"Why isn't she at school? *Madrassah, madrassah,*" the soldier says.

"*Madrassah,*" repeats the father, nodding his head eagerly.

"She's going to school," I say.

"I didn't ask you. Stop talking."

I don't say anything further because I don't want the soldier to punish them if I do. I look at the ground. *Let them pass, please, she needs to go to school.*

"*Yalla,* get out of here," the soldier says. He waves them through, and the girl's father nods at me wearily.

"You can't be here," he says, addressing me now, and I notice his *yehida* insignia, the shoulder tag with the sword and olive branch of the District Coordination and Liaison Officer. "This is a military zone."

"I'm not talking to you or to your men. I can be here."

"This area is under my jurisdiction, and I will tell you where you can or cannot be. Anyway, you're wasting your time here."

"As long as these checkpoints exist, I need to be here," I say.

"No. As long as these checkpoints exist, *we* need to be here," he says, gesturing to the other soldiers. "You can be at home making couscous for your kids right now."

I flinch at the word *kids*. Plural.

"You got kids?" the soldier asks.

"Yes."

"They serve?"

"My daughter, Yael, is only twelve years old. My son, Adam, was in Golani."

"And this is what you do? You must hate each other," says the soldier.

"I don't hate you. You're doing your job, I'm doing mine. I'm here to make sure you treat these people fairly. Legally."

"I bet your son hates you. I would, if you were my mother." The soldier returns to monitoring the metal detector, ignoring me now.

I feel so tired suddenly, even though it's not yet eight o'clock, I arrived almost three hours ago. I woke up so early to be here, when it was still dark outside. On the way I was so exhausted, I hardly thought of Adam. Not until I reached the checkpoint. I don't want to wait. I want to leave now, to just get back in my station wagon, the one Shaul and I don't really need anymore, and turn on the AC and drive out of here. My friend Nechama, that seventy-six-year-old firecracker, will come to replace me soon, but I don't have the patience to wait.

The parking lot is far, and the air is so oppressively humid, like a sauna but without any of the fun. Winters at the checkpoint can be tough, too, with the rain and wind and bitter cold seeping into your bones, but there are also moments of strange beauty. I remember, six years ago, there was a heavy snowstorm. Adam was still alive then, the day it snowed at the checkpoint, and the heavy flurry of flakes settled on the concrete wall and the barbed wire, and I watched a bizarre and lighthearted snowball fight between a Palestinian family, a mother and her sons, and two Israeli soldiers.

I watch the long line of people yawning, coughing, spitting, and smoking. It feels as if it has finally caught up to me, all those years of fighting for equal rights for the Palestinians, protesting the evictions in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in East Jerusalem, attending meetings with members of Combatants for Peace, organizing the joint Israeli-Palestinian Memo-

rial Day Ceremony, all for nothing. Most people who are my age are already starting to prepare for their retirement, looking at brochures to go on yacht cruises in the Bahamas, learning to play the mandolin, building model airplanes, or at the very least sitting at home and doing the *Haaretz* crossword, but here I am, arguing with eighteen-year-old soldiers.

I make my way to the parking lot, down the long stretch of empty highway, surrounded on all sides by dry grass and pale, craggy boulders, and it really is all very dramatic, this Promised Land, this so-called Judea and Samaria, with its rolling green hills and ancient olive groves, the chirping of hummingbirds, the gurgle of natural spring waters. There are many things wrong with this country, but its landscape doesn't lack any natural beauty, if we can only keep it that way. Adam was always telling me to appreciate the stark Israeli landscape. I used to love going on hiking trips to the Galilee or the Negev, and Adam and Yaeli would toast marshmallows on our open campfire, and the smoke kept away all the mosquitoes, and I slept so peacefully in my husband's arms, hearing my children breathing right next to me.

After a few minutes of walking rather absentmindedly in the direction of my car, I notice that someone is behind me, the settler from the checkpoint, and that he is singing, in a strangely beautiful and mournful voice, "Hatikvah," our national anthem, which always makes me cringe with its two-thousand-year-old longing for a Jewish homeland. I ignore him, walking purposefully. *Nefesh Yehudi homia.* I'm no longer young, but I do my best to walk quickly, and my hips ache, my back hurts, my shoulders are tense. *Ulefati mizrach kadimah.* The soles of my feet are sore from standing around. *Ein*

*Le Zion Zofia.* My head hurts from being out in the sun, and his booming, thunderous voice, which has the qualities of a *hazzan* cantor, isn't helping with my migraine. *Our hope is not yet lost, the hope that is two thousand years old, to be a free nation in our land, the land of Zion, Jerusalem.*

The settler's words are drawn out, melting into each other like the stream of *El Malei Rachamim,* the prayer Shaul insisted we recite during Adam's funeral. I thought that Yehuda Amichai's ironic version of the prayer for the dead would be more appropriate. *If God was not full of mercy, mercy would have been in the world, not just in Him.* With each repetition of the chorus, the settler gets closer and closer, the more my throat closes up, and the more constricted I feel, as if I am being buried alive. *I, who plucked flowers in the hills, and looked down into all the valleys. I, who brought corpses down from the hills, can tell you that the world is empty of mercy.* I imagine the settler standing over me, reciting a funeral prayer, shoveling dirt until I can't see, can't hear, but still my thoughts keep spinning, spinning in the void. Keep walking, he'll back off at some point, just keep walking.

The settler gets closer and closer, and now I can hear his footsteps behind me, but I keep walking, staring straight ahead. Walk quickly, faster now, faster, but don't run. Running signals that you're scared, that this is actually real and happening. He would never hurt me. He wouldn't dare. The highway is desolate. He could grab me, pull me by my hair, toss me under the shade of an olive tree or leave me out in the blazing sun and do whatever he wanted. I walk faster. He's caught up. He flanks me, pressing in.

I look back. I'm too far from the checkpoint, but I can al-

ready see the parking lot in front of me. The settler starts walking alongside me, his *pe'ot* locks bouncing with each step he takes, and now his steps match mine, we are synchronized, and for some reason, this bothers me more than anything, because I don't want anything in common with this man, not to share the same air, not to eat the same food or drink the same water, not to speak the same language, and not even to walk in the same rhythm as him. That's when I start running.

"Hey, where are you running off to? Gaza is the other way!"

He runs after me. He is overweight but surprisingly quick. He reaches me, pulling me to him by my wrist. I struggle free and push him away.

"Because of you, the brothers of Israel, the sons of Abraham, are being murdered!"

I aim my kick between his legs, but he grabs my foot, seizing my shoe. Momentarily I'm caught off balance, and then he lets go and clutches my arm instead, holding me in place. He is a mountain, a thick big block of a man. I slap him, hard. The sharp crack resounds, startling a pair of small birds to fly away, and everything is silent for a moment. He steps in front of me, blocking my way, and I bump into his chest, which smells surprisingly sweet, like laundry detergent.

"Get out of my way!" I cry.

He presses his fingers into my shoulder. His face is contorted, his hot breath makes me want to vomit. He laughs, flashing his buckteeth. Spittle flies in my face.

"What did you say to me, *shikse*? I am in your way? No. I think you're in my way."

I bite his arm, and he yelps in pain. I seize the opportunity to take out my car keys, the metal sticking out like a knuckle

duster, and try to get away, but his grip is back and stronger than before—his fleshy hands are on my neck. My vision is blurred. Black spots dance in front of me. I raise my hand, clutching the key, and aim for his face, but he hits me above the eye, knocking me down. The impact takes the breath out of me, scratches my cheek. The burning tarmac of the road sticks to the palms of my hand. I can feel blood trickling down my forehead, and I start shaking uncontrollably.

I'm on the ground. I can hear a noise, far away, but getting closer and closer. The roar of an engine. I can make out a military jeep in the distance, a desert-colored Sufa off-road vehicle, speeding this way in a flurry of dust, and for a moment, I think it's not going to stop, and for a split second, I hope it doesn't. Do the soldiers really hate me that much, that they would leave me here? Would they just drive by? Run me over? Would I really care if they did?

The jeep stops with a screech of wheels on dirt, and a soldier jumps out, leaving the engine still running. "*Yalla!* Get out of here!" he says.

From my position on the ground, with the soldier standing over me, his AK-47 hanging off a strap at his side, I notice that between the rubber bands tucking in the pant legs of his uniform and his dusty black combat boots, there is a hint of color, a red sock, which is technically breaking the rules. Only black and gray socks are allowed. This hint of color makes me like him a bit.

The settler, who is standing to my left, frames the other side. He is wearing Shoresh sandals, the straps forming an X below his ankle. He doesn't back down—fearlessly he spits on the ground, very close to me.

They face each other, my body between them, the prize at the end of the fight.

"Go, get out of here!" the soldier says. "Start running!"

The settler doesn't move. Is he carrying a weapon? Most of the settlers are armed nowadays, but because they're Jewish no one thinks of them as terrorists. I can hear the soldier cursing under his breath, and the settler takes a step toward him, and the soldier raises his weapon and shoots a few rounds into the air as a warning. The bullet casings drop all around me, but I can't hear them hit the ground because my ears are ringing, a high-pitched frequency, like the one Adam used to complain about after he went out dancing, standing too close to the speakers in the Block, a techno and house club on Salameh, by the old train station in downtown Tel Aviv.

The settler starts loping away, clumsily, and trips once or twice. I lie there for a moment more, feeling the warm road vibrating against my skin with the rhythm of the jeep's engine, and thinking why it is that I wish the soldier hadn't come. A dull buzzing in my head, but the ringing has stopped. Leave me alone. Let me bleed out, right here on this highway, be found the following morning: *Nurit Abramovich, mother of Adam (1996–2014) and Yael, wife of Shaul. Political activist.* And what else? What have I done that would be worth mentioning? I have sent off my son to be killed in a war I don't believe in, fighting for a government I hate. And I made him feel bad about going to war, as if he even had a choice.

"Hey! Hey, wait a second," the soldier says, as I get up and start heading in the direction of the parking lot. He's speaking, but I can barely hear him even though he is right beside me. It's the same soldier I argued with at the checkpoint, the

District Coordination and Liaison Officer. His face is concerned, like he's helping a grandmother cross the road. Really, that's what I must seem to him, a grandmother. The truth is I'll have to wait awhile until I have grandchildren—Yaeli hasn't even had her first boyfriend yet.

I'm wobbly on my feet. My head is throbbing. I dab my eye with the sleeve of my shirt.

"You're bleeding," the soldier says.

"What?"

"You can hardly stand, you shouldn't be operating a vehicle—"

"I don't have to stand to drive."

We finally reach the parking area. It's not difficult to find the station wagon, since there are only three cars in the entire lot.

"Do you have anyone you can call? Your husband?"

"I don't want to scare him. Besides, this is our only car. No, I'll be fine."

"Wait a second."

He walks a few steps away, making a call. Getting permission, I assume. I want to call Shaul, to tell him everything, to cry into the phone, but I can't.

Ever since Adam died, he's hardly said a word. He's never been the talkative type, but now he's almost completely silent, retreating so far into himself, I'm not sure he knows how to talk anymore, how to move those tired muscles. It's as if his wife and daughter have ceased to exist, and there is only Adam, Adam, Adam.

When Adam was sent to Gaza, Shaul replaced our door. He got the idea from David Grossman's novel *To the End of the*