

Saturday October 7, 2023

Queens, New York

When Bram unclipped his leash, Harold the Dog ran up the steps to the house. At the top he turned around and started barking as if to tell Bram to move his lazy ass. Inside, he circled the living room and ran into the dining room before charging upstairs to Theo's bedroom. Within a few seconds he slowly made his way back down and followed Bram into the kitchen where he watched him place a coffee pod into its holder, take a dog biscuit out of a box, and toss it to the floor. Without much enthusiasm he gnawed at it as Bram sat down at the table with the *New York Times*. This was the morning routine since Theo left home.

Harold the Dog missed Theo as much as Bram did, maybe more. Liz and Bram had resisted getting a pet, but when Theo was seven years old, he had practically memorized *McDuff Moves In*. Every time the family walked down Austin Street, they had to stop at the pet shop, where Theo would press his face to the storefront and look at the puppies scampering on shredded newspaper. The day he spotted the little West Highland White terrier Bram had to practically unglue him from the window. Later that afternoon Bram went back and brought the puppy home. The terrier jumped into Theo's lap – and that became his happy place forever more. No one could remember how he got the name Harold the Dog; it may have had something to do with the book, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, which was Chrissy's favorite, but whatever, it stuck. And the appendage, 'the dog' always had to be said, thus it became his proper name.

It was early and Bram had planned on driving down to Brighton Beach for what he irreverently called his Shabbat swim, but a hard rain had started. The younger Bram wouldn't have taken that into consideration, but at sixty the idea was less appealing. With no urgency to be anywhere he took the paper into the living room and stretched out on the sofa. Harold the Dog followed and lay down alongside him. The room was neat, with everything in its place, something it rarely was until all three children had moved out. Though it never had a big screen TV or a fancy sound system, it was the center of the house. Whenever their children's friends came over it was where they played games and huddled in groups, laughing and shouting. When they had company, it was where all get-togethers started before moving to the dining room and then back for more spirited and usually humorous conversation. Now, with

only the two of them, it functioned mostly as a pathway from the front door to the kitchen.

Jenna was the first one to leave home after entering college in 2017. Now, in her third year of medical school in Texas, she spent the last few summers volunteering with Doctors Without Borders. Chrissy entered art school in Rhode Island a few years later. As the pandemic waned, she did a Birthright trip to Israel. She claimed to fall in love with the country, but the main attraction was Boaz, the IDF soldier who accompanied her group. Last summer she started her junior year abroad at Bezalel Academy in Jerusalem. Theo, who graduated high school a year early, was accepted to the University of Chicago where he planned to study philosophy. Seeking to improve his fluency in French, he decided to take a gap year in Paris. In August, a few weeks before he was supposed to start his freshman year, he informed his parents he was staying on and enrolling at the Sorbonne. He found a share in Belleville and worked part-time as a waiter in a small restaurant around the corner from Les Deux Magots, the café where his parents met forty years ago.

After scanning the headlines, Bram turned to the back page of the arts section where the *Times* published a weekly recipe guide. He had gotten into the habit of selecting a recipe and making it for dinner one night the following week. Studying the ingredients for a fusion Asian-Cajun gumbo, he heard Liz coming downstairs. Glancing at the clock on the mantel, he saw it was a little after seven, much earlier than her usual Saturday wake-up call.

“Did you see the news?”

“Yeah,” he replied without looking up. “Hey, what do you think about a fusion gumbo...”

“Bram, there were missile attacks from Gaza!”

“There’re always missile attacks from Gaza, it’s like the weather: rain, thunderstorms, missile attacks; they’re used to it. Do you think the farmer’s market has fresh okra? This recipe specifies the okra must be...”

“Bram!” Liz loudly interrupted. He looked up. She was in her nightgown and holding both of their phones. “There are messages from all the kids!”

“What?” He jumped up and pulled his phone out of her hand. “Holy shit,” he said seeing the trail of messages from Jenna, Theo, and Chrissy. Most of them were from Chrissy.

Liz was already calling her. As she did, Bram read the texts from Jenna and Theo. “Chrissy, we just got up and saw your calls...”

“I’m fine Mom...really I am.”

“What the hell is happening?”

“Where are you now?” Liz asked before Chrissy could answer her father.

“I’m in my dorm. It’s kinda crazy here. The sirens woke us up and we had to go to a bomb shelter, and we were there for hours and it was damp and smelly and then we were told it was okay to go back up. Boaz then got an alert to go to...”

“Boaz was with you?”

“Yes Dad, Boaz was with me,” Chrissy said in an exasperated tone.

Liz shot Bram a look and then asked her daughter, “Tell us what’s going on?”

“The news says Hamas started attacking areas around Gaza and the army is there, but everyone was talking so fast, and my Hebrew isn’t good enough to keep up with it...”

“Do you want to come home? I’ll get you on a flight.”

“No Dad,” she said emphatically. “There were no missiles in Jerusalem. Everyone says they won’t send any here because of the mosque, but I’m scared for Boaz.”

“Where did he go?” Liz asked.

“He had to go back to the base right away. He was on Shabbat leave and we were supposed to go to the Dead Sea and Ein Gedi today. I bought a new bathing suit...I put it on your card. Sorry I forgot to tell you, but it was on sale.”

“I saw a picture of you and Boaz that Shoshana posted.”

“It was a holiday and they had like 30 people for dinner, but Rina couldn’t come because she’s still in the army. On my God, she’s stationed near Gaza. I hope she’s all right.”

“I’m sure she’s fine,” Liz said looking at Bram nervously.

“Lior and Shoshana loved meeting Boaz. Maybe when we go to Paris at Christmas he can come too? I really want you to meet him. Do you think Grandma would pay for his airfare?”

“Do you have enough food and water and everything?” Bram ignored her mention of their planned trip to France in December financed by Joan, when the entire family was to meet over the holidays.

“Yes Dad, there’s plenty of food and I just took a shower. The shelter had all these cobwebs. What are you and mom doing today?”

“We’re home...here talk to mom. I need to call Jenna and Theo.”

“I already spoke to both. Do you know Theo has a girlfriend? And they got a cat.”

“I’ve heard. Love you. Call you later, okay?”

“Love you too.”

Bram took his phone and went downstairs to the basement, Harold the Dog right behind him. Turning on the television, he switched to CNN in time to see missiles falling from the sky over Tel Aviv. At first, he watched in silence, but then began to mutter, “Fuck...fuck...fuck.”

That evening was the first time they would be getting together since Memorial Day when Julie and her boyfriend Charles had them out to his summer house on Fire Island. Bram thought that Charles Mandell was an insufferable blowhard and spent as much time as he could swimming in the Atlantic even though the weekend weather was cold and rainy. That left Liz, Meryl, and Ryan to make believe they were interested in his pronouncements on everything from politics, to culture, to wine and everything else under the sun as Julie looked on adoringly. Liz and Meryl felt for their friend after Max walked out on her after 34 years of marriage. The three women had been friends for over 30 years and treated each other as the sisters they never had. After Meryl was diagnosed with breast cancer, Liz and Julie were by her side; in March 2020 Sophia was an early victim of covid and Julie arranged a cemetery plot through the Workmen’s Circle; she helped them again when Maury died; and a year later when Gerry passed. Her life fell apart after the divorce, and she turned to her friends for support. They were happy for her when she met Charles, a retired professor of political science at Columbia University who she met on Lefty, a dating app for progressive types. At first, they found him charming though after a few get-togethers, less so. Ryan and Bram thought him condescending from the get-go.

Bram spent the day watching the news and the disaster that was unfolding. He left messages for his friends in Israel: Dovy, Gal and Lior. As they were about to leave for dinner at Meryl and Ryan’s, Lior called. He had been unable to reach his daughter Rina and was hoping Bram could put him in contact with Dovy, whose son Gideon was an officer in the IDF.

They didn’t speak much as they drove to Ryan and Meryl’s home in Rockaway. After 40 years Liz Ellis was the foremost expert on The Mood Swings of Bram Goodman. Her ESP-like intuitiveness helped her understand him. Early on she

realized that if this relationship was going to work, accommodation had to be made. He made it known he did not want to have a family or dwell on his past. Those unfamiliar with their relationship may have thought she was subservient, though this was not the case. ‘You love a person for who they are, not for what you want them to be,’ her mother told her after Liz confided her concerns. And Liz did love Bram for who he was. Time and gentleness were key in helping him see how important it was to have a family. Liz and the children were his touchstones and therefore his guides, shepherding him around the metaphoric abyss. With them he learned the wisdom of reflection. Their trip to Israel in 2017 didn’t change his views on religion, faith, or spirituality, though his family did notice that he was more comfortable in his own skin. His outbursts of anger – never directed at them – were gone. His humor was less dark and biting. Jenna coined it, “Bram Lite.”

With the rapid succession of deaths of his parents and only sibling, Liz saw the abyss opening. Long before they met Bram had put up boundaries between himself and his parents. But as they aged and needed more, the boundaries dissipated. He took on the same responsibilities for them as he did when he became the guardian of his brother years ago – managing their health, finances, and all-around wellbeing. Even before covid killed her, he was spending a great deal of time helping Sophia maintain her independence. He flew out to Los Angeles every few months, eventually moving Maury into a nursing home. This was happening as Gerry’s mobility declined to the point where he was bedridden and needed a feeding tube. The home where he lived took care of him in every way. All Bram had to do was visit and hold his hand. And Liz was always there to hold Bram’s hand.

“I know how much you like these,” Meryl said as she placed the platter of cookies in front of Bram. This was in addition to the cheesecake and chocolate-dipped strawberries that were already on the table. Liz watched as a smile appeared on his face, the first one all day.

They got there before Julie and Charles. Over drinks the two couples discussed the situation in Israel. Liz did most of the talking as Bram sipped bourbon. When Julie and Charles arrived, they moved into the dining room. Julie immediately asked about Chrissy. Again, Bram let Liz handle the response. The conversation turned to updates about their offspring: Liam’s impending fatherhood, Jenna’s studies, and Julie’s daughter’s engagement. This morphed into a discussion of each couple’s experience

of being empty nesters, which in turn led to Julie's plan to sell her home in the suburbs and move in with Charles who lived on Central Park West. Bram and Ryan listened on the sidelines as the women and Charles had a prolonged debate as to whether Julie should keep any of her furniture. By the time Meryl brought out the desserts, the decision was made to donate most of it to Goodwill. That settled, Charles looked at the array of sweets on the table and asked about the cookies.

"They're made with sesame and honey. It's a Moroccan Jewish recipe and I always make them when Bram comes for dinner. His mother was born in Casablanca," Meryl told him.

"She was Moroccan only on her paternal side. Her mother's family was from Paris, the sixteenth," said Bram referring to the snooty arrondissement Sophia worked into every conversation she had about her French roots. He knew the snob in Charles would appreciate the reference as much as his mother always did.

"Ah, the *Rive Droite*," Charles' interest in Bram, which until then was nil, perked up.

"Aren't you going to France soon?" Julie asked Liz.

"We are. My mother is taking us for Christmas. It'll be the first time since we met. I can't wait to see Theo."

"Their son lives in Paris. He's studying at the Sorbonne," Julie informed her boyfriend.

"When he's not waiting tables," Bram added.

"*Parles-vous Français?*" asked Charles.

"*Seulement quand je veux impressionner les serveurs ou les connards pompeux.*"

Liz's French was limited, but she knew enough to know that he said something along the lines of, 'only to impress waiters and pompous asses,' a diss to a Francophile. Charles either didn't understand French very well or ignored it, and launched into the memory of his last trip to Paris where he spoke at a symposium about Hannah Arendt. Ryan and Meryl tried to appear interested. Bram focused on the desserts in front of him, but Liz knew he was listening. She tried to remember how many drinks he had. As she calculated, Charles asked if anyone had read *Eichmann in Jerusalem*. Bram sliced a piece of cheesecake as he responded.

"It was somewhat wordy, though I am looking forward to the musical." He took a bite of the cake and turned to Meryl. "This cheesecake is delicious." He looked back at Charles. "Do you think *Chana* made cheesecake for Marty Heidegger, before

he became a Nazi of course.” Bram pronounced Hannah with the guttural Hebrew ‘Chet’, so it came out ‘Chah-na.’

Charles was flummoxed but quickly recovered and went into raconteur mode. “Well as a matter of fact she invited me to dinner at her flat on Riverside Drive shortly after I completed my dissertation, and she did serve cheesecake. My train from New Haven was delayed, and I arrived just in time for dessert. I was terribly embarrassed, but she was quite gracious and seated me right next to the guest of honor, Lionel Trilling!”

Liz expected Bram to say something snarky, but Ryan spoke first. “I’ve read a number of his essays. I think the introduction to George Orwell’s *Homage to Catalonia*” is one of his finest.”

Liz noticed the smile on Meryl’s face.

“You’ve read Trilling?” Charles asked. “Among others,” Ryan answered modestly. “One of my teachers at Xavier studied with him.” He turned to Bram. “Did you know he was born in Queens?”

“Hey, a Queens guy,” Bram said with a grin.

“Would anyone like more coffee,” Meryl asked.

“No more coffee,” Charles declared without looking at his hostess; and in what Liz interpreted as misogynistic moment, directed his attention to Ryan. “I’m thinking perhaps a brandy or a cognac. Do they serve that this far into Queens?”

Ryan grimaced, knowing this was an affront, but as the gentleman he was, got up without saying anything and went to the liquor cabinet.

“Hannah Arendt always served a nice cognac after her dinner parties,” Charles mused to no one in particular.

“With her special cheesecake I assume?” asked Bram.

Ryan came back to the table with a bottle of cognac and three glasses. He poured one for Bram and himself and then placed the bottle and a glass in front of Charles.

Meryl came out of the kitchen with a carafe of coffee. “I just made a fresh pot. Who’d like some?”

“The boys are having cognac,” Julie said.

“Yes, very continental,” said Liz as she raised her coffee cup knowing she’d be the one driving home.

Charles leaned back into his seat. In his late seventies, Liz had to admit he was a handsome man. He wore an expensive black cashmere turtleneck, and around his

right wrist was a thin sterling silver cuff with some sort of geometric engraving. In contrast, her husband wore a faded light blue denim shirt, with holes in the elbows. On his wrist was a frayed red Kabbalah string next to the worn beaded bracelet that Chrissy made years ago at Camp Utopia.

As Charles picked up his cognac, Meryl looked at his wrist. “I’ve been noticing your bracelet. It’s a beautiful piece.”

He held it up for the others to admire. “This amulet? I purchased it many years ago in an antique shop in Gaza.”

“You were in Gaza?” Meryl asked.

“Yes, during my Fulbright I traveled throughout the Mideast.”

“It must have been an interesting experience,” responded Meryl.

“It was. What has always stayed with me is the terrible plight of a people who have been subjugated for generations under the leadership in Jerusalem.”

Bram looked across the table at Charles. “I think the current leadership is nothing to write home about. Israel may be a flawed democracy, but a democracy nevertheless...unlike the rest of the neighborhood where almost every other leader has made an art of subjugating their own people.”

“From my personal observation and extensive travels, the West has made an art of imposing its values without any regard for the culture of the region, ergo the imposition of Zionism.”

“So that’s what you think?” Bram asked in the voice that if his children were present, knew he was about to go ‘full krav maga.’ Liz knew it too.

“It’s been written that Israel’s occupation of Palestine is one of the most brutal and inhuman forms of colonialism in modern history. And we know that colonialism is baked into Zionism.”

“I guess that’s from the cookbook published by the same folks who brought us *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.”

“How wry,” Charles said with smug smile.

“I’m a wry guy, a corned beef on rye kind of guy.” Bram then picked up the bottle of cognac and poured himself another shot. Charles leaned in, glass in hand anticipating Bram would pour another for him too. Instead, he slammed the bottle down in front of Charles and looked him in the eye.

“Charlie, what happened today is not about colonialism, and if colonialism is so concerning to you, maybe you should hand over the deed to your coop to the

descendants of the Lenape, though I suspect the admissions committee of the Beresford isn't too keen on feather droppings in the lobby.”

“What happened today, to quote Malcolm X, is what happens when the chickens come home to roost.”

Bram looked around the table before focusing on Charles. “That cavalier attitude reminds me of when my aunt died of lung cancer. The first thing people asked my cousin was, ‘Oh, she smoked?’ as if she deserved to die.”

“I abhor the loss of human life, but what happened today is about a disenfranchised society expressing their need to liberate themselves and as such there are bound to be excesses...”

“STOP!” Bram raised his right arm put his hand up, causing Charles to flinch. Liz thought he was about take a swing. Instead, he pulled his arm back and placed both elbows on the table, formed a fist with his right hand and put his left hand on top of it as if to hold it down. “What happened today was not about liberation. What happened today was murder. Plain and simple.”

“Oh?”

“I’ll bet you don’t know why men murder?” Bram asked but didn’t allow Charles a chance to respond. “Well, I’m going to tell you. There are two reasons. One, we murder to protect the people we love. Because when someone we love is about to be harmed, we will do,” and he raised his voice “ANYTHING...even murder. We force ourselves to believe we had no choice, so we smother any feelings of regret. But, if we have even a single shred of humanity, we will have remorse. The animals that did this today were not protecting anyone.”

“You don’t understand...” Charles began.

“SHUT UP, I’M NOT FINISHED!” he shouted. Pausing, he lowered his voice and spoke in a controlled cadence. “Two, the second reason why men murder. It’s because they hate. Hate they’ve ingested like mother’s milk. And when they murder, they have no remorse. And do you know who Hamas hates the most Charlie? Jews...just like you and me. And they don’t give a rat’s ass about your politics, or your collection of Palestinian amulets. No, they’ll blow your fucking brains out anyway just because of who you are...a Yid. Whether you like it or not.”

He stood up, tossed his napkin on the table, and looked at Liz. “It’s late. We should go.”

Walking out of the dining room, he turned back and looked at Julie, “I’m sorry. You deserve better.”

“It’s three in the morning there, take the night bus.

“Dad it’s not like when you lived here, Paris is safe,” Theo’s voice emanated out of the car’s speaker.

“Theo, please text us when you get home.”

“Okay Mom.”

“Love you,” Liz and Bram said at the same time.

“Love you too.”

Earlier, when they got in the car, Joan called. It was the first of many calls they received from Liz’s family, each wanting to know how they, and especially Chrissy, were. Liz assured them they were fine, though each time she repeated those words, it was more for herself than the caller. Despite it being four o’clock in the morning in Jerusalem, Bram texted Chrissy. Twenty minutes later Theo called to tell them he had just spoken with her, and she was indeed fine. He asked about Rina. Bram told Theo he was sure she was okay. Liz glanced at him as he spoke. Rina was Theo’s first crush after they met in Israel six years ago. Though nothing came of it they were online friends. Recently Theo told his mother that Rina was planning a trip to Paris next year, and he was looking forward to seeing her.

He had just left work when he phoned, hence Bram’s concern that he was walking home from the Left Bank to Belleville in the middle of night. At 19, Theo was six feet tall, an inch taller than his father. When he was in his early teens, he wanted his father to teach him krav maga, which Liz was not thrilled about. But in the end Theo wasn’t into it anyway. Unlike his dad, he wasn’t a fighter. Bram knew that was a good thing, but it did worry him that his son may not be able to defend himself, and others, if a time ever came that he needed to do so.

After Theo hung up Bram mimicked his son, “Dad, it’s not like when you lived here. Paris is safe.”

“It’s different now,” replied Liz. “I read in a guidebook that Belleville is an up-and-coming neighborhood, pulsating with diversity.”

“That’s guidebook speak for, it’s sketchy, enter at your own risk.” His phone buzzed and he looked at it, “Dovy.”

He had been waiting for this call, put the phone to his ear and spoke in Hebrew. Though her attention was on the road, Liz knew his jaw was clenched and brows furrowed. From the corner of her eye, she could see he was shaking his head back and forth. The only non-Hebrew words he uttered were: ‘no,’ ‘fuck’ and ‘*mon*

dien. Interspersed in his conversation, she heard him say, ‘Gideon,’ ‘Lior,’ ‘Shoshana,’ and ‘Rina.’

Hearing their names spoken, fear came over her. In that moment she realized it was unthinkable that anyone in her family would ever be killed in a wartime situation. But right now, across the world, she had no doubt that it was foremost in the minds of their dear friends in Jerusalem. Though she only met Lior and Shoshana once, she felt close and connected to them. Lior and Bram emailed sporadically, but she and Shoshana had become Facebook friends and emailed each other regularly. Liz realized Shoshana wasn’t what she appeared. While fulfilling the role of a Modern Orthodox wife and mother, she was an artist and recently opened a gallery. Though she had not travelled extensively, she was worldly and well-read. Her emails were filled with family news, events at the gallery and sometimes politics such as when she and Lior had participated in protests against the Prime Minister’s plans to diminish the authority of the Supreme Court.

Bram was still on the phone with Dovy as Liz parked the car. He finished the call and followed her up the steps to the house. Upon opening the door, Harold the Dog was barking and wagging his tail. With no Theo with them, his tail stopped moving.

“Time for a walk,” Bram said to the dog as he bent over and attached his leash.

Harold the Dog led the way down the steps to the sidewalk, followed by Bram and Liz. He hurried to his first stop, the base of the streetlight at the corner. When he completed his business, his pace slowed down. It had rained most of the day, but it had cleared up and the evening was almost balmy. They walked in silence until Bram spoke.

“Dovy said it was a like an atomic bomb went off.”

“Is he safe?”

“Ashod’s about halfway between Tel Aviv and Gaza. Many of the rockets were intercepted, but others got through. He told me there was a lot of damage. He said it reminded him of Lebanon...” and his voice trailed off.

“Isn’t Israel supposed to have the best intelligence? You always told me that.”

Bram looked at her. “It was a colossal fuck up...big time. Dovy said everyone is talking about it. It brought back memories of the Yom Kippur War.”

“I heard you mention Lior. You told Dovy he called you?”

“I did. He told me he spoke to Gideon...” He looked away before he continued. “He said its bad...very bad. A lot of people may have been killed or injured...hundreds maybe...civilians as well as IDF.”

“Dear God...do you think anything may have happened to Rina?”

Bram didn't answer her as they entered the park. Named after a long deceased founder of the neighborhood, everyone called it the 'cereal bowl' as it was a small sunken meadow in the center of the neighborhood. A brick path descended to a fountain surrounded by benches. In the winter when it snowed, they used to take the children there to go sledding, as its gentle slope was perfect for youngsters. Other than that, it wasn't used much except by dog walkers. As they got to the bottom, he let Harold the Dog off his leash. He and Liz sat on a bench and watched as the terrier scampered about.

“What do you think is going to happen?”

Bram pondered Liz's question before answering. “Tomorrow when the world wakes up there'll be lots of thoughts and prayers...just like when some lunatic in Texas shoots up a shopping mall with an AK-47. Everyone will feel terrible for the victims...and then Israel will retaliate, and we'll become Zionist aggressors.” He was pensive and then asked, “Tell me, when did Zionism become a pejorative? I must have missed the memo.”

“I'm afraid to some people it's always been. Sometimes even subtle criticism of Israel is construed as anti-Semitism,” Liz answered.

“I'm a Zionist and I criticize Israel. Does that make me schizoid?” he said, placing a hand in his jacket pocket and fumbling around.

“But you do get offended when others criticize it.”

“All depends who's doing the criticizing...it's sometimes a slippery slope that lands in a sewer of antisemitism. You know, even though my father and uncle disagreed about almost everything, they agreed on one thing; we need a place of our own, because in the end the world doesn't give a shit.” He reached into his pocket and fumbled around.

“You left your cigarettes on the kitchen counter,” said Liz knowing he was hoping to find his pack of Gitanes.

Finding his phone instead, he glanced at his emails. “The Social Democrats of America are holding a rally tomorrow in Times Square.”

“I didn't know you were a member?” Liz asked with some surprise.

“I like what they say about inequality...and I got a nice tote bag.” He looked back at his phone, scrolling through his texts and stopped at one. “You sent me this?”

Liz leaned over and looked at it. “That’s the picture Shoshana sent me.”

Chrissy was wearing a hot pink blouse that if anyone asked her father, revealed too much cleavage. Boaz was in his army uniform. With jet-black curly hair, dark eyes and complexion, he had a classic Mideastern Jewish look.

“Handsome guy...reminds me a little of you when we first met,” said Liz with a smile.

Bram looked at the photograph. “Yeah, cocky and arrogant...just like I was. That’ll change once he’s sent to the front.”

“Do you think he will be?” Liz asked.

“Dovy said they’re calling everyone up, even the reservists.”

“Will Dovy be called?”

“Dovy is 63, overweight and uses a cane. If he’s called up, it’s time to buy Hamas war bonds.”

“That’s a terrible joke.”

“It is...I’m sorry.”

He leaned his head back and looked up at the sky before he spoke. “Whenever anyone would trash the Germans, my Uncle Lou would say that we should never castigate an entire group of people. ‘That’s what they did to us. It was the Nazis, not the Germans,’ he’d say. Today he’d say, it’s Hamas, not the Palestinians.”

“The world needs more people like your uncle.”

Bram nodded. “He had this capacity to seek out the decency in everyone...even after all he went through. I don’t know how he did it.”

“I can’t help but think of Lior and Shoshana. Last night they had a happy Shabbat dinner and tonight...”

“...The saddest Havdalah, it marks the end of Shabbat,” Bram interrupted and finished her sentence, “you light a braided candle, drink some wine, and say a prayer. Then you pour a few drops of the wine on a plate and extinguish the candle in it. The flame goes out with a little sizzle, and Shabbat is over. Whenever I heard that noise it made me feel sad. It meant that the little holiday we had went poof and disappeared.”

“Did you do that Saturday nights growing up?” Liz asked.

“Only in Paris with my *Avuelo*,” he said wistfully. “What we did do on Saturday nights in Jerusalem was drive Gerry back to the residence he lived in during the week.”

When we got there Gerry would run to find Ibrahim. He was an old Arab guy who was the janitor. All the kids loved Ibrahim...and he loved them. I would wonder why Gerry was so happy to see him. Wasn't he supposed to hate him because he was an Arab? It was only when I got older, I realized Gerry never knew what hate was...he knew love, but he had no concept of hate."

"He didn't," Liz said.

He sat on the bench and stared out into the park as Liz placed her hand in his. "What are you thinking about?"

"You don't want to know."

"I do."

He hesitated. "Beirut...the body of that Muslim child laying on the ground with a stuffed animal next to him...and how terrified his last moments must have been. And today there were little Jewish kids clutching their stuffed animals in sheer terror at what was happening around them..." Shaking his head, he swallowed before continuing. "And soon Boaz will be sent to Gaza and see the fear in the eyes of Palestinian kids too young to know why we should hate each other. He then turned away, his voice choking up. "It never fucking ends."

Liz held his hand tightly. It was a beautiful night, and as they sat next to each other in the serene little park, it was almost possible to believe that the world was at peace. Upon hearing simultaneous pings they looked at their phones. It was a text with a photo of Theo, lying on the sofa, smiling at the cat curled atop his stomach.

"Safe at home," said Liz.

Bram looked closely at the picture and nodded.

"We'll all be together soon," she said.

"We will," he whispered as he brushed his eyes with the palms of his hands.

