October's Ashes

Synopsis

by Steve Caplan

On the morning of October 7, 2023, Israeli-American neurophysiologist Yariv Brickman and his wife Orly Mizrachi-Brickman watch in horror as the Hamas massacre unfolds. The violence reverberates through their New York home, igniting old divisions about identity, loyalty, and belonging.

Yariv—a cautious, reflective academic scarred by his IDF service—believes in dialogue and restraint. Orly, the daughter of an Israeli admiral, hardens into fierce nationalism. Their three children reflect that divide in sharply different ways. Ron, twenty-one, leaves his studies to enlist in the IDF; Leora, nineteen, turns her climate activism toward the Palestinian cause and becomes entangled with the People for the Freedom of Palestine (PFP); and Idan, fifteen, the analytical, chess-minded youngest, serves as the quiet stabilizer in a household coming undone.

Two months after the attack, tensions peak. When a Palestinian student disrupts Yariv's lecture with a firecracker, the university places Yariv on leave—an act Orly interprets as cowardice. Her frustration with Yariv's caution drives her toward Benny Natanson, the charismatic new Israeli consulate attaché who once served with Yariv in the tank corps. Their affair becomes both a private rebellion and a judgment on Yariv's restraint.

Meanwhile, Leora's conviction deepens into zeal. Guided by the PFP's magnetic leader Ziyad, she agrees to deliver what she believes are informational pamphlets to Natanson's apartment. Unbeknownst to her, she is carrying a bomb. The explosion kills Orly—who was secretly with Natanson at the time—and leaves Natanson badly injured.

Realizing what has happened, Yariv and Idan act swiftly to protect Leora. Before the FBI can question her, they send her to stay with relatives in Montreal. Ron flies in from Israel soon after, still in basic training, to attend the funeral. Orly's parents, Admiral David Mizrachi and Naomi,

arrive later, their grief deepening the family's turmoil. During the shiva, federal agents arrest Yariv for obstruction of justice after he refuses to disclose Leora's whereabouts.

With Yariv imprisoned and Leora in hiding, the family fractures further. Ron's anger and guilt erupt against his father's silence. Naomi pleads for compassion, while Admiral Mizrachi, though reserved, becomes a quiet presence of dignity and sorrow. Amid the chaos, Idan emerges as the family's anchor—managing the home, handling lawyers, and navigating an adult world of fear and moral ambiguity with unnerving composure.

In Montreal, Leora's idealism curdles into guilt and despair. When the PFP issues a public statement branding her a Mossad agent who planted the bomb to discredit their movement, she finally sees the depth of her manipulation. Encouraged by Idan's steady communication, she decides to return home.

Yariv is released soon after, the charges quietly dropped. The surviving Brickmans gather again in their apartment, grief and uncertainty between them. The war in Gaza continues; hostages remain captive; but within the fractured family, a fragile awareness begins to take shape—that righteousness can blind as surely as hate, and that what once burned in *October's Ashes* can smolder for generations.