Land, where a mother is haunted by visions of army officers knocking on her door and bringing her news of the death of her son. If they come to tell me he is dead, I don't want to see their feet in the door, the mother says, and taped a piece of cardboard to block out their boots. Our door, like the fictional mother's, was made of glass. Shaul replaced our glass door with a heavy, dark door, but it still wasn't enough to keep them out—the soldiers can come through any door and tell you that your son is dead.

The soldier will drive me home and take a bus back. It takes less than an hour to get from the checkpoint to my home in Tel Aviv, on Dubnov Street. We leave the military jeep and take my station wagon. I get in the passenger seat. Looking around in the back seat, he finds a sandy towel. He hands it to me, and I touch it to my forehead.

When Adam was very young, he would frequently get high fevers. I remember pressing a cold cloth to his burning forehead. He was shivering. Only a small boy, thin arms, freckled face. I stroked his damp reddish hair.

Ima, Ima, I'm scared.

What are you scared of? It's just a fever.

Ima, am I going to die?

Die? Don't be silly. What nonsense.

"Press on it," the soldier says.

"That's the surest way to get it infected. You know how dirty the sea is?"

I take the towel anyway, so I can cover my face, so he won't be able to see the tears in my eyes. For the longest time, I have been numb. The pain feels good. I am grateful to feel something, anything. The sand sticks to the blood on my face.

"I could have taken care of myself, you know."

"It didn't look like it from where I was standing."

"Well, you were standing far away."

"You're lucky I was taking the jeep for a supply run."

"Yes. Very lucky," I say with a sigh. Even luckier if I was dead on the highway.

He turns on the radio, flicking through channels as if we were two friends going on a road trip, until he settles on Galgalatz, the military broadcast station. They're playing oldies. "You like this kind of stuff, right?"

He is making fun of me, *mistalbet*. "Why? Because I'm old?" But I do like this kind of stuff, he's right.

He shrugs.

Patches of earth, low bushes, dry grass to our sides. Adam would always laugh at my taste in music. *Ima, why do we always have to put on Leonard Cohen? All his songs sound exactly the same. So whiny.* The soldier's left hand is on the steering wheel. His right hand is on his thigh. Thick blue veins. Hairy fingers. The fingernails are chewed off, and gun grease darkens his knuckles. Adam used to bite his nails so fiercely, we had to spread bitter polish on them. I want to pat the soldier's hand, to tell him thank you, but I don't.

I imagine the soldier's body relaxing, just for a second. Just the way my Adam would lounge on the couch when he came back for the weekend. The army had made him silent, more like his father. For brief moments, he would return to his old self. *Ima, make me schnitzel and p'titim. I'm so hungry.* He was like a little boy again. Demanding, childish, pretending to be powerless. Then he would snap to attention. Show no weakness. That's what they teach them.

"Have you got a name?"

"Nurit," I say. "You?"

"I'm Tamir."

"You know, Tamir, I can't imagine how hard it is to do this shitty job if you don't believe you're doing something important, useful."

"It's shitty, all right."

Tamir has long, dark, almost feminine eyelashes. A hint of stubble on his cheeks. He keeps one hand on the wheel, and with the other he undoes the buttons of his uniform, revealing a white shirt and a silver *diskit* dog tag that glints in the sun. He wipes the sweat from his forehead and turns on the AC.

"Where are you from?" I ask.

"Kiryat Ata."

They always send these kids, from places like Kiryat Ata, Ashdod, Netanya, to guard the checkpoints, kids who barely graduated high school, one wrong step away from Ofek Prison, angry kids.

"You said your son was in the Golani Brigade, right?"

"Yes. He fought in Operation Cast Lead."

No reaction. Well, who didn't fight in Gaza? Everyone knows someone who did, especially at his age. Everyone knows someone who knows someone who died. Around the country, those who make it out alive organize half-marathon runs in memory of the dead classmate, the dead friend, the dead son. I think of the military funeral they organized for Adam. The honor guard firing their rifles, the coffin draped in the flag. Sometimes I imagine Adam's funeral as a dance choreographed by Ohad Naharin or Pina Bausch. Darkness onstage, drums beating, then a bright spotlight. *Batsheva* dancers dressed in

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white burial shrouds stand in a semicircle. They shiver and convulse, shaking uncontrollably, as if their bodies are being torn apart. The drum beats faster as they thump their chests and stomp their feet and let out a wail, raising their hands to the heavens in a cry that will go unanswered.

"I mean, I never thought he was a fighter when he was growing up. I thought he would go do intelligence work at 8200, but he had a different plan. He joined a fitness group to prepare. He was never the strongest boy, but he was stubborn. He would get this tremble in his lower lip as a boy. I don't know why I'm telling you this."

Tamir's jawline is hard. I can't imagine his lips trembling. The back of his neck is burnt and peeling from the sun. The AC is working full blast now, and the hairs on his arms are all erect. Over his shoulder, I can see the stone homes of the Palestinian village At-Tira, the mosque tower sticking up like a long pale finger, sheep grazing in fields of tall grass, thorns and brambles growing in patches on the ocher-colored dirt, under a vast, pale blue sky, clouds moving quickly across the horizon.

"I know what you think of me, of what I do. My son also hated my volunteer work at the checkpoint. The night before he left for the operation, I wanted to be sure he knew I loved him even though I didn't support the government or the war he was fighting in."

When I think of Adam's last night at home, I have this claustrophobic feeling, as if everything is closing in on me, and I want to scream, but I can't. I'm like the mouse in Kafka's "A Little Fable." Alas, said the mouse, the world is getting smaller every day. The long walls have grown narrow. I'm running, forever running, toward the trap. You only need to change your

direction, said the cat, and ate it up. But as I'm talking, I feel as if a barrier is being lifted, ever so slightly. There is a small opening, and by talking and talking, maybe I can squeeze through.

"But somehow, instead of telling him I loved him, we had this big argument the night before he left. We were standing in the kitchen—I was making a cup of tea. He told me he was ashamed to tell his friends what I did at the checkpoint. He told me it was hard being my son, that he hated me sometimes. I didn't look at him, but I knew he was crying. I poured the hot water into a mug and let the teabag soak. Then I went to the living room without saying another word to him, without even looking in his direction. Why didn't I at least look at him?"

Tamir stares straight ahead, betraying nothing. The countryside zooms pasts us, in row after row of electricity pylons, and shades of yellow and brown, and the red-roofed homes of the settlement of Beit Horon, where last year a twenty-three-year-old Israeli woman was stabbed in her home by two Palestinians in a deadly terror attack.

"It was just a few days later," I continue, "he was killed. Friendly fire."

I can feel Tamir tense beside me. He turns to look at me, his lips part for a moment, but no sound comes out, then he turns his eyes back to the road, pressing down on the gas pedal and overtaking a green Egged bus.

"I'm sorry," he mumbles.

"And you know the last thing I said to him?"

Tamir shakes his head.

"I was still angry at him from the night before. It was a Sunday, early in the morning, and Adam needed to go to the