

CHAPTER 1

JACOB SCHWARZ STOOD at the ship's rail, face to the wind, and let the humid salt air blow through his hair. Beside him, was Sarah Ginsburg, his wife, and Avi Livney, Sarah's cousin.

The ship on which they sailed was appropriately named the *Exodus*. An aged American freighter, it was seaworthy only in the sense that it floated and took on no more water than the bilge pumps could handle. Its engines ran, most of the time, and it had a rudder that seemed to keep them on course. But it had few amenities and not much more food than the Nazi concentration camps from which its passengers had only recently been freed. Some said the ship was owned by Haganah, the security force created to protect Jewish settlers who'd already arrived in Palestine. Others said it was owned by the Allies who hoped it would sink. Jacob, Sarah, and Livney didn't care who owned it, just as long as it took them away from Europe and closer to the Middle East.

"We aren't far from Palestine," Livney observed.

"Soon we shall be home," Jacob said wistfully.

"Ah, yes. Palestine," Sarah added with mock enthusiasm. "The home of our ancestors." She glanced in Livney's direction and he smiled back.

"I heard you," Jacob droned. "And I know what you're trying to do."

"Not difficult to get you started," Sarah laughed.

Jacob shot a look in her direction. "You wish to return to Europe?"

"No." She shook her head. "But our families lived many generations in Poland. *That* was the land of our ancestors. It will take just as many before

Palestine feels the same.”

“Perhaps not that long,” Jacob replied. “Unlike Warsaw, there are no Nazis in Tel Aviv.”

“Don’t be so sure,” Livney responded. “We know there will be Arabs, and that’s almost as bad.”

“We have as much historic claim to the region as the Arabs,” Jacob groused.

“A long time has passed since this was Israel,” Sarah noted.

“Time does not matter to the heart.” Jacob gave her a smile. “You should know that.”

She squeezed his arm and rested her head on his shoulder. “That much is true.”

“Well, I don’t care who has the whole place,” Livney said. “Just a little spot. That’s all I want. Just a place to live and be left alone.”

“If we are patient,” Sarah added in a playful tone, “perhaps we can have it all.” She knew the comment would be too much for Jacob to resist.

“And that’s the point!” he said in a burst of emotion. “We don’t know if ‘perhaps’ will ever happen. We can have a state now if we act boldly and courageously. The world has seen what the Nazis did to us and they are ready to give it to us. We’ve bought it with the blood of our own families and this is the moment God has given us!”

“You would give up the whole,” Sarah goaded, “for only a part?”

“No,” Jacob retorted. “I would give up a *dream* for the whole in some distant future—I would give up the illusion of holding it all—for the *reality* of having a part here and now.”

“*You* are the dreamer,” Sarah chided. “States require work. First, we must do the hard work. Then we will see the result.”

“And on that we agree,” Jacob nodded. “Work. Build it by hand, on our own soil, bought with our own money, and improved by our own labor. But I am not a dreamer.” He looked back over the railing toward the sea. “This is our moment.”

“But,” Livney joined in, “do you expect the Arabs to greet us with open arms?”

“Of course not,” Jacob replied. “They will never accept us, but that

doesn't change things."

"So you are resigned to a life of constant conflict?" A frown wrinkled Livney's brow. "I thought we left Europe to get away from that."

"We left to avoid persecution," Jacob corrected. "But we will never escape a life of struggle."

"But what about peace?" Sarah asked, stoking the argument to the next level.

"Peace is the province of established governments. The luxury of people living far away." Jacob was on a roll now and both Sarah and Livney seemed to enjoy encouraging him to continue. Livney smiled at her as Jacob ranted, "Established governments have a vested interest in peace. We do not. We have only—" A jolt from below caught his attention and he stopped in midsentence.

Sarah's eyes opened wide. "What was that?" She glanced around nervously. "Did we hit something?"

"The ship's stopped," Livney replied.

"Why?"

Sarah pointed to the water. "What's that doing out here?"

A British warship appeared at the stern of the *Exodus*, plying its way through the choppy waves. In a few minutes, it came alongside, only a hundred meters away.

"They're going to ram us," Livney blurted out.

"I think they mean to board us," Jacob pointed. "They're armed." Onboard the warship, sailors stood at the ready along the rail, rifles in hand.

Someone standing to Jacob's left had an amused grin. "Relax," he chuckled. "Probably just a routine customs inspection. They can see we're loaded to the top with passengers."

Jacob had a puzzled expression on his face. "A customs check? From the British?"

"The British control Palestine."

"We're close enough for that?"

"By my reckoning," the man opined, "we're less than fifteen miles out." Jacob's mouth gaped open in surprise. "Palestine?" he said softly.

“Palestine,” the man nodded.

“That’s what I was telling you,” Livney reminded. “Before you went off on that speech about Jewish statehood. We’re almost there.”

Jacob slipped his arm around Sarah’s waist and they stood with Livney watching as the *Exodus* slowed to a drift and the warship bobbed a short distance away. In a few minutes, the British lowered a gangway to the waterline, and a winch eased a power launch into the blue-green water of the Mediterranean. A seaman held it steady at the foot of the gangway while men came down from the deck and boarded it, then they pushed off. When the launch reached the *Exodus*, a voice on a bullhorn shouted up at the passengers, “We are from Her Majesty’s Royal Navy! Stand back from the rail and prepare to be boarded!”

In the launch, a sailor stood and lifted a shoulder-fired device, much like an oversized rifle, into which a grappling hook was loaded. The hook was attached to a rope that trailed from the device to a coil that lay in the bottom of the boat. With the help of a mate, the sailor aimed toward the ship and squeezed the trigger. A bright flash burst from the muzzle followed by a puff of gray smoke. The hook shot from the device and sailed through the air toward the *Exodus*.

The crowd along the railing gasped and backed away just as the hook clanked into place on the second rail. Moments later, a sailor in the launch started up the rope, followed by another, then another, moving hand over hand, lifting themselves toward the deck.

Farther down the ship, other launches appeared with more grappling hooks striking the rail. Jacob leaned over the railing and was about to ask where they came from when he saw a second warship just off their stern. Then a cloud of black smoke wafted overhead and they turned to see a third British vessel on the opposite side.

Suddenly, thick black soot belched from the *Exodus*’ stack and the ship lurched forward. At the same time passengers appeared along the railing. Angry and determined, they elbowed their way through the gawking crowd. One of them stood near Jacob and shouted down at the sailors below, “We are a private ship! Properly registered and bearing the flag of Honduras. Sailing in international waters. You have no right to board us!”

Then he drew a knife from his belt and cut the rope from the nearest grappling hook. The sailors climbing up from the launch fell with a splash to the water below.

Others along the ship's rail did the same and a shout of approval went up from the crowd, followed by cheering and clapping. Seconds later, a burst of white smoke appeared on the deck and the crowd shrank back. "Tear gas!" someone shouted. The crowd turned into a stampede as everyone surged toward bow and stern. Jacob backed away from the rail and pulled Sarah with him into a narrow passageway behind an air vent. Livney joined them as panicked passengers pushed and shoved their way past.

A second canister hit the deck followed by a muffled rumble as it burst open, then came the clank of additional grappling hooks and minutes later the sound of an Englishman. "Stand back and no one will get hurt!"

Ten minutes later, the deck swarmed with British sailors, each of them armed with a rifle, ready for use at a moment's notice. Then an officer appeared with a bullhorn and shouted, "As passengers without authorized entrance documents, you are forbidden to enter Palestine."

Someone shouted, "How do you know we have no documents?"

"Any of you possessing valid documents, please identify yourselves. Those of you with valid papers will be allowed to disembark. Anyone presenting forged documents will be prosecuted as a criminal."

"We are here to start a new life!" someone shouted.

"You'll have to find it somewhere else," the man with the bullhorn replied.

Then a woman along the rail pointed and shouted, "Look! I can see the coast."

The crowd fell silent as everyone turned in that direction. Far in the distance, barely visible above the horizon, the hazy gray shoreline formed a thin ribbon against a backdrop of blue sky. Then a voice to the left said, "Let's swim for it."

The crowd surged forward. Sailors along the rail stiffened and pushed back. "Stand back," one of them shouted, "or we'll be forced to respond!"

A murmur went up from the crowd, followed by a chorus of protests. Someone threw a bottle that bounced off a sailor's shoulder and hit the

floor. A bucket sailed through the air, and the crowd grabbed for everything not secured, sending chairs, plates, cups, and an assortment of objects raining down on the sailors.

Jacob turned to Livney and shouted above the fracas, "This is why we must break free now! This is why we must have our own state." He jabbed the air with his index finger for emphasis at every phrase.

"How dare you oppose the Crown!" a sailor shouted, and struck Jacob in the forehead with the butt of his rifle. The force of the blow sent him reeling as he staggered backward into the person behind him. Someone grabbed him about the waist and held him up.

Livney, enraged by the sailor's conduct, stepped forward and shouted angrily, "I'll send you to the grave for this!"

Another sailor, caught off-guard by the intensity of the response, raised his rifle and fired. A bullet struck Livney between the eyes and he collapsed to the deck. Jacob could only watch as Sarah fell on her cousin's body, weeping and moaning.