

pickup spot. He said he didn't mind taking the bus, but my husband, Shaul, suggested we drive him. I refused, rather childishly, insisting that I needed the car to get to the checkpoint in time for my shift, that it was difficult to reach by public transportation, that he was a big boy now and could take the bus by himself, couldn't he? Adam looked so hurt. And he took the bus to go to war."

Tamir sighs. He starts tapping his hand nervously against the dashboard. *Tap. Tap. Tap.* I want to keep talking. I have thought about this so much that the story comes out automatically, mechanically.

"Three officers came to our house. I heard the doorbell. Shaul and I stared at each other. It rang again. When I opened the door, I just looked at their feet. I knew from their boots that they were coming to tell me that my son was dead. We sat in the living room. The officers were confirming Adam's information with us, but I wasn't listening—physically I think I was unable to hear them. My ears shut off. I refused to listen to what these people had to say. I stared at the painting hanging in our living room, a Gershuni with these thick brushstrokes, a cross in the earth. And then I heard one of them say: 'Sergeant Adam Abramovich.' Shaul corrected him. This was the only time that Shaul spoke when the officers were in the house, so I remember it well. He said: 'No, he's a corporal. He hasn't been promoted to sergeant.' I had no idea what rank our son was. And the officer replied: 'When a soldier falls in the line of duty, he gets promoted automatically. He's a sergeant now.' He said *falls*, not dies. As if Adam had slipped and grazed his knee."

We pass the city of Modi'in-Maccabim-Re'ut, built on the

ruins of Palestinian villages, with its sloping wadis and identical white homes. In half an hour I'll be home. The blood on my face has dried. I touch the wound to feel the stinging again. "Sometimes I wish Adam had never been born." I watch Tamir's face for a reaction. Nothing. My face hurts. My whole body hurts. "What if I had a son who wore overalls and smoked feisels with hash? An artist who didn't go to the army. Someone who grew a beard and squatted in an abandoned building off Allenby Street, and constantly talked about that one time the bouncer let him into the Berghain in Berlin and ate *masabacha* in Abu Hassan every day and tried to speak in Arabic to all the staff. A son who would say things like *The occupation corrupts us*."

Tamir's laugh sounds like a low growl.

"You know the type. Well, Adam wasn't like that. When he was little, he liked building Playmobil cities, with tiny plastic people, always smiling, Swedish cottages and bridges, construction workers and pirates, and a remote-controlled train going in circles. His favorite figurine was a French Revolutionary soldier, with a red jacket and a large black Napoleon hat. He was so serious with those toys. Adam and Shaul would play for hours in his room, making up stories and battles and sieges, two coconspirators planning an elaborate military strategy. A few months after Adam was killed, I caught Shaul playing with his toys. I don't think he saw me watching him. He'd taken the toys down from the attic, where they had been stored for years in a dusty Tupperware box, and he was holding the French Revolutionary soldier, Adam's favorite, and then he cleaned it with his shirt sleeve and put it in his pocket."

Creedence Clearwater Revival on the radio, "Have You

Ever Seen the Rain?" This land hasn't seen rain for a long time. There will never be enough rain. I want to feel clean, to think simply. Everything here sticks to you, dirtying you. Suddenly I feel very old. I want to be home, in my bed, not on this empty highway with this soldier who reminds me so much of Adam.

"You know," I say, "when David Grossman gave a speech calling for a cease-fire in Lebanon? Writers and intellectuals were gathering, protesting in Rabin Square. Grossman demanded an end to the bloodshed. His son, Uri, was among the soldiers fighting. Three days later Uri was killed in action. The following morning a cease-fire agreement was reached. I remember watching on TV, Grossman standing over Uri's grave in Mount Herzl. I listened to the eulogy, thinking I can't imagine what he feels like, what it would feel like to lose your son.

"Eight years later I knew exactly what he was feeling. I remember he had said, *Every thought begins with no. No more coming home to you, no more talking to you, no more laughing with you. This is a war we have already lost. As a family.* You know, most days I don't feel like getting out of bed. I just lie there. But I have a daughter, too. My Yaeli. When Grossman told his daughter that her brother was killed, she sobbed at first. Then she said, *But we will live, right? We will live and trek like before, and I want to learn how to play the guitar.* Grossman hugged his daughter and told her, *We will live.* When my daughter, Yaeli, asked me the same question, I couldn't answer her."

We turn off of Highway 1 to Ayalon Freeway, at the La-Guardia Interchange, and suddenly we've reached Tel Aviv, the monstrosity of its three Azrieli towers, and to my left the Sarona market, all fancy shops and swanky restaurants, and right

in the middle of the city sits the Kirya military base with its barbed wire and tall fences, and we turn from Kaplan onto Ibn Gabirol, then down the quiet, tree-lined boulevard, and finally we get to Dubnov Street, to my home overlooking the public garden, where all the children are running around and crying in the colorful playground, and the pretty young mothers, rolled-up yoga mats tucked under their arms, chat to one another, and all is well, and for a moment, when I go up the three flights of stairs and unlock my front door, and walk down the cool, carpeted hallway leading to the living room, past the Gershuni painting and the spacious windows and tall bookcases and pale white orchids and bright healthy succulents, fleshy green leaves spiraling forever inward, I forget that Adam won't be there.