avoid getting involved in political issues and to

prevent hatred from festering within him towards those whom everyone around him considered the terrible Zionist enemies.

In the conversations he overheard everywhere, the topic of the Jews and the cultivation of growing hatred was always present. This hatred was deemed necessary to overcome the fear of undertaking risky terrorist actions aimed at killing as many Zionists as possible and achieving the longed-for revenge that, according to them, cried out for justice from their deepest being.

Khaled preferred to stay away and not take sides in these conversations. He held in his heart a promise made on his father's blood, a promise he could not break if he was to honor his father's memory.

— O -

Chapter 27.
The Yom Kippur War

Present time.

During his time in Barranquilla, Akram Abushihab wanted to know first-hand the details of Joseph Levy's research on the *Yom Kippur War*. With this in mind, he met with Bonifacio and Joseph to discuss the subject.

The meeting took place in the evening hours, in the restaurant of Judith Friedman, Joseph Levy's wife. An excellent seafood establishment called *El Rincón del Bucanero*, located in the upper part of Barranquilla, very close to the *Buena Vista Shopping Center*.

They were served directly by Judith, who recommended the day's specials: Crab au gratin on steamed vegetables for Bonifacio, an assorted seafood casserole with wild rice for Akram, and a mixed ceviche with leche de tigre for Joseph. For pairing, they ordered a bottle of Marqués de Riscal white wine.

After dinner and having touched on various day-to-day topics about their respective businesses, they proceeded to get down to business.

Akram Abushihab began:

"Many years ago, and many months after his death, I learned from an old magazine that my beloved brother Abdulah Abushihab died in the *Yom Kippur War*. For this reason, I have a special interest in knowing the details of what happened in our country at that time. At that time, I had already been living in Bogotá for many years and I was never able to learn about the situation. I would love to learn more about it."

"Look Akram," said Joseph, "In order to talk about the *Yom Kippur War*, it is necessary to review its background."

"It all goes back to six years earlier, in 1967, during the *Six Day War* and Israel's triumph over the Arab countries. In that confrontation, the defeated countries lost part of their territories which came under Israeli control. This was practically impossible for them to accept, as it inflicted a very deep wound on their honor. From that day in 1967, the Arab countries began preparing to attack Israel again soon, but this time, better prepared."

Joseph continued his explanation:

"Delving into the background of the conflict, we cannot fail to mention the influence of the Soviet Union in the Arab countries. The USSR supplied them with war material and heavy equipment, while, on the other hand, the United States supported Israel fully with military support. Israel already had a strong military and aviation industry, bolstered by technological assistance from the United States, allowing it to equip itself directly."

"Having established the background of the conflict," said Joseph, "we can continue with what happened in the *Yom Kippur War*."

After the end of the Six-Day War, recognizing the fragility of the new border between Israel and Egypt in the Sinai Peninsula, which extended to the shore of the Suez Canal as a natural border, Israel undertook a monumental civil engineering project: the creation of the famous Bar Lev Line. This fortification ran along the coast of the Suez Canal, featuring a sand wall that averaged 25 meters in height, with a slope between 45° and 60°, and a trench considered the best anti-tank ditch of its time. Additionally, thirty-five well-armed fortifications were established along the line to defend Israel's border.

Yom Kippur War in the Sinai:

Joseph continued: "We come to October 6th, 1973, in the middle of *Yom Kippur*, when, without warning, the Egyptian air force launched an air strike against Israel's defense forces in the Sinai. This was followed by a heavy artillery barrage, piercing the sky as a prelude to what was to come. The Egyptian forces attacked Israeli military bases and checkpoints along the *Bar Lev Line,* catching the Israeli forces off guard and initiating a fierce and pivotal conflict.'

"The Egyptian army then spread a dense smoke screen over the entire Suez Canal area, concealing the Egyptian military operations. First, using light lifeboats, the Egyptian forces transported high-pressure water cannons to the east bank of the Canal, in the Israeli zone. They began to demolish the sand wall built by the Israelis. Under the cover of smoke, they then laid floating bridges of Soviet manufacture, enabling them to cross the canal with tanks and war materials. At ten points along the canal simultaneously, they transported their entire arsenal into Israeli territory, penetrating deep into the Sinai Peninsula."

"However, the Egyptians did not dare to go very far into the Sinai territory, as long as they were not under the protection of their artillery, stationed on the west bank of the Suez Canal."

Joseph continued:

"Taken by surprise, on the day of their holiest holiday, *Yom Kippur*, the Israelis were overwhelmed by the situation. However, the authorities' appeal to the population through radio messages paid off. Reservists were called up and, without even having had time for basic training, went straight to the front lines.

In addition to the above, and given the urgency of the government's calls, the civilian population mobilized almost in its entirety, composed not only of adults but also of women, adolescents and the elderly, who took up arms and went to the frontlines. Even disabled people showed up to help. Those who

could still drive used their private vehicles to transport necessary supplies to the front. Others assisted in preparing medical supplies such as gauze and antiseptic compresses for the care of the wounded."

"It is worth mentioning that in Israel military service is compulsory for both men and women, hence almost the entire population of the country is well prepared in the event of a confrontation.

In the Six-Day War, the strength of the Israeli attack had been led by its air force. However, in the *Yom Kippur War,* the initial days were marked by a significant drawback: the lack of the surprise factor. Additionally, the dangerous presence of SAM-type surface-to-air missiles, specifically the Russian S-350 Vityaz supplied by the Soviet Union to Egypt, severely limited the operability of the Israeli planes."

Joseph continued:

"A U.S. call for a cease-fire was rejected by Egyptian President *Anwar El-Sadat.* In the background of this confrontation was the interest of both the Soviet Union and the United States to prove the effectiveness of their respective weapons and demonstrate their hegemony over the opposing forces.

An air bridge with war supplies from the Soviets reached Egypt and Syria. Likewise, many military weapons began to arrive in Israel, supplied by the United States, achieving a balance of forces, although the predominance of American weapons was clear."

"The first positive skirmish for Israel's army came when fourteen Egyptian helicopters were shot down in the southern Sinai Peninsula; this served to lift Israel's spirits.

Strengthened, the Israelis began a gigantic counterattack against Egypt, penetrating the territory of the Sinai Peninsula, but now in the opposite direction, that is, eastward, even

entering Egyptian territory, crossing the Suez Canal itself from the south and attacking the Egyptian bases in their own backyard, and directing their forces towards Cairo, the Egyptian capital."

"At that time a meeting of the *United Nations Security Council took place*, where Resolution No. 338 was approved, requesting a cease-fire, with the joint signature of the United States and the Soviet Union. This resolution was to enter into force on October 23rd at 6:52 pm. However, by nightfall, the actions between Israel and Egypt had not stopped.

On the one hand, a few moments before the cease-fire, the Egyptian army decided to test, for the first time, the *Scud* type missiles (Russian version of the R-11), supplied by the Soviet Union, against Israeli army positions in some cities such as the port of *Arish* and other strategic sites. In turn, the Israeli army, having a very advantageous position, decided to isolate, attack and destroy the Egyptian Third Army in the South of Suez, and did not intend to stop, under the pretext of answering the Egyptian attack with *Scud* missiles."

"While accusations were being made by both sides for violating the cease-fire, the Israeli army managed to totally isolate the Egyptian Third Army, separating it from the main forces of the Second Army. This action against the Third Army was highly risky, threatening regional peace, and neither the United States nor the Soviet Union could allow it. Consequently, the United States pressured Israel to withdraw to previous positions. While this was not entirely achieved, the siege against the Third Army was loosened. By October 28, the cease-fire finally came into effect, though sporadic firing continued until it ended definitively around January 18, 1974."

Joseph continued his explanations:

"Following the cease-fire, talks began to reach a lasting peace between Israel and Egypt. It was clear that Israel had a greater military build-up than its neighbors, but it was not able to secure permanent control of the region, let alone totally dominate its enemies. For this reason, battles and skirmishes would continue to occur frequently until peace was secured through the signing of an agreement. This led to the *Camp David Accords*, when Egyptian President Anwar El-Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Beguin met in the United States on September 17, 1978, under the guarantee of Jimmy Carter, President of the United States."

Joseph continued with his explanation of the facts.

"After this agreement was reached, Israel returned to Egypt all the territory of the Sinai Peninsula, which had been occupied by Israel since the Six-Day War, and withdrew from the Gaza Strip, leaving it in the hands of the Palestinian people. In turn, Egypt committed to maintaining a lasting peace with its neighbor Israel. Consequently, Egypt began to move politically closer to the United States, while distancing itself from the Soviet Union's sphere of influence.

As a consequence of the Camp David Accords and a subsequent armistice between Israel and Jordan, who had been defeated in the Six-Day War, both nations reached a secret and tacit agreement not to confront each other during the Yom Kippur War and in successive skirmishes. Finally, 20 years later, on October 26, 1994, an agreement was signed between Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Jordanian Prime Minister Abdelsalam al-Majali, representing King Hussein I. This agreement, endorsed by U.S. President Bill Clinton, guaranteed peace between the Kingdom of Jordan and the State of Israel.

The points of this agreement were contained in the following topics:

1. Free mobility of nationals of both nations,
2. Security in their regions,
3. Yom Kippur War in the Golan Heights.

Joseph Levy continued to speak:

"Now we must refer to the second part of the Arab attack against Israel. In this case on the northeastern front, by the Syrian military forces."

"Going back to the beginning of the Yom Kippur War, at the same time as Egypt's attack on Israel in the Sinai, a massive tank assault began from Syria against the Israeli border in the Golan Heights in the northeast. This attack took Israel almost by surprise, as the country was celebrating the Yom Kippur holiday on that day.

The force deployed by Syria was disproportionate to the weak presence of Israel's defense force: 28,000 Syrian soldiers, 100 aircraft, 600 artillery pieces and 800 Soviet-made tanks, compared to Israel's force of 3,000 soldiers, 180 tanks and some 60 artillery units. These Israeli forces were tasked with defending the northeastern border and protecting the highly threatened cities of Tiberias, Safed, Haifa, and Netanya. If the Israelis had ceded their position of predominance in the *Golan Heights,* these cities would have been at great risk of destruction."

"The attack began with an aerial deployment against the Israeli forces, with the attack of 100 Syrian aircraft and a terrible artillery barrage that lasted 50 minutes uninterrupted. Then came the advance of the engineering teams, tasked with covering and securing the advance of the Syrian armored vehicles. They worked on the anti-tank trenches prepared by the Israelis, making them passable to facilitate the attack of the Syrian tanks into the Golan Heights territory. Their objective was to displace the Israeli forces from their strategic positions."

"Hundreds of tanks then began to attack the Israeli positions and were repulsed by them in an incipient manner. The Israeli forces defended their positions heroically, while reinforcements from Israeli reserve units were arriving."

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At that moment Joseph paused to ask for a glass of water because his throat was dry. The others took it as an opportunity to stop for a moment and stretch their legs.

Joseph then continued:

"At that time, everything suggested that the Israelis would lose the war. The Syrians expected that it would take 24 hours for Israel's reserves to take up positions. However, after only 15 hours, the reserves with thousands of Israeli soldiers began to arrive on the battlefield to defend their territory, taking the Syrians by surprise."

"At the beginning of this war, the Israeli air force had lost 40 aircraft. However, they soon adapted and took a route through Jordanian airspace to penetrate Syrian territory, attacking the Syrian army from the flanks. This maneuver was unexpected by the Syrians.

Then, over the course of the next few days, there were frequent attacks by the Syrians, defensive actions by the Israelis, huge casualties on both sides, and finally, a stalemate situation where the Syrians failed to achieve their goal of dislodging the Israelis from the *Golan Heights."*

"However, after the first few days, the situation changed radically. Israeli forces took the initiative in counterattacking Syria on its own territory, including aerial bombardments of some Syrian cities and devastating artillery attacks. The Israeli advance managed to penetrate Syrian territory up to 40

kilometers from Damascus, endangering the capital, to the horror of the Syrians.

With the arrival of the *ceasefire order* by the United Nations on October 24th and the withdrawal of the Israeli forces from the Sinai Peninsula at the beginning of the armistice with Egypt, Syria found itself exposed to the full force of Israel, which no longer had to divide its attention between the Sinai and Golan fronts. Realizing the risk of facing the undivided Israeli military, Syria decided to abide by the ceasefire order to avoid the precarious situation."

"And that was it. That was the Yom Kippur War of 1973," Joseph concluded.

Bonifacio intervened to comment:

"Thank you, Joseph. However, Akram, in closing, this is a very brief summary of what happened in the *Yom Kippur War*. If you want to delve deeper into the subject, you can find a much more complete explanation on Wikipedia at the following internet link.

https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerra_de_Yom_Kipur

— O –

Chapter 28.
A life without horizon

Gaza Strip
(Palestine)

Such had been Khaled Abushihab's daily life for the past fifteen years:

Lost, without family, job, shelter or food, wandering the streets with no destination or horizon in sight, even if it was far away. He owned nothing but his violin, which he cared for with his life.

Perhaps a trash can was the only image of opportunity, the disheartening chance to find something of nutritional value to get through another night without having to sleep again on an empty stomach.

His strength was waning as the days by without finding a solution to his most basic needs. A plate of food in his hand, a coat for winter, a roof over his head to spend the night, or even a fleeting chance to dream that maybe, one day, he could escape the hell that was the *Jabalia Refugee Camp* in the northern Gaza Strip.

He watched the children in the streets, with their powdered sandals, or without them, playing with a deflated ball. They dreamed that one day they might see *Maradona*, hoping that luck would allow them to glimpse a match on a hidden television set in the corner of collapsed compound in the middle of the chaos that was the Palestinian sector of Gaza.

The streets, devoid of pavement and riddled with scattered bricks and masonry, featured sloping roofs on the verge of collapsing and blocking the passage of vehicles. Old

buildings, pockmarked by metallic ammunition, had walls filled with holes.

So many conflicts, so many bullets, so many warheads, so many interests, so much accumulated evil, so much hatred between neighboring brothers, and so many differences of ethnicity and religious beliefs—all separated by an infamous wall that sought to create borders. These borders were disrespected by missiles that did not recognize them, crossing over with the murderous aim of causing harm on both sides.

Battered vehicles passed by their old dents and banged-up tin cans displayed like trophies of their countless battles on the cobblestone streets. It was virtually impossible not to crash or at least scrape another vehicle while navigating the narrow, cramped, poverty-stricken streets.

Poverty... a word that had lost its necessity. True poverty could only be conceived by comparing it with a world of wealth, but here, it was not poverty; it was just the usual daily routine. Life passed by with no way to compare it to anything other than another example of similar poverty.

And when the military vehicles of the Zionist enemies passed by, one could not compare with them because they were so strange, like aliens coming from another galaxy, trying to bring order to what had no chance of becoming organized.

That was a surreal chaos that seemed to have been born from the beginning of time, from the farthest reaches of the ancient word, back when the Old Testament was written. Perhaps it began when Adam was born, or even at the moment of the very creation of the cosmos when everything started from chaos and began to become organized. Except in that place, thrown into a forgotten corner of the planet, in that blunt and impoverished reality called the Gaza Strip in Palestine.

There lived, barely surviving, Khaled Abushihab, a Palestinian orphan. Homeless and without a future, he had no

way to escape from that hell of conflicts and terrors—realities impossible for a sane mind to fully comprehend.

The painful refugee camp of *Jabalia*, where Khaled lived, was a consequence of the so-called Arab-Israeli War, which began in May 1948 and is also known as the *Israeli War of Independence*. This conflict led to the forced exile of Palestinian settlers, who were removed from their lands and homes and pushed into the uncertainty of having to survive in unbearable precariousness, without any future or hope. This situation, referred to by Palestinians as NAKBA, signifies the catastrophe of their forced exile when they were expelled from their lands.

In the peace forums, the Palestinian right to return to their lands was mentioned, but this went against the logic of the Israelis who said that, if they allowed such a return, the Arab population in Palestine would become a majority and Israel would lose preponderance in the region, so this should not be allowed, according to them.

However one looked at it, it was impossible for Khaled to think about political issues, when his reality was not a political one but one of blatant survival. He was reaching the point of perhaps dying for lack of food. His possibilities had already been exhausted.

To complete and even worse, was the situation of street skirmishes in those days, with what they called the *Intifadah*, a form of rebellion of the Palestinian population against Israel, which made it even more difficult for Khaled to take action to get food and a roof over his head. Those were days of terrible confrontations between Palestinians and Israelis and the consequent repression by the latter.

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Chapter 29.
The Intifada

Present time:

Gathered again, this time at the bar of the Hilton Hotel in Cartagena, were Bonifacio Bonfante, Joseph Levy and Akram Abushihab. They had met in this city for business reasons and were now accompanied by a few good beers to distract their palates from the flavors and fumes of the hot climate. It was the middle of the year, and the heat was at its peak.

After the usual greetings and the recounting of everyone's daily lives, Bonifacio Bonfante took the floor to touch on a topic that was missing:

"It is necessary to refer to some conflicts that eventually exceed, in number of deaths, those of the above-mentioned wars, and these are the two Intifadas*, which* occurred in more recent times."

At that moment Akram interrupted to comment: "Oh, I know a lot about them."

"Well Akram," said Joseph, "then could you explain to us better what an *intifada* is?"

"Yes of course," Akram answered, "it was the total upheaval of the Palestinians rebelling against the Hebrew establishment in Israel. They called it *the Intifada*, and it was the transgression of everything established by the mandate of the Israelis, which meant stirring up the atmosphere and transgressing the imposed laws and norms, trying to generate chaos in Israel, in a rebellion that started from the *Gaza Strip* and the *West Bank*."

"The Palestinians' objective was either to attack the territory of Israel to create mayhem, or perhaps to pursue a

greater goal: the destruction of the State of Israel, by any means available, including weapons like stones. Beyond the political background, there was an underlying motive for the more radical extremists: religious discord. The Islamists sought to eliminate the Jews and their religion by any means they could."

Akram continued with his explanations.

"Let's talk about the two major *Intifadas* that have occurred in recent years:

The First Intifada occurred between 1987 and 1993 and was called *the War of Stones*. However, the reality was more complex, since it meant that the Palestinian rebels attacked the Israeli army with stones, sticks and other blunt objects, and the Israeli army responded with firearms, killing more than 3,000 Palestinians. This rebellion lasted several years and ended with the signing of the *Oslo* Accords (September 13, 1993), and the creation of the *Palestinian National Authority,* a provisional and autonomous government for the areas established for Palestine, although this agreement and this authority was never accepted by the extremist Palestinian group *Hamas*."

Akram continued:

"The Second Intifada, or *Al-Aqsa Intifada,* occurred in 2000 and began as a protest by Palestinian Muslims against the visit of the Hebrew leader Ariel Sharon to *the Dome of the Rock* and the *Al-Aqsa Mosque* in Jerusalem, acts that were considered a very serious offense by the Muslims. At the beginning there was a Palestinian rocket attack against the Israeli forces of law and order. This was followed by a large stone-throwing attack by Palestinian youths against Jewish worshippers praying in front of the Western *Wall.* The Israeli police responded to these attacks with firearms, killing several Palestinians (about 8 youths).

This meant the generalized rebellion of the Palestinians, indiscriminately attacking Jewish settlers, in shopping malls,

transport stations, restaurants and any public place. The consequence was the Israeli policy of surrounding and isolating the areas where Palestinians lived, creating real ghettos and further discrimination. The worst part of this isolation took place in the *Gaza Strip*. In this *Second Intifada* about 5,000 Palestinians and 1,000 Jews were killed and it lasted from September 2000 to February 2005."

"There is so much that I can tell you about the Intifadas. But this in short summarizes everything," said Akram.

"Well, thank you very much for your explanation, dear Akram," said Bonifacio.

"Yes, Akram, thank you very much," said Joseph.

"But before we go," said Akram, "I want to thank you for all the information you have given me so far, it has been very valuable to me."

— O —

Chapter 30.
An unexpected development

Gaza Strip, Palestine.

They were in the town of *Bait Hanun*, in the *Gaza Strip*, Palestinian territory.

It was 1992, the white pennants, with the blue Star of David in the middle of two equally blue horizontal bars, swayed in the wind on the sides of the hood as the Israeli army truck M-462 sped by. It transported a platoon of 13 soldiers under the command of Lieutenant Myriam Kravitz, daughter of Isaak Kravitz and Sarah Weissenberg.

She was an experienced soldier who had served multiple tours of duty in the *Intifada* war in the Middle East between 1987 and 1993.

Myriam Kravitz, whose ancestral name meant "rebelliousness", was a beautiful young woman in her early twenties. Lieutenant Myriam Kravitz was of medium height, with ash-blonde hair and a very light olive complexion, slightly tanned by long days spent outdoors. She lived in Kibbutz Shefayim, located 17 kilometers from Tel Aviv in central Israel, where she engaged in agricultural work typical of that community when she was not on military duty.

She had a very atavistic and long aquiline nose, well-proportioned to the structure of her face, along with the same blue, direct, and cold gaze that mirrored her father's. There was not the slightest trace of fear in her expression. Myriam was well-accustomed to the vicissitudes of war, her strengths honed by working in the fields. She knew how to act with certainty and security whenever an urgent situation demanded it.

It was a time of war, and everything happened suddenly. An explosion, an attack, a terrifying unexpected blast or a Palestinian suicide bomber ready to take as many lives as possible to the next world could occur at any moment. On the other hand, any slightest hint of danger, however false and unjustified, served as a pretext to open fire and exterminate the enemy.

Everyone, Israelis or Arabs, believed they were right from their points of view; half-truths were reason enough and everyone wielded a huge stock of rich arguments to justify their political position against the other side.

But from a hypothetical angle where the presence of Universal Consciousness and true sanity would shine through, none of them had any reason or justification for their warlike actions.

One day it happened that Myriam caught sight of him, but she could have expected anything. Perhaps he was an enemy.

In the distance, amid clouds of dust stirred up by the warm afternoon breeze, there appeared an almost spectral figure in the middle of the dusty, debris-strewn street. He moved with some difficulty, limping on his right side. Generous in stature, he had the appearance of a sickly caricature from a fairy tale, reminiscent of a lanky *Pied Piper of Hamelin.* He seemed to have escaped on the sly, without permission or discharge, from a charity hospital, passing unnoticed like a fleeting, imperceptible breath.

Dry, with visible bones and a rickety complexion yet fibrous from having no flesh—only bones wrapped in fragile muscles long forgotten by philanthropy. He had sharp features, a wide nose, and cheekbones sunken from enduring hunger. His minimal waist demonstrated the ancient and persistent precariousness he lived in. His legs were as thin as javelins, driving into the ground with each step, though very long

compared to his waist and trunk size. Light-skinned, with a complexion not naturally tanned but burned by the relentless sun—not from field sports or outdoor physical work, but from walking endlessly, trying to earn some meager handout from a stranger or acquaintance who might hire him for poorly paid domestic work. More often, he simply wandered, rummaging through dunghills to find scraps to stave off his hunger.

It could be decided that he was a failure in almost all his attempts to set out on his own paths. He had been a bad student, a bad employee, a bad manager, and according to some misguided people, a good-for-nothing—except when it came to loving his fellow man and enthusiastically cheering up gatherings of friends. This was how he had been fifteen years ago when his family and friends helped him with the expenses of survival.

In those days he lived in a precarious but dignified situation, with the minimum to barely subsist, but never lacking anything important; now everything had changed.

His main banner, which he raised with fantastic boastfulness, and which served as his business card in those distant times of informal gatherings, was his charm and bright smile. With great skill, he managed to steal the attention of those present and won the affection of all. He was always aware of their affairs, problems, troubles, and innermost secrets, and he was always available to help, even when he himself had nothing. Despite his own hardships, he had a strange characteristic: he never abandoned his *Stradivarius* violin, even in the worst of times.

Now, in times of war and *intifada*, many of his friends were either dead or on the run. He, however, had failed to raise the necessary money to escape far enough to avoid the presence of war and misery. As a result, he languished in hunger and helplessness. Yet, he held fast to the promise made during his

father's last moments, amidst the bloodshed: He would not harbor hatred or seek revenge against anyone in his heart.

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That day the soldiers led him up against the wall for the routine search, complying with the peremptory order of Lieutenant Myriam Kravitz.

Without intending to get involved with a stranger, let alone a Palestinian, she noticed that up close he was much younger than he appeared from afar, with attractive masculine features and a pleasant countenance. As he was being searched, he looked her straight in the eye. He said something to her with a deep and silent look, something that she could not decipher at first. It did not contain hatred or rancor. As she pondered, it seemed to her that his gaze carried a message of understanding between human beings, who, in spite of the enormous political, ethnic and religious differences, were still brothers and sisters.

That look touched some deep fiber in her soul and a slight and high vibratory frequency resonated in her entrails. But, accustomed to hiding her feelings, she immediately masked them and resumed the cold gaze of a soldier with the authority of a lieutenant. She continued to fulfill her mission with unwavering responsibility.

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Chapter 31.
The First Violin

Many months passed, perhaps even a couple of years, and the last days of the conflict arrived, almost heralding an incipient peace to come. Myriam Kravitz was still in the service, now with the rank of captain, and this time she met him again.

It was a routine service day, and she was passing through a suburban neighborhood in the Gaza Strip, in the twilight of a forgotten alley.

She recognized him. She remembered him. She found him fallen, half dying, in a closed alley where his strength had left him, for lack of food and hope. However, he held firmly to his violin, as if his life and uncertain future depended on it. For him, losing his life was less important than losing his violin.

Myriam knelt to listen to his condition. He was still breathing, still alive, and in that instant, she found a glimmer of hope in the dying man's eyes.

Without being able to mutter a word, he was crying out for help with his eyes. Something in his expression told her that she was his salvation, and she sensed it too. He was Palestinian and she was Israeli, but in that moment, what did it matter?

She could not leave him there to the fate of certain death. So, she decided to help him, even if it was contrary to the *"every man for himself"* mentality that so many others adopted in times of war.

With the help of the soldiers who accompanied her, she took him home with some difficulty; she fed him, cleaned him and gave him rest. She had to seek the assistance of an internist and a nutritionist because the physical deterioration from so

many days without food and shelter had undermined his existence, both physically and emotionally.

Those were many days in which he slept and slept, almost unconscious, or rather it seemed a deep coma, not induced but natural. During this time, his mind and his soul were slowly being repaired. The emotional fabric essential to justify a reason to live was being reconstructed, bit by bit.

The recovery was slow, like a stealthy step between an almost assured death and the return to life and reality. It took almost a month and seventeen days of patience to recover. The most difficult thing to heal was the emotional wound, which required love and understanding —something very difficult to find amid a crisis of conscience, where everyone fought for their own survival, often at the expense of others' misery.

But Myriam persisted in her efforts to save the ragged incognito. Yes, Myriam Kravitz, the soldier, the captain of the Israeli army, the one with the cold blue gaze. She had found in a hidden corner of her conscience, a light of compassion and love for a stranger, and there arose a ray of hope. A beautiful hymn to hope and to life.

Early one morning, the sun rose —radiant and full of good omens. It was a sight rarely seen, as the war had raged on for several years, and the sun had not shone so brightly in a long time.

Myriam woke up pleasantly startled. Soft, beautiful violin chords were coming from the room where the once-dying man lay, and she was ecstatic.

She learned that the young Arab was named Khaled Abushihab, of Palestinian origin. He was an orphan. His relatives, if they were still alive, had emigrated to South America, and those who had not emigrated had died. He was thirty-four years old; he had learned to play the violin without having received a single music lesson.

"But that has to be done," thought Myriam, "professional studies are mandatory if you want to perfect your art."

* * *

As time went by, Myriam gave him the necessary money to take private lessons with Daniel Barenboim, a famous pianist, professor and orchestra conductor who holds four nationalities simultaneously: Argentine, Israeli, Spanish and Palestinian.

After some time, Khaled auditioned at the *Ron Shulamit Conservatory* in Tel Aviv, where he was admitted for his musical career, among a very large group of applicants and very few spots available.

He spent countless hours practicing and practicing, time which turned into months and then years. Several arduous years of study without rest, striving for the exact sound, seeking perfection. He had to overcome the frustration and disenchantment of the false note, which always seemed to lurk like a hidden enemy behind every effort to reach the longed-for achievement.

But, little by little, over the years, the long-awaited mastery, almost always elusive, arrived. Khaled's undergraduate studies lasted five years. In the meantime, he worked in a bar in Tel Aviv, playing in the evenings with a jazz band from 7:00 to 11:00 pm, earning enough money to support himself adequately. He also played with a chamber music group, performing at public events and family gatherings, where they played classical music compositions.

Khaled had always felt strongly attracted to Myriam Kravitz but had not dared to verbally express his immense love for her. However, with time, their relationship became stronger.

They lived in the same neighborhood, very close to each other. They went to the movies, to the park, in their free time they went out to eat and on Sunday afternoons, they watched movies together and ate ice cream with popcorn.

Little by little, their amorous intentions began to show more clearly, especially from that day when, arriving late from a jazz music event, Khaled realized he had lost the keys to his residence, and it was too late to call a locksmith. He asked Myriam for help, requesting to spend the night in her apartment.

Khaled arrived practically frozen, sneezing and coughing. Outside the temperature was 2 degrees Celsius, but with the breeze and the wind chill, it was about 3 degrees below zero. Myriam offered him the sofa and soft blankets so that he could feel at home.

"Are you over the cold?" asked Myriam shortly after.

"No, not at all, I'm still frozen and I can hardly feel my feet or hands," he replied.

At around 2:45 a.m., Myriam could hear Khaled's coughs. She could sense that he was still awake and that his body was shivering on the couch, signaling that he had not been able to fall asleep despite the hour.

To Khaled's great surprise, he heard her softly say,

"Move over! I'm going to lie down with you so you can warm up. Take off all your clothes; you'll warm up faster." His heart raced as he followed her instructions, the tension between them palpable. Without waiting for an answer, Myriam settled down next to him, wrapping him in her arms. The closeness and warmth of her embrace chased away the cold, and as their bodies pressed together, the unspoken attraction between them simmered, finally blossoming into something deeper.

Thus embraced, their legs, arms and bodies intertwined, they were getting warm, and a wave of mutual tenderness enveloped them. Khaled's happiness and emotion almost made it difficult for him to breathe; the sensation was so strong that his heart skipped a beat. He fell asleep in her arms, though several times he woke up again, feeling a profound gratitude to life that was finally smiling upon him.

In the following days it was impossible for Khaled to separate from his mind the scenes and sensations he had experienced with Myriam. He could not put aside that amazing thought: He had spent the night with an Israeli woman, while he was Palestinian. A total contradiction and a strangeness of life.

They began to fall in love with each other and grew closer as the days went by. Secretly, they had already spent a few nights together in one of their apartments, either hers or his. However, their love affair remained clandestine due to the difficult cultural repercussions of Palestinian-Israeli relations in that country.

Khaled entered a language school to learn English, a language that Myriam was fluent in. She had studied Marketing at Tel Aviv University and was interested in pursuing her graduate studies abroad.

Once he finished his musical undergraduate studies, Khaled applied for a scholarship abroad, and having stood out among his professors as a musician with a bright future, he was awarded a scholarship for his graduate studies at *Berklee College of Music*, in Boston, Massachusetts. Khaled's smile was still his best calling card to open all doors, and his talent and career as a musician complemented his good star.

Myriam, on the other hand, got a credit to continue her studies with an MBA at *Boston University* around the same time and together they traveled and settled in a beautiful and cozy apartment on *Massachusetts Avenue* in Cambridge.

Myriam Kravitz stood out as a respected professional given her talent and dedication, and additionally earned a scholarship for a doctorate, and two years later graduated with honors.

Upon completion of her studies, Myriam was immediately contacted by Amazon to work in New York in a high-level executive position.

For Khaled, now in the United States, the arduous and endless days of practicing music for weeks and months, tirelessly working with his violin and seeking the utmost perfection, no longer felt like a sacrifice. Instead, they were a blessing, the fulfillment of his most cherished dream: being happy with what he was doing.

Shortly thereafter, after a grueling audition, he was accepted into the *Boston Pops Orchestra*, where he worked for two years. Sometime later, he also played with the *New York Philharmonic Orchestra*. Finally, given his high academic performance, and his outstanding professional level, he was nominated by the University to join the *National Symphony Orchestra of Washington DC*.

Khaled and Myriam were married in a notary's office under the laws of the State of New York in 2004, being officially residents of the United States.

Eight years went by, and life brought more and more smiles.

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Year 2015

One day, in faraway South America, on 11th Street and 9th Street, in Bogotá, at the cloth and loom store of an old and dear Palestinian, a letter arrived, it had been left under the door. The letter was addressed to Akram Abushihab and his wife, including the tickets and a few dollars for travel expenses.

They were being invited to a concert of his only surviving nephew in the United States. A surprise for him, since he had thought him dead for many years. The return address on the envelope indicated a person, a woman, a Myriam Kravitz.

It was a funny thing, Akram thought, because it was an Israeli name and he didn't know anyone in Israel anymore.

* * *

Shortly thereafter, on a night of conflicting destinies and of certain response by a just Universal Consciousness, at the famous *Kennedy Center in Washington.* As part of the customary ritual at the end of a flawlessly executed concert, a young man of middle age with light wheat-colored skin stood up. Tall and lanky as a cypress tree, slender as a marble monument chiseled in honor of perseverance, and languid as if he were a fictional character hidden among the pages of the Thousand and One Nights, Khaled Abushihab, now in his impeccable tuxedo, stood to greet the audience. With a broad smile, he shook hands with the conductor of the orchestra, savoring the moment of his triumph.

It was the famous Russian conductor Mstislav Rostropovich, who, breaking all protocol, pulled him by the hand and gave him the warmest embrace imaginable, amidst the cheers and thunderous applause of a standing audience.

Young Khaled Abushihab had earned the position of First Violin Soloist or Concertmaster of the iconic *Washington DC National Symphony Orchestra.*

In the theater box, Myriam Kravitz could not hold back her tears of emotion as she was embraced by Akram Abushihab and his wife Fadhila Mubarak. Her greatest mission in life—to support Khaled—was fully accomplished.

At the end of the show, a journalist from the audience asked them:

¨Where do you come from? ¨

Myriam Kravitz replied:

¨From Israel...¨

¨And the violinist concertmaster, who, I believe, is a relative of yours, where does he come from?¨

¨Yes," Akram answered, "he also comes from Israel... from Israel and Palestine...

— O -

Epilogue
A gathering of friends

This time they were gathered at the Country Club of Barranquilla. The three good friends—Bonifacio, Joseph Levy, and Akram Abushihab—chatted happily, enjoying their reunion.

They were older adults, not to say very old, but they were in excellent health.

It was as if they had agreed to live for many more years, setting an example of harmony between people of different ethnicities and religions.

Akram had told them the details of his recent trip to the United States to attend the concert of his violinist nephew Khaled Abushihab and to meet his Jewish wife, Myriam Kravitz, an extraordinary woman.

They remembered that Bonifacio had read him that letter in English, which they had slipped under the door of their cloth shop in Bogotá, with the tickets and the money for travel expenses, sent by his nephew's wife from Washington, inviting them to Khaled's concert.

¨About Myriam Kravitz," Akram said, "that woman gets a whole battalion going, no matter the situation or the circumstances. She is an Amazon executive, and it's because of people like her that Amazon is where it is today."

¨I would like to meet her," said Bonifacio.

¨She is also a beautiful woman," said Akram.

Joseph kept cautiously silent, his wife had passed away about three months ago and he was still grieving. However, he enjoyed the company of his children and grandchildren, as well

as his friends, who had taken him in to avoid those discomforts of loneliness that affected his heart.

It was a warm sunset, not too suffocating, and at that time, in the late afternoon, the last light of the sunbathed the scene.

At this point Akram spoke.

¨It is a pity that, life being so beautiful and interesting, there exists in men the tendency to lose themselves in the obscurities of the mind, seeking reasons to harm those they consider enemies simply because of slight differences in religious beliefs or ethnic backgrounds. ¨

¨Differences? If people knew how close we are to monkeys in terms of our genetic characteristics, they would have no problem in fully accepting other human beings, who are much closer to us than monkeys, ¨ added Bonifacio.

¨Well," Joseph said, "but that's the way life will be as long as we reach a higher level of consciousness and understand that we have to transcend those low vibrational frequencies of thought. For the time being, let's enjoy these whiskeys and this sunset. ¨

They then toasted to life, friendship and themselves and continued their chat for a while longer.

* * *

At that moment, during that pleasant meeting of dear friends, with the beautiful sunset brushing the horizon and their iced whiskeys raised high, they could never have imagined what was to come. Just a few years later, on October 7th, 2023, a dark attack by *Hamas* would surprise the people of Israel on an unforgettable morning marked by its tragedy and mercilessness.

This would lead to a fierce retaliation, resulting in the near-total destruction of the Gaza Strip and the deaths of thousands of Palestinians, both terrorists and civilians. The Israeli army aimed to ensure that the *Hamas* terrorist group would never again attempt such an attack against Israel.

* * *

We will never know what Myriam Kravitz, Khaled Abushihab and the three elderly protagonists of the stories contained in this history would think today, but what we do know is that the whole of humanity yearns fervently for the advent of a lasting peace in the Middle East.

End