

Neither incisive editorials nor works  
blithely pursuing the fictional; neither raw  
documentaries nor aestheticized commentaries;  
**S**helter  
neither confessional diaries nor inadvertently  
confessional fantasies... but rather writing in-  
between: ten writers, from Israel and elsewhere,  
**O**ctober  
stumble toward expressing the experience of  
that Sabbath in October, and of what came  
**7**th  
after. While reorienting its limbs and recovering  
its voice, literature becomes aware—slowly,  
**a**nd **A**fter  
hesitantly, as though once again having to  
acquire the ability to walk—of both its searing  
limitations and saving vitality.

**Shelter**

October

7th

Bilingual Edition

**and After**

Edited by Oded Wolkstein and Maayan Eitan

The Israeli Institute for Hebrew Literature



## **Shelter**

October 7th and After

Bilingual Edition

Edited by Oded Wolkstein and Maayan Eitan

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## Content

### **Preface** 7

Oded Wolkstein

### **Shloshim (from the diary)** 13

Joshua Cohen

### **The Count** 55

Tehila Hakimi

### **The Encounter** 27

Dror Mishani

### **Justin Trudeau** 63

Oded Carmeli

### **Cute Travelogue** 35

Elisa Albert

### **Before the Massacre** 69

Maxim Biller

### **Money** 43

Maayan Eitan

### **Invitation to Grief** 75

Yaara Shehori

### **The Drive** 49

Asaf Schurr

### **Collision** 81

Aryeh Attias

### **Contributors** 85



## Preface

Oded Wolkstein

Translated from the Hebrew by Nadav Avruch

“On the surface, the great machine is starting to stir, but internally, something else is happening. Time stands still.”

Yuval Plotkin, *Haaretz*, November 1, 2023

At some point in his discussion of trauma, Freud turns to the following example: “It may happen that someone gets away from, apparently unharmed, the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave psychical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. He has developed a ‘traumatic neurosis’. This appears quite

incomprehensible and is therefore a novel fact.”<sup>1</sup>

Cathy Caruth uses Freud’s example to get at the core of the enigma surrounding trauma. The person walked out from that horrific collision “apparently unharmed,” without a scratch: the event left no mark, did not etch itself on the person’s flesh or into their psyche. It’s as though that person was never there. And yet, this very fact is the root of the traumatic injury. If the victim of the accident had at the very least been scratched, the mark upon the flesh would serve to signify the moment and anchor it in the experience of the present self, like an inscription at the margins of a picture: “I was there.” In the absence of this, trauma arises: the experience is so extreme that it suspends the very possibility of experiencing it, eliminates the experiencing self. Right from the outset, the event registers as unregistered, as a site of forgetfulness and absence: “It was as if I wasn’t (there).”

Trauma, in other words, is a skipping beat, a mirror reflecting nothing more than the slicing hardness of

1 Freud, Sigmund. *Moses and Monotheism*. Translated from the German by Katherine Jones. New York: Vintage Books, 1939.

its irreflective surface; a disjointed moment exiled away from the axis of time; a scorched, infertile clearing in the forest of experience. And yet the pain, orphaned from the moment of its conception, is so intense that it threatens to submerge everything in its path, along with any hope of experiencing it. It is so beyond the pale that it categorically denies all possessive pronouns.

In Dickens' *Hard Times*, a daughter sits beside her mother, on her deathbed. She asks her, Are you in pain, dear mother? To which her mother replies: I think there's a pain somewhere in the room, but I couldn't positively say that I have got it. How many of us can "positively say" that the pain we feel these days is ours? Trauma creates a gaping pain at the very core of our existence, a pain that never was quite ours—it is too big, bigger than our capacity to know, and too elusive, as it courses through the transparent vessels of forgetfulness. In this decisive sense, trauma *is* forgetting.

Therefore, rather than trying to forget an unbearable memory, we are left to grapple with a



different question: how can we remember that which has already been forgotten?

Most Israelis have walked away from the events that took place on October 7th “apparently unharmed,” in Freud’s sense exactly: subjected to the regime of a dislocated time, the oppressive rule of an hour they cannot accommodate in speech nor compute away in the calculus of their lives. Most are imprisoned by a moment that exceeds their dimensions and resists their futile attempts to recast it in their likeness. Precisely for this reason, the moment threatens to linger indefinitely. And if so, how does one return to a moment that one has never really left? How can one leave a place where, from the beginning, one had never been? And again: how can one remember that which is rooted in its own forgetting?

The texts collected in this anthology are the attempts of ten writers, Israelis and non-Israelis, to leave a mark, make a scratch on this ongoing moment in which we are trapped; to leave a mark, if only an initial sign, on the amnesic time of the “accident.”

The texts differ from each other in spirit and style, but share a certain commitment: they refrain from rushing to resettle the wreckage of recognition with the roaring forces of narrative. They do not set out to address the fractures of time with remedial images, nor to gorge its hollow halls with torrents of words. They risk talking about this time, to this time, in *its* language: at that, they seem to share a non-verbal acknowledgement that in order to talk about the hour when everything stopped, one must dare to stop. Seeing as forgetting and absence lie at the very foundation of this moment, this endlessly prolonging moment, the only way to remember it is to embrace a language that carries a trace of forgetfulness; to summon the moment is to evoke the tangled roots of its absence.

Some may say that this, from time immemorial, has always been the language of literature. Perhaps. But it seems that at this particular moment, we need this language more than ever.

**Shloshim (from the diary)**

Joshua Cohen

1.

We, the undersigned, will not sign your letter. We are tired of letters, petitions, and masturbation. We are tired of the internet, interpretations and death. We don't support murder, but we also don't support kitsch—in fact, we call for the murder of kitsch in its sleep. We are liberal humanists who oppose the concept of liberal humanism, or at least the right to say the words “liberal humanism” aloud. We recognize all existence and all the differences that exist in existence and identify ourselves as contradictory plurals up to the point where “identify with” becomes “apologize for”—and we're also sorry for all the quotation marks. We believe in God only as a precondition for hating god. We mourn with all mourners who respect our mourning. We don't want to meet to drink tea, coffee, or even “something stronger.”

Joshua Cohen

Joshua Cohen

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2.

An interesting thing about being named Joshua Cohen is that there's always someone else named

Joshua Cohen who's signing letters about Israel.

3.

Pogrom is from the Russian *pogromu*: *po-* “by, through, behind, after,” cognate with the Latin “post” + *gromu* “thunder, roar.” As most children know, lightning comes before thunder (or we only see the lightning before we hear the thunder). And now I—who feel like a child again, helpless, enraged—know what comes after pogrom: a “postgrom” livestreamed from the bodycams of Cossacks on jihad.

4.

What's surprising to me isn't the antisemitism. What's surprising to me is how many attempts it takes to decapitate a human with a shovel.

5.

And speaking of cutting heads...the book of Judges.

6.

What's striking about Judges 16 is that Samson

*collaborates* with Delilah. She asks him how she can strip him of his strength and he tells her—after a lot of foreplay he tells her—CUT MY HAIR. He doesn't have to tell her this secret, but he does: he volunteers it, not under duress, not under torture (unless Delilah withholding sex is torture). After his hair is cut, he winds up powerless, entrapped by the Philistines who put out his eyes and incarcerate him in Gaza, where they force him to grind grain (or, in another interpretation, where they put him out to stud).

7.

How does it end? The Philistines bring him out to dance for a party at a temple or palace and Samson dances, then grips the venue's columns and brings them crashing down, killing himself, killing everyone, "killing more in death than he ever killed in life."

8.

Samson reigned for just a few years longer than Bibi has—than Bibi will. (A risky prophecy.)

9.

A lot of those people at the party—a friend tells me—were killed while high, rolling on MDMA. I don't know if this fact makes things better or worse. So high you want to hug the grenade. So high you want to kiss the bullet.

10.

Perhaps this is something more easily noticed by non-native speakers of Hebrew: that the name of the Likud party (“unification”) shares the same root (*Lamed-Kuf-Daled*) with *milkud* (“entrapment”)—the word used to translate the title of Joseph Heller’s *Milkud-22*, which Micah Goodman took for his nonfiction analysis of the Six Day War, *Milkud-67*.

Is the language telling us that unity is a trap? Or maybe it's telling us that falling into a trap is the only way toward civic cohesion?

11.

The problem (a problem) is that the teaching of history has been replaced by the teaching of



theory, bringing in forms, structures, templates, and framings that result in the synonymy of struggles shorn of context. This is how, in the imagination of the Global Left, Palestinians become the black and brown people and Israelis become the whites. Ridiculous, absolutely, but it's somewhat consolingly funny to think of my old Yemeni landlord in Tel Aviv as a white dude.

12.

The decolonizers never made much sense. Each generation contradicts its predecessor. In the 50s, 60s, and 70s, the guiding radical ideology was “violence is speech”—meaning that violence was the legitimate expression of a person or people whose words have gone unheeded. Then throughout the 80s, 90s, up until October 6th, the guiding radical ideology became the opposite, “speech is violence”—meaning that the words you use can harm, so be careful how you use them, especially the words that don't belong to you, to your identity. On October 7th and after, “speech is violence” pivoted

immediately to “violence is speech,” if only to contextualize—to justify—the slaughter of Jews as Palestinian liberation.

13.

I’m reminded and ashamed of that disgusting but funny game some kids used to play in school (I think fourth or fifth grade): say “baby rape” ten times fast.

14.

The Hamasnik who called his parents to tell them he killed ten Jews? Hard to imagine being a full-grown mature terrorist still craving parental approval.

15.

The Global Left now agrees with the Israeli Right: Israel and Jews are synonymous, as are Hamas (and Islamic Jihad) and the Palestinians.

16.

I deplore all killing of innocents only because that’s what I am: innocent in the sense of naïve; innocent

in the sense of knowing nothing (but feeling all).

17.

Israel blew up a hospital. No, it was Palestinian Islamic Jihad and the hospital they blew up was a hospital parking lot. 500 died. Or 50 died. Also, here's video of it that's from last year and a photo of the aftermath that's from an earthquake in Turkey. Below the disinformation is the misinformation; below the misinformation is the information; and then below that—buried beneath the rubble, and beneath the disarticulated bodies of the 500 or 50—there are tunnels where the hostages are held, old people, young people, babies. It's hard to imagine: they've survived a month already without the internet! What luck!

18.

From the Mississippi to the Caspian Sea. From the Amazon to the Sea of Azov. From the Danube to the Arctic Ocean. From the Nile to Lake Baikal.

From the Pishon to the Gihon. From the Tigris to

the Euphrates. (Says Tanach.)

19.

If it is true, as some friends say, that Israel is currently committing genocide, then one day soon I expect to be at a party (if I'm still invited to parties) where a beautiful woman (or man, it doesn't matter) sips their martini and wonders aloud: "How could Khamenei have let that happen? Why didn't Iran bomb the train tracks?"

20.

By all means: Iran should bomb the gas chambers, Iran should bomb the ovens, Iran should bomb the railroad tracks, if they exist. But because they don't exist, irony does. (Oded Carmeli says to me something like: Have you ever been on an Israeli train? Meaning, I guess, that no country can effectively commit genocide if their trains keep running late, breaking down, and then totally stopping on Fridays come sunset.)

21.

If I'd known that I could kill as many Jews as I wanted and nobody in the world would care, I think I would've lived my life rather differently.

22.

They never kill the Jews you want them to kill.

23.

That Shabbat was the thirtieth anniversary of my bar mitzvah, so I was already depressed.

24.

“No government has ever peacefully ruled a civilian population it has aurally bombarded,” says my WWII scholar friend who served in Vietnam. But he says this with too much confidence.

25.

I wonder if anyone in Israel remembers Sapir Cohen AKA Livnat Green. That happened this year, which is to say a millennium ago. Born Sapir

Cohen in Beersheba, she finds herself in and out of foster care and abusive situations. Shedding the skin of her childhood trauma, she changes her name to Livnat Green. She does her mandatory service in the Border Police. A lone soldier, because she has no family, after she completes her service she refers to herself as a lone civilian and suffers nightmares and recurring panic attacks that make it difficult for her to hold down a job. She bounces from apartment to apartment and, after one eviction, sets up a tent outside the Israeli Welfare Ministry.

26.

Cue the cameo: her tent attracts media attention, and then-Defense Minister Naftali Bennett invites Livnat Green to move into his family home. He makes her eggs—for some reason, this is her primary memory of Bennett, that he made her eggs—and tries to help her find a job and housing, but Livnat Green will not be helped. She has mood swings, depressions. She also has experiences with drugs. In 2022, Tikva Saban, her closest friend—one of her only friends—

purposefully injects herself with a lethal dose of heroin and dies in Livnat's lap.

27.

In May of this year, Livnat Green sends a message to a boy she might or might not be dating (she herself is unsure), asking him what would happen to a woman if she dressed up “as a Muslim” in a hijab or burqa and, carrying a gun or a decent toy facsimile of a gun, stormed one of the border checkpoints screaming “Allah-hu Akbar”? Would such a person be killed? Meaning, would some of the soldiers doing one of the jobs that Livnat Green used to do at the border checkpoint shoot to kill this hypothetical woman, or would they just seek to disarm her by, say, shooting at her legs? The boy who receives the message answers his pseudo-girlfriend bluntly: We're not talking about a hypothetical woman, are we?

28.

A few hours after the boy reports her as a suicide risk, Livnat Green—wearing a Muslim headcovering

and shouting the *Takbir*—charges the border at Metzudat Yehuda, near Hebron, which is or should be Palestine, and is shot dead just like she wanted.

29.

Livnat Green's suicide—which almost no one outside of Israel noticed, and which even within Israel was swiftly forgotten amid the maelstrom of protests that characterized much of the country's 2023— strikes me as a parable of how one unstable person or side can entrap another into legally sanctioned murder. I think often of those Israeli soldiers who—terrified of the Muslim woman coming at them, not knowing that they were actually terrified of Livnat Green— shot at Livnat Green and killed her. Or let her kill herself? And, on reflection, is this really a parable or just a literal demonstration of entrapment? I wonder how they—the soldiers—think about it...how they deal with the horror...

30.

Some of Gaza is Hamas, but most of Gaza is Livnat



Greens—young people made crazy by circumstance, made desperate by failure, abused, neglected, and charging ahead because there's nowhere else to go but into the guns that can't do anything but fire.

## The Encounter

Dror Mishani

Translated from the Hebrew by Oded Even Or

It was evening, eighteen or nineteen days after the war broke out. I went to a café, around the time when the rocket sirens usually went off. At the next table was a young man, somewhere between twenty-five and thirty years old. He was hiding beneath a hoodie that he had pulled over his head, trying to avoid my gaze. His face, which I saw for just a moment, had a couple of weeks of beard growth. On the table in front of him were two empty bottles of Coke. He looked familiar. Even though it is against my character, I went and stood over him and asked, “Hey, are you one of the—”

The man raised a bony, grimy finger with a long nail and pressed it against his mouth. Up close, I saw that his lips were dry and cracked. “Shhh. No, I’m not,” he whispered.

I sat next to him without asking his permission. “Are you sure?” I said. “Because I’ve been watching the news from morning till night and I’m pretty sure that I’ve seen...”

Again, he made a hasty sign with his finger for me to be quiet, and at the same time tried to catch the attention of the waitress, probably so he could settle his check and flee. I had no intention of letting him slip away; I made this clear by grasping the hem of his shirt. He might have also seen that I was armed. He looked at me. “Don’t turn me in, please,” he said.

I yielded, more due to the silent plea in his eyes than to his explicit request. “Explain yourself,” I said. “Nobody said on the news that all the hostages, including the young men, had been released.”

The waitress returned with my order. She hesitated for a moment, surprised, perhaps because I had changed tables without telling her first. She asked the man if everything was okay and if he wanted anything else. He said no. Once she had left, he whispered to me: “They weren’t. I’m the only one. Don’t make a big deal out of it. I beg you.”

Out on the street, a young couple strolled past. I scrutinized him. He didn't have any shoes on but his clothes were clean. "I don't understand. What do you mean? Was there some kind of commando mission? Were you rescued?"

"No, nothing like that. I just couldn't stand it anymore. I couldn't breathe. I had to go out, to get some air for a few hours and to refresh my memory. So, I escaped. Do you have a cigarette?"

I gave him a cigarette, then showered him with questions like a Shin Bet agent or a reporter, even though I am neither of these things. How did you escape and when? I demanded as the flash of the silver lighter he took out of his pocket lit up his gaunt face. Where were they holding you and in what conditions? Who were your captors? Did you see their faces? What did they tell you?

He exhaled smoke and said, "Can we talk about something else? I only have a few hours and I don't want to spend them talking about where just I escaped from. It's not what I ran away for, do you understand?"

I didn't.

“What do you want to talk about then?” I asked.

“We don’t have to talk,” he replied. “We can sit here quietly. That’s good enough.”

“Is that what you’ve been up to since you escaped? Sitting?”

“Partially,” he said. “I also went for a walk along the seafront, in the part that I remembered, between Frishman Beach and Bugrashov Beach. I wanted to see the sunset. Fall is my favorite season and the thought that I’d miss it, trapped in a tunnel underground, was driving me crazy. No more falls, can you imagine? I was hoping for rain, nothing makes me happier than the rain, but there was none. Then I went to eat at a place called HaKosem—The Magician—because I remembered going there with friends once, before the war, and having a nice time. Do you know it?”

“And you didn’t go to see your family?”

“I saw them. From a distance. I went to the vigil but I was scared someone would recognize me. I stayed on the other side of the street and saw my brother and sister standing there, holding my

photograph. My mother was sitting next to them on a plastic chair, reading the Book of Psalms. I couldn't go any closer."

"Why?"

"It would have been too much. They wouldn't have let me go back and I wouldn't have been able to leave if they saw me."

"What do you mean, go back?! You're going back there?"

"I am," he sighed.

"Why?!"

"The others are still there and some of them need my help. I calm them down. I promise them that we will all get out alive, I tell them what we will do when we're out and show them how to escape through the burrows of memory in the meantime. I can't leave them there on their own."

"It doesn't make any sense," I said. "You can't just... and the army could..."

He put his hand on mine on the table. "I have to go back," he said. "I belong there, with them, for now. Until we're all back. I'm begging you, don't tell

anyone you saw me. My life would be in danger if they realize that I escaped, and my brother and sister would be crushed if they found out I visited only to look at them from a distance. Okay? And you'll give me another cigarette, for the road?"

I don't consider myself a resourceful or a quick-thinking man. Deep inside, I know that if I was called upon that Saturday to protect myself or my family, I would have fallen short. But in that moment, I knew exactly what I had to do. "Wait here for a second," I said. "I'll go around the corner and get you a pack or two." His eyes followed me as I got up and ran across the street. As soon as I was out of his line of sight I called the police.

"I just saw one of the hostages in a café in Tel Aviv," I told the operator, trying to catch my breath.

"What?"

"One of the hostages. He managed to escape but he's planning to go back. You have to help me stop him."

"Where is he now?"

I gave her the address of the café. But when I

ran back, he wasn't there. He wasn't anywhere up or down the street either, and the waitress either couldn't or wouldn't tell me when I asked her, screaming, where he had gone. She had already cleared the table of his two empty bottles. Only my cup of coffee remained.

The police cruiser arrived a long while later. Maybe even half an hour later. On the long wall covered with photographs of the hostages I pointed him out to the two officers. He was fourth from the right on the third row down. He didn't have a beard yet. His face was lit up, just like when it flashed before my eyes in the light of the narrow flame of his lighter.

"You saw him here, in this café? And he told you he was going back to Gaza?" the first officer, a woman, asked and I said that it was exactly so, and that we could still possibly stop him from going back across the border. "I'm telling you, it's not too late. He was here just ten minutes ago," I lied.

"And did he tell you why he is going back?"

"Because he has to be with the others. To help



them stay alive.”

The second officer looked impatient, and I thought that I had annoyed him. Or that maybe he despised me. “This is the fourth nutjob today already,” he said. “As if we have nothing better to do, with the war on. Do you think people are walking around pretending to be the hostages? If that’s the case, we have to put a stop to this. Anyway, should we arrest this guy?”

The first officer shook her head. “Arrest him? Don’t be crazy,” she said. She had a different theory. She turned to me and said gently, “Sir, I think you’re experiencing PTSD. You should get help. And you shouldn’t be out now anyway. It’s dangerous, you have to stay close to a bomb shelter.”

And I would have believed her if it wasn’t for the fact that on the way back home I groped about in the inner pocket of my thin coat for my cigarettes and found his lighter, which I had taken by accident.

November 2023

## Cute Travelogue

Elisa Albert

I had in mind to write some sort of cute travelogue. The trip was a perfect recipe, all the ingredients top notch. My mom was going to drive me bonkers, I was going to lash out at her, it would be hilarious. Two generations of bickering, judgmental, symbiotic bitches in the Holy Land. The two of us back in the place where we had once been a twisted dyad within our own shattered family.

We planned the trip at the last minute, to see the Codex Sassoon installed at ANU, the Museum of the Jewish People. The oldest and most complete bound copy of the Hebrew Bible in existence. There were going to be parties, ceremonies, a speech from Herzog.

When will we get an opportunity like this again, Mom asked. Rhetorical. She is 80. Never.

One condition, I said: separate hotel rooms.

Done, she said. And first-class flights.  
I'm such a whore, I told my husband.

The air was velvet in Tel Aviv. Glorious homecoming. We had meals with various friends in various *sukkot*. Reunion! Abundance! Belonging! Pardes Hanna, Zichron Ya'akov, Jerusalem. Precious time. We walked and talked and walked and talked.

By day four my patience with Mom was running thin, so I rented a bike and rode down the sea path to Jaffa, said a private prayer on the astrology bridge. A woman selling beautiful vintage clothes in the *shuk* raged defensively at me about why the clothes were so expensive. I hadn't taken any issue with the prices, and furthermore didn't want to buy anything, but I complimented her on her outstanding taste.

Was there time to go down south, to Be'eri, where beloved Saba had lived from the age of fourteen, working the printing press? Nah, maybe on the next trip. Would there be time to go north to Haifa to see an auntie? Or to Tzfat, where I habitually envision myself an ancient leathery lady with a long grey

braid? No, not this time.

“I belong here,” I announced to Mom when we lived in Jerusalem in 1986, when I was eight. No awareness of history or politics or war or terror or occupation or survival. “This is where I can be *myself*.” She often recounts this conversation. The freedom I had during those months! The shekels for the bus, the friendship with the guy who ran the corner store. The best ice-cream bars in the world. Bags of *Bisli*, blah blah blah. The symbols representing violent “resistance” were the quaint slingshot and rock. When we returned to Los Angeles, Mom threatened to make Aliyah and take me with her; my father panicked, put my passport in a secret safe deposit box.

Puberty fucked me sideways. I got into alternative culture, (finally) made it to second base with an IDF reservist at a Tel Aviv nightclub the (epic) summer before eleventh grade. My eldest brother got a brain tumor and died, an engaged couple we vaguely knew got blown up by a suicide bomber on a Jerusalem bus, and my middle brother went to Hebrew U,

stayed in Jerusalem, refused to serve in the IDF, left. I got my heart crushed by a rabbinical student. Was a little obsessed with Rachel Corrie. Chickened out on the two-year post-college Israeli work-service program I'd signed up for, choosing instead to go colonize New York City and work in publishing. I wanted glamour. I couldn't handle Israel. American Jews are weak.

And somehow, two decades went by without my setting foot on Israeli soil.

Day five I was entirely out of patience with Mom. The way she spoke to service providers, the way she tried to control every detail of everyone's existence: exhausting. I spent Erev Shabbat, October 6<sup>th</sup>, on the beach, ignoring her texts, then feasted on hummus and fowl with a Fay Weldon paperback I'd scored earlier at Halper's, the epic used bookshop.

I wrote a lot in my notebook that night, overtaken with grief. A certain hopelessness. Not unrelated to traveling with my mother. Old, old sorrow. I wrote a lot about "what I believe." I had some kind of

reckoning. I was premenstrual.

*I believe in belief not being static. I believe in ever-changing, ever-evolving belief. I believe in stories, an endless proliferation of them. I believe in 72-degree weather. I believe in letting people go when they treat you like unrepentant shit. I believe in refusing to carry burdens that are not my own. I believe more and more in saying nothing. I used to believe in saying everything. I believe that some people will never, ever get it. But I believe that some people will, and do. I believe in relationships with children and animals. I believe in gardening. I believe in pity, and forgiveness, but also distance and refusal. I believe my mother did her best. I believe my mother is a monstrous person. I believe in optimal distance. I believe in smiling placidly for limited, finite periods of time. I believe that if you squash or deny or suffocate your feelings, you die inside. I believe the mind and body are one. I believe death is a passage. I believe that altered states of consciousness, in great moderation, are portals to the divine. I believe in escape. I believe in the oneness of everything. I believe the child I was given to have was a gift. I believe he isn't mine. I believe the pain and grief inherent in that statement are portals to the divine. I*

*believe violence is stupid, the height of stupidity. I believe in yoga. I believe most people are terrified of life and equally terrified of death. I believe in working without striving for validation or reward. I believe love heals. I believe that when I am without hope, without love, without the will to continue, there remains a small tenderness in me that is divine. I believe in contrarianism as a means to keep from fundamentalism. I believe that the avowedly secular can also be fundamentalist. I believe ignorance is everywhere by choice and design. I believe that anger is the strongest form of pain. I believe that it has always been too late. I believe in doing my best. I believe in Shabbat. I believe Shalom Bayit overrules most things. I believe in learning. I believe in art. I believe in the brokenhearted. I believe I can change. I believe my family of origin almost killed me, and that my survival, wounded, maimed, broken as I am, is a triumph to which some of the credit is due me, and some due the divine. I believe in history repeating itself. I believe in pain. I believe bullshit will always out. I believe in a flexible spine. I believe in lying down. I believe in reading while eating*

Heard the rockets and sirens just after dawn, looked

out the window, went back to sleep. (Evidence of a nihilist streak?) Dreamt I missed my son's high school graduation—how had I been so careless and stupid? What was I thinking? Would he ever forgive me? It seemed not; he refused to look at me. I was anguished. Woke up again an hour later, went to breakfast. Did you hear, did you hear.

An oat milk cortado set down before me just as the sirens went off again. *Inside, inside, away from the windows, get down*, shouted a man in a hotel uniform. Being highly dependent on caffeine, I grabbed my cortado, took it along to crouch by the wall, spilled a little bit down the front of my nice new blouse from a snooty shop on Rothschild Boulevard.

*Now there will be hell to pay*, I joked, examining the stained blouse. *It's war now*. Then I burst out crying.

Are you scared, Mom asked.

No, I said. Just shocked and sad.

I had no energy to continue being irritated by Mom. There was no point, for the time being, in being irritated by her. We sat in her room watching the news on the highest volume because she had



lost a hearing aid. The scope of the atrocity became clearer. I had been planning to go to a protest that night. The protest was going to fit nicely into my cute travelogue. But there was, of course, no protest that night.

I downloaded Tzofar and befriended a beautiful older couple from Chicago. I rode my bike to Shuk ha Carmel, which I had entirely to myself. I sat in silent, dazed Dizengoff Square. I watched military planes fly up and down the coast. I played peek-a-boo with infants in the bomb shelter. I wore my party dress to sit at the hotel bar. Might as well. Refugee kids from Ashkelon entertained us with magic tricks and the Russian bartender confessed his dreams of screenwriting.

The fear didn't take root until I got back to New York.

## Money

Maayan Eitan

Translated from the Hebrew by Joshua Cohen

Gradually, my thoughts narrow to a single subject: money. On the fifteenth of October I realize that I will not be able to pay rent for November; one of the courses I was supposed to teach was canceled, a major project of mine has been indefinitely delayed, and publishers have been closing their doors one by one. I dedicate the next three days to making frantic inquiries which bear no fruit; no one has anything to offer me. I end a conversation with my bank's local branch by having a panic attack that lasts all weekend and at the end of which I decide to accept their proposal: a three-month postponement of my compound interest loan repayments, a term I have to look up online while talking to the clerk and that conjures up in my mind an image of a tower being built atop a tower being built atop a tower. When we

finish speaking, and after I sign all the digital forms she sent me, I manage to derive real pleasure from that image: I place myself, in my mind's eye, on the ledge of this tall tower. As I see it, it's a kind of Tower of Babel, as in the famous painting by Brueghel the Elder, and I imagine myself at its windswept peak, above the clouds: then, in my imagination, I jump. I think I remember reading that men are more likely to commit suicide than women and that they do so at such high rates because of their debts. I come to my senses, in the end, and push the picture out of my head.

I recall that once someone took me to a tall parking garage on the outskirts of town: the view from the top was beautiful, but all I could think about was how we had to leave before I jumped. My debts weren't that high back then and I could imagine repaying them within a year or two. Pieter Brueghel the Elder, I tell my boyfriend, also painted *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, the basis for a poem by Auden, who would later also write that it's always better to be the one who loves more. I disagree with this sentiment in

principle: Auden, Late Auden, is wrong. But now there's no point in disagreeing with anything. Over the course of the last week of October I take on a series of sordid jobs that I do at night and that I know I won't be able to tell my friends about; on the first of November, the amount in my checking account is just enough to make my rent. But I'm not sure what I'll do in December; I don't get enough sleep; I know I can't go on like this. When I finally collapse into bed, in the early morning hours, I know full well that I'll pay for it.

When my boyfriend comments on the dark circles under my eyes and my weight loss, I change the subject. In fact, I get him to have sex with me; as always, the action of the body obliterates both consciousness and soul. But when we're finished, he goes home and I'm left in bed alone, thinking about what else I can sell: I don't own a single object of any value. In the days that follow, I experience a series of increasingly severe domestic disasters that finally leave me without a working phone, refrigerator, or laptop. I don't have the money to repair them or

buy them anew, but I manage to restart an old, only partially broken phone and arrange a replacement computer. I decide to do without the refrigerator; what did I keep in it, anyway? My boyfriend asks if when it's all over we can go somewhere. I answer: must we dream our dreams and have them, too? I decide to walk because it saves on public transport, and also because I find walking calming. The streets pass me by and remind me that I love them, that I love the city, and I'm overcome with waves of love for passersby. But that's only because they're strangers; they don't charge me anything, and neither are they supposed to pay me.

I begin to feel a creeping disgust toward others: toward my friends, who sleep safely in their beds, who get up in the morning for jobs that still require someone to do them, who gladly pay for my coffees when we meet; toward my relatives, who've made it all too clear that they can't help; toward my boyfriend, who remains ignorant of my true condition. The weather is getting colder. Though I've been waiting for winter all summer, I'm realizing now that I'm

afraid of it: my warm jacket hangs in the closet above my worn-out sneakers, which I know will get waterlogged with the first rain. The first few days of November pass and the nature of my dislike changes: I begin waking up in a fog of apathy. If I could get the money for a plane ticket, I think, maybe I could start over somewhere else where the bank won't catch up with me. I check this out online: is it possible to withdraw insurance and pension funds without a penalty? Is it possible to leave the country in debt and never return?

Walking a lot wears my shoes down further, but I keep walking. Since there's nowhere I need to be, I can afford to look around, at every turn and crack, and I see that others are doing something similar and I know why. The front doors to many residential buildings, even doors that always used to be closed and locked with a code known only to tenants are now wide open; some of them have pieces of paper stuck on them: SHELTER. But I'm not looking for shelter—on the contrary. When I realize I have to leave my apartment in late November I pack a few

things in a small backpack, a thicker shirt, three or four pairs of socks and underwear, the book I haven't had time to read. I throw my phone and my borrowed computer in a nearby trash can. And I let the rain wash over me.

## The Drive

Asaf Schurr

This anthology disgusts me and my willingness to participate in it disgusts me. Everything disgusts me, at least more so than usual. And everything's sadder than usual too: more important, more pointless, more significant, duller. It's all supposed to be very confusing, but at the moment seems fairly obvious.

I write these things by the table in the nature reserve by the house. Above, fighter jets; in the distance, explosions. Between these are trees, the railroad tracks, the birds. I'm in the heart of the country and all around me, in ever-radiating circles, are the armed neighbors, the police, Border Police volunteers, army bases, soldiers, naval destroyers. A rustle in the dry bush behind me, and I turn around in dread (it was a lizard).

I'm afraid of falling rockets. I'm afraid someone will sneak up on me and kill me. I fear for my life, but not enough to get up and go home. I fear for the lives



of others. I tell myself I mustn't die, because I can't leave my wife alone, nor the cats. Because I've only just discovered Virginia Woolf and how the Lydian augmented mode works. I'm considering taking up smoking again. I read about the establishment of civil-guard squads throughout the country. I know there are already people hard at work turning them into militias. I knew that would happen. I was ready for it. I've already protested against it, knowing how awful and dangerous this would be (there will be lynchings, a civil war). In the meantime, I've joined one near my home. I have tactical thoughts.

I sleep enough but I'm still constantly tired to a weird and almost unbearable degree, and in a way that's hard to understand or explain. I want to do terrible things, which I'm able to imagine in detail. I find great satisfaction in imagining them and yet, when I sit down in front of the TV, I can't bear even the implied violence of children's shows.

At night, I drive out to the gate of the moshav and guard there, or make my rounds back and forth from the cemetery that lies at the end of the horrifically

dark road to the neighboring town. My shift passes in an odd counterpoise of ease and suspense. I keep the windows down. It used to be that I only drove with music on. Now I don't. I only want to drive like this: alone, in silence, with the streets changing in front of my eyes. It gives me something to do, and I'm happy to keep busy. When I'm not, things I don't want to see, things I'm sorry I saw, float up in front of me—things that it's better to go through life without ever seeing or even knowing that they might be possible (too late for that).

I don't know whether to believe my feelings. It seems that it's better to be suspicious of them in the same way that I'm suspicious (and justifiably so) of everybody else's. I know I'm seeing only the most intense and explicit of my emotions. I know or at least assume that the rest of them are there, but submerged, sunken. There was a flood, and now only the tops of the mountains can be seen (which flood? What waters came? I know, but prefer not to).

The familiar characteristics emerge from the people around me as if outgrowing the bodies that

contain them: they split the skin on their way out. Everyone wears their own face like a giant mask, a single grimace that's visible even from the cheapest seats. Sometimes it seems that everyone has chosen just one main personality trait to cling to—until the wave breaks, that is, and everything is settled one way or another; just try not to drown (whoever's angry is 30x angry; whoever worries, worries 40x as much; whoever is responsible by nature is now 50x, 100x, responsible).

I get to bed by dawn, go to sleep and wake up exhausted. I ask myself what's the use of writing now, what's the use of literature, and the question repels me and embarrasses me. It seems to me that writing now (let alone writing fiction) is impossible, almost forbidden; certainly illogical. And yet I write and try to convince myself that there's a benefit to it (but what benefit? And for whom? What for? When for?).

Reading, however, I can manage. I yearn for it like I haven't in years. And if reading might be beneficial (at least to me), then maybe writing might

be so as well, because ultimately both allow you to simultaneously gain some distance and to annul it. To see and feel everything fully, but not from the heart of the matter, or our role in it. To see the whole entire form and feel everything, feel all of it, but without personal bias. To see that our existence as a node of the collective web is inevitable, whether we be a strand or a knot, a void or a juncture, a fly or a spider.

And when the wind blows and everything shakes, we tremble with the thought of this web tearing. We tremble as we wait for it to end. We tremble and our feet already strike the rhythm: Death, death, death.



## The Count

Tehila Hakimi

Translated from the Hebrew by Jessica Setbon

On the news, they count in days, then it becomes months. They count the ones we've lost: one thousand three hundred and still counting—murdered, kidnapped, soldiers fallen in battle. They count the casualties on the other side as well. Thousands of them are children, the numbers unfathomable.

I, too, am counting the days and weeks inside of me. The fifth week of the war is the eleventh week of my pregnancy. According to the app, this is a period of rapid growth; the fetus will double in size in just a week. It will reach five centimeters in length, and its teeth and nails will begin to form.

Over thirty children are held captive under the ground of the Gaza Strip. Gaza's ground shakes and roars— Hamas launches rockets, the IDF retaliates with bombardments, masses of IDF troops

have penetrated deep into the Strip. Among those captured is a baby, ten-month-old Kfir Bibas. I think of him every day, a fragile infant. Shiri, his mother, was also kidnapped and taken to Gaza. I pray for her well-being. What is he eating there under the ground? When will Kfir Bibas be brought back to us? When will Kfir Bibas see daylight again?

The first images on the news were full of blood but devoid of people. In children's rooms, there was blood on walls and beds, on sheets and stuffed animals. The photographs showed puddles of blood on the floors, at front doors, and along the hallways leading to the safe rooms, one house after another. Blood, more blood, and yet more blood—congealed, dark as wine. In the first few weeks, many Israelis flocked to hospitals to donate blood. The media eventually asked the public to stop coming, except for type "O"s. More and more blood was collected. According to my app, at eleven weeks the blood flow in my body will increase so much that I'm likely to feel warmth in my hands and feet, and intense thirst. Do the kidnapped people have water underground?

What will they do when they feel extreme thirst? How will they drink water down there? The elderly, the infants, the women, and the men?

During the first few weeks, I believed that my son was oblivious to the war. He's only two years and five months old. I know that at this point I should be describing his age differently—I should be saying that he's two and a half. But to me, it feels more accurate to measure such unparalleled love in months. If I had the time, I would count it in minutes or even seconds, but I don't have that luxury.

When the siren blares, we have ninety seconds to reach the safe room. That's enough time: we're lucky, we're far enough away. At any rate, my son seems utterly undisturbed by it all. I pick him up and take him inside; my partner closes the door and rotates the handle all the way until it locks. My son is happy when we take his toy garbage truck or a book with us into the safe room. He sits on the floor, listening attentively to the story. As I try to differentiate the sounds outside, the slamming of safe room and shelter doors from the booms of explosions and



interceptions, my son pushes his toy truck—back and forth, back and forth.

Late one evening, the alarm went off after he'd fallen asleep. He woke up inside the safe room, was thrilled to see us all together. He even suggested we stay there to sleep on the floor. I imagine that the abducted children must be sleeping on floors, too. I hope they at least have a mattress, or a blanket, or a mat—something to shield them from the damp, cold ground. How can they sleep underground? Human beings are meant to sleep above ground.

People are saying they're having trouble sleeping, that sleep has been stolen from them—the entire nation is sleepless. I'm constantly tired, exhausted. There's a physiological explanation; my body is constantly working to form another one inside me. But I've always been a sound sleeper. It's one of my strengths, this deep sleep. It's very difficult to wake me up, especially in the middle of the night. It's when I do wake up that the problem begins. How can I fall asleep again, knowing that two hundred and forty people are trapped underground? There's a little

girl, four years old, named Avigail. Both her parents were killed in the massacre. I can't bear the thought of her being down there alone. It's suffocating to know that little Avigail is there by herself.

Time feels different now. It still passes—minutes, hours, days—but it has a different texture, like a material that suddenly and surprisingly altered its form. This new shape is unfamiliar, distorted, twisted. In engineering school, I learned a theory in the Materials Science course called Young's Modulus. It's a measure of the elasticity of a material. It indicates the flexibility and strength of a substance, its level of resistance under force and ability to return to its original shape. According to this theory, up to a certain point, a material will stretch without distortion, its elasticity enabling it to return to its original form. However, if more and more force is applied, its molecules and atoms become distorted. The material changes forever, turning into something else entirely; something unexpected, with qualities and properties vastly different from before.

It's been almost twenty years since I finished

my military service. Less than a week after I was discharged, I took off for a long trip to New Zealand and Australia. During those first weeks in New Zealand, I often found myself unconsciously reaching for the M16 that used to hang on my back. Over time, I gradually got used to its absence. Slowly, I forgot those military habits and reflexes.

Two days into the war, after staying indoors the whole time, I ventured out for a short walk with my son. I encouraged him to ride his bike and play soccer with me. He wanted me to throw the ball high above the trees, to the top of our building. My attempts to throw the sponge ball made him laugh so hard he nearly fell backwards onto the grass. We were the only ones there, and the sound of each passing car made me jump. My mind raced, planning how to react if a siren went off. I knew we couldn't make it back to our building in ninety seconds, and the buildings nearby were all locked. I realized that the safest thing would be to lie down on the ground, keeping my son close, shielding him under me if necessary. The instinct to reach for a weapon at my

back suddenly felt all too familiar.

A week before my eldest son was born, in May 2021, there was another round of fighting in Gaza. There were riots across the country, and we had sirens even in Tel Aviv. I'm almost certain they gave this war or operation a name, but I'm not sure what it was called. The names of these operations all sound the same to me, as if churned out by some automatic word generator: Iron Swords, Cast Lead, Guardian of the Walls, Protective Edge. Each word signifies strength; but when strung together in this context, they form vague, meaningless expressions. During one of these wars, I wrote a poem that began:

To the prime ministers:  
Call this upcoming war  
by your own name.  
I'm tired of meaningless names, like rock, or  
material, or mountain.

In 2021, we lived in a different apartment, and we didn't have a safe room in the house or a shelter in the

building. The nearest shelter was just down the street, but I was too scared to run over there, worried about falling in my pregnant state. Our stairwell was open to the skies, offering a clear view of the intercepting missiles, streaks of flame in the sky. During one alarm, a neighbor from the building next door went out onto her balcony, screaming incoherently. Her cries are still etched in my memory. At that time, I was counting days beyond my due date; my firstborn could arrive at any moment. I recall standing in that stairwell, weeping uncontrollably. I cradled my rounded belly and begged for my baby to stay put—just until the war was over, just until the sirens ceased.

## **Justin Trudeau**

Oded Carmeli

Translated from the Hebrew by Oded Even Or

I have thought about leaving many times. I've never once thought about my mother or my father. Once I thought about Amir, but that was by accident. I thought it was a funny thought. Not the thought about Amir, but the thought that I could have an accidental thought. More than once I thought, how can reality be checked? Other times I thought, I will never leave here. Meaning that here is where I will die. Then I thought, anyone who has ever died has died someplace, wherever they happened to be. And a third thought, that even if all the dead died someplace, not all the dead knew that the place where they died would be the place where they would die. On the contrary. Few did. Most had hope. And you never stop having thoughts. For example, I have thought about leaving many times.

I've never once thought about my mother or my father. Once I thought about Amir, but that was by accident. And it's too late now, anyway. I think I can hear them. What else was I thinking about? Quick, what else was there? I wasn't thinking about myself. I had forgotten to think about myself. Then I thought, it's funny that you are not thinking about yourself at a time when all you would be expected to think about is yourself. I thought, my hand, why did it stop shaking? And my lips, why did they stop quivering? Did I fall out of human evolution? On second thoughts, I thought it was only natural. You could say that I was struck by hopelessness. To think about something else while this is going on. Letting the mind sail away. To Canada, for example. And, after all, I have thought about leaving many times. I made preparations to leave, even. People used to say, one day I'll get up and leave. And again, just get up and leave. People don't say that anymore. I don't know why, but it saddens me and I am moved almost to tears because people no longer say, one day I'll get up and leave, then pause and say again,

just get up and leave. Because like everyone else, I've also thought about leaving. Many times. I thought about life in Canada. Back then, I mean when I was thinking about leaving, I thought about going away to live in Canada. But then I thought that I didn't know anyone in Canada. I mean, not only did I not know anyone there personally, but I also didn't know of any Canadians in general. Except for Justin Trudeau, the prime minister of Canada. And Amir. A funny thought, Amir as a Canadian. The thought of shouting, listen to me, I could have left, I had the means but not the ends. The thought to explain that I chose not to. Consciously chose not to. They're outside now. I think I can hear them. I know that they've always been outside, but they've gotten awfully close now. There had been no warning. I am not making a sound. I think I wish to make a statement or perhaps to be interviewed (by whom?). I think I wish to say that we had not been given warning. On the other hand, as my own interviewer, I consider it important to remind the listeners that the alarm went off years ago. Am I lost



in thought? That is in itself a thought, therefore I am lost in thought. Lost in reverie, they used to say. In our region, they don't say anymore that so-and-so is lost in reverie. Everyone is in their thoughts or with their thoughts. I thought, in Canada they still lose themselves in reverie. But, when I thought about someone getting lost in reverie, I could only imagine it from the outside. Like watching a silent film. A man is lost in reverie, he walks and walks and then walks right into a pole. He hits his head and falls into the snow. The snow becomes dark with blood. I think that snow absorbs blood better than sand. In any case, I can't see what the man is thinking about. I mean, what his reverie is about. There, in Canada. I mean, what is there to think about in Canada? About me, maybe. If the news has reached Amir (what time is it over there?), then the reverie would be about me. I thought it was a funny thought, to be the subject of a reverie. That someone would walk into a pole and it would be my fault. I think I closed the shutters. I can't see them. I think it's only a matter of time, meaning time is short. I repeat (for the last

time?): I have thought about leaving many times. I've never once thought about my mother or my father. Once I thought about Amir. More than once, if we count this time too. I mean if this time counts. My father once tried to manipulate me. He had good intentions. He went (Where? Here) and got Canadian dollars. Foreign currency, they call it. And I thought, I don't even know who the people on the bills are. Because as I said, or as I thought, I didn't know any Canadians except, perhaps, Justin Trudeau. And Amir. I almost said, and my Amir. I thought it was a funny thought. My Amir on a Canadian dollar bill. Even Justin Trudeau isn't. It is universally accepted that bills should not be illustrated with the faces of the living. I had no further guesses. I refused my father. With good reason, I think. Angrily, as I recall. Don't Canadians have their own generals, explorers, saints? Make them into currency, then. I thought, I am thinking about them more than I am worrying about myself. There's no light here, it is very dim. I think I either turned off the lights or it is night out. It doesn't matter. I am not visible to

them. I can hear them very well. The dry or dead leaves under their shoes or their boots. And the shouting, probably directions, instructions, orders. I could have use that right now, I think. I think about Justin Trudeau. I think, where is he right now, Justin Trudeau, and where am I? No, I will never leave here anymore. Their language is foreign and close. I can only understand a few phrases. Come here, look there. And all the time, *yalla, yalla, yalla*. That can be loosely translated as go, go, go. I thought it was a funny thought, as I am not going anywhere. Seeing as I am in the stern. Stowed away. The shadows are getting lighter. I think I can see black oars. I have thought about leaving many times. I've never once thought about my mother or my father. More than once I thought about Amir, but that was by accident. I think they're here. I know I am.

## Before the Massacre

Maxim Biller

Translated from the German by Nadav Avruch

Ira from New York sat behind Anna and me in the ballroom-sized breakfast hall of the King David Hotel in Jerusalem and spoke loudly about tennis courts, the new house he wanted to build, and five million dollars. He might have been sixty but he looked younger, like a fit fifty-year-old with a little belly and the steely constitution of the post-war generation. And like all the men and boys at the large round table listening to him, he wore an inconspicuous kippa, jeans, and a simple pair of sneakers. It was the second or third day of Sukkot, and the world-famous five-star hotel was full of people like them.

“I’ve piled up too much food at the buffet,” I said to Anna, who was wrestling with a huge slice of French toast of her own. “I’m going to smoke

a cigarette in the garden right after this,” she said, “and then go for another swim.” “Should I try to put these two croissants back without anyone noticing?” “I’m leaving now,” she said, “think about it.” “About what?” “Whether you’re joining me later or not.” “I’ve been to the Western Wall so many times,” I said, “and I don’t believe in God anyway.” “Yes, unfortunately.”

After Anna left, I turned to the cheerful man behind me and said in English, “Hi! So where do you guys come from?” His face, small and burly, darkened. “I’m from Berlin,” I continued, “but actually I come from Munich, or actually from Prague.” “We all come from New York and Long Island,” he said, so loudly that everyone at his table could hear. He then told me about his parents and grandparents, who had had to hide from the Germans in Poland. And about America, where Ira—we had introduced ourselves in the meantime—was born in 1960. “My dad still had to work in a scrapyard in Hoboken,” he said meaningfully, nothing more. Only later did I learn from one of the overeager Arab hotel porters

that he rented two dozen rooms for his huge family at the King David every Sukkot for half a million dollars. “How safe is America today, Ira?” “For us?” “For us.” “It’s hard for me to say what will become of my children. With more and more antisemites left and right.” “Is Israel the answer?” I asked, somewhat dramatically. “Israel. Maybe. Yes.”

Anna and I had arrived in Jerusalem the day earlier from Tel Aviv by train. From the central station, we took a taxi to Rehavia, where many German Jews used to live. At Café Efraim, the owner, whom everyone called Efi, was already expecting us. He was thin but still robust, and he kept placing small bowls of salads and sauces on our table. “Jerusalem has soul,” he said two or three times in a row. “Tel Aviv is just full of dirt and pretentious people.” In the taxi to the hotel, I admired the quiet, clear facades made of Jerusalem stone, the elegant government buildings and museums, the clean streets. Efi was right, I thought. Jerusalem is the Paris or Geneva of the Middle East. I just hoped I wouldn’t end up at the Western Wall again tomorrow, like always.

And what happened the next morning? After the cigarette and sixteen long laps in the shimmering-blue pool of the hotel, Anna quickly dressed and we took a car directly to the Western Wall. As she turned right and disappeared, gorgeous as always with her proud Cleopatra-like walk, into the vast crowd of women, I trudged to the left to join the men. She hoped to experience something very profound by touching the ancient temple stones, as she had three years ago. As for me, I hoped for this day to be over soon, so we could finally go back to Tel Aviv and kick back on our balcony. Standing shortly afterward in the subterranean synagogue at the northern edge of the Wall, shielded from the October heat, I watched the worshippers and couldn't help but wonder how come so many of them looked just like my father, only with beards and sidelocks. All of a sudden, I was a few thousand years old, like the men and the stones around me. Finally, I was very late to come out, and as soon as I spotted Anna amidst the human chaos, I could tell that she hadn't experienced anything special herself.

“Why did you make me wait in the heat for so long?” she said angrily. “Damn Jerusalem,” I said, “I think I’ve just started to believe in God.” “Then we need to get away from here quickly,” she said, grabbing my elbow firmly.

This was only a couple of days before the Hamas pogrom. Did I feel the threat back then? Not in Tel Aviv, but maybe in Jerusalem. It was perfectly obvious to me that Ira from New York would never send his children to Israel. Seeing as his family had already narrowly escaped destruction once, why risk a second time now by coming within firing range of Hezbollah and Hamas rockets? This much I realized, then and there: that the kind old Arab porter at the King David Hotel and the two Arab students at the prestigious Van Leer Institute who had helped me with directions would remain peaceful toward people like me only as long as we remained stronger; and that there was no God, I knew once again when Anna and I smoked the first cigarette of the evening on our balcony in Tel Aviv. But if there is one, I think right now, here at my safe desk in Berlin, at



Zionskirchplatz, He should immediately send the Ten Plagues upon Israel's enemies again. We haven't heard from Him for too long, anyway.

## Invitation to Grief

Yaara Shehori

Translated from the Hebrew by Jessica Setbon

Will you come cry with us? There's space beneath the charred tree, beside the ruined house. There's enough room in the bullet-ridden armored vehicle, in the field where crops ripen and decay on their stalks. Here, mothers wail; here, a brother tattoos his dead sister's silhouette onto his arm; here, young women and men ran from the bullets; here, final messages were sent—We're here, they're killing us. Save us. They're here.

Here a father cries for his wife and children who were torn from him. Someone is at work cleaning the houses in Be'eri, in Kfar Aza, in Nir Oz—of ammunition and bloodstains. The young people still chase birds in the sky, they said to each other that birds know the way, they know how to flee from danger. I still hope they'll be saved. They still have

the party's ID bracelets on their wrists. A month later, you can buy a solidarity bracelet. The party goes on, pink legs punctured with bullets, rescuers, survivors, the murdered, dead girls, an orchard littered with bodies. The devastation. The slow, lingering murder. The abductions. The signs of destruction. Here's the bus with its elderly passengers, all of them shot. Here we sat and wept.

Here are the infants. I won't speak of the infants. Here. Too many stories have been told about this land, too many names given. The blood is always ancient, always new. But with me, only my eyes overflow with blood. My veins are sealed. I'm still standing in the kitchen, listening to the news from October 7th, the beginning of a *shiva* from which we cannot rise. Girls yearn for home; children can't sleep. Sleeping pills. Tranquilizers. We're fine only when we continue to move. Do something. Drive. Look. Stand in the square. Tie a yellow ribbon, and another. Whom will it bring back?

I call my friend on the phone and we remain silent. "How are you?" she asks. "Like everyone."

Suddenly there's everyone, but no one. It's Saturday morning again. Children from kibbutzim and towns wake in panic, those who are safe in beds that aren't theirs, those who were promised, those who can still be consoled. How will they trust us? Is it easier to fall asleep into a nightmare, or to wake up to one? In my dream, an eyeless girl calls me mother. I recognize her. She is mine.

In fact: more dead. More flags. A girl asks about her small shoes. Why were they taken from me? Who took them away? More torn photos. Mothers grasp their children's hands gently, sometimes, they grasp them too firmly. I constantly smell smoke. I smell nothing. Saturday morning. It's still Saturday morning. Time has stopped. The white pickup is still driving. Young people are lying on the ground, already shot. Death dances around them. They hear the voices. They hold the door. There is no door. We are the women, the grandfathers, the sons, the workers, the dancers, the daughters, the lone man. The orchestra plays by his grave. The orchestra that has stopped playing. The dead. The kidnapped. The

abducted. The ones now living underground. The kingdom of shadows. Are we alive?

This is an invitation to grief. An invitation to sorrow. An invitation for ash to cover our hands, leaving fingerprints on every window. An invitation to know everyone by name. Come back. Return to us. We're not awake, but we are. The child pinches himself in order to wake up from the nightmare while his mother holds the door. I hesitate again: are we alive?

We are the ones who wait. We wait for them, as they taught us. *El na refa na la*. Please heal us. A mother sings a lullaby to her abducted son. Grief has descended to earth, trudging after the terror. We've learned to wait, yet we've forgotten. We peer out of the window, startled by every sound. We, living in cities where weapons have been stockpiled suddenly, too late. We who know that the garden had no keeper, that the vineyard was destroyed, that the house was burned. Under the concrete beam, like in the belly of the beast, we wait with torn eyes, for one hour, a thousand hours. Bread of tears on our

table, our lips mumbling. Let them come, from old to young. At any hour, they could return. Any moment. Do not banish hope. My friend tells me that her son said to her, “Maybe there will be a miracle.” We’ve seen miracles. A sea parted. A child returned. All the children. All the people. And a river of tears surrounds us.

November 12, 2023



## Aryeh Attias

### Collision

Translated from the Hebrew by Jessica Setbon

Once, in the Malacca Strait en route to Singapore, I was a young third mate on the morning watch, the sea was calm as a mirror, visibility perfect. The sun peeked through clouds, and the sweet scent of land hung in the air. I noticed a ship to the left, about fifteen miles away, speeding toward us on a collision course. Maritime law dictates that since the ship was to my left, I should maintain my course, and that the other ship's officer should take early action and change course at a safe distance. But I hate waiting for the other side to do us a favor and move out of the way. Maybe their officer was busy in the map room and hadn't even seen us. Maybe he was an idiot who didn't know the law. Such thoughts could ruin a beautiful morning, so I decided to alter our course slightly right, just for a short time, to cross



their path and get away from them.

Just then, the bridge door burst open, and the captain stormed in. He must have seen the approaching ship from the window of his office under the bridge, and rushed up when he noticed the course change.

“What do you think you’re doing?” he thundered, slamming the door behind him.

“I just shifted our course a bit,” I said, “to get rid of that pest and then return to our original course.”

“And what does maritime law say in this case?” he asked, rubbing his hands together, as if I had dozed off during that lesson in school.

“Legally, they should clear the way, but I thought that since it’s almost bow to bow, maybe it’s better to yield...”

“It’s not almost bow to bow,” he interrupted, pointing at the ship. “It’s on the port side, so please follow the law,” he commanded, directing me back to the collision course.

The chief mate waited calmly until the ships were just five miles apart, then started fidgeting in

his chair. In a matter of minutes, if neither ship changed course, we would collide. At four miles, he couldn't hold back any longer.

"Why isn't that idiot turning around!" he exclaimed.

He jumped up and rushed to the radio in the corner of the bridge. He called the other ship on the emergency channel, demanding they turn and clear the way as international maritime law requires, but there was no response.

Meanwhile, the ships continued to approach each other on a clear and beautiful morning, until we reached the point where collision seemed inevitable.

"Hard to port!" the captain yelled at me. I stood behind the wheel, ready to execute his every command. Just then, I saw the bow of the other ship turning left, as if they'd finally seen us and turned their wheel to their right. If we'd turned in the same direction, we would have definitely collided.

So, against the captain's order, I turned the wheel to the right. The ships passed so closely, I could have jumped from our bridge to theirs.



## Contributors

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