

The blast breaks the golden summer morning. For the second time in his life, Nathan sees people in the air, people flying, a Chagall painting, bright against a white, veiled sky. It must have been the sound which conjured the image. Sounds can do this, he knows, create a synaesthesia of colour and noise, the only explanation for the way he suddenly sees them appear, there in the air above him. He stops, the implacable doors of the hospital swinging finally behind him, not knowing, forgetting in that instant the news he's about to carry across a small corner of the city. He realises at once what's caused the noise but doesn't know what to do, how to find out, how to discover where, exactly, knowing that it's always this way, that in the midst, or almost, there's no knowing. On the periphery, there are radios and news bulletins, shocked and hasty statements but in the street, at the precise moment of the terrible silence of endings, there's nothing but to wait for the brain to catch up, for the map-lines of the mind to spark and begin to extend out to connect to all those you love, ticking them off one by one from their points of safety, leaving the fear for the random ones, children, friends whose precise ordering of the day you don't know, the ones you can't account for, and over everything, the almost pause in the movement of the earth, the moment when you know everything has changed.

In the silence which couldn't really, he sees later, have been silence, Nathan begins slowly to walk away- he's quite certain of that- from whatever has happened, towards the cafe-bar in Camden where he's to meet Elli, his daughter for what he does, but she doesn't yet know, was to have been a celebration breakfast. Where is she? he thinks in a

moment of panic but she is, almost certainly not yet dressed, or in the shower, anticipating her meeting with him, her moment of running down the stairs from her flat into the brilliant sunshine of the morning into the cafe, which is only next door. He wonders if she's beginning to know what he doesn't, if there have already been news flashes and the first, cursory details. But this much he does know. It was a bomb. Behind him, the silence ends. The wailing begins. Sirens start, serially, to howl, urgent and woeful.

Stepping out from the shadow of the building into sunlight, Nathan knows that his own news, the news he was going to bear so carefully, triumphantly through the hot London streets, has changed. It has lost its brilliant vigour, already eclipsed by whatever it is that has happened. Beginning to walk faster, he feels a sharp, marvellous pleasure in the heat, in the movement of his body through the summer city air, knowing that hot or cold, this is honest sensation, his own, not the chemical induced falsity to which he's had to become accustomed. He wants to smile as a sign of gratitude for his renewed health but around him, anxiety seems already to have begun to tighten the faces in passing cars which appear now frowning, intent. Celebration is at an end. On this bright, promising day of summer, there will be only muted joy. He has used his phone, dumbled into obedience for the duration of his hospital appointment, to tell his wife his news but now, it will remain switched off. He needs this short time to begin to think of himself again as a man in the fullness of life. The sounds, ambulances, police cars behind him, begin to form a chorus, the question and answer of distance and approach.

Leaving the hospital where he's spent too much time in the past years, gives him a sense of almost reluctant freedom, an awareness of regret in response to the surgeon,

Mr McIntosh's words, 'I won't need to see you for a while now,' suddenly understanding the force of breaking the ties which have underlain the jovial, unequal relationship he's had with this man, a relationship which has always contained, for better or worse, its natural end.

Nathan looks at his watch. He's happy to be meeting Elli first, before he has to talk to anyone else. Seeing her is always a testing of the closeness of love and he thinks of her as a small child, hopping on the path or in the porch each evening as his car drew in, full of a child's earnest joy, shouting,

'You're home!' as if the matter had been in doubt. He's always loved her ceremonies, her gracious markings of events and as he thinks of it, feels a moment of disappointment for her as well as for himself in the ruin of a self-centred moment of purest celebration.

As he walks, everything looks renewed, vivid, made more beautiful by Nathan's realisation that he no longer needs to look with the wary eye of the possibly doomed, weighing each observation, each reaction against the balance of what might or might not be. The disease which has inhabited his body, and his mind, for a long time, has gone. The leaves on the trees in Regent's Park are a richer green, the terraces more elegant than he's ever seen them. He thinks of the animals and birds in the zoo on the other side of the park, imagining the sheen on fur and feather under this morning's sunlight.

His meeting with Elli is almost as he thought it would be. She's waiting for him outside the door of the cafe, full of eagerness and anticipation but what he hasn't expected is her throwing down of the flowers she's been carrying onto one of the pavement tables, her leaping at him, nearly crying, saying,

'Thank God! I was so scared when I heard!' and more, her telling him what she knows so far. All around, people are tapping at phones, the same tight and anxious faces as he's seen on the way. Now, he knows why. There's a moment's hesitation before Elli, remembering the purpose of their meeting, asks what the doctor said. When he tells her, she seems, for a moment, overcome, holding him, her hair against his face. They choose a table. Elli hands him the flowers, insisting that he should sit while she gets up and goes to the bar. Sitting, he thinks of a morning in Berlin, a few months ago, a cafe not unlike this one, his wife brave and smiling, his seeing in her eyes her thoughts, that they were there because the world must be experienced, because they had never been there before, because, soon, he might be dead. The waitress had lit a candle on the table although the morning was like this one, sunlit. It was cold though, the sun of winter.

Elli carries two glasses of champagne to the table. Their raising of them is less flamboyant, their toast quieter than it might have been. Their conversation can only be of what's happened in this city, near to them. The sounds reach them, as if they have pursued, or accompanied him on his way.

'I don't think anyone knows what it is yet,' she says, 'but they think it was a bomb.' He already knows. This is how memory begins, with sound, the sound which resurrects the past,

'It was,' Nathan says, 'it was a bomb.'

Now, sitting in this cafe, it starts in the back of his brain, the first dim strand of it, everything connected with that time, everything that happened. It starts, the sense that

he must have carried for forty years, the knowledge that one day, he will have to remember.

'Dad, how do you know?' Elli says, 'When have you ever heard a bomb?'

'In Jerusalem,' he says, 'once, a long time ago, when I was a student.'

Together, they read the menu. Nathan feels hungry but also, irrationally, that it's inappropriate to be eating at this moment of uncertainty, possibly of other peoples' deaths. He overcomes the feeling, realising that he need no longer think of what he's eating as contributing, or not, towards his recovery. The music playing is matched discordantly by other sound. All around them, people are phoning, texting, receiving calls. He switches on his phone, reads the few messages which have accumulated. Elli's phone rings and when she answers, it's with reassurance, telling the person phoning that she's fine. The conversation is cursory, brief, the same as other peoples' conversations, their words the same, the echo of them passing persistently through the room, don't worry, I'm here, I'm fine.

It will be in the days after, seeing the first images of dim, purposeful figures moving through the city, through the Underground, when the fullness of memory, with all its dark anger, will begin in him. It will happen slowly, over the next weeks, the next months. Nathan will remember. The sun will remind him and later, the days of autumn rain. The faces he will see on the news, the unreadable eyes, the unfathomable intent, all of it will drive him back. Memory. He will recall the words of conversations. Everything will come to him in its infinite detail but most of all, he'll see, both in his wakefulness and in his sleep, the face of son of his Jerusalem landlord.

It isn't, he knows, that he hasn't thought often over the years about the district of Jerusalem where he lived for a time when he was young. Mostly, it has come to his mind on seeing television pictures of conflict, ruination, tower blocks, the work of forty years. The district was one of large stone houses, of gardens and peaceful streets. It was after the Six Day War, more than a year after. As a Jew, he'd still been unusual, an unlikely presence there in the Arab part of the city. Every day he lived there, he'd imagined how it must have been before the war, before military headquarters and troops and patrols, the paraphernalia of occupation. It must, he always thought, have been even quieter, slow traffic passing the large stone houses used as foreign embassies, trailing, ebbing down the road which led to the Old City. He'd think of the pictures in prayer books, engravings of hills and wadis, wishing it had still been that way, knowing, even at the time, that circumstance had made his tastes and longings into an old man's tastes and longings, for quiet, for things the way they had been, a knowledge of all things wild and threatening shut out. He was eighteen then, and alone. He'd been in the country since early spring, living in a settlement in the north, a kibbutz of people from Germany, Poland, from the dark places of Europe's past. At the end of summer, he moved to Jerusalem before the university term began.

The house was divided into two flats, his, the spacious upper storey. He'd found it by chance after days of fruitless, frustrating searching in the west of the city, what was, before Six Day War, the Jewish side of the city. In a bookshop in the east city, he'd asked a question of a man in a bookshop then watched how events followed like a pile of cards tilting in a slow, gracious collapse, the final fall taking him through a gateway into the arched hallway of the ground floor of the house, vaulted, dim and lovely. Now, he wonders if the feeling he had then, that the house was closer to what he knew, was not

the moment when it all went wrong, when the future of his life there ended. He'd thought momentarily of his parent's house, the place where he had once lived.

The owner of the house was small, dark-eyed, solemn, a man, Nathan had felt, of distant, unreachable sadness, a quality, he'd hoped, which might give them common cause. A lawyer, the landlord wore a grey suit, the first Nathan had seen since leaving home. His English was precise, out-moded, the kind you no longer heard spoken except on old recordings of famous people, scientists famous for discoveries long since superseded, politicians or poets stranded, cut off by the continental drift of time. The landlord tilted his balding head to one side as he spoke, discussing terms. It was the first time Nathan had done this but the landlord gave no indication of knowing it, if he did, leading him swiftly through calendar months and fuel payments and dates of entry. Nathan left feeling an odd, deep, calm rippled slightly by the excitement of anticipating his own first home. As he walked away from the house, he remembers allowing himself to think about the future, to plan, just a little.

It would, Nathan knows, have been a pleasure to have sat here in this cafe yesterday, last week, last month. He and Elli would have discussed the menu, relaxing, laughing, chatting, choosing what they'd have for breakfast but today, although they smile, it's no longer a pleasure. Nathan thinks again, moment by moment, of his appointment with the doctor.

'I must think about getting a present for Ian McIntosh,' he says.

'Whisky?'

'Lots of people probably give him that. I'd like to find something more personal.'

'What's he interested in?'

'Lots of things. Butterflies. Gaelic poetry. The Spanish Civil War.'

'A book then. A first edition of something?'

'That's more or less what I was thinking. Nabokov, or Sorley Maclean perhaps. I'll see what I can find.'

They order the same, smoked salmon, beignets, scrambled eggs, coffee. Around them, the same words have begun to tumble from one table to the next, locations, numbers, numbers which will change, will grow, expand into the awful reality which will be revealed in the days to come. This is what always happens, Nathan knows, this communal horror and fear, this drawing closer of people looped together by a reverberant wave of shock.

In the days and weeks which follow, he'll astonish himself with the clarity of his recall. Conversations will be there, if not in their entirety, then in the total imprint of their meaning, words which will begin to resonate in his head. He'll think of how, after he'd moved to Jerusalem, he'd repeat to himself the warnings of the people on the kibbutz, about not walking alone at night, the words of a lorry driver from whom he'd hitched a lift, who told him something valuable, something to which, clearly, he didn't listen.

Randomly, he'll remember the sounds of church bells in quiet streets, the scuttle of cockroaches over stone floors, the crown of thorns he and Mirri found in the flat, a bit of tourist tat, poignantly, shockingly silly, which they both put on their heads at one time or another, adopting poses of suffering. He will think of late winter afternoons in the blueish light of Old City shops, buying grapes and apples to carry home. He will think, without ceasing, of the face of the landlord's son.

It's with reluctance that Nathan allows himself to wonder where the landlord's son might be now, if he's still alive. He must have been about the same age as Nathan, thin and dark, with black eyebrows which almost met at mid-point beneath his frowning forehead. Nathan saw him every day in the courtyard of the house, always with a broom, always sweeping. The son swept morning and afternoon, sometime in the darkness of evening too. Watching, Nathan saw him tense, quick, edgy, the way he swept seeming imperative, driven, the product of compulsion. Nathan had often felt that he wanted to share whatever it was which held the young man to life, maintained in him his tensile balance, sweeping, looking from time to time towards the sky, so completely had Nathan wished to understand the nature of compulsion. Mirri, his flatmate, was fascinated by the landlord's son or more particularly, by the way he appeared to live. She began to tell Nathan every detail she'd observed. Alone she'd watch him come out of the house early every morning. She'd follow his walk across the road, his return a few minutes later carrying fresh bread. She'd report to Nathan every sighting. All the time he lived there, Mirri, a Canadian, slightly older than himself, a graduate psychology student, woke first. She was a tall girl with wild black hair whose skin was marked by the indentations of old acne scars. An insomniac, she'd take her cup of coffee onto the balcony to listen to the call to prayer, to watch people making their way down the road below the house, into the city to start the day. She'd lean her pale, blemished face against the stone parapet of the balcony as she watched.

At first, they wondered if he was a simpleton, employed to do tasks around the house until one day, the landlord made a reference to his son when talking to Mirri and it became clear that the boy was not simple.

They both tried to talk to him, Nathan twice. The first time, he turned away quietly, almost, Nathan has thought since, without rancour. The second time, he looked back, his eyes seeming to see Nathan only as a dark shadow over the sun, appearing to hear only a voice asking of him something he could never give. On both occasions, he went on doing as he always did, sweeping the yard as he did every morning, every afternoon, circling drifts of golden dust round and round the flagstones, lifting the grey-green leaves of the flowering oleanders to sweep the dust back onto the flowerbeds from which it had been blown. He swept up the leaves which, with the beginning of autumn, had begun to fall from the trees. Every afternoon, late, if it hadn't rained, he'd water the garden, turning the light, glistening flags dark with his dripping hose.

'What's with this person?' Mirri said periodically, 'a person without any visible purpose.'

Walking in the streets of the city that autumn, Nathan saw no more people wearing the cotton hats they'd worn after the war with the Hebrew word for victory stamped across the front, superimposed over a map of the new borders. The sun had lost its heat and people no longer wore them. They didn't need them any more or they had gone out of fashion, Nathan couldn't tell which.

Spring had been just beginning as Nathan arrived in Israel, the green hillsides dark with growth. After work, in the mid-afternoons as it grew warmer, he'd liked to lie on the grass at a quiet place at the edge of the kibbutz where he could hear the low kickings and rustlings of cows in their sheds, the frantic chatter of chickens. He'd lain back amid the pale dots of cyclamens, trying to imagine a future. Everything that spring, had felt to him as a demand, sleeping, waking, entering the communal showers, which, on the first occasion he'd used them, had seemed like a challenge beyond his powers to meet. He'd

had no choice since they were all that was provided for the itinerant population of foreigners who had appeared after the Six Day war and stayed on, the groups of soldiers serving terms of duty on the kibbutz, the odd kibbutz member who had run out of paraffin for his shower at home. The sight, on the late afternoon of the day he'd arrived, of the corrugated shed which housed the showers, had lowered Nathan's spirits, his own reluctance making him feel awkward, pampered, foreign. Sunlight was falling in chilly patches onto the concrete floor through tears in the fabric of the building. He'd taken his clothes off slowly and folded them onto the low bench along the wall. He'd never felt quite so naked or so alone. Two young men standing under waterfalls of steam, watched him idly as he crossed the floor, his walk awkwardly illuminated by the brilliance of interrupted light. They were looking, he knew, to see if he was circumcised, as if they needed proof. He'd been conscious of the scars on his legs, across his stomach, almost guilty about the fact that they weren't the scars of war.

It had been early the previous winter by the time the wounds healed from the car crash that had killed Nathan's parents and sister. He'd been discharged from hospital into the care of his grandparents, his mother's parents, while a slick of Glasgow snow still lay on the ground. Standing by the hospital door, he was surprised by the snow although he had watched it falling, a haze of moving grey against the blank white sky which in the quick alteration of its colours and light and cloud, had been the background to his months of breaking and healing.

The accident happened during the first term of Nathan's final year at school. He didn't go back when he recovered. He felt too old, too knowing and drained. His contemporaries were two terms further on, two terms which had flowed past him, reminding him that ranks would have closed on him, not from malice or fear, but from

the terrible force of time. He'd already passed his exams, had a place at university, a place which, when he decided that he wasn't going to take it up, seemed unimportant, almost incidental and he thought with wonder of the day when he'd received the letter of confirmation, his parent's delight, the aura of proud anticipation which surrounded him that day being just one more thing which had gone.

He told no-one about his parents, not at the kibbutz or later, at university. He'd already learned that to do so was to alter indelibly his relationship with other people. It was too new for him to accept, never mind for other people. When anyone asked about his family, which they inevitably did, he told them everything, their names, their likes and dislikes, about his sister and her perverse sibling habits. The only thing he didn't mention was that they were dead. He had the same conversation many, many times.

'Where are your parents?'

'Scotland.'

'Are they going to come to visit?'

'No'

'Why not? Aren't they interested in Israel?'

'Not specially I don't think.'

Then his interlocutor would make the strange, singularly Israeli clicking noise with their tongue which denoted disgust or negation.

He'd never been back to his parent's house. He'd walked out of it one early afternoon in October with his family for the last time. He would have gone, wanted to go but had been tied to the material stuff of the hospital by drains and drips and lines, assured by his aunts and uncles and grandparents that it was better that he didn't. When he left hospital, his possessions were already installed in the spare room of his grandparent's house, arrayed and displayed, embarrassingly, in a way which clearly, they thought

would please him. The rest had been stored, packed, put away. It was the best thing.

He'd been told it was. The house, now his, was sold, the money invested. Everything had been dealt with.

His sister's things had been packed away too. He'd asked specially for them, her stuffed toys, her school uniform, her collection of frog mugs, to be kept until the day, three or four years later, when he'd opened them.

Only once, he'd walked past the house, after someone else had moved in, past the same walls, the same windows, the same sad and hopeful door. Afterwards, he dreamt that his family was alive and living in the house and that it was he who was dead. They were all in there, mourning him while he walked in the street outside. He'd wanted to tell Mark, his best friend, about his dream but he felt he'd burdened Mark with enough that winter and that friendship extends only so far. The two of them were diffident enough with the changes in circumstance which made them speak only slightly above a whisper in an alien room in an alien house. It was that which had made him go, that, and the feeling that his very presence exacerbated his grandparent's grief. They'd argued less then he had feared about his decision to go. He remembers using portentous phrases like 'a new life' but like him, his grandparents had lost the sense of the absurd which would make anyone question the idea of someone of eighteen beginning a new life.

Why there?

'Why there?' Mark had asked. They were in the park, walking round the pond where Nathan and his sister had pushed toy boats out among the duck weed and sodden crusts when they were small. Fragments of white, foamy scum bobbed among broken pieces of ice round the pond's edges. Tetchy mallards hobbled over the uneven surface.

'I don't know really.'

'You've never expressed much interest in it before.'

'I know I haven't. I followed the war.'

'Nat, everyone followed the war. It doesn't mean anything.'

'I know. But I can read the script. That's a start.'

'You can read the script everywhere. Except China and a few other places you wouldn't want to go.'

'I suppose you're right. It just seems like a sensible thing to do. Like it might be easier there than other places.'

He saw that Mark was scared to argue with him. They'd become fragile, both of them, startled by the tenderness of this abrupt, new maturity.

When their food arrives, Nathan looks round briefly to make sure that other people are eating, that he and Elli won't be the only ones. They're not.

'God Dad, I'm starving!' Elli says, 'I couldn't eat this morning until I knew what had happened at the hospital.'

During spring and summer on the kibbutz, he rose every morning in cold darkness, hours before dawn when it was chill and damp, before the sun dried out the soil and grass and stones. The pleasure he learned in doing the mundane work asked of him, lay beyond its physical nature, somewhere which lost him to pain and made him wait eagerly for the ache in his shoulders to begin, made him stop minding in the prissy way he had at first, that the water in the jerry can for drinking was warm and tasted of plastic and that other people drank from it without first wiping the rim. His first months carried him easily through the seasons, through the burgeoning days of spring

towards the implacable heat of summer. He was secretly proud of the sting of thorns which grazed his hands and arms among the peach trees. The heavy, ripening fruit made the air sweetly alcoholic, made it buzz and drone with the sound of wasps. The effort of the day made him stop dreading night, reversed the fear he'd had that he'd never sleep again. For a time, that life had suited him, numbed his apprehensions, surrounded him with curious attention, the quotidian distractions of other people. Occasionally, when he moved to the city, after he'd become immersed in the fathomless intricacies of academic life, he thought about the afternoon of his return to the kibbutz, the day after he'd found his house. By then, he had expectations. He had thought, hoped at least, that the kibbutz where he had lived since arriving in the country, would have held a few people to share his enthusiasms and his pleasure in a manifest success. Everyone had known, the way they knew everything about each other's lives- even that of a wayfarer like himself- that he had gone away for a few days to look for somewhere to live when he began university. They'd all warned him, having read it in the papers, of how difficult it would be, the influx of people since the war having made flats scarce. Knowing that, his success had seemed to him all the more triumphant, symbolic of his ability to make his way in the world, or more accurately in a variety of worlds, foreign, diverse, subtle, adult.

Walking down the path to the wooden hut which had been his home for the past months, he passed a small garden at the front of a standard kibbutz house where a woman was sitting at a garden table with a transistor radio, a glass mug of tea and a biscuit box in front of her. He'd never spoken to her before although he had, of course, seen her, in the kitchen, working, enveloped in a coarse green apron, one of the women who stirred things in huge pots in the kitchen by day, set apart by her odd, rolling gait,

her withered leg and built-up shoe on which she traversed the broad terrazzo floor of the kitchen.

'Well,' she called as he passed, 'any luck?'

Nathan, even now, remembers her look of frank disbelief when he told her, just the name of the district, just that was enough,

'Are you crazy?' she said.

The news spread fast, so fast that by the evening of his return, people were seeking him out to remonstrate, to tell him why he should not live there. Nathan was shocked. They had failed to register his joy.

'Don't you know what happened there?' and then told him old tales of ambush and murder. By then, he understood some of the language, but not enough to follow everything. His gaps and failures of understanding made their stories worse, gave his mind uneasy areas to fill, edged his knowledge into frightening, sinister outposts.

'What will you parents have to say?' one man said, clearly angry, 'They'll remember. They'll know what it means to live there.'

'Nothing,' Nathan said, aware of sounding stubborn, teenaged, 'they won't say anything.' He'd had no intention of arguing his case. He didn't want to say what he thought, which was that everywhere has had its killing. He remained silent, knowing that in this, he was among experts. He'd wanted to say that the city was filled with people looking for places to live and that that flat was the only place he could find, but they would have found arguments against it. He hadn't wanted to sound despairing, hopeless. It was in any case, only partly true. The truth was that he had sickened with looking. The scarcely built blocks of Israeli Jerusalem, crude, ugly suburbs had lowered his spirits, had begun to alter his painstakingly constructed view of himself and his prospects. He had walked endlessly past rows of flats with washing-hung balconies of stained concrete and iron.

Nobody had ever heard of the names the flat agency had given him, the numbers, and they directed him back the way he'd come to the other side of the wadi, to the upper slopes of the hill he'd just walked down. He was made miserable looking into dark, barred basements, thinking of himself in those rooms with narrow beds placed head to foot, repelled by the faces of hard or possibly just sad women who looked through him to the sum of money he might be prepared to pay them, all of them insisting on knowing if he was a Jew, if he led a religious life, if he would mind sharing with Yitzi or some other very quiet baby. He felt that no-one must find him in a place like that.

Instead, in dealing with his critics, he'd tried to appear knowing, good humoured, to win over opposition with his confidence. He told them that the flat was spacious and cool, that the broad stone balconies opened towards the golden expanse of the city. He described the quietness of the streets, the kindness of the people he encountered. When he said these things, people looked at him but oddly, did not seem to hear. He knew better than to mention the mesmeric charm of the muezzin's calls to prayer. Only later, when he'd moved to Jerusalem did he begin to feel the power of the stories of the old men in the kibbutz, feeling them as rancour, unwelcome inside himself as he crossed the city, exploring its hills and its valleys. He felt as if they'd set their ghosts on him, made them wait and follow him through the streets, encouraged dead enemies to wait for him round corners, behind copses of dark trees, walls, under each shadowy lampposts.

Every day after term began, Nathan walked from the campus on the west side of the city, the Israeli side, past the empty, dead place which before the war had been the border, a corridor of wire and separation. He learned the quickest way through the

narrow Old City streets to the Damascus Gate, and on beyond the ancient walls, through the streets of the Arab city to his home.

The rain began, the rain of his first, new winter. He hadn't anticipated the change in weather and with the rain, he felt betrayed. Jerusalem was one city again, grey and gold and bathed in rain. The war was, by then, fifteen months over, six days of hot war.

The people in the part of the city where he lived seemed passive, subdued. Under occupation. Adapting to change.

'Don't walk alone at night,' they said to him before he left the kibbutz. They'd come up to him with advice, in the dining-room, at work, in the communal showers, but he did. He walked everywhere in perfect safety, alone.

Nathan was studying history. That too he'll think of in the days to come, the days when newspapers will be lined with photographs of the dead, people who could not have imagined they'd ever appear there. It was 1968 and he'll feel again the incandescence of the world. He'll think of the names, the words, Dubcek, the Prague Spring, Paris, les événements, Khe San, Hué, My Lai, the Tet offensive. He and the new friends he'd made demonstrated against the Biafran war, against the war in Viet Nam, and he'll think of them again, his friends, the people in his classes, Czechs who seemed, and were, so cynical, so adult and knowing, Americans who lived in daily fear of the day when their call-up papers would summon them to the recruiting station in Italy. The Israelis too, older, all of them because they'd had to do military service before university. He'd look at them and understand the distance which would be forever between them because they knew war and he did not. In the days to come, he'll realise what he didn't know but

now, he won't be able to find, as he did then, the easy excuse for himself that he had other things to think of, that he was still distracted by the nearness of his own grief. He'll test his memory by repeating the new vocabulary he'd had to learn, words to describe unknown territory.

As they eat, Elli goes back to his hearing of the bomb,

'When was that?'

'What?'

'The time you heard a bomb.'

'Must have been 1968. November I think.'

It was November, that first time, the image from Chagall, the sound, the blast, the inexplicable, dense sense he had again this morning, of everything dropping inside him to join every other fear and dread of his life. As now, he knew only later. It had happened in the street market, Mahane Yehuda. He'd been walking nearby, through the streets of Mea Shearim, the Hundred Gates, through the territory of the orthodox, under the signs which exhorted modest dressing. He'd heard it, the same sound as he'd heard today. That time too, the images came later, indelibly absorbed from his slow reading of the Hebrew newspapers, things he never wanted to think of, never wanted to know, imprinted now upon his mind and memory forever, the reading of words which described the scene in ever-burning pictures.

There were curfews that November, after the bomb. He and Mirri had watched, tentatively, fearfully concealed behind the stone parapet of the balcony, away from the sights of guns as half-tracks moved menacingly up and down the street in front of their

house. Nathan had found himself repeating his own words to himself, a new life. A new life. It had seemed a good idea, self-explanatory, easy for others to accept, a concept which, for a moment, made them fall silent, but now the words seemed overtaken by the new words he'd had to learn: administered territories, raids, casualties, infiltrators, all our planes returned in safety.

The cafe by now has switched off the music. Continuous news bulletins send out voices, of commentators, police, witnesses, urgent and breathless, telling what they saw.

In next days, and the remaining hot days of this summer, the conversations will roll back to him, a conversation over lunch in the university cafeteria, the lorry driver's percipient words. He will remember them with particular clarity. The man told him that he should be careful, 'The only Jews you know are your family and friends. Here everyone's one, good and bad. Be careful who you trust.'

In the memory of the conversation in the cafeteria, he will discover lapses, gaps. He will, by intent or the force of time, fail to fill in the faces around the table. Late November, the campus at Givat Ram, in the west of the city, before the university moved back to its former home on Mount Scopus in the east, which happened after he had left. He hadn't known everyone at the table, some were his friends, some not. He'll remember only the bones of conversation, people laughing at the fact that he'd been subject to curfew, the moment when the talk turned to who had carried out the Mahane Yehuda bombing and why, a discussion about disaffection and resentment, the moment when, for no reason he can remember, he mentioned the landlord's son. That at least will be clear in his memory, the immediate sense of something changing, his knowing the irreversibility of

what he'd said, an alteration in atmosphere although he will not be able to remember who it was, with an attempt at casualness, who asked him where it was he lived.

The following night too will return, his sudden waking to lights and noise, the sound of shouting and of weeping, himself and Mirri running in their nightclothes to look through the glass and wrought iron door at the bottom of their stairs. He'll remember too his quizzical wonderment at why so many were needed to take away one thin young man, the sight, just for a second, of the face of the landlord's son as it was pulled into the blinding haze of soldiers and lights.

The length of that night too will be there, himself and Mirri huddled together for comfort in her huge bed in the huge room of stone floors and stone lintels, towards morning, waking to the sound of rain, making love with the urgency and fear of those who would try to forget, and afterwards, his telling her what he'd done, feeling the instantaneous drawing away of her body, his knowing that in this, he would never be forgiven.

They moved out of the house. He was first. He left within days, without seeing the landlord again. He gave money to Mirri for the rent and bills and moved in with friends in the west. At the end of the winter term, he left university, travelled in Europe for a few months, working in odd jobs, carrying in his rucksack his guilt, as the young men whose images he will see now every day, were carrying in theirs, their crime.

He came back and took up the university place which had been kept for him. He told people that he had never intended to stay in Israel, that it had been an interlude, a break before university.

Mirri wrote to him once from an address in a street in the west of the city. She told him that she too had left the house but that before she did, she spoke to the landlord about his son. He'd been a student, she wrote, in Cairo, at home for a wedding when the Six Day War began. The war and the occupation meant that he had been unable to go back to his studies and his fiancée. Not knowing the word depression, Mirri said, his father used instead the word sorrow. Nathan wrote back but didn't hear from her again. Years later, an internet search showed her teaching in a university in Canada.

Now people begin to leave the cafe, as he and Elli will soon. They both turn and watch the hesitation with which they approach the door, obviously unwilling to step out into the street. The couple at the table next to them say good-bye before they leave and they seem, all of them, to understand that the thin web of connection created by the sharing of this experience, will be ended by their leaving.

It will go round in his mind, for the rest of July, the hot days of August. Forty years will stir and heave. Forgetfully, he'll look at his diary to check his next hospital appointments but there will be none. Nathan will think again, as he hasn't for a long time, about his parents and his sister. He will wonder why he lived and they did not, and when he stares at the photographs of the recent dead and thinks about himself, he will wonder the same.

Forty years. Nathan will think again of the house, of Jerusalem. He will take the measure of his own life, the usual things, the things anyone will expect, career and marriage and children, the life of a free and independent man. The landlord's son will visit him again and again, as a revenant, a citizen of a liminal world where comprehension is lost, where, Nathan will come to know, anger destroys the last barrier between guilt and innocence.

He's about to suggest they order another glass of champagne, when Elli does.

'Why not?' he says. She gets up and goes to the bar. The flowers she bought for him lie on the chair beside him. Nathan looks out at the traffic, the people walking past. Through the glass of the window, sirens sound faintly, overlapping, as if they're calling to one another across the city. In a short while, he'll have to stand outside on the pavement and watch his daughter walk away into a street, into a world which soon, he'll believe he helped make dangerous.

End

Written in 2006:

I wrote 'Chagall' in the months after July 7th, inspired by the memory it aroused of a bombing in Mahane Yehuda in Jerusalem during my first year of university there. That particular time already felt strange, heightened, because a few days before it, I had cut my hand badly in an idiotic accident with a door-jamb and a cola bottle. I was living in the east, the Arab side of the city and so the wound was repaired in St Joseph's Hospital –a hospital for Palestinians- by a Hungarian surgeon called Lorand Gaspar. The incident left me with a permanent scar on my left hand and the bitter knowledge that I was disapproved of (rightly) by the people at the hospital for being a Jew living in East Jerusalem and by my friends on the Israeli side (wrongly) for almost the same reason. The fear and new awareness of the days after the bombing live in me still, reminding me daily of what Palestinians have had to endure, unimaginably, for decades.

The year after that, I left Israel, unable to come to terms with a situation I had only just begun to see in its entirety. I returned to Scotland, to university in Edinburgh. One day, in a bookshop in Forrest Road, I found a book called 'L'Histoire de la Palestine'. It was written by Lorand Gaspar.

This summer, I have felt the profoundest rage at the destruction of Lebanon and our government's cruelty and blindness, at the terrible negation of all that Judaism holds to be true and worthy, at the evil of war and the failure of those who should, to realise that the only hope is in justice.

Lorand Gaspard is a respected poet and writer, now living in Paris. I would like to dedicate this story to him.

2020

Little has changed for Palestinians. In many respects, their situation has worsened. The prospects for justice in Palestine have been greatly reduced over the years by the constant re-election of right wing governments in Israel, the election of Trump and the indifference and failure to act on the part of world governments. The threat of massive annexations of occupied territory remains. The term 'apartheid' is used widely, even among Israeli commentators and political figures, to describe the prevailing situation in Israel/Palestine.

Lorend Gaspar died in Paris on October 9th 2019 at the age of 94.