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DECODING COLOURS


EDITORIAL
Victoria Ocampo

DECODING COLOURS is not an easy book to read. It is based on the true story of a mother challenged by the special needs of her child. Some readers, particularly women, will sympathize with the author and recognize the emotions described, some will identify with the mother. Others might be curious, angry or even shocked, but no reader can remain indifferent.

DECODING COLOURS is the story of a family; of a mother and wife who is always questioning and searching and who refuses to give up or accept 'no' for an answer; and of each member of the family opening slowly and sometimes painfully to the outside world, while closing around each other lovingly and protectively.

DECODING COLOURS is an intimate family album, describing the daughters, the father and the mother who is fighting for her health and life. Again and again Rebecca returns to the hills of Jerusalem and the colours of the desert from whence she draws her strength and inspiration to continue fighting for her family.

From Jerusalem to New York to Paris to London and back to Jerusalem, fragile threads of hope and continuity run throughout, linking places but above all, linking family and tradition.

WHITE

Under the heavy August sun Rebecca came down the road. She was holding a young child in her arms. The sun glowing red against the Jerusalem rock, reflected on the woman's face, shadowed by a hat and large sunglasses. Her dress swayed with the movement of her light walk. Sweat poured down her arms and face. The heat was unbearable. Her lips parted in what she meant to be a smile. Dry lips. Strong handshake. The child seemed to be asleep. She pushed open the door into the dark, cool kitchen and climbed the stairs with her burden.

In the kitchen, colours and smells, books and prints, mint growing on the window sill and pickles shining in a jar. The books on the shelves: English and Spanish mixed with French and Hebrew. The selection spoke by itself. Rebecca obviously loves reading, as well as tea, judging by the amazing selection of tea in front of the kettle. The house had retained the smells after their absence, away in Paris. Now they were back for the summer holidays.

Rebecca: I'm exhausted. I just don't know what to do. I should have cancelled the meeting. Time, I desperately need time to get my thoughts in order. First of all, let's put you to bed. You're soaked through. Let me undress you and give you some water. Your skin is so soft. You're such a perfect little child of the desert with those dark, dark eyes. Now you've gone away into your own world again. I can't face the woman waiting for me downstairs in the kitchen.

She let herself sink back into the chair and closed her eyes. Her dress was sticking to her back and legs. The heat, the incredible heaviness, made it impossible to make even the slightest movement. Half-opening her eyes she watched her breasts, her stomach moving with the rhythm of her breathing as if her body belonged to someone else.

Zohar was born in Jerusalem on a day like this one. A hot August morning. A day when the heat came up from the rocks, from the stones, from the trees, and enveloped you in a white cloud with the heat from the desert. She had stayed on in the hospital for a few days longer than usual as she had had jaundice. But the doctors had said it was not serious. She was such a lovely, plump baby. Looked so healthy. Rebecca had to admit it, even then, that she felt slightly disappointed not to have had a son for her third baby. But Zohar had arrived and seemed to become a part of the family almost before Rebecca was ready for her. How strange it was and how slowly it took her to begin to feel comfortable with her new baby daughter.

Rebecca closed her legs tightly, wondering once again if that was the movement she had made while giving birth to Zohar. Once again the thought came to her mind: had she prevented her from breathing for that fraction of a second? Her eyes wandered to the body of her daughter and her fingers touched

her while her mind went back to her friend Ana waiting in the kitchen, smoking one cigarette after another. Ana had let herself into the house. She knew that the side door was open and that Rebecca would hear her coming in. Ana can't understand Rebecca's anxieties nor her need to be involved with something more than being a mother. Had Rebecca closed her legs on the child's head just as she was being born?

Rebecca's pregnancy with Zohar was to be her last. She didn't carry easily neither did she feel that Trevor could cope with another child. She closed her legs on her child's head like closing a chapter of her life as a woman.

Zohar did not seem to be developing at the same pace as other children of her age. But neither of Rebecca's two elder daughters had walked and talked and done the sort of things other children do at certain ages according to the childcare manuals. Everyone is different, she kept thinking, why shouldn't her children be different from the others? The way she herself has always felt so different from others.

* * *

“Rebecca, wake up, you'll be late for school. Please child, get up. Your mother will wake up and get annoyed with both of uw! Here, come, put on your dress.”

Maria helps the girl get dressed, not without difficulty. Brushes her long, blond hair, takes her to the bathroom with kind, careful hands. The distance of the servant towards the young girl is evident, unspoken. The Spanish middle-aged, grey-haired woman knows Rebecca's moods and explosions. She's been with the family for ever.

“I don't want this dress. You know I wore it yesterday. I don't want it, I don't want it!”

Young Rebecca ripped her dress, tears flowing down her face red with anger. She had to wear a different dress every day. Different ... what did she mean by 'different'? Rebecca knew. She had been told by someone that her mother hadn't really wanted her, that she had tried to abort her. Her mother had been afraid of having another child after giving birth just eighteen months before, to a son with Downe's Syndrome. When Rebecca confronted her mother with this in later years, demanding why she had wanted to abort her, the answer was dry and brief: if you had been a normal boy how would I have felt?

Rebecca in her confusion felt isolated, unwanted. She had a great need to find a niche for herself, a particular role to play.

Once she had finished school, she wanted to break away from everything that held her back home. Did her real difference start then? Argentina became part of her past and Jerusalem became her life. Through the stones of Jerusalem, the colours and the seasons, she discovered her heritage. Tradition tells that each stone of Jerusalem reflects the tears of the Jews who cried for Jerusalem,

who cried to go back home. For Rebecca, a new stone began. She started engraving a stone. What she believed to be a different kind of stone, a different kind of story. She isolated herself in a need to go through a catharsis while digging into her inner self.

* * *

The family had arrived in Jerusalem from Paris for the summer holidays. They had been away for eighteen months. Rebecca was longing to be back with her friends, to be in her house, to see her hills, to recognize the smells. Her friend, Ana, was waiting for them. The front door was open and friends came in and out. Ana stayed till last. They sat in the kitchen, lit cigarettes and started chatting. The day had seemed very long. The atmosphere between the two women was unusually heavy. Coming slowly down the stairs was Zohar. Rebecca didn't move from her chair, though she knew how difficult it was for Zohar to manage the stairs. She stood in the kitchen doorway with her big brown eyes open wide, looking at Ana and her mother. Rebecca understood. She knew what Zohar wanted. She didn't say a word. She couldn't. Zohar couldn't speak. Ana didn't understand. Rebecca just went to the tap, looked at Zohar and asked her if she would like some water. She nodded. Rebecca gave her the glass of water. She drank it slowly, wiped her mouth and off she went. Ana's eyes met Rebecca's and hesitantly she said:

“What's wrong with her? You hadn't told me. What's wrong with Zohar?”

Defensive, Rebecca's answer: “What do you mean: what's wrong with her? Nothing is wrong with her”.

Rebecca: I carry on making tea. And Ana keeps on nagging me. Let me make the tea, Ana. We'll have another cigarette. We'll discuss it.

Ana didn't give up. She carried on questioning me. No, she didn't give up. She kept on questioning me. Ana was clearly spelling out the question I was refusing to ask myself: has my Zohar inherited my brother's problem? Is Zohar backward? Why doesn't she speak? Why doesn't she eat? Why doesn't she hold a pencil properly? Why is she so different? The others were different. I am different. In many ways I refused what I called “routine”, what I called “mediocrity”, what I called “being like everybody else”. Why do I need that difference, that attitude of being different, why do I want to seem different? I don't know. I haven't analysed it. I haven't got the time right now. I can see, I have to acknowledge that Zohar has a problem. Shall I call it a problem?

As soon as Ana left, I went to the phone and called Zohar's paediatrician. He had known her from the day she was born. Surely he would have noticed if there were anything wrong. I asked if I could come to see him. He gave me an appointment. After checking Zohar he said, “Yes, you should take her to see a neurologist”.

That was four days ago, on that hot, white, beautiful Jerusalem afternoon. Four endless days

since then. I didn't hear, I didn't see, I didn't want to touch the others, I didn't want to be touched by my husband. I was an automaton. Where had all my independence gone? Where was all my self-esteem, where was all my pride, my elitism? Where was the Rebecca who would tear her dress just because she didn't like it?

Rebecca was hanging on every word that was said to her, every explanation that was given to her she accepted, she followed, she did it. All she could hold to herself was Zohar.

She was just waiting for Zohar to surprise them all and prove wrong all those interfering people. Zohar was fine; she was a lovely baby. And yet, little by little, Rebecca began to wonder if maybe there was something not quite right somewhere, with one of them, perhaps with she herself, the mother. With the doubts that began to form, Rebecca became more and more defensive.

Rebecca: By now I'm afraid. I don't know what to expect. Both Ana and the paediatrician have said there is something wrong. How could I have failed to see and understand sooner that Zohar needed a different kind of medical attention?

This time it is not a question of having a cigarette or buying a dress to calm me down. This time I need to drive to the desert into my own self and ask myself questions. Time is pressing me. I can't run away, nor can I consult with the colours of the desert. The heat comes from all sides. The same question comes back to me: was I neglected or have I neglected Zohar? But Zohar is my baby. There can't be anything wrong with her, there can't.

A new rock stood in front of Rebecca, this time the writing was done with a hammer and a chisel.

Another very hot day in the white month of August in Jerusalem. Rebecca went to see a neurologist. Zohar's father went with them. The old hospital was cool and quiet. The waiting room was full of worried people waiting to have their fears confirmed or dispelled. Only in maternity departments are there happy faces, flowers, smiles and chocolates, fathers running and mothers and grandmothers. But here there were no smiles and congratulations, no laughter and bright flowers. The doctor was a woman, with large dark, warm eyes. She said, "I'm afraid your daughter has a neurological problem". She asked endless questions about Zohar, her habits, the way she walked, how she ate...

"What are you trying to tell me, doctor? Is she normal? Is she going to be normal? Is she going to be handicapped? Is she going to be able to cope with life? Is she going to be a normal human being?"

The doctor looked at Rebecca with understanding, with sympathy, and calmly said, "We will see. Now we have to do tests".

Rebecca: I feel detached. I can hear my own voice as an echo. The doctor isn't talking to me. She isn't talking about my child. Not about Zohar. She can't be. I start crying. Crying, mascara

running down my face, blurring my sight. My nose dripping. I don't care. I am beyond that, way beyond. I detach myself from the present. My brain floats back to years earlier. My mother's face is in front of me. A pair of green eyes staring at me, questioning while stretching out her hand to caress my wet cheek. I become a desperate child asking her mother, begging her for forgiveness, asking for help, regretting the things and gestures I didn't have towards her or towards my brother. I am a wounded animal, bleeding inside and blinded by fear and pain. The bright light of a summer day in Jerusalem becomes grey with clouds brought by a mysterious wind from the Dead Sea.

Rebecca has gone into her world closing all doors behind her. The voice repeats to her that there is nothing wrong with Zohar. She's not speaking, she's not eating, she's not walking, she's not behaving like every other child simply because she wants to attract the attention of the voice. Rebecca searches for the smell of life in the body of her child to bring herself back to the doctor's office. Zohar, at the age of four, holds her mother's face in her two small hands and kisses her. Zohar, the child who doesn't speak, with the silence of her words comes to her rescue. Rebecca would like to explain herself, to define as she is usually capable of doing, analyse and prognosticate reactions. This time she's inept. What has happened to the special and self-sufficient professional woman? Why is she failing?

Rebecca: I hold Zohar tight to myself. I know I am hurting her. I turn to my husband. I yell at him, I yell at myself, I yell at G-d and scream "Why? Why Zohar?" I am holding her tight, tight against my chest.

Zohar is only four. And all this time, all these years have been wasted on waiting and looking and thinking and asking, "Why? Why?" And when I had asked why, when I went to talk to doctors and teachers, they had said, "What are you looking for? You're a working mother, you don't stay at home, you don't give enough attention to your daughter, you leave her with nurses, with a nanny, and you wonder why? No, she's just doing it on purpose. There's nothing wrong with her. She's not speaking, she's not eating, she's not walking, she's not behaving like every other child simply because she wants to attract your attention. I think you are the one who has something wrong; you need a psychiatrist". And there, now, they're coldly saying that there is a medical reason, that there is something wrong with Zohar.

On those white days in the month of August in Jerusalem, Rebecca carries the child from doctor to doctor, trying to understand what is expected of her. In the morning light her skin seems to reflect the yellow of the sand in the desert, pulling her out of bed to let the shower run over her body. Clouds and darkness wrap around mother and daughter in the hospital waiting rooms. They hold each other, smelling each other's sweat, wetting their dry lips with cold water. Their feet are swollen from their walks. The child falls asleep in her mother's arms, never with a look of complaint. The mother's eyes become like two yellow sunken stones drowning in a deep pool. Her voice is controlled and so are her answers to the questions posed by the specialists. She tries to be accurate, detached, logical.

The red sun hiding behind the hills of Jerusalem welcomes them on their return home just before

sunset. Rebecca always stops to admire it. The Jerusalem stone becomes gold and pink. Magic is once again falling over the city. Her step becomes lighter, wanting to get home. A bath and a cup of tea will help mother and daughter to face the darkness of the night in their unknown.

A week has gone by when both parents together with the child are called to see the neurologist to hear the results of the examinations. The room is quiet and cool.

“Please come in. The doctor is waiting.”

Rebecca walks in with Trevor who wants to hold Zohar. His face is pale and he waits for his wife to put the questions. The doctor looks directly into her eyes. There is hesitation in her voice.

“Rebecca, your daughter was born with a minor neurological problem. It’s situated on the left side of her brain...”

“What’s ‘minor’ for you, doctor?”

Two pairs of eyes are on the woman doctor’s face. The child, now in her mother’s arms, looks frightened. The voice keeps on talking, referring to the need to work on the muscles, on the therapy, on the prognosis, on... Rebecca’s eyes go to the window, to the three moving with the light wind. She is lost. The husband is taking notes. The woman’s tears embarrass the man. Zohar pulls her arm. Trying to smile back, feeling her face cracking with wrinkles. She feels tired, drained, old. The irresponsible, light laughter from her youth is gone. Rebecca straightens her back, wipes her face and looks straight at the doctor.

“Rebecca, can you hear me? What do you think? We will look for a school in Paris for children with special needs, with a speech therapist...”

Trevor’s voice sounds far away. Rebecca keeps on hugging Zohar tight to her.

Rebecca: Zohar, Zohar, I need you. I must hold you tight to me. If I don’t you may disappear. We might both disappear. Zohar, help me. Trust me.

The hills of Jerusalem. Dry, rocky with movement, with the movement of the body of a woman, with the movement of the air that seems to penetrate deep inside and that movement joins the rhythm of the hills. She is looking at the hills, white with heat, with Zohar heavy in her arms.

Rebecca: I keep on hugging you tight. It seems that if I don’t hold you tight to me, you will just disintegrate. Holding you close, you look at me questioningly. You can feel me crying, feel the wetness of my tears, the wetness of my sweat, the wetness of my hands. You look up, questioning, asking: what is it? And now, at this moment, without words, but with my eyes and my heart, with my mind and my soul and my body, I am promising you we will fight!

The father's face is turned away from the wife. His step can be heard in the silence of the screaming rocks. The back of his blue shirt is stained with sweat, his shoes white with dust. He is carrying papers, envelopes, Zohar's medical history and future seem to be in his hands. He longs to be back at his office, in civilized Paris, where he can be in control of situations. Trevor is not a man to accept defeat nor to feel comfortable with uncertainties. His unhappy childhood has prepared him to fight on his own and refrain from showing weakness. Their marriage has been based on a deep friendship while avoiding the "pebbles" they encounter on the way. He knows Rebecca is waiting for his arm to hold her close to him. She needs to be held like a child afraid of the dark. Shouldn't she know him after eighteen years of marriage? Why does she challenge him? He doesn't know how to deal with the problem. Nor does he understand the problem. The sun is setting behind the Judean hills. A strange calm is settling in the air. A few more steps and they will be home.

That night, together in the kitchen, facing his wife over their evening tea, Trevor reaches for a piece of paper and starts making a list of doctors, experts, trying to put some order to their emotional chaos. Rebecca cannot share his detachment.

Rebecca: I need air. I need my own agenda, my own space, my changes and my decisions. First, resign from my job, cut my hair, clean the house. Zohar, I will be yours; totally and completely at your disposal. The other Rebecca will be buried.

A small figure appears at the door. It is Yael, who at only eight years old shows a capacity for understanding situations which surprises her parents.

"Mummy, it's so beautiful outside, couldn't we all go for a drive?"

"Why not", her father answered, "let's go to the Wall".

Rebecca lifts her face towards her husband, grateful for his suggestion.

The square in front of the Wall is empty. A few figures are there, praying in silence. The voices are soft and mingle with the quiet steps of the worshippers and those of the soldiers guarding the security of the place.

Rebecca walks with her three daughters towards the ancient stones. A beggar approaches her and she notices the brilliant dark eyes that look into her and through her. She drops a few coins onto the dish and carries on until she can touch the freshness of the rocks.

Rebecca: I can't talk to anyone. I should try to pray. What do you say in a situation like this? If I were religious I would know. I call myself names. I call everyone names. I realize I'm angry.

Angry against the world, G-d, but above everything else, against myself. My one fixed idea is that I want Zohar to start treatment immediately. I'm oblivious to the rest of the world, worse, even to the rest of the family. I think that I feel different from them, that I am on another level. Am I detaching myself or was I already detached without realizing? The stones of the Wall are cool. I put my forehead against them. Something strange comes over me, a feeling from miles away, from another time, is telling me that it is for me, Rebecca, to help Zohar. Is this expected of me? Is Zohar asking me to do something for someone of consequence? If there is a construction to be built, it is up to me to find the blocks, the elements, most important, the structural order. Where do I start? I don't even know how to begin. Like a lioness protecting her cubs, I hold my three children against me, feeling a sensation of a new beginning. Three small faces look up at me. The moonlight of the month of Ellul. Now I'm praying.

DOORS

The sun comes down in Jerusalem. The rocks begin to shine with the evening dew of the autumn. Lights in the city start to appear earlier as darkness comes by early evening.

Rebecca and her family leave Jerusalem and return to Paris. The school year is beginning. Noga's and Yael's schedule will be the same as the one they had before the summer holiday. Trevor's work is waiting for him. Rebecca and Zohar stand, holding hands. One wondering when she will start on her new path, the other, looking up at her mother in wonder. Zohar's eyes show her jealousy of her sisters. She stays in her nursery for hours, talking in her own language to the dolls and animals spread all over the room. Rebecca stands by the door, watching her, with a feeling of anger at her own impotence at not knowing how much the child of silence can understand.

Before their departure, the Israeli neurologist had given them certain instructions to be followed as soon as possible: speech and occupational therapies to develop Zohar's muscles to help her walk better, catch a ball, swallow her food and help her to speak.

This is Paris. They have the problem of finding a therapist in a society that denies this type of diagnosis, refuses to see it as a medical problem and prefers to attribute such behaviour to psychological problems endured by the youngsters because of their selfish or uninterested parents.

Trevor and Rebecca have decided to search in England where they have been told there is an Association of Parents of Learning Disabled Children. Now, at last, they have a means to address Zohar's problem.

There are endless telephone calls and meetings. Trevor is at his best. Rebecca at her worst. Is this the kind of being different she had felt or aimed at all her life? Where is her daughter taking her? Her sense of being part of a special world is tumbling down. She has to find a role, an active role to play. For the mother, these days are an endless maze out of which she emerges looking haggard, her eyes lost.

Rain is falling. The rain Rebecca used to welcome as invigorating is now just a reflection of her own inner greyness. She feels pulled down with the cold and damp. No door seems to open to the softness of her beloved desert where she can be one with the passion of the past.

Finally Trevor announces the name of a school that has been given to him through the British Association: Marymount School in Neuilly. An appointment is made and father, mother and daughter reach the door of a new experience.

Sister Tekla opens the door. The beautiful 19th century white mansion, set in vast grounds is filled with young voices. A smell of the past – chalk, paper, classrooms – comes to Rebecca, making her smile.

Rebecca: The school looks warm; there are rugs at the foot of the stairs. If Zohar were to fall she would be protected. Zohar, hold my hand, yours is so soft and warm. Mine is ice cold. Do you feel as I do, that this may be the beginning of a new relationship? Daughter, please hold on to me. I'm scared.

Zohar leaves her parents in Sister Diane's study. The Headmistress, tall, blue eyes, red cheeks and with a warm smile, sends the daughter away with a teacher and prepares herself to listen to the father explain Zohar's medical history.

Rebecca: I like the trees. They are tall and strong. I can hear the wind. It's warm inside, in this room. I wish they would offer us a cup of tea or coffee. My stomach is swollen with wind and anxiety. I should have put more cream around my eyes. The winter is practically here and I should protect my skin. Who is this woman?

"Hello, sorry to be late. I am the Educational Therapist and I head the Special Resource Centre here. I've already met Zohar, she's so cute!"

"Barbara, do you think she would fit in the Centre?"

"Sister Diane, she'll need a lot of sessions first with the Speech Therapist. Zohar has no language. Within six weeks she may be ready to work with me."

"She understands more than you think. She wants to work. At home ..."

"Mrs V., we have to work with her and prepare a year's planning sheet. Don't be anxious. There are children of Zohar's age at the Centre and each one develops at their own speed."

Rebecca: This woman has a certain way of saying things that I like. My stomach is going down. Trevor is listening to her. She's so young and professional. I wonder if she herself has children. The Headmistress is Irish. I should have guessed. She and Trevor crack jokes. Do I feel out again? No, it's like a play, and I'm watching. When will it be my turn to come into the scene?

Sunday afternoon, the month of October. Zohar will be attending Marymount School from Tomorrow. Yael and Noga are excited for their naughty little sister as they like to call her.

Rebecca: I must remember to prepare her food in small pieces. She can't hold a sandwich and bite into it without dropping half of it. I must remember to make things easy for her. Was the therapist being cruel or was she being honest when she told me Zohar isn't like everybody else; that she's got a problem and we must work together to help her overcome it? Slap me in the face,

woman! I'm the one who has the problem to face! But don't let me go, guide me, please, support me and show me the way! Part of the day she'll be with the "normal" children of her age – four and five years old – at mealtimes and when they have their rest during the day. At other times she'll go to the therapist for her private sessions. I have seen the "Centre". It's upstairs, on the top floor. I looked at the children working, drawing, doing exercises. They seemed happy. But how will Zohar react? Yael is calling me from the kitchen. What is she doing? Trevor is away on one of his business trips. He'll arrive late tonight, Sunday. Sunday afternoons I want the time to be mind. I have always wanted to keep them for doing personal things, for clothes, for my own "beauty", to look at the sky and see the light gradually fade. I mustn't forget to put a small, lightweight, plastic cup in Zohar's bag for her drink. I must get used to making lists for her personal needs, not only mine. Will they laugh at her when she'll need help to do up her coat, tie up her shoe-laces or go to the toilet? Maybe I should get her a pair of moccasins, no laces, but she needs solid shoes to keep her feet straight. I must bath Zohar, dry her hair with the dryer. I want her to look her best.

"Mummy, come, look at them!"

Yael, my eight-year-old, is standing by the door, an apron reaching to the floor.

"Mummy, will you come. I want to be the one to prepare the scones!"

Is it her voice or my own, claiming for my rights at my parents' home? It's uncanny. I can see so much of myself in her. Is that why I attack her so often?

I can hear Noga calling me from the bedroom. She wants me to help her choose what to wear tomorrow. Noga's a mixture of a tomboy and a girl of eleven who is just beginning to awaken to her body. She's standing on her bed, admiring herself in the mirror. I look at her big green eyes, her blond, curly hair, her small build and her big smile. Apart from her freckles – those are mine – she's just like her father.

Three daughters and each one so different from the others. Yael has olive skin, brown, romantic eyes and the slender figure of a ballet dancer. She's the middle child. She triumphantly walks into the room, wearing an apron that reaches the floor and proudly bearing a plateful of scones.

A voice from the bathroom breaks this happy moment. It's Zohar calling me. Zohar, your only word: "Mummy", sounds so painful to my ears. Zohar is in the bath. Children look so vulnerable when they are naked. She looks lost in that bathtub. It's difficult for her to keep her balance, even just sitting there. She looks so small. I ask myself: will we make it tomorrow? I touch her and wash her. I don't want to get wet. Her small hand reaches for my face. Why are you doing that? I don't want you to thank me. I'm your mother. Isn't this my job?

Then came the time when Zohar began very gradually to come out of her world of silence, when

“mother” wasn’t the only word she could say but she started saying others. It was in that white room, beside Zohar’s speech therapist, Arleen, that Rebecca learned what she already knew and yet did not know how to actually do it. She learned how to watch Zohar struggle with papers, with words, with figures, with her own silence, with her desire, with a desperation to come out from one room and pass through into another. And Arleen, being tough with her, gentle, swift, demanding, surprising.

Rebecca: Demands are not only on my daughter, they are on me. She is confronting me with my responsibility – the different ways I can help her. Values, reasons – explain it to her, be tough with her, talk to her – all this is in my hands? Her life, her future, her problem, my problem. And with all of this, a feeling of life. Life. I am alive, I am responding. I’m not just speaking for others. I am acting for something far more..., far more what? Did my mother think of my life? She never actually mentioned that. Did she worry about us? About my sisters and me? Yes, it’s true, it’s the first time I am facing this. Do I look on my mother as myself? Do I look on myself as my mother? Do I look on my daughters as future mothers? Do we, as mothers, look at our daughters and feel a terrible jealousy of what we haven’t yet been able to achieve, manage to do what we wanted to do, and we try to shape their futures into what we did not do? Or do we become jealous of what they may be able to do and we haven’t been able to? I look at my daughters and I see things that perhaps were in me but lay dormant and forgotten. And, yes, I am jealous. I am jealous of my daughters, especially Yael. She’s so much of what I wanted to be, very much the way I am or I was or I didn’t know I was, and it’s nasty. I’ve been very nasty to her many, many times. Don’t tell me that mothers can’t be nasty. Don’t tell me that mothers don’t have to learn how to say sorry. And why not say: “I’ve learned thanks to you, through you, by you”? I have to say that. I have become so very different thanks to them. I have had the courage to look into myself, into my own womb and ask: what am I?

What do I want and where does my anger come from? How easy things seem to be for Trevor and the girls. Am I questioning that it’s easier for Zohar as well? Somehow I should get things straighter in my mind. Yes, I’m forty, married three children and a Ph.D. From the outside, people may look at me and think: she’s an achiever, she’s made it. Made what? I long for the soft, sweet roughness of Jerusalem stone. My fingers run over my body, touching, searching and finally reaching my eyes which I close. I don’t want to see.

Rebecca, what are you looking for? Yes, I do it more often than before. I talk to myself and even get angry to the point of insulting that woman, that Rebecca who’s coming out of me. I pick up a mirror and look at my eyes, red from crying. Wrinkles around them, around my mouth. Signs of ageing, of worry and lack of sleep. My fingers go through my hair. I’m tempted to grab the scissors and cut it all off, including my brain. Maybe that way I will stop thinking and get some sleep.

No, I don’t want to sleep. Look at the pile of books next to me which I haven’t touched. The films and plays I haven’t seen. I have drowned myself with my daughter. I feel I am left behind.

Once again, I start my own monologue. I go over the information we received from the neurologist in Jerusalem: minor brain damage – which side? The left. How did it happen? We don't know. Fine. What do you assume provoked this lesion? Could be lack of oxygen at the moment of birth. What are the symptoms? Slowness in walking, running, speech, thought, in short: slow development. What do you call this, doctor? Learning disabilities. How should we deal with this? Special schooling, physical and educational therapists... the list is long.

I slowly start undressing myself, looking at my body, trying to find the same signs of ageing as in my face. There isn't enough light. I turn it on and sharp with brightness at first it hurts my eyes. What would happen if someone were to come into the room now, this minute? They would find it very strange. Maybe if it were Trevor who came in he might think I am masturbating. Should I? No, too much effort. I would rather take a shower. I'll go downstairs in a while and wait for the school bus bringing Zohar home.

* * *

Zohar has fallen asleep in the back of the car. Her head is on one side. She's clutching her teddy. A fine line of saliva dribbles from one side of her mouth. Her long eyelashes shine in the autumn light. The trees look beautiful at this time of year. It is very quiet. The trees are changing colour. Zohar wakes up as I stop the car and put the brake on. She looks up at me, her eyes questioning.

“Come, let's go. We'll look at the trees together. Come, Zohar, let's walk.”

The season of change. My season.

“Look, Zohar, touch these leaves. Hear how they crackle. They are yellow, not green. They are dry. Hear the sound they make. Feel them. Smell them. That's autumn, Zohar. There are four seasons.”

Speak slowly, Rebecca, don't rush.

“Listen, Zohar, it's like music, the language of the trees is floating in the air. Can you catch the words from faraway lands? They speak of loneliness, rain and wind.”

Zohar, I can see the anger in your eyes. Trust me, my child, I don't want to humiliate you. Push. Make your muscles work. The neurologist said that we must help you develop all your muscles. My back's beginning to hurt. Let's take a break.

PARIS

Rebecca: My life, now that I have stopped teaching at the University, revolves around Zohar's timetable of school and various therapists, and then comes the rest of the family. I have blocked my past life. I have locked it inside the safe. Sometimes I can hear it calling me, but I tell myself that I have no time for that, not just now. Soon I must go downstairs to wait for Zohar's school bus. Around me, the house is ready for Shabbat. It is a moment of peace which I enjoy having to myself. The table is ready with the white table cloth. The candlesticks shine, holding the white candles ready to be lit. I'll do it as soon as Trevor gets home. Through the big window I can see the rooftops of Paris. The sky is grey and it's almost sure to rain tonight. Am I looking for water to wash away the dark thoughts of a woman searching? I wish for a storm which would shake the whole house with me inside it.

"Mummy, Mummy, where are you?"

That's Yael's voice. She's standing next to me. Did I fall asleep? What's the time?

"Look at me Mummy, listen to my song ... This is my dress for Shabbat...", she sings.

Yael, the little girl with the eyes of a gazelle, desperately searching for my approval and my love. I can't. I have no time for you. I must go downstairs. Zohar's bus will be here any minute. Later. I will listen to your song, later.

Yael: Mummy, how can you be so cruel? I can't wait. I know, I try to understand your need to help Zohar, but I need you too. I hate you, Mummy! You always leave me till after. You aren't like that with Noga. I need you as well. Look Mummy, I prepared a card for you to put on the wall, next to your mirror. I know what I'll do, I'll arrange your table, then you'll be pleased with me and you'll pick me up in your arms and hug me tight, like you hug Zohar. Why don't you hug me?

Noga: Yael is stupid. She shouldn't try to compete with Zohar. Now she's angry and thinking that Mummy will notice her. She should try to do more work at school. I am lucky to have a room of my own. She has to share hers with Zohar and she likes helping Mummy with Zohar's exercises and games. I have no patience. If it is going to be the Bois and bicycling and climbing trees, then yes, but Zohar can't do those things. One day she will, Daddy says so. He's so clever and funny when he reads us stories at night. It's a pity he has to travel so much. Tonight he'll be home, but not for the whole weekend. Never mind, Mummy is home. She's always at home. Isn't she bored?

Apart from Zohar, they all know the prayer. They say things she can't understand. The father speaks to her and gives Zohar a piece of bread. Yael helps her cut the chicken on her plate. Zohar wants to go back to her room.

“Zohar, tell us, what did you do in school, my child?”

Rebecca: Your eyes shine with anger and frustration. You feel out of everything and talk with your own sounds to your teddy. Wait, Zohar, dinner is almost over. We will have our own chat when I take you to bed. Look at the candles. How they shine! I wish I could say sorry to Yael for this afternoon, but I can't. How can I explain to her, a child of only eight, that her little sister needs me more, that I have to give her all I can? Do I have to say it? Doesn't she know more than I imagine? What would I do without Yael's help with Zohar, without her readiness to play with her and repeat word after word, without me asking her to do so? I want to hold her in my arms, hold her tight.

SUNDAY MORNING

Rebecca: From my room I can hear Zohar's soft voice talking to her animals. She must have been up for a long time. As usual, instead of coming to my room and jumping into my bed like the others, she chooses to be on her own. Outside it looks cold and grey. The bed is warm and it's all mine. Trevor left yesterday for the whole week. I can't even remember where he is today. Do I care? He leads a life of his own. We speak so little to each other about ourselves. I can't even remember when was the last time we made love. A lover, I should have a lover. How stupid of me. As if my schedule...

"Mummy! Zohar is pulling all my books down from the shelves, come quickly!"

Rebecca: Yael is calling me from their room. Is it a question of schedule, even that? Yael's hand is pulling my pyjamas. Her eyes are so big and frightened. Her skin so smooth, she has the look of a gazelle. Let me hold you, let me smell you. I want to say it to her but I neither say it nor do it. As usual, I only dream of things. Inside me is the other world. That's where I am. Who could be my lover of all the men I know? Why not a woman? It could be an experience!

"Mummy! Can't you hear me? Zohar could hurt herself. She'll pull the whole bookcase down on top of her. Come quickly!"

Rebecca: Sitting around the kitchen table for breakfast. I'm trying to organize things – schedules and agendas, for our Sunday together, the girls and me. I wish I could get back into bed and leave everything behind. Zohar is making a mess of her food. Her muscles are so weak in her legs, hands, tongue, that everything keeps on falling from her mouth or from her spoon. I try to control myself, neither complain about the mess nor help her. Above all, I must not help her all the time. She has to try on her own. I mustn't inhibit her. She's five now and she wears a bib with a pocket into which the food keep falling.

Yael: Zohar needs me. Mummy and Noga don't know how to do it properly. They don't understand her. If Mummy would leave me alone with her I'm sure she would learn faster. If I do that, Mummy will love me more. I was frightened this morning. I didn't want to wake her up. Why didn't she kiss me? Or give me hugs like she does with Zohar? She always gives compliments to Noga, that she's clever, that she works hard, that she's quick, that she finishes her food and her room is always tidy. I'm not like that. I like dancing and listening to music. School is boring and I don't like food. I like listening to Mummy's stories and going out shopping with her. I like playing with her make-up and touching her silk blouses, smelling her perfumes and creams. Just being close to her. Mummy, I need you too.

There they are, the two of them, Mummy and Zohar. I wish Mummy would read the story louder so I could enjoy it too. How lucky Zohar is! Every night she gets all the attention. Maybe if I cough or get sick Mummy will come to see me. There, she's kissing her, tucking her up in bed. I'll close my eyes. Maybe she'll come to me? She's turned the light off and now she's closed the door. No, I can hear her footsteps moving away, towards her room. Does she know that I exist? Mummy, I want you to hug me.

Trevor: Rebecca looks worried and tired. I thought she would like the presents I brought her from New York. She asked me for a light coat and now she's asking if I kept the receipt so that I can change it next time I go. I don't know how to please her. The girls are happy with the toys. It's much easier with them. Zohar loves the puzzles. That girl can spend hours working on her own. I try to communicate with her but I just haven't got the patience of Rebecca or Yael. I am like Noga, give me a book, a newspaper and a corner on my own, don't go into psychological explanations. I had enough with my own childhood. Rebecca goes on and on trying to see what is behind everything. Leave me with my work and international issues. Don't dig into my past too much. It's mine and I'd rather not understand too much of it. Yael is like her mother. They can both sit, look into the air and after a while they know what to do: get up and go straight to Zohar, or the kitchen or whatever. They are silent people with a world inside their eyes. Though sometimes Rebecca picks on Yael. She hurts her consciously, deep; blood spills all around. Only then she holds her tight. Strange kind of love. I don't think I fit in with this weave of women very well. Rebecca is a mystery to me. I'm amazed how foreign she seems to me. It's not only that we were born in such different parts of the world, but all of it. Sometimes I almost believe that she is bewitched and all that nonsense about reincarnation; maybe she was in Spain all those centuries ago and burnt on the cross like so many other thousands of Jews during the Inquisition. It is true that when we went to Cordoba she knew the city as if she had been there before. Rebecca is full of imagination and Yael follows her example.

I wish I didn't have to see my father every time I go to London. We don't communicate. Not even now, after my mother's death. We're like strangers. Rebecca encourages our relationship but I get bored in his company. Anyway, he's not interested in my work. Human rights, politics... He just says he's an ignorant man and that's the end of the conversation. I'll try to do better, maybe through Yael. She loves art and he likes drawing. A bridge could be built between them. Where's Rebecca? Still with Zohar. She feels guilty. On every possible occasion we meet a doctor and the questioning starts: was it her fault? Did she do something wrong at the time of the birth? I know that she would like to send Zohar to boarding school but I refuse. The family stays together.

ZOHAR

Rebecca: While I am touching you, washing your think, black hair, I press my fingers against your head and I close my eyes trying to imagine what moves inside. We are both – you, Zohar and me, Rebecca – in the loneliness of the sound of running water. There are rooms in our minds and each has a door with a key. What would happen, Zohar, if I broke down one of those doors? Could I plant the seed of my strength in your brain? I wish I could feed you with my physical strength. Come, it's time to get out now. Let me dry you.

Let me cover your nakedness. Images of the past come to my mind. Photographs yellowing with time and covered with history. Other women and their children being pushed into the gas chambers. Family association. We could have been there. Those images are with us.

“There you are, Zohar. Let's get the hair dryer and do your hair. Tomorrow's Monday and a new week is beginning.”

Yael: Mummy, why do you speak so slowly and carefully?

Rebecca: Yael's eyes are on us, searching. She says what Zohar can't express.

Yael: You treat her almost with fear. That's it. You're afraid of her. You're touching her as if she were still a baby. We were your babies as well. We couldn't stay inside you either, nor can we stay within these four walls. Don't you understand that you can't keep on protecting us? That we can't continue being dependent on you?

I remember another bath. It was in Jerusalem at the big house with a balcony looking onto the yellow mountains. It was winter and the hills were white, covered with snow. You let me walk without shoes, feeling the heated marble floor under my feet. I came back with Noga from school, our noses were red from the cold and we were very wet. You made us undress as soon as we came in the front door and we ran upstairs, straight into a hot bath waiting for us. Zohar stayed behind. We laughed a lot then. Talking and laughing. Why did we leave the big house in Jerusalem?

Rebecca: Zohar, look at me. You look beautiful. Here, have a look at yourself in the mirror. What is it, don't you like your hair? I think it suits you shorter and that way it doesn't get in your eyes. Come on, let's go and prepare dinner together.

The little figure in teddy bear pyjamas disappears into the nursery. As soon as Zohar is out of sight, she makes a mess of her hair, stands on a stool and looks at her reflection in the mirror. Yes, now her eyes

are beautiful. She goes even closer to the mirror, peering at her reflection. After three operations her eyes are now straight. The first two operations took place in France. She was only two and a half when she had the first operation and only three and a half for the second. She was operated on for the third time in London just a few months later.

From her room, Noga can hear what's going on but she prefers not to interfere. With her legs crossed in the lotus position, pulling hairs from her bushy eyebrows, she seems to be deep in her book.

Noga: Hasn't Yael understood how Mummy's moods work? I'd rather keep well away from Mummy and Zohar. They are just like a couple. Mummy becomes dry and cold. I can see it in her eyes. Even if she puts on that sweet tone of voice and speaks slowly, pronouncing each word so clearly. If anyone gets in the middle I think she'd explode. Sometimes I wonder if Zohar's pretending or can't she really do those things by herself? What's wrong with her? She looks OK to me. Mummy says we can't speak Hebrew at home any more. She doesn't even let me put on Israeli music. Why should we only speak English at home? Daddy told me that it's to help Zohar learn how to speak and if she hears more than one language she'll be muddled. The same happens when we get back from school every day. We have to concentrate on Zohar.

Mummy locks herself in the nursery with Zohar and they stay there for hours. She's selfish. Other mothers play with all their children, not just one of them. Look at Ilana upstairs. Her mother comes to the school, chats with the teachers, they go out shopping together all the time. My mother is different from the others. Yael is very like her. They both take things seriously but things I don't understand. Will I ever have children, get married...? That's for Yael, that's what she'll do. I wish I could do my hair like she does. Mine is so curly and now after the haircut I look like a bush. Mummy says I have beautiful blue-grey eyes like Daddy, but behind my glasses my eyes look so small. My face always seems red. Mummy just says it's a sign of health and I look like a "classical English rose". Yael is pale and thin and she's so quiet. But me, sometimes I feel I could break anything I touch. Yael is special somehow. I wish she wouldn't cry so much, it's boring. But I love it when she tells her stories. They're fascinating. When are we going to have dinner?

MARYMOUNT IN PARIS

Black and white figures move up and down, in and out of the garden, the rooms, the stairs, the kitchen; smiling, warm, welcoming. In an old, Parisian mansion, surrounded by trees and greenery, Zohar spends two and a half years of her life. With her, the whole family blend into a new world, looking through a magnifying glass.

CHRISTMAS AT MARYMOUNT 1984

“Mummy, leave her, let her be herself”, Yael begged Rebecca. “Let me do it along. I’ll find a way.”

They sit facing each other. The sun shining on Yael’s hair, gives it a golden, reddish tint and makes her skin the colour of the sand in the desert on a winter afternoon. Their knees almost touch. Zohar’s lips repeat slowly the lines she so wants to learn for the Christmas play. Rebecca leaves the room but her mind is still with them, with Yael, and tries to superimpose itself on hers.

The day is cold and bright, the gardens white with snow. The Christmas lights shine through the windows. The children’s play in beginning.

Rebecca: There she is, my daughter, Zohar. I can feel people looking at me – her teachers, her tutors, the nuns – they want to reassure me. The unasked question is there: will the child who hardly speaks – how many words can she say now, 40? – will she manage her lines?

Zohar steps out from the rest of her group and goes to the front. Silence. Then the miracle happens. Zohar recites her lines! Her first public appearance and she doesn’t seem the slightest bit afraid. Sister Tekla has tears in her eyes. Barbara calls Zohar a ‘gutsy’ little girl. Sister Diane looks serious. She seems to be saying: You see? You must trust, have trust in Zohar.

Rebecca: Yael, you are the only one not to react. How do you feel? It’s your doing, your efforts. And yet, I don’t come to you to thank you. I’m not humble enough to acknowledge your superiority. I’m not ready to accept that yet.

DAYS

Rebecca: Hours, days, months. How long will it take? Where are we going? How many rhymes and exercises will it take for you to speak, Zohar? I'm not reproaching you, but I wish there were someone who could reassure me that this is the right way, that it is going to work.

Every single one of your toys has a purpose. Each one is a teaching tool. Trevor is exceptional in following the instructions of the educational therapists. Before each of his business trips he gets a shopping list and when he returns home he's always laden with parcels. Zohar needs to see in order to remember, to touch in order to understand shapes, sensations. This week will be the brown week. From top to bottom she'll be dressed in brown. Each time we wait, Yael and I, to see the results. It's not always smooth and happy. We have to be prepared for trouble as well. Zohar's reactions to failure are explosive. Papers, books, toys are sent flying all over the nursery. But she rarely cries. There are hardly ever tears in her eyes. Sometimes I wish she would hit me. And then, when suddenly a smile appears on her face when she recognizes a sound or a word – can anything be more rewarding? Another battle has been won. And yet, is this really the best we can do for her, the best we can do with her? I begin to doubt.

It was then, when I went to Zohar to hug her, that Yael left us. Why didn't I include her in our circle? Her small, fragile figure disappeared without asking for anything. There is something she needs. What is it?

A NEW DEPARTURE

Rebecca: Jane Toppard will arrive from New York today. Two years have passed since we met. It was thanks to Barbara, one of Zohar's therapists, who introduced us.

Jane had been a student of Barbara's at Teachers College, Columbia University. Jane wasn't born in New York but over the years she had lived there, she had learned a great deal about Israel and Israeli society through her many Jewish friends and colleagues. Rebecca supposed that that is what must have made their relationship seem so easy in the beginning. Later on, Jane's interest became more personal through her care for Zohar and the rest of the family. She was a tall, grey-haired woman with large brown eyes and a huge smile. Her hands touched you with a warm gesture while her words were clear and to the point. She wore long, flowery skirts and colourful tops, earrings and silver rings on her fingers with very short nails. Her trip to Paris had the purpose of getting to know Zohar's school and her teachers. It was Friday night. Trevor and Rebecca had invited all the teachers to dinner. The windows were open, looking onto the river, the lights of Paris below. Jane and her husband, with Trevor and Rebecca, remained sitting round the table. The other guests had already left. The contrast of the calm of the night and the tension in the living room was painful. The Shabbat candles were long, their flickering light cast shadows on the walls. Jane's profile had a golden glow, softening her looks.

Rebecca: What's wrong with Jane? She avoids my eyes and talks about paintings and theatre when I'm waiting to hear the results of her findings. Why is she so detached? Maybe there's a problem with Tom. No, they've been together for thirty years. I wish Trevor would stop talking about everything and nothing. Should I ask outright?

Trevor is holding his cigarette very tightly between his fingers. Rebecca notices his drastically short nails. He likes cutting them whenever he has a spare moment. A small pair of scissors hangs from the key-chain attached to his pocket. He's letting his beard grow again, giving him a very professorial appearance. His words are as controlled as his voice. It is a technique he has learned through his many years as a public speaker.

Tom is wearing sandals and Rebecca finds herself staring at his toes. Living in Paris where appearances are so controlled by fashion, it seems strange to her that a man should come to a dinner party wearing sandals.

"We must go, Rebecca. Thank you for everything, all of you. It was a wonderful evening. Let's go, Tom. These people are tired." Jane's voice was clear and determined. The meeting was over.

Rebecca: How can she leave like this? I wish Trevor would ask her.

The couple leave. Rebecca finishes clearing the dinner table and Trevor sits down to watch the late edition of the news. An hour goes by when suddenly the phone rings. It is almost 1 a.m. Rebecca answers the phone.

“Rebecca, I’m sorry. You must think I’m a coward, that I should have told you face to face. But I couldn’t go back to New York without telling you what I believe you should do with Zohar. Rebecca, Zohar won’t be able to go forward, to progress with her learning, unless you send her away to boarding school, a proper school for special needs. Tell Trevor. He can’t keep her at home just because he wants the family to stay together. What do you prefer: a handicapped daughter or an independent daughter?”

The sky, already dark, became black. The lights of Paris could no longer be seen. There was the heavy feeling of a storm coming. Heat and tiredness overcame Rebecca. Trevor picked up the other phone. Silence. A word of thanks. Rebecca had made her decision. She walked to the shower. Crying, in pain. From the bathroom she went to find Trevor.

DEPARTURES

That Monday was grey and cold. It was a very grey Monday morning when Zohar left her father for John Horniman School in England, her very first boarding school. Rebecca couldn't bring herself to go with her daughter. As soon as Zohar left, Rebecca went and sat down at her desk. She started dictating. She tried to make it look as though it were just another working day. Her assistant knew her mind was elsewhere. She offered Rebecca a cup of tea. Rebecca just sat looking out of the window. The windows in that flat were very high and looked down onto the river. The balcony had a protective veil of netting making it safe for the girls to play there. But now that protection gave the mother the impression she was inside a prison. The sky was very grey, the way she felt. Finally, Rebecca gave up.

"I'm going out", she said.

Miss Farrell, her assistant, typically British, discreet, understood there was nothing to say. She helped her on with her hat and coat. Rebecca looked at the Burberry hat, smiling to herself. It was too big for Zohar. The American neurologist had told her that Zohar's head was small and that her brain was not developing normally.

Rebecca: Nonsense.

She put on the hat.

"See you later. I'll take the calls", reassured Miss Farrell.

Rebecca went out but didn't know where to go. She headed towards the metro. An unconscious need to feel people around her, to hear voices, to see faces. She got off the metro somewhere on the Left Bank and started to walk. Waling alone in no particular direction, looking in shop windows without seeing the displays. Finally she saw a face. It looked back at her.

Rebecca: Who is that woman? Wrinkled, red-eyed, her hair in a mess, hands in her pockets, holding on to something as if it were going to fall. Look at her eyes! She looks haggard, she looks terrible, who is she?

That woman was Rebecca. Rebecca, the mother who had run away from the room where she had said goodbye to her daughter early that morning and where she could still feel the smell and presence of the child leaving home. She couldn't walk into the room where all the toys spoke of her child's absence. A disorder she did not want to tidy up. She couldn't look at the bed because it was going to be empty from

now on. Rebecca felt responsible for all that had happened to Zohar. But who is that woman looking at her? She tried to hold back her tears.

Rebecca: Zohar, tonight you will be going to sleep away from home for the first time. Somebody else will be going to tuck you up, somebody else will ask if there is anything you need. It will be the same tomorrow morning and the one after that. You will wake up and look around and say: where am I? And I will be waking up without you and wondering: will they understand her? Will they look after her?

Zohar, are you angry? Will you be angry with me for the next ten years, from the moment you left home? Will you tell me? Because I will be waiting for that. I want you to yell at me and tell me if you are happy or have just accepted our decision. There is no going back now. We must give you this chance.

That afternoon the house was quiet. Noga and Yael did not find their mother at home. They had their tea and went to their rooms. Noga worked. Yael went around arranging Zohar's toys, touching her little sister's things, putting her desk in order, organizing what she knew her mother couldn't do, waiting for her to arrive.

MONOLOGUE OF DECISIONS

Rebecca: I gave you a “Joseph’s multi-coloured coat” to protect you, while what I did was to build a wall of bricks. The only sounds I wanted you to hear were my lines, instructions, time-tables. I used love, reasoning and opened a tiny door for you to learn about the world outside. Now I can see you in that other world while I remain behind and build a different one.

The café is full of people and cigarette smoke, damp coats and voices. Rebecca is sitting in a corner, holding a cup of coffee, warming her hands. Her eyes are fixed on the glass door. The waiter leaves her alone. Her feet feel wet. Her legs are tired. Outside it is already dark.

Rebecca: What is Zohar doing now, on her first day away from home? I can feel myself smiling. I know my little “gutsy” girl too well. Most probably by now she’s already made a friend, arranged her “little people” around her pillow and found out where the sweets are kept. I’m beginning to feel warmer now, less tense. Zohar will be all right. I must stop feeling sorry for myself. It’s already late, almost dinner time. I must pay and get out of here. But how can I? What am I going to do tonight after dinner? To whom can I read a story? Emptiness. Summer in New York. It wasn’t so long ago.

AUGUST 1985 – CENTRAL PARK, NEW YORK.

Zohar is once again attending summer camp. For the first time, she tells Rebecca a story of her own. The child is opening like a flower, a flower daring to grow. It hurts the mother to see how hard Zohar tries, with such difficulty, to find words to keep her attention. Zohar gets angry, loses her patience. She slaps Rebecca and runs off. From far away she looks back at her mother then she returns to her. She hugs her.

Rebecca: Our New York is welcoming. Come, Zohar, let's go out and buy a red ice lolly. That's what you like best, an Italian ice lolly. And then later we'll go home and watch something on television. No, I'm not going to hide it, I'll need a break. Sometimes, after an hour, an hour and a half working with Zohar, all I want to do is get under the shower, let the cold water run over my body, and cry. Because I still can't accept the fact that she doesn't understand things as fast as I wish she would.

At the end of the summer we'll go to Columbia Teachers' College for Zohar to be tested. Jane Toppard and one of her students will be testing her. They follow her development. They give us guidance for the year ahead. They know how to communicate with my daughter. She has been tested every weekend throughout the whole summer. This is our last weekend and I will hear the results.

The consultant asks Rebecca: "Would you like to stand behind the mirror? Your daughter will not be able to see you but you can observe her".

Rebecca looks at the consultant, "Observe her? No, I can't. I won't do that. She's not a monkey!"

"Rebecca, don't take it that way. Please try to understand. We would like you to see what happens. We want you to understand your daughter better."

Rebecca: Why am I refusing? Why don't I want to look at her? Is it because she doesn't know I'm here? I don't want to lie to her. I feel as though it would be cheating.

"Rebecca, please stay behind the mirror."

Rebecca: I accept the order. It is almost an order. Jane Toppard leaves me. She goes through the other door and I stay in the dark room behind the "window-mirror". I look at Zohar and I try to detach myself from her. What I see is a totally different person. Not the Zohar I know. She's

talking to them, she's drawing, moving, smiling. They're laughing together. That's the other one! That's the way she is when we're not with her. I smile to myself and I am yes, proud. I have this strange feeling that a dream, a dream I have dreamed, may yet become a reality. Zohar is opening up. She's developing. Sharing a meeting of the minds – will I ever share that with her? Something's happening. I wish I could be in that place.

Zohar: I know I can do it. Jane help me. There. This piece goes here. Oops. There again. Finish the cat. I like puzzles.

Later that same afternoon Zohar develops a fever. Her throat is very sore and Rebecca becomes anxious for her small daughter.

Rebecca: I feel strange. I feel afraid. Afraid of losing her. I'm always afraid of losing her, because if I lose her, I lose the meaning of my life. She gave me the reason to exist. I can see the drops of sweat on her tiny nose. The temptation to kiss her is so strong. Lightly I touch her fingers. They feel cooler than before. Her lips are dry. I feel like this each time I look at her while she sleeps: it's a miracle. I want to suspend this moment.

It's raining so Zohar won't be going to camp today. Carol, her language therapist, as a sister-mother-friend relationship with her. Rebecca is sometimes jealous of the closeness between Zohar and her therapist. The mother listens behind the door to hear how she is teaching Zohar, what methods she is using. She wants to be steeped in the therapist's knowledge, to be able to carry on when she's away because Rebecca knows how keen Zohar is to go on learning. Carol and Zohar are planning a "trip" to the supermarket together, just the two of them. They laugh while working. Rebecca promises herself to make it more of a game when she's working with her daughter. She wants Zohar to laugh with her.

Zohar: I like her. She smells nice. Beautiful, long hair.

Rebecca: I'm sitting in the very small kitchen in New York. I have a migraine. I couldn't stop being sick all night I feel a little hand on my arm. Zohar's lesson is over and she has walked into the kitchen without my hearing her. Her face is looking up at me and her big eyes are saying: "Mummy, please don't be sick. Mummy, I need you". Did I say I was jealous? How could I? She wants me. She needs me.

Zohar: Mummy is white. She doesn't look pretty.

Rebecca stops remembering and comes back to reality. She gets up from the table, and holding herself very straight, walks out into the night. The rain feels fresh on her face. Smiling to herself, she runs to the metro entrance.

That evening, dinner was very quiet. Another hand touched hers, Yael's. Rebecca can't accept her. She closes the door, a door which will not be opened for a long time.

FALL 1986 – VICTORIA STATION

Zohar is at school in Worthing, a small town on the south coast of England. Rebecca is going to see her. The train leaves from Victoria Station. She is excited. Rebecca loves train journeys. She gets into the train, looks at her watch, at the station clock. She is always afraid of getting lost or being late. She neither reads nor sleeps. She tries to picture the weekend ahead, just Rebecca and Zohar without the other members of the family.

The main attraction in Worthing is the High Street, and for Zohar and Rebecca, the tea shop with its welcoming smell of fresh scones. It is already a year since Zohar went to live in Worthing. The house-mother is known as “Auntie Sally”. She is a dwarf and she is beautiful. She is the person who looks after Zohar from morning till night. She knows all her secrets, her body, when she is happy and when she is not.

From the train station Rebecca takes a taxi. She is anxious to arrive. The school is a lovely old house surrounded by trees and flowers. Behind a tall window Rebecca can see a small face and a pair of eyes looking through round, pink-framed glasses. She runs. Zohar is waiting by the front door. They hug each other. The child’s face and hands are cold. Taking her mother’s hand she leads her up to her room on the first floor. The room is arranged like a doll’s house and smells of sweets and young children. Zohar shares the room with three other girls and there are toys scattered everywhere.

Rebecca: I can’t be unhappy – she’s surrounded by warmth, colour, tenderness – even though she’s not with me. Her hand is still in mine. Hers is getting warmer now. So this is the bit bath and rubber toys she plays with at bath-time. They do it in twos apparently. It’s more fun, faster, maybe more family-like. Am I jealous? Yes, I suppose I am. I am jealous of those who can see her and touch her, hear her and smell her when I’m not there. But then I know that I could never do for her what they are doing.

Zohar: She likes it. This is my room. She looks nice.

They pack a few clothes and go to a hotel in town. They have planned the weekend over and over. It is going to be the first time they will be alone, just Zohar and Rebecca, in Worthing. Rebecca knows what Zohar is expecting, but she wants Zohar to tell her. They walk past the ice cream parlour.

“Shall we go there tomorrow afternoon?”

“If you want to.”

“Shall we go in for dinner?”

“If you want to.”

Zohar is reserved. She stammers. It takes her time to unwind in her mother's presence. They feel uneasy.

Rebecca: We're walking by the sea. The wind is strong, fresh, lovely. The sky is grey. We're both enjoying it. Zohar tells me in her own time about her friends. We walk by a park and who do we see? Her friend, Zoe, with whom she shares her room. She waves at Zohar and Zohar looks at me. I say, “Yes, let's go in”. Other children from her school are there, children whose parents have not come to take them out over the weekend. They look at Zohar with some jealousy and at me with curiosity. I feel like buying them the whole trolley of sweets but I know I mustn't. I stand outside the playground and watch Zohar interact with her friends, trying to discover what I don't see every day. It reminds me of that afternoon in New York when Jane Toppard told me to stand behind the “mirror-window” outside the room where Zohar was being tested. She's looking at me and in her eyes I can read: Do you realize that this is my world? Yes, Zohar, I realize, but where is the key to that world? Will I ever find it? Will you ever let me in?

Zohar: Why doesn't she come in?

That kind of visit repeated itself many times over the years and yet Rebecca still remains an outsider.

IN BETWEEN

Hurried footsteps on the wet cobble stones. The young woman's face can hardly be seen under the bit black umbrella. Over one shoulder she carries a bag of books. She is eating an Arab bagel. Tall, dressed in black, with flat boots, her long hair caught in a barrette. Her eyes are searching in the darkness falling over Jerusalem.

The religious neighbourhood is bustling with men and women and children on the day before Shabbat. The noise of the butcher chopping the heads off the chickens and the smells of the bakeries mingle with human smells.

She often comes to the small tea shop. It has very few tables. They serve tea in tall glasses, Russian style. Rebecca, a student, has only recently arrived in Jerusalem. She enjoys her escapades to the "forbidden territory" without understanding why it attracts her.

Rebecca: That woman's wig is going to fall any moment if she keeps on shaking her head! I wonder how she would look if she dressed more fashionably. She can't be much older than I am. I hope she chooses to share my table. We could start talking. Are those three children hers?

Prayers can be heard from the many different places of study in the neighbourhood. Blessings for the rain so badly needed, questions and answers between the Rabbi and his students, the words sound like music: a sort of musical background enveloping everyone. The woman's eyes move from face to face, looking for a line of communication with this almost mystical world. Prayers and beliefs, rooms full of books and children, the glorification of life and tradition.

Rebecca: Were my ancestors in Eastern Europe like this? Where and how did we break away from this way of life? They seem so sure of where they are going. I want to learn. But I don't want any kind of involvement. At last I am on my own. No parents, no sisters or brothers. Yesterday I had the same nightmare again: that I was back in Argentina. I couldn't bear it. I enjoy my solitude. For the first time in my life I can do what I want, how I want. I don't even want to visit Tel Aviv. Here, I feel warm, protected. For how long?

Rebecca lives in an old house, near the market. She shares the kitchen and bathroom but she still has her own space: her own room with a bed, a desk, a closet and two chairs. On the floor there is always a big bowl of oranges, grapefruit and apples giving the room a pleasant smell. The shelves hold books on politics and English literature and one single photograph: her parents on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary.

Rebecca: I must get back to my room.

“Oh, yes, please sit down. No, I’m not waiting for anyone.”

“You’re not from here. You have a foreigner’s accent. Why are you leaving? Oh, I see, of course, you must prepare the Shabbat for your family, mustn’t you?”

“Yes, yes I must. Shabbat Shalom to you too.”

Rebecca: Why did I lie?

BARE TREES

The sun is brilliant and Paris shines under clear skies. The house is quiet. Rebecca takes off her coat and neatly hangs it in the entrance closet. For a moment she looks at her reflection in the mirror with total detachment. Though the flat is warm, a sudden shiver goes down her spine. She goes into the kitchen to make some tea. On her way, she passes Yael's bedroom door. It is half open. It seems to invite Rebecca to go in. Reluctantly, she pushes the door further open, and her eyes go straight to her daughter's desk. A pile of drawings attracts her attention. A pile of drawings of bare, skeletal trees, crying out for love and attention. Holding one in her hand, she leaves the room. Carefully she puts the drawing in her pocket. She carries on making tea. With a cup in her hand, she walks to the window. The sun has disappeared now. There is no light over the city. Bareness and solitude scream in her ears. The bell rings.

PRESENT PAST CONTINUOUS

Two years have gone by since Zohar left home. She has begun to express herself and to be demanding. The words “I”, “no” and “I want” can be heard clearly. It’s a new experience for her family. Her father can no longer simply buy what he thinks is good for her. She points at shop windows, toys, sweets. Her mother can no longer choose clothing for her. If Zohar doesn’t like it, she takes it off. Both parents laugh, pleased with her affirmation of existence. Noga approves her courage Yael observes.

Yellow has not yet broken through the greyness of Rebecca’s uncertainty, though colours begin to mix and inject new ideas. Zohar flies back to Paris every two weeks. As she is under twelve a hostess looks after her. Zohar’s arrival home creates changes in the family routine. These changes are not always welcome though no one ever complains. An agenda of activities and subjects of conversation are carefully prepared. Rebecca plans meals she knows Zohar will like. Trevor, if he is in Paris, goes to the airport to pick her up and take her back. He is less complicated than the mother. Noga carries on with her won schedule, rather like her father, a very matter of fact person. But Yael always prepares herself for the visit. She realizes that she’s emotionally very attached to Zohar and on each new visit she wants to see what new things she’s learned but also how her mother behaves with her and Zohar. The middle daughter arranges the nursery, prepares a surprise for Zohar and gets ready to help Rebecca.

Rebecca: My list once again, checking I haven’t forgotten anything. I’m always preparing shopping lists, lists of phone calls to be made, letters to be written, everything imaginable in case I forget. I drop onto the bed, trying to close my eyes and rest a little. Something rustles under my head. It’s a piece of paper. It says: Mummy, don’t worry, everything will be OK. Can I come to your room? Love, Y.

Yael’s best way to communicate with me is short notes on colourful pieces of paper, left in the most unexpected places. Why is she such a giver? How is it she knows how worried I feel? But do I really need her to be with me to look after Zohar?

A gentle knock at the door. A small figure walks in. Rebecca holds out her arms to pick her up and hug her tight. Yael looks straight into her mother’s eyes. She can see every line around them the golden dots on her eyes and smell her fresh breath. Hiding her face in her mother’s bosom, Yael’s voice comes soft and warm.

“Mummy, how are we going to tell Zohar that we are planning our return to Jerusalem? D’you think she’ll understand or will she feel abandoned?”

“How do you advise me to do it?”

“Maybe we should wait until after the holidays. I mean it will probably be too difficult for her to understand that in four months’ time home won’t be here any more but it’ll be back in Jerusalem. Mummy, you know how much she likes her desk and all her toys? Well, after the holidays we can make her room in Israel all ready for her with all her things. Don’t you think she’ll understand then and she won’t be unhappy?”

Rebecca looks and listens, while stroking Yael’s head.

“Yael, did I tell you how proud I was at your Bat Mitzvah? You read the prayers without hesitation, your voice was clear. We had to put a stool out for you to stand on otherwise you wouldn’t have been able to read from the book. Yael, you may be right. Do you realise, you’ve actually solved Daddy’s and my problem? But if we don’t say a word to Zohar now, how are we going to explain all this packing and shopping to her?”

“We won’t talk about it, Mummy. And if she does ask, we’ll just say we’re preparing for our trip round the world. I’ll show her on the map where we’re going. I’ll explain that it’s such a long trip we’ll need a lot of suitcases, won’t we?”

Rebecca: Karmela defined Yael as the “old lady who knows it all”. She may be right.

“Yes, Yael, you’ve got it all worked out. You tell Noga. I’ll tell Daddy. Have you had your shower yet?”

Rebecca can’t bring herself to say more than that. They look at each other. They understand each other. The doorbell rings. Zohar has arrived.

WHITE

White in the air of Jerusalem in the month of Elul. Pure is the heat in the hills of Masada. The scent of Rebecca's skin is inebriating. Her hair shines under the burning sun. Her hands stretch out for the fresh water to satisfy her thirst. She closes her eyes to hear the silent sound of the desert wind. Rebecca wants to feel the heat. She fears pain. Rebecca is back at home.

The rains arrived early in the autumn of 1986. Rebecca's mother died and the family returned to Jerusalem. To everyone's surprise and relief, Zohar loved her room. She accepted the change and settled down to the routine of flying five hours instead of forty-five minutes to and fro, from home to school. The learning development was evident in Zohar's drawings. Now she holds her pencils firmly, uses colours imaginatively and with still limited language, she tries to tell the story of her picture.

Rebecca parks her car on the street behind the semi-detached house. She feels tired. Her day started early. By 8 o'clock she was at the office. Working at a hospital makes her very aware of pain and creates in her a certain feeling of reverence for medical doctors. She picks up her briefcase and hurries down the stone steps to the house. She stops in exactly the same place every day to gaze in the direction of the Dead Sea. At that time of year and day the sky and hills mix their colours like two bodies wrapped into one, swathed in a light mist. The miracle occurs. It never fails: Rebecca has to force herself to leave where she is standing and walk on towards the house. The light is white. She stops again to look through Zohar's bedroom window. There she is, the small figure, bent over her papers. Her face is calm, the light on her pink cheeks making her look like an oversized doll. Rebecca taps on the window pane with her keys, smiling before Zohar turns to see who is there. A big smile showing rabbit teeth is the answer given to the mother.

"Where is everybody?" called Rebecca, pushing open the front door.

Inside the house it is cool and calm. Rebecca stands for a few seconds, looking at the room.

Rebecca: It's really not at all bad. The place is almost finished. Just a few things I still want to fix and it's not even a year since we returned from Paris. Our house has become welcoming. Well, now perhaps we are settled at last. I really should water those plants, they need more water with this dry, hot weather.

"Where is everybody?" called Rebecca, dropping her briefcase, hat and car keys on the sofa.

I like this study. It's not too large a room. The walls lined with books, the wooden desk we brought from Mexico, the leather sofa and a table ready for tea – it's perfect!

“Slaves, your mother is here, come and kiss me, it’s an order!”

Rebecca: Zohar is first. She can almost run now. I hug her tight. Searching for the familiar smells. Yael and Noga come to me afterwards.

“I’ll change and come to join you in the kitchen. Start lunch. It won’t take a second.” Lunch – it’s almost half past three in the afternoon! Never mind. I think it’s important having my meals together with the children, especially when Zohar’s at home, always a special moment. I’ll take off my clothes and get into a towelling bathrobe, feel the pleasure of walking barefoot, the coolness of the stone against my skin, take off rings, watch and earrings – I feel almost free!

“Mummy, in my class we’re preparing a show for the end of year and I’m going to be dancing, together with Noam. I’ll have flowers in my hair, the teacher is going to make skirts for each of us who’s going to dance and they’ll all be in different colours.”

“That’s lovely, Yael, you see? You belong to the chevre. What’s new with you, Noga?”

Noga’s blonde, curly head was concentrated on her food. She only made a dismissive gesture with her hand, asking for a minute.

“I need help with maths, Mummy. I talked to a teacher who gives private classes...”

The rest of the sentence is lost in the air. Rebecca had put her hand against her chest, to touch her neck and down to her breast. She kept on touching, touching something.

“Mummy, are you all right?” Yael asked.

Rebecca left the kitchen, mumbling a few words: “Yes, I’m all right. It’s nothing. I’ll be back.”

She runs up the stairs and goes straight to the bathroom. She takes off her bathrobe and stands in front of the mirror. There is a small round lump at the top of her right breast.

She keeps touching it, closing her eyes, checking her breasts, under her arms, like thousands of other women who go regularly to their gynaecologists or read articles on breast cancer in magazines. She is sweating. Her head is spinning. She goes downstairs again, to the study, closes the door behind her and makes a phone call.

“Mummy, you didn’t answer me, can I start taking private lessons?” asked Noga.

Rebecca is thirsty. She drinks one glass of water after the other. She looks at the three faces in front of her.

“Of course, Noga, start as soon as possible.”

ROOMS

Rebecca wakes up in a clean, white room. She is afraid.

Rebecca: White. Everything is white. As white as that day in August in 1981 when they told me about Zohar's problem. But this is different. This is me. I'm not reading a story. It's me they're talking about.

"Ah, you're awake. I'll bring you something to eat, something light. A yoghurt and a cup of tea? Would that be OK?" asked the friendly nurse. As you didn't have a total anaesthetic, you can eat something, don't worry, you won't be sick". The nurse kept on chatting.

Rebecca: I'm waiting for the answer to that question. The question I can't bring myself to ask them.

"Shalom, Rebecca." The professor walked in.

Rebecca: He's good looking. Wonderful eyes! Beautiful hands! I suppose all surgeons have special hands.

"It was a small lump, Rebecca. I won't beat around the bush. It looks like cancer. I'd advise you to have a mastectomy."

"No", said Rebecca.

Rebecca: What am I saying? What do I know? I have cancer, he's saying that I have cancer.

"Look, doctor, I have a meeting tomorrow with Shoshi."

"Oh, of course, you want a second opinion. Do it. It's your right."

"Thank you. You've been very kind receiving me so quickly and I appreciate your honesty."

The doctor leaves the room. Rebecca lies back on the bed. She can't move. She knows she can leave if she feels ready. It was only a biopsy.

Trevor is standing by the door. Pale, unsure, not knowing what to do.

“Please, just help me get my things. Let’s get out of here. I want to go home.”

Outside, the air is still and white.

They drive back in total silence. Rebecca’s eyes, hidden behind dark glasses are fixed on the Jerusalem hills. Her hands are cold and limp in her lap. Trevor is driving, both hands gripping the wheel. He is a heavy smoker, like Rebecca, but he doesn’t offer one to his wife.

They walk straight into the study, the room which holds so many beautiful memories. Trevor closes the door behind them. He sinks into the armchair and holds out his arms, calling for his wife to come to him. A silent scream tears Rebecca’s throat: Why me? Those are the only words she is repeating over and over. Tears running down her face. Holding tight to her husband’s neck. Sitting on his lap like a child looking for refuge, for an answer.

“I don’t know, there is no answer, Rebecca. Look at me, you have the best doctors. We don’t know everything yet. We’re together, we’ll fight this battle together.”

“Noga”, Yael called to her sister’s room, “can you hear Mummy crying? What is it?”

“Quiet, Yael, something must have happened. Let’s not get involved.”

The family spend the evening at home, without making any reference to the mother’s problem. That night the family didn’t go to the Wall.

Rebecca spends no time with the girls. After dinner she goes straight to bed.

“Noga, Yael, I have to speak to you”, called Trevor.

The girls obediently follow their father into the study. The door closes behind them. Robin, the dog, goes to lie down next to the woman whose eyes are brimming with tears. The voice of the mullah from the mosque sounds through the hills. Jerusalem hasn’t changed.

Early next morning, the couple return to the hospital. Rebecca walks straight in to be examined by Shoshi, the Head of the Oncology Department.

“Shoshi, I want you to tell me my options. Give me a scenario, time-frame, something!”

A smile appears on Shoshi’s face. Rebecca and Shoshi are colleagues.

“Rebecca, we will do a lumpectomy...” she carries on talking. “Be ready for more tests. Monday we’ll operate. Shall we go in to the meeting now? Neither of us likes to be late. Remember, today is Friday.”

As if in a cloud, Rebecca attends her meetings, smiles, offers ideas and plans.

Rebecca: I am planning, therefore I don't think of death. I think, therefore I am. I can't listen to this discussion any longer. My patience has gone. Trevor's waiting for me at the coffee shop. I need some air. I wonder if they already know.

The weather is cooler. The streets of Jerusalem are empty before the Shabbat. The couple walk to Trevor's office on Ethiopia Street. The trees look very tall and solemn. They pass by the Temple. The gate is half open. Rebecca pushes the door open a little further to look into the silent garden. A couple of priests dressed in black sit on a bench. Trevor is standing outside the garden. He carries a sheaf of papers.

"Why me?" screams Rebecca. A sound that only Trevor could hear. Clinging to him, smelling his clothing, touching his face, she asks him: "Will you make love to a cancerous woman?"

GREY

The woman is lying down in the recovery room. There are several other patients in the same room. A familiar smell wakes her up and the softness of a hand touching hers. Shoshi's smiling eyes meet Rebecca's. She drifts off to sleep again. The next time she wakes, she is in a room on her own. It is dark outside. Rebecca can hear someone breathing. Trevor is sleeping in a chair next to her bed.

Rebecca: Sleep. I want to feel myself in that deep sleep again. There is no white any more. My white has gone. Everything is grey. I am wet. I have wet the bed.

“Rebecca, Rebecca, wake up. You need to drink. Eat something.”

Estie is in her white uniform. She is standing beside the bed. Her strong arms go round Rebecca to help her sit up. Rebecca looks around her. Trevor is standing at the foot of the bed. Serious, worried, not knowing what to do with himself.

Rebecca: I am dirty. Wet. Smelly. What are these feelings? I want to be clean. I want to wash.

She tries to lift herself from the pillows. She can't. She doesn't have the strength. Estie calls a nurse. She walks Rebecca to the bathroom, supporting her, holding her close to herself. The morning goes by and then the afternoon. Rebecca keeps falling back into the clouds of her sleep. She never asks what they have found. The days pass slowly. The girls come to visit their mother. Nothing much is said. Zohar returns to England with her father. The sun has begun to set. The colour of the Sabbath spreads over Jerusalem.

A light knock on the door and a voice says: “Anybody there? Shabbat Shalom”.

With difficulty, Rebecca grips the arms of the chair she is sitting in and pushes herself up. She slowly walks over to the door. She has to carry the bottle with her. The bottle is attached to her wound, draining away all the residues from the operation. She looks out of the door to her room and sees a man – a religious man – going from room to room. At each doorway he says: “Shabbat Shalom. I'm going to make Kiddush, the blessing of the wine. Join me, please. Join me also you people. Join in the prayer with me. I haven't forgotten you.”

Rebecca stands just inside the half-opened door. She feels a lump in her throat. She begins to cry. She doesn't want the man to see her tears. She doesn't want the other patients to see her cry. But she listens to the words: Barruch ata adonai – praise be to you G-d.

Rebecca: I want to say: thank you, G-d for my being here. Praise be to you, G-d, that I am still here. Help me. I want to go home. I want to live.

Rebecca doesn't know the name of the man but she knows his face. She takes the bread and the wine. Their eyes meet.

Rebecca: I'm back in my room now and wiping my tears. I put cream on my face. I don't want to have wrinkles. I want to be beautiful. I want my children to look at me and see me as a beautiful woman. To remember me beautiful. Even the day I die I promise to myself I am going to be beautiful. I don't want pity. I refuse to be pitied. That man gave me back the feeling of being part of this world.

The door opens. Georgette, Rebecca's hairdresser, stands in the doorway, smiling.

"Go and have a shower and wash your hair. I'm going to do it for you. I don't want you to look like that. You must look after yourself. Are you listening to me?"

Rebecca smiles and says: "What a lovely surprise! This is a real treat. It's like a present. The Sabbath and you come to work for me?"

"It's not work. I'm your friend, Rebecca."

Rebecca: Yes, only a real friend does that for you.

She washes and sets Rebecca's hair.

"Come on, look at yourself in the mirror. Don't you look great?"

Rebecca: Do I? Big yellow eyes in a pale, thin face. But my hair is shining. Am I still the same?

* * *

Rebecca: Now it's Sunday. Shoshi, my oncologist is here. I can't move from my chair. What is she going to tell me? Am I going to need chemotherapy?

"Have you got a bottle of champagne? Open it! You're clean! You're going to make it. No, Rebecca. No chemotherapy. You will go for radiotherapy. You're going to be all right."

THE SEVEN WEEKS

In the row of small houses, all the windows, doors and gardens seem to be asleep. In the mid-afternoon June sunlight everything appears strong, golden, alive. The sun is at its highest. There are no voices, no music, no dogs barking. In the heat of the afternoon Rebecca parks her white car in the usual place. She closes the door gently. There is no haste in her movements. A cat, startled by the arrival of the car, jumps out from the garbage and runs towards the bushes. Rebecca turns, walks to the steps and stands looking towards the hills. In her left hand she holds some papers tight against her chest. The keys to the house are in her right hand. She feels hot, tired but satisfied. Her footsteps can hardly be heard on the stones. She unlocks the door and goes through to the study, dropping her papers, hat, everything. Barefoot, she sits at the kitchen table. With her eyes half closed, she covers her face with her hands. Her tears start flowing. An inner voice begins speaking to her.

Rebecca: Every morning, week after week, while I was having my treatment, I opened a door. The door was closed behind me and I was left alone in a very cold room under a huge light. The light was white with yellow lines. I would count the seconds, close my eyes and smile to myself saying: it's almost over. Then the door would open again and the people dressed in white would say: "It's finished for today. See you tomorrow."

I haven't worn a brassiere for so long I wonder if I can bear to wear one now. Will it hurt? I didn't need a mirror to see myself while I got dressed after each session. I have learned to get dressed quickly, noiselessly, blanking my mind. Only one thought, one wish – to be sitting in front of a black coffee and a bagel with the clear blue sky over my head. I wanted to get out of those underground rooms where the radiotherapy takes place in order to protect others from radiation.

I wanted to get out. And yet, those sitting outside, in that waiting room, those who will be waiting there again tomorrow, those are the ones who know how I feel. They share my white light every day in that cold bare room, waiting for the door to open. I haven't forgotten you, Shmulig, I haven't forgotten you, Hussein. You were my companions during my treatment at Hadassah. I remember one morning, I was sitting waiting, wearing my hat. My face was made up and I was thinking: it's just a matter of another ten minutes, I'll go in, go out and then have my breakfast.

I had planned it, I had planned it all so beautifully. Nobody could make me change my plans. And those two came in. Shmulig was being wheeled in by his father, wearing a long, black coat. He looked so hot. Yes, classical Hassid. His young son sitting in the push-chair, so small and so pale. The father looked worried and uncomfortable. He sat at the other end of the room, not near me, a woman. Boy, little boy, how old are you? He couldn't have been more than three, maybe three and a half. Yes, coming for treatment. On the opposite side of the waiting room sat an Arab,

also with a small child. “What’s your name?” “Hussein.” Little boy with beautiful black eyes. I saw you every morning, almost every morning during my own seven weeks of treatment. You couldn’t take as much of it as I could. At the end of May something happened. One morning, Hussein was already sitting to my left, when in came Shmulig. He jumped out of his push-chair and said: “Hussein! Hussein! Look at me! I can walk all by myself! Look how I can stand up! My head is getting better!” He fell. We all wanted to run to him and help him get up, but nobody moved. Without a word, everyone bent towards him. All eyes were on him. We wanted him to be strong. Come on Shmulig, come on little boy, pull yourself up, straighten up your legs. You can make it! Come on, Shmulig! our faces said.

Another very hot day, one of those days when the heat rolls in from the desert. She was sitting on my left, a new member of the group. From her dress I guessed straight away she was East European, probably Russian. She was looking at me. I knew she was curious. I knew she wanted to start a conversation. But I didn’t feel like it. I never wanted to, only on very rare occasions I felt I wanted to speak but rather I wanted to keep my thoughts and my inner dialogue to myself.

She didn’t say anything, she just smiled and I smiled back. She was perspiring, her face was sweating. I knew why she was there. Obviously, cancer. It was perhaps cruel of me but I ignored her, had my treatment, went upstairs, had my breakfast and went to the car. On the way home I drove past the bus stop. She was standing there. I stopped the car. I remember what went through my mind – she was with me in the waiting room, she’s been going through the same treatment, she’s hot, she’s tired, she’s lonely – she is you in the mirror. I opened the car door and said, “Get in, I’ll take you”.

We started talking. I asked her where I could drop her off. She said, “Wherever you want to”. I said, “No, really, I’m serious. Where would you like me to drop you?” She said, “I have nothing to do. I have nowhere to go”. I didn’t want to look at her as it was a difficult road in front of me. The road from the hospital into town is full of bends. It goes to the left, through the old village of Ein Kerem, beautiful, deep valley, a Wadi with old churches and beautiful homes, full of history. John Baptist was there. That’s where the word ‘baptism’ comes from, did you know? So I keep my eyes on the road, it’s shining, even the road seems to be perspiring, the heat reflecting off it. The Russian woman talks to me. She tells me about her arrival in Israel, with no job, no family, alone. “What do you do with yourself?” “Nothing.” The question was in the air: what’s wrong with you? I asked her, “Are you all right?” She laughed. She said, “Am I? Are you? Well, I’m going through treatment”. I asked, “Breast?” she replied, “Yes. Did you find it yourself? How was it?” Somehow there seems to be a dialogue between those who share the same prison cell, a language in common, a knowledge of symptoms, of fears, of treatments, exchange of information on that level. She felt comfortable, and all of a sudden I too felt comfortable in the closeness and intimacy of the car. She was my sister. She laughed and said, “Do you know something? You will think I’m really ignorant.” I said, “Why? Tell me, how did you find it?” “Well, I touched it and I found it and I said to myself, if I squeeze it, it will disappear, and I kept on trying to squeeze it but it didn’t disappear.” And she laughed. There were tears in her laughter, not in her eyes but in her laughter.

A laughter I won't forget, nor her face. I sat more comfortably in the car and I said, "Listen, I come here every day like you. When I go back into town, if it's all right with you, I'll drive you back." She looked at me. There wasn't a grateful look on her face, but more one of curiosity, and she said: "You're a very complete woman, aren't you." I smiled and said, "I don't know what you mean by that." "Well, you have a career, you're educated, you're well dressed, you have a family, a husband. And I don't know what I have." "You have life. You should work. You must find something. You've got to struggle. D'you hear me?"

She just said, "Yes, maybe you're right". I couldn't help noticing her nails. They were half-broken, the nail polish chipped. I felt like taking her home with me to dress her, wash her, do her nails, wash her face, wash her hair, shape her up a little. I was thinking that if I wash her body, wash her hair and generally make her look presentable, she will feel better mentally. I still think so. Somehow I feel that if the body is in good shape you can face things differently. Does that mean I'm demanding? Am I superficial?

I dropped her in the middle of town. We said goodbye. I did see her again. But I did not try to go deeper into the conversation. I didn't want to make her feel dependent on my driving her. I had to cope with my own problem. Was that wrong of me?

The woman's shadow, thrown against the kitchen door, looks like a broken marionette too tired to carry on dancing. Rebecca's head is buried in her arms on the table. Her bare feet look very white against the brown kitchen floor. The surrounding silence in the air is warm and in pastel colours. The light of the setting sun gives golden stars to Rebecca's red hair. Stretching her arms, the mother glances at her watch. Had she fallen asleep?

Rebecca: Strange. I've been here for over an hour and no-one has seen me or heard me coming into the house. That's not the sort of reception I expected. Not today, my last day of treatment. Have they forgotten? Could they?

With an angry gesture she gets up from the chair and walks towards the stairs. Her voice is ice cold when she calls her daughters.

"Yael, Noga! I'm home!"

There follows a short silence. Then Yael's face appears at the top of the stairs. She stands there looking at her mother. Her skinny legs poking out of her shorts, her top half covered by a baggy T-shirt emblazoned with a ballerina in a pink tutu. Her long hair tied in two bunches and a crayon between her fingers.

Rebecca: Yael spends most of her time drawing, dsreaming, dancing in front of her mirror. The way she looks is the way she is. Yael is an artist. How can I be angry with her? Why should she remember?

Noga appears behind her sister. A defiant look in her blue-green eyes.

“Shalom, Mummy.”

Rebecca: She doesn't remember either. I can't believe it. They've forgotten!

Rebecca's scream comes out like the cry of a wounded animal. All the control and restraint of the seven weeks leaves her and her anger flows like a river in flood. Tears pour down her cheeks. Rebecca sits on the floor at the bottom of the stairs like an offering to be sacrificed to the gods.

Rebecca: I've waited for this day. I thought we would talk. I wanted flowers, kisses, surprises. Instead, I'm here in a crumpled heap at the bottom of the stairs, crying and shouting.

Robin, the dog, goes up to Rebecca and licks her, lying down by her side as though trying to comfort her in an animal way. Rebecca's hand caresses Robin's head.

“Fine, girls. You forgot. It's true, it wasn't your problem but mine.”

Getting up slowly she pushes away the hands going out to her. She pushes them away roughly and climbs the stairs.

Rebecca: A shower, that's what I need.

The sun is disappearing and magic sets over the hills of Jerusalem. Slowly, very slowly, Rebecca gets undressed. Then she looks at her reflection in the mirror. The last of the daylight hurts her eyes. She touches her breast, red with the heat of the seven weeks of radiotherapy. “You are still here”, she says to herself, trying to establish contact with her body. “You are still here.”

CURIE

The church bells are ringing. The day is grey and Rebecca is back in Paris. The room at the Curie Institute is bare. Rebecca is lying on a bed waiting to be rolled into the operation theatre. The air is still.

Rebecca: I have cancer again. I feel calm. Somehow I was waiting for this to happen again. From the moment I went to the doctor I was waiting to hear them tell me it was cancer again. And now they've told me. I am in your hands, doctor. Take me. Cut. Open. Look inside me. No, not the right breast, this time it's the left one. What can you see? What did you find? I'm waiting for the worst. I must sleep. I can hear the church bells ringing. It's not music. It sounds very sad. This building is beautiful. Peace, there is a kind of peace here. I feel it coming over me. Somebody's knocking me, hitting me.

"Rebecca, wake up! Wake up! Will you please wake up!"

Rebecca: Yes, I'm awake. I open my eyes. Where am I? There's my husband. Worried. I can see the fear in his eyes. Trevor, you can't hide your thoughts, not even if you put on dark glasses. Your blue eyes speak to me and beg me to answer back. His little beard isn't straight. I know it doesn't matter, but it bothers me. It should be straight. I can feel his long fingers holding my hand. His grip is strong. I need that. No, Trevor, it's not your fault. It's nobody's fault. I'm going to fight back. I've learned how to fight. Zohar taught me. Zohar who couldn't talk, who would run to her desk to draw, to pull, to try to find a way, any way, to express her feelings. I remember when she was only two and I was trying to make her swallow her food and she couldn't. In the middle of that dinner party she just slapped me across the face. I smiled then probably because I was embarrassed, but now I smile because I think any kind of reaction must be positive. That's what I want: reactions. When you react, it means you're alive.

The doctor comes into the room. He tickles Rebecca's toes. They know each other. They work together. An agreement had been signed between his hospital and Rebecca's. They already knew Rebecca was ill when they both flew to Jerusalem to sign it. Neither he nor Rebecca said a word about her cancer. Not then or now. There is an understanding between them. He knows Rebecca wants to be treated as just another patient. They smile and talk about everything and nothing. Rebecca begs her husband to go home. She doesn't want him to stay. She needs to collect her thoughts.

Rebecca: I feel far more alert than the first time. Perhaps they gave me less anaesthetic. I wonder what's waiting for me. What will the results be? I feel so tired.

Rebecca falls asleep. In the middle of the night she calls for the nurse. She is afraid of getting out of

bed on her own. She is afraid of falling. The door opens. Rebecca can see the nurse's shadow against the wall.

“Oui, madame?”

“Will you help me, please?”

“Why should I? You can do it on your own.”

“Please, I'm worried.”

“No. You can do it on your own.”

“Please.”

“Non, madame, vous allez le faire toute seule.”

Rebecca: Yes, you're right. You're right, woman, I have to do it on my own. I slowly, gently, lower my legs down to the floor. I stand up and then start walking. Holding myself. I go to the toilet. I look back at her. She's smiling. I thank her.

The next day Rebecca returns home, home to all the familiar smells. Back in her own room, she undresses and climbs into bed. The sun comes through the window giving the room a beige, yellow colour. Friendly, almost playing with Rebecca, the sunshine warms her. That's what she wants. Robin, the dog, stretches out on the bed and lies down next to her. Things seem to be falling back into place. Rebecca looks at her watch.

Rebecca: The girls will be back from school soon. Am I asleep? I can smell them close to me, I can feel them. Noga and Yael are looking at me. Their cheeks red from running, one on each side of the bed. Noga looks anxious. My little biologist. That's what we like calling her. She looks frightened. Knowledge. Yael's velvety eyes are warm and reassuring. I know they want to hug me but they're afraid of hurting me. I pull them to me. Yes, now I'm really home. Melanie, our housekeeper and friend, is standing in the doorway. Her hands resting on her big tummy. Her body swings with the movement of her words. The big slanted black eyes search mine and a tiny smile appears on her lips when I return her look. Standing next to her, Robin's pathetic eyes move from one to the other.

“Mum, shall I prepare tea?”

FRIDAY IN PARIS

In 1988, the agreement for scientific cooperation in cancer research was signed in Jerusalem between Hadassah and the Curie Institute. Now there is to be another signing ceremony in Paris. Professor M.H., Head of the Hadassah Oncology Department, has arrived in Paris.

After the formality of a full day of meetings, discussions and speeches, they come to Rebecca's home for tea. Outside it's raining.

Rebecca: M. looks so young with her page-boy haircut. Her eyes are sparkling. She looks happy.

"I spent my first year of medical school here. But I couldn't cope with the language and so I went back to Jerusalem. I wonder how things would have turned out if I'd stayed in Paris. My husband loves this kind of weather. It's a pity he couldn't join us. I miss him."

Rebecca: There's so much longing in her voice and yet she's not bitter.

When tea is over, Rebecca and M. go to Rebecca's room. She takes off her top and the oncologist examines her breasts. Her words try to reassure Rebecca. She says she is pleased with the work of the Curie Institute. As soon as the wound is dry, Rebecca will begin having radiotherapy. The two women see each other's faces in the mirror and smile. They change the subject and start putting on make-up. Laughing. Hiding painful thoughts. The rain against the window keeps them company.

They leave the apartment to go and join Trevor and the girls in the synagogue. They had saved places for them in the first row. The choir fills the place. Rebecca closes her eyes to let herself go with the Shema. Listen, Oh Israel...

Rebecca: Rabbi Williams is looking at us. He can see Zohar is with us again.

When the moment of Kiddush comes, the Rabbi asks Zohar to join him, to hold the cup of wine while he sings the blessing. Zohar looks at her mother, questioning.

Rebecca: She looks so pale, shy. I can feel Yael holding onto my arm. We're thinking the same: will Zohar be able to follow the prayer fast enough? We're both anxious for her.

Zohar joins the Rabbi and stands very straight. She looks back at her family and without words is telling them clearly: "I can do it".

ZOHAR SPEAKS UP

“Why not?”, Rebecca asks the family. “Zohar can do it. She must. Just like you Noga, and you Yael”.

“Your mother is right” replied Trevor. “I will talk to Rabbi Williams and prepare the text for Zohar’s Bat Mitzvah.”

Rebecca has her doubts but she can feel that Zohar must be given the chance to prove herself. They all know about Zohar’s memory and her determination to work. But they also know how removed she is from Judaism and tradition.

“Noga, I think I know how to help Zohar learn her part without special classes with the Rabbi”, Yael said.

Noga looks up from her book. Yael is sitting on the opposite bed.

“We will prepare tapes and sing them together. It will be both a game and serious at the same time. We’re going to be together for the whole summer. She can be ready for September. What do you think?”

“You’re right. I did practically the same and so did you. But everything in Hebrew? For us it was easy, after all, it’s our first language, but for Zohar?”

“Don’t you see? She will only say a few prayers in Hebrew, she can read the rest in English, like the French read them in French. Our synagogue is conservative, they don’t mind.”

The parents agree. Now it was for Zohar to get ready.

Behind the closed door of the girls’ room, in the afternoon heat of the month of August, the tapes didn’t stop playing.

Zohar: I know I can do it. But can I do it in front of everyone?

“Rebecca, you have to work on your piece if you don’t want to embarrass Zohar!”

The girls laugh. They know their father’s British sense of humour, but in this case he is right. Rebecca’s reading is not perfect.

“Fine, Noga, will you be my teacher?”

Zohar’s eyes open wide. Her mother can’t read Hebrew? Her mother?

Emotions are running high, lists of what is still to be done, invitations have been sent, the house is shining and smells of the party to come. Zohar arrives from school.

“All this for me?”, her voice soft and quiet. She is very pale as she looks around the house.

Thursday afternoon the family goes to the synagogue for a rehearsal. Trevor sets up the video camera. Zohar walks up to her place. Looking up at the woman by the organ, Zohar’s voice can be heard: I am ready.

Not once does the young girl stop. Not once does she hesitate. She finishes her piece, looks up and smiles.

Saturday morning the synagogue is packed. Once again, Zohar shows no emotion. She takes her place followed by her father. Rebecca is called up and without a word holds Zohar’s hand for support. Her voice is heard, loud and clear. The tension can be felt Trevor approaches from behind. Rebecca looks up and sees Yael’s and Noga’s eyes, waiting.

“Thank you G-d for having given me this Shabbat.”

Her voice breaking, Trevor’s hand holds her, tears springing from her eyes, she finishes the prayer.

“Zohar, are you asleep?”

“No, Yael, I’m awake.”

“Can I come into your bed?”

“Yes, you can.”

“Oh, it’s cold here!”

“Yael, how was I?”

“You were the best, the best, Zohar!”

They hug each other tight, very tight. Rebecca finds them that way next morning.

CAMBRIDGE

Rebecca is on a train on her way to see her eldest daughter, Noga. It's the first time she's going to visit her in Cambridge.

Rebecca: I don't know what to expect. I don't know why, but I'm anxious. Will she be there, waiting for me? Will she be pleased to see me?

The meeting place, Brown's, is in a narrow Cambridge street. The room, decorated with palm trees, is packed with students, professors and parents like Rebeca, sitting at the wooden tables, talking. There is smoke, noise and music. It's cold and wet outside. Inside is warm and welcoming. Rebecca walks into the restaurant carrying her suitcase.

Rebecca: There she is! There's my Noga! What a big hat and that coat she's wearing is too bulky. Her cheeks are red. She looks excited. I know I am.

"Mummy, you're here!"

"Noga!"

They hug and look at each other, laughing. They start talking. Noga wants to know everything all at the same time. Rebecca tells her about home and the rest of the family.

Rebecca: Is this Noga? Her curly blonde hair has grown long. Why is she dressed all in black? That hat suits her, it makes her look different. Her blue-green eyes shine. Her freckles, her fresh complexion ... she's so like her father.

"Mum, I'm going out tomorrow evening."

"Let me buy you something new to wear."

"Oh please, Mum, don't start spoiling me."

A little smile dances on the young woman's lips. Her body close to her mother's, searching for her warmth, Rebecca holds Noga tight to her.

Rebecca: That's so typical of Noga. She doesn't want to be spoilt. She likes being Spartan.

The street outside is no longer full of a kind of dim light, now it is shrouded in mist. Mother and daughter can hardly see in front of them. The colour of the fog is neither grey nor black. Minute stars are jumping in the fog of the night. Shapes move in the foggy streets of Cambridge. While Rebecca and Noga walk towards Noga's rooms, she describes her new world. Their steps can be heard in the silence of the night.

Rebecca: Her friends, shopping and keeping track of her expenses seem so important to her. She fits in so well here. She's found her place. Everywhere she's shown me round with such pride – the kitchen, bathroom, common room. I want to capture every detail, to retain it in my memory. There's a notebook and pencil pinned to her door.

“Mum, do you want me to read you Isaak's message? He calls me all kinds of funny names: cucaracha, insect...”

Noga tells her mother about Isaak. He's an Israeli boy from Jerusalem working on his Ph.D. They play tennis together. He has red hair and a great sense of humour.

Rebecca: From what she's telling me, he's obviously interested in her.

Sunday afternoon. Noga is sitting at her desk, reading, working, biting her nails. Rebecca looks at her and asks:

“What are you reading?”

Noga's face goes red. “Would you like to see it?”

Rebecca reads the title: Description of Cancer Cells, etc., etc. She doesn't give back the book but continues reading.

“Noga, why did you choose biology? Why are you choosing immunology?”

“I want to understand better.”

Rebecca: Noga's right. We don't need to say anything else. I smile at her, hug her, kiss her. No, we don't cry. We hope.

The weekend is over. Rebecca has to say goodbye to her daughter. A taxi takes her to the airport.

Rebecca: Noga's room with her poncho, her hats, her postcards. The pot of tea, green apples and grapefruit. Noga knows how much I love grapefruit! We had a good weekend together. A private weekend, getting to know each other. Noga's so small, so different. But I don't feel sad leaving her among all her books. I now she's happy there.

Yael's Rebellion

Yael: They're all making plans, having meetings with counsellors. I'm the one left out. Why?

Rebecca: Her anger doesn't hide her frustration.

"You will try to get accepted at Cambridge, Yael. Just like Noga. You must always have different options in life."

"But Daddy, I want to be with my group. I want to return to Israel. I want to join the army. I'm tired of being different, the odd one out."

"Listen to me, try for one year and if by then you haven't changed your mind, you can go to the army."

Rebecca: I can feel the gap widening between father and daughter. I feel like a spectator. But I also feel I can identify with Yael's needs for roots and independence. Trevor knows I agree with him that Cambridge would give Yael a special experience. Perhaps it will help her understand her father's British culture. Perhaps it will bring them closer.

Trevor, Rebecca and Yael meet at dinner time. Yael remains silent Rebecca listens to Trevor. Nothing further is said about Cambridge. When the father leaves, mother and daughter begin to talk.

Yael: Mumy is a coward. She lives in a different world. She's as detached from me as she is from Daddy. I wonder what she does on her own that we don't know about.

Rebecca: Yael can read through me. But it's not for her to judge me. This is my secret and my own space. She will learn the needs for solitude. If she wants to be free from her father, her home and family, she should learn to control her emotions, be strong and keep her thoughts to herself. That's the way I keep out of conflict.

The house is quiet. Rebecca and Yael have tea. An empty weekend stretches ahead of them. Yael is in her room. She has left the door half open. Robin, the dog, is lying outside the door. The small light in the lounge dances with the street light, swinging in the strong wind. Rebecca is reading in her room. She looks at her watch.

Rebecca: I wonder if Yael has already gone to bed without saying goodnight. I feel guilty. This novel is fascinating. It's so much easier to stay here reading than to go and have a discussion with Yael. But I'd better do it.

Rebecca slips her feet into her slippers and puts on her dressing gown. She goes along to Yael's room.

"Yael! I didn't hear you. How long have you been standing here?"

"Not long."

"Well. I'm sorry, but..."

"No, Mummy, not sorry, but why?"

"Why what?"

"Why don't we talk?"

There is passion and tenderness in Yael's voice. With one hand she is stroking Robin's head. Her feet are bare. Her cheeks red.

"Oh, I thought you wanted peace, that you wanted me to leave you alone. Come here, Yael, come my celibatera."

They hold each other for a long time.

"Mummy, what's your scent?"

Rebecca leaves the words hung in space while taking Yael to the lounge. She covers her legs with a blanket, switches on a lamp and sits down, opposite her daughter.

"Do you really want to know?"

"No, better not."

Rebecca knows that Yael will agree to spend one, and only one year at Cambridge. After the experience of that year she will start her own life in Israel.

THE BRIDGE

The Pont des Arts in Paris. Yael's favourite bridge. Rebecca leaves the office early to meet Yael at the bridge. They walk along among the lovers, the tourists, the children, the painters. The bridge leads them across to the Tuileries gardens.

Rebecca: It was an afternoon just like this one when I first came here with Trevor. He was leaving for London and I was staying behind, alone.

"I've still got a photograph of the very first time I came here. It was with your father before we were married. Come, Yael, let's go the way I walked with him that afternoon so many years ago."

Their feet make a crunching sound on the gravel pathways. There are few other people. Rebecca and Yael look at the statues in the garden.

Rebecca: Is Yael remembering I wonder? That rainy Sunday morning when I was taking her and Zohar to the museum. Zohar wanted photographs in black and white of those statues. That unusual statue over there of beautiful little girls in dresses, with their mother. In the car I asked Yael to shut up. I don't know what happened, but I remember I started yelling and screaming at her, saying awful things. She's remembering the same, I know she is. I can feel it. She's tense now. Yael, please unwind.

Yael, do you forgive me for that awful Sunday morning? You and Zohar went into the museum on your own. I stayed outside. Do you know why? I was crying. I was angry with myself. There was no reason to have yelled at you like that. I had a headache. I lost control. Why do I lose control in that way? But I remember I went into the museum and I found you. I found you there with Zohar in front of a painting. Don't ask me which artist it was. The only thing I could see was you and your sister sitting on that metal bench in a large, white room with tall windows and the light rain falling outside. I walked towards you, my steps could be heard but you didn't turn to see who was coming into the empty room. I hugged you and I think I said I was sorry. I said sorry then. I'm grateful you welcomed me in your arms. Later we went out and took photographs. Zohar standing beside the statue of the little girls with their mother. It reflects the state of mind of that day. We walked, the way we're walking now, on the same path I walked with your father more than twenty years ago.

"Mummy, I didn't forget. Today is different. Let's make today a different day."

Rebecca bends her head to look into Yael's eyes and puts her arm round the young girl's thin shoulders.

“Yael, that was my first trip to Paris. If someone would have told me then that I would be living here, I would have laughed.”

The autumn air gives the trees and gardens an intimate and romantic flair. Mother and daughter walk in silence. Firm and fast step, heads up, straight backs. The mother wears dark glasses. The daughter's big eyes trying to capture every colour, movement and figure, to carry them in her memory. Yael's mind is already in Israel, wondering, curious about what service in the army will give her, reflecting on what she is leaving behind.

“Yael, you're already...”

“Yes, I am, Mumy. I want to find out how I will be without your hand holding me, without Daddy filling in forms and paying bills for me. Yes, I am ready to leave you.”

Facing her mother, Yael's face shines with pride. The young woman's profile against the grey sky has the perfection of a sculpture. She knows perfectly well that she has to go away. She feels her mother's wish to control her. Yael frowns, knowing the pain she is inflicting on her mother.

Rebecca: I admire her. I think I love her more than I am prepared to acknowledge. We are too much alike. I need to reach my own identity. But neither do I want to break our dialogue.

Turning her face back to Rebecca, tears shine in Yael's eyes. She buries her face in her mother's chest.

“No, no Yael. You're right. Fly away. But let's have some tea now.”

CAFÉ SÉGUR

Rebecca is sitting in a café, looking at the street outside. An ambulance draws up and stops at the building on the opposite corner. Out of the ambulance comes a woman. A man is holding her. She is wearing a wig. She has just had chemotherapy. Shaky, fragile, the woman looks up at a window, anxious to go inside. Her eyes looking around, hoping not to be seen.

Rebecca: Open the door for her, she doesn't want to be outside any more. She's cold. I understand you. I feel for you. I know what you want. You want that door to be open. You want to go into your flat, into your bedroom and into your own bed. You need to be left alone to find again all the familiar objects and smells of your own home.

Holding her cup tightly with both hands, to warm them, the woman bends her head. The café owner looks at her, stops whistling. She has been there for some time, alone and looking sad.

Rebecca: Another check-up in two weeks. It used to be every three months. Now it's every six months. I know the procedure by heart now. It seldom changes. I feel comfortable with the oncologist in London. I'm not afraid of asking questions which might appear irrelevant. I see the whole trip to London as a sort of contract which has to be approved, signed and sealed with some absolute power who will either sentence or absolve me. I must check that everything is left in order – papers, bills.

Trevor travels with Rebecca to these appointments almost every time. The husband of over twenty-five years waits. He sits in those waiting rooms in the hospitals and clinics. He tries to read. He tries to smile. He does not leave her alone. He takes her shopping. They go to restaurants. When the time comes for the last appointment of the check-up, he always holds her tight as if he's afraid it's for the last time.

Rebecca: All these rooms are cold. The machines are cold. The nurses seem to have such understanding smiles. They do have an unpleasant job. This young girl pushing my breast under to get a better mammo. She looks so young. The masses of flesh they have to touch every day. Pieces of flesh that might have to be cut off. What a mess!

Two weeks have passed since Rebecca sat drinking her tea in the café and watching the ambulance draw up at the building on the corner. Now she and Trevor are sitting in the consultant's waiting room in London. The tall windows let in the sunshine. Chintz-covered sofa and armchairs furnish the room. The highly polished table offers a selection of magazines.

Rebecca: What will he say this time?

Rebecca jumps as the nurse calls her name. Trevor doesn't move. His eyes go from Rebecca to the nurse, waiting for instructions.

Rebecca: Last time he said: "Congratulations. Everything clean. No changes." But what will he say this time? If he doesn't smile it will mean something is wrong. Please say it again. Give me another six months. Am I ungrateful? Do I have the right to ask?

"Will you follow me, please", says the nurse.

DEPARTURES

Slowly, like a slow motion picture, Zohar is beginning to express her thoughts and her memories.

* * *

She is leaving the school where she has been living for the past seven years. She must say goodbye to all her friends and to the only way of life she has known until now. Rebecca takes the early morning flight from Paris to be with her daughter.

Rebecca: There's my Zohar, waiting for me. She looks pale, lonely, standing there beside her cases. It must have been so very difficult, to pack into them so many years of her young life.

The headmaster calls all Zohar's friends to come and say goodbye to her. The English summer morning is cool. The sky is grey. The air is still. A misty rain is falling. Zohar lets go her mother's hand and moves towards the group of friends to say goodbye. Rebecca stands beside the car that fetched her from the airport. She is watching. One by one, Zohar says goodbye to each of her friends. Then she comes to the last girl in the little group. Denise is Zohar's best friend. Denise can neither speak nor hear. The two girls hug each other, crying. Silence around them.

Rebecca: They look lovely together – Denise tall and fair, Zohar shorter and dark beside her. They're talking in sign language. How can a silent language house so much emotion? Denise is looking into Zohar's eyes. They're holding hands. Zohar's smiling now. She's walking back to me.

Zohar has said goodbye. She gets into the car with her mother. They drive away. Zohar waves until the school, the grounds and her friends are far out of sight. She puts her head on her mother's shoulder and cries.

Rebecca flies back to Paris from Gatwick. Zohar is driven to Heathrow to meet her father and fly to New York together.

* * *

"Do you remember, Mummy?"

"Remember what?"

"When you came to Moorhouse School to fetch me that day? And I cried so much on your shoulder your jacket was all wet?"

“Yes, Zohar, I remember. One plane in and almost the next one out. It was crazy wasn’t it?”

“Crazy? Why are you saying that? If I have a daughter like you have me, I’ll do the same for her.”

Zohar turns away from Rebecca and leaves the room.

Friday evening. Once again, Zohar has flown to Paris to spend the weekend with her parents. Both her sisters are away from home.

Rebecca: Zohar, for once you’re with us and not far away. Tonight you won’t miss the warmth of the candles on Friday.

Mother and daughter move together, the mother’s hands over the candles. She blesses them once, twice, three times. They cover their faces. Trevor looks at his wife and daughter. He comes towards them and wishes them Shabbat Shalom. He blesses Zohar with the old traditional blessing of a father to his children. They sit at the table.

Rebecca: Zohar doesn’t feel comfortable. I can see it.

Trevor and Rebecca talk about everyday things: his business trips, his work, Rebecca’s work, her anxieties.

Zohar suddenly says: “It’s Claire, she’s hurting. She’s my best friend and she’s hurting me.”

“What’s wrong? What’s bothering you?”

“I wanted to talk to her about our future.”

“Yes?”

“My future. I want to share a flat with her. You see, Mummy, when she leaves school. I want to know that when I leave school I’ll have someone to live with.”

“Yes, go on.”

Trevor carries on with his soup. He doesn’t take part in the conversation.

“Mummy, she’s leaving next year.”

“Yes, Zohar, but you’re not leaving for another two or three years. And you know you’re

applying to a special college to do ceramics. You're so good at ceramics, you've made some beautiful pieces."

"I don't know. I'm not sure about anything."

"But Zohar, look, we've kept everything you've made. They're here. And you like working with your hands."

"Mummy, please let me finish. I want to know about my future. I talked to Claire. I'd like to share a flat with her."

"Fine, Zohar, we shall see. There's plenty of time."

Rebecca: Time. For Zohar there is no time. There is uncertainty. That's what there is ahead of her, uncertainty. How can I explain the meaning of time to her? She wants concrete answers, now.

Yesterday she was still just a child. Today she's a young woman. I saw her coming out of the shower. She covered herself shyly. She's beautiful. She has nothing to be shy about. Her hair is dark and her skin very white. Who will be the man who will love her and respect her? Don't hide yourself from me. Let me dry your back, your legs. Let me put cream on your skin. I want you to work out in the gym. I know you don't like it but I have to tell you about your posture and how to walk. I want you to be comfortable with yourself. I feel the uselessness of everything around us. Is it worth it, all this struggling, all this fighting? Why should I encourage her to go deeper, to have hopes? Hopes of what? But when I look at her and see her eyes smiling I know it is worth it.

* * *

"Mummy, have you asked yourself what you dislike most?"

"Yes, what Zohar?"

"What do you dislike most about yourself?"

"Dislike, what d'you mean?"

"Well, I mean, not mentally, physically."

"My tummy and my nose! How about you?"

"My tummy and my face!"

Rebecca: Courageous little gutsy one, asking your mother such a question. Keep on, Zohar, keep asking questions. Be brave. I would never have dared ask my mother those things.

Zohar starts exercising in the gym. She begins wearing big floppy sweaters and asks about diets. She is awakening to her femininity.

* * *

Saturday afternoon. Rebecca has invited several friends to tea. Ten people sit around the large dining-room table. Zohar walks into the room proudly carrying a home-made cake and presents it to her mother.

“Happy Mother’s Day!”

“Zohar, it’s wonderful!”

“Do you like it? I baked it myself.”

“It’s delicious, Zohar!”

“Do you know, Mummy, at school I’m one of the few girls who’s allowed to cook on her own. It’s because I’m capable of being responsible. I know how to do it. One of the staff told me I follow instructions perfectly all right. So they can trust me.”

Rebecca: It meant so much to her, preparing that cake for me. Telling me she loves me. It’s so important for her to be able to do things like bake a cake. Not so long ago it was just as important for me to see that she could do those things. But now I wonder why it seemed so important. And yet I must continue to stimulate her, to push her forward.

The friends around the table watch Rebecca and her daughter. Everyone takes a piece of Zohar’s special cake.

That night Zohar has a girlfriend staying over. In the middle of the night footsteps in the corridor wake Rebecca. She calls out. Through the door the girls tell her not to leave her bedroom. At 8 o’clock on Sunday morning they walk into Rebecca’s bedroom with two breakfast trays.

“Happy Mother’s Day!”

Zohar stands in front of her mother with love and respect.

Rebecca: G-d, do I deserve this? No, I don’t.

The girls leave Rebecca and go back to their room.

Rebecca: Warmth is what I’m looking for. Warmth. That’s what she gives me. My real raison

d'être is there. It's embodied in Zohar, in my three daughters, in each one of them separately. They give me the reason to exist.

Returning the special treatment, Rebecca takes breakfast in to the girls' room. They have fallen asleep again. Rebecca wakes them. After leaving Zohar's friend at her house, Rebecca and her daughter drive to the Bois to walk the dog.

"What's the matter?"

"I have a headache."

"Would you still like to go to the Bois or shall we go straight home?"

"No, let's go to the Bois."

Rebecca drives to the Bois. She switches off the radio. Silence between them. Heavy silence. Rebecca opens the window for some fresh air. A wind has started to flow. The sky is grey. Clouds are moving. The sun appears every now and then.

Rebecca: No, I don't want the sun to come out. I want the weather to remain grey. It's more inviting for confidences, for talking about things without a full light shining on them.

They arrive at the Bois. Robin, the dog, jumps out of the car and runs around them. The Bois is empty, calm. Rebecca gently hugs her daughter.

Rebecca: I mustn't push my presence on her. But I want her to feel I'm here with her, ready to listen when she's ready to tell me.

It's cold. They find a café and sit down with a cup of tea.

"Mummy, about my future."

"Yes?"

"About the flat."

"Yes, Zohar, I'm not against the idea, but it all takes time."

"I want to start learning to drive."

"That's wonderful! You know your father and I agreed on that."

“Well, you said I couldn’t do it until I was 18. I’m 16 and I want to start driving.”

“That’s great. How are you going to do it?”

“Well, you see, I spoke to somebody in the school and I could start driving around the grounds.”

“Yes.”

“And then I want to choose a car.”

Rebecca: She has it all planned out.

“But it takes time to learn, Zohar.”

“I know but actually ...”

Rebecca: ‘Actually’ is her new word. She loves saying it. I’ve heard it over and over again this weekend.

“Yes, actually what?”

“Well, I haven’t told you yet but I had a meeting, work experience, you know, they’re trying to guide us on what type of work we’re going to do in the future.”

Rebecca: That word ‘future’ again. All weekend she’s been worrying about her future. I wonder if that’s one of the reasons she insisted on coming to see us this weekend.

“Yes, tell me.”

“I had a meeting. I had a meeting with somebody – a counsellor. And we talked about the different things I’d like to do in the future.”

“What did you tell her?”

“I said I’d like to be a hostess. You know, a kind of hostess, Mummy, like for children like me or for small children at the airport, to receive them, to help them fill up the questionnaire, to deal with the computer, or child care or a vet.”

“And what did the counsellor say?”

Zohar turns her face away from her mother.

“Well, you see, the counsellor told me that to be a hostess you have to walk properly, hold yourself straight, talk clearly and many other things and she doesn’t know if I’ll be capable of doing all that.”

Rebecca: I know it hurts you Zohar. It hurts me.

“Kindergarten. I’m very kind and that would be good for me. I like educating, teaching children. I’ve been doing it this week.”

“Why didn’t you tell me? When did you do it?”

Well, in school, I’m helping the younger ones.”

“How are you helping them?”

“To get dressed, to do up their shoes, to prepare their things.”

Rebecca: Can she remember when someone had to help her do all those things? And now she’s helping others.

“How often have you helped them?”

“Only once. They’re testing me.”

“For how long?”

“Three hours.”

“Did you like it?”

“Yes. Very much. But I panic.”

“Why do you panic?”

“Well, it was supposed to be for only three hours and I stayed there for five hours and I was wondering when they would come and replace me.”

“What else did you say the counsellor suggested?”

“Vet. She says I’m very good with animals. I like animals. I think I understand them. I like caring for things.”

Rebecca: Yes, Zohar, I know you like caring for things. I know how much you like to care for me. And how much you care about everyone. Now you want to give.

“So tell me, which one of the three would you prefer?”

“Well, you know I prefer the first. I’d like to be a hostess. But you yourself told me that I don’t walk straight, that I have a tummy, that UI don’t know how to hold myself.”

“But Zohar, you told me you were doing gymnastics, that you’ve started weight-lifting. Tell me about it.”

“Well, I’ve been to the gym twice and worked out for two hours, two full hours.”

“How often do you go?”

“Just once a week.”

“If you went to the gym more often you’d see the results faster.”

“Well.”

“Zohar, for being a hostess, you need to walk straight because you have to set a good example. Now you must learn to walk straight so that you can aim at being a hostess. And if it doesn’t work out, if you’re not accepted, then you can choose one of the other two options.”

Rebecca: She’s looking straight at me now. Yes, she feels reassured. I have confidence in her. I have full confidence in you my little girl. No, you’re not my little girl any more, I’ll call you my special daughter. The trees around us show that Spring is coming. I want to tell her but she doesn’t like it when I talk about colours. But sometimes, when we are together, it seems the best way to express myself – through colours, the sky, nature. Buildings don’t talk to me; not when I’m with you, Zohar. When I’m with you I want to go back to nature, to feel how the earth receives the water from the rain seeping through, going through like blood through your veins. I wish I could give you all my energy – to inject it into you. I would like to open your mouth and breathe into it everything I have inside me. I’d like to put my head next to yours and give you all I have, until my head becomes empty. I’d like to give you my eyes, to give you my sight, to encourage your sight to see further and deeper into things. But you do see deeper, further than I do because in your silence of so many years you have accumulated so much.

“Do you remember my first school, Mummy?”

“Yes, I remember.”

“Do you remember when I asked you to buy me a Care Bear and you couldn’t understand over the phone what I wanted?”

“Yes, I remember that too.”

“Do you remember we went to... what’s the name of that city?”

“Washington, darling. We were in Washington.”

Rebecca: I was on the verge of saying: tell me, what is the capital of...? But I stopped myself. What is the importance of knowing where the capital is? I must let her go back to her memory.

“Yes, and what did we do in Washington?”

“We went from toy shop to toy shop trying to find a Care Bear until there was someone who understood what I wanted. I wanted a Care Bear and you bought me a Care Bear.”

“What else have you been remembering about those days?”

“Well, we had a questionnaire in school about what are our important things and guess which place I said is my favourite place for holidays?”

“I know.”

“Tell me then.”

“Hong Kong.”

“No, not Hong Kong.”

“But when you were small, that was your favourite place. When anyone asked you where you’d like to go back to, you always said Hong Kong, and when I asked why, you always replied: ‘Chinese food’. So tell me then, which is your favourite place now?”

“New York.”

“New York?”

“Yes. In New York I learned a lot about myself.”

“That teacher, Zohar.”

“Yes, what’s the name of the woman who used to come?”

“Carol. Do you remember her?”

“Yes, of course I remember her. But there was another one, in a white room, with very long nails.”

“Arleen.”

“What did she help me with?”

Rebecca: She uses the word ‘help’ not ‘teach’.

“Speech therapy, and it’s true, she had very long nails.”

“I liked her. Do you think we’ll ever see her again?”

“If you’d like to. Would you like to go to New York?”

“Yes. You asked me which place I’d like to go back to, alone with you, just a private holiday, like you had with my sisters. With the others, you went to Venice. With me, I want to go to New York. New York is my city and your city. We’ve spent so much time there together, you and me, no, Mummy? You and I can remember what it means, what New York means for us.”

Rebecca: Yes, Zohar, we’ll go back to New York. But tell me more, what else do you remember? Please open your mind. Please reassure me. But you don’t want to remember, do you? You want to look towards the future, a future you’ve told me about. She doesn’t mention the flat again, nor the driving.

“How is your headache, Zohar?”

“Better.”

“Shall we go home for lunch or shall we go out?”

“You want Japanese, don’t you?”

“Well, yes, I wouldn’t mind.”

“All right, I’m going to get Robin.”

Wind. The leaves around them – gold, copper, dry.

* * *

Rebecca: I love listening to the sound of the wind and the rain against the window at night. It's like music. It's nature and its strength speaking, showing itself.

“Mummy, do you think it will be windy when I fly back to England tomorrow?”

“Yes, maybe.”

The wind is blowing hard. Rebecca and Zohar are sitting together, their arms around each other. Trevor comes home. He brings chocolates. Zohar is pleased and flirts with her father in her very innocent way.

Rebecca finds a poem under her pillow. Zohar has written her a poem called 'Sick'. The poem says she hates the wind because the flight will be bumpy and she'll be alone with no one to talk to. Zohar is frightened.

* * *

Rebecca: It's still windy. I wonder how your flight was this morning. I want the time to pass and already hear your voice tonight when I phone you at school.

The words are floating in the space, breaking away and joining back together again, like a puzzle. All the elements are there, Zohar, all the elements for your future.

MARCHING

Marching steps everywhere, climbing over ancient buildings, trees, bodies and up to the sky. The air charged with emotion, colour, smells. Butterflies dancing with the rhythm of some strange, invisible music. Colourful groups moving from one end of the city to the other. Teeth shining against the light of the sun. The human theatre started early on that June Saturday in Cambridge.

While the students are being helped to don their graduation gowns, the families stroll in the surrounding gardens of the women's college. Some are sipping champagne, eating finely-cut cucumber sandwiches. Friends and family take photographs.

Dresses blow playfully in the light wind. The women hold their hats with gloved hands. Some sit on rugs on the grass, others on old benches scattered in the grounds.

Rebecca walks out of the building holding a tray of sandwiches followed by Yael carrying cups and a friend carrying tea. They form a funny picture, amusing but not comical. Trevor sees them approaching and smiles at Rebecca's resourcefulness. She hadn't thought about the interval between breakfast and the graduation ceremony. But she had found the solution: no champagne or English picnic, simply the college cafeteria.

The sun has reached its height when the doors open and out come young women dressed in black gowns, ready to meet their families. Their voices and giggles fill the gardens and like butterflies they move from one group to another, greeting friends, tutors and relatives. The official photographer arrives and groups them for the official picture.

The family looks eagerly for Noga's curly blonde head among the two hundred young women standing on the steps, smiling into the camera.

Trevor stands behind Rebecca, sensing his wife's emotion, seeing her lips tremble. No words are exchanged. No need to express what they know so well they both feel.

Yael: Noga wanted this. I don't regret leaving Cambridge after one year and going into the army. I'll decide what I want to do with my studies later. We're so different.

Zohar: Noga looks so different in that gown. She's so intelligent. Daddy and Mummy are so proud of her. Is Yael jealous? Mummy looks as if she's going to cry.

With no instructions being given, the young women come down the steps and arrange themselves into lines of eight, a squadron of soldiers ready to march to the Senate House.

The families start marching next to them trying to reach the Senate on time to take their places. The fervent silence and sounds seem magical. Instinctively, all are energized by the strength emanating from the approaching young students. Inside the Senate, trying to cool down, the four members of the family wait in Middle Hall packed with others doing the same. Suddenly footsteps can be heard, becoming louder and louder, so loud it seems a storm will break.

Rebecca: They're coming. Noga, you are going to open those doors. Life is speaking in those footsteps. Today you're free, an independent woman.

Rebecca could not, nor did she want to hide the flow of tears coming when the doors were flung open to let new life come in.

Total silence falls in the Hall. The provost calls each student, one by one, to receive their degree. Only two of them do not kneel. A Muslim student and Noga. The ceremony comes to an end.

Rebecca: Noga seems to be floating in happiness. Her face covered with freckles and perspiration glows in the early afternoon light. She feels like a star. She is a star.

FRIDAYS

The family is together in Israel, in their house by the sea for the summer holidays. The colours are strong: vivid blues of the sea and the sky, the powerful yellow of the stones, luscious green trees. Rebecca and Noga wake early. They leave the rest of the family sleeping and go to have breakfast in the village square. Different shops surround the square. They cycle to the Hungarian bakery and order coffee, rolls and butter. Other early risers start arriving, some with newspapers.

Rebecca: I like spending time alone with each of my daughters. It's a moment of intimacy I cherish. Noga has asked me about my own plans. Going back to Paris when the holidays are over, back to an empty house. There won't be any more weekend trips to Cambridge. Both my big daughters will be in the army. I can't look Noga straight in the face. I don't want her to see my eyes are wet with tears. She's not looking at me either. We both look at the square. I'm afraid. They will write to me, I know. And after a few months I will see them again. But how will they look at me? I didn't wear a uniform at their age. I got married. I started out on a different life. My daughters will go through experiences I know nothing about.

"The dialogue will carry on, Mummy. You know that."

Rebecca takes her daughter's hand. It feels cold despite the heat. Noga's hand is very small with the softness of a young child's. Their coffee is getting cold. They order some more, wanting to prolong this special meeting. The square is becoming noisier, animated. More people are arriving to buy cakes for Shabbat.

* * *

On Friday Rebecca will be having breakfast with her daughters again. Trevor, Rebecca and Zohar are returning to Jerusalem, to the hills and the sky of Jerusalem. The changing colour of the sky.

Rebecca: Have you changed my daughters? Will you see more wrinkles in my face? Will you be able to express how you feel and be open with me the way I wish you would? Will I be up to your standards? Will you still love me?

The sun is already shining over the city when Rebecca arrives. The dew of the night still clings to the hills, the rocks, the trees. The door to the flat and the windows retain the night's film of moisture. Noga and Yael have prepared breakfast. With their parents and their sister they sit around the kitchen table. The family all talk at the same time. Presents for each other. Smiles, kisses.

The streets of Jerusalem are filled with voices and colours. Everyone shopping for Passover, cleaning their homes, getting ready for the family gathering. From all over the country people come to the city as they have since Biblical times. Children are dressed in white, women wear white blouses. Flowers decorate the homes. The smells of baking are everywhere.

DEATH

A cold day at the end of March. Rebecca is in her office preparing for an interview. The phone rings. A call from Jerusalem.

“Rebecca?”

“Yes.”

“She’s dead. Shoshi is dead.”

“No, you must be joking. No! What are you saying? How did it happen?”

“It’s true. She died. Will you be coming?”

Rebecca: But it was only two weeks ago we were together. I was in Jerusalem for that meeting. I asked her for a quick check-up while I was there. I remember she asked me what I was worrying about. I said I just felt reassured when I saw her. We sat and chatted about Paris, about my work, about her work. Then I remember she looked out of the window and told me her son’s best friend had died in a stupid car accident. That he had so much ahead of him. She asked me why people disappear in such a nonsensical way. I didn’t understand. I didn’t understand what she was trying to tell me. I can’t forget you, Shoshi. Your face, your smile are still with me.

* * *

One year later Rebecca loses another friend.

Rebecca: Ofira, do you remember our days in Spain when you came to lecture at our conference? Do you remember how we talked? Do you remember how many times we met at the same hospital with the same doctors? And you said to me: “I’m making it”. I trusted you. Why did you go away? Do you remember how you showed me your beautiful, long black hair and you said: you see how it grew again? Do you remember you asked me where I had bought my beautiful pink silk petticoat and I said I couldn’t remember. Do you know why I said that? Because I didn’t want you to have the same. I was mean. You knew I was being mean, or maybe you didn’t, but I know. Perhaps now you will forgive me, but now you’re gone. Before you went, you spoke. You spoke a long time about your pain, your fears, your dreams.

Rebecca lowers the paper. She takes off her dark glasses and looks around the swimming pool. Nothing has changed. Her eyes meet her husband's.

“Would you like a drink? It's so hot! Come, let's go for a walk by the sea.”

Trevor picks up her hat and puts it on her head. Holding her tight, smelling her skin, he leads her towards the steps.

NIGHTMARE

Rebecca is alone. Crying. She looks around her. No one is there. None of her family, neither her husband nor her children. She calls out asking where they have gone, why they have left her. They have all gone away. They no longer need her. She keeps on walking, walking down the empty street. Damp and fog envelop her. Her face is wet with tears. She stretches out an arm. The bed is warm. Trevor is there, sleeping beside her. She is not alone. Still sleeping, he stretches his arm to touch her. The room is quiet. A dim light begins to filter through the window.

Rebecca: That recurring nightmare. What does it mean? Every time I wake from that dream I have to ring one of you just to hear your voice, to be reassured you're really there. Do you still want me? Why do I doubt? Why do I question myself, my behaviour all the time? I'm worried about you, my Yael, and your same questioning. You seem so independent from the outside but dependent on the inside. Do you really believe we can deceive them? I need to shower, fix the bed and try to get back to sleep. The stillness of the house is reassuring. Nothing has changed.

Wrapped tightly in her bathrobe Rebecca walks barefoot into the girls' room. Yael's eyes are half-closed, her lips parted, her thumb in her mouth. Paula, the doll, looks straight into Rebecca's eyes. She smiles back at her.

Under the warm water, Rebecca feels her body, touches her breasts, raises one arm, then the other. Nothing unusual. Back in bed, she waits for sleep to come.

Rebecca is in her bedroom in Paris. Her two elder daughters are moving around behind her. She can see their three reflections in the mirror.

Yael: Why is Mummy letting go like that? She seems tired and so much older.

Noga: Is that what happens when you get to fifty? Will Yael and I be like that? Why aren't you pushing yourself any more? You must be more active, do something new and interesting.

Rebecca: Is that how they see me? So it isn't just my imagination. I'm beginning to look old. Is that why Trevor isn't interested in me any more?

Yael: Noga and I must encourage Mummy to pull herself together. There must still be things she'd like to be doing. Her job doesn't seem interesting enough for her.

Rebecca: They're doing with me exactly what I used to do with them when they were younger:

sorting out the priorities, the possibles, the negatives and the positives, what I need to make my life fuller.

Yael: I think she should start writing. Why doesn't she tell us to add "writing" to the list? Perhaps she's afraid of not being good enough.

Rebecca: I should have liked a career in politics. But it's too late now. It just wasn't possible, moving from country to country as we did. We moved around because of Trevor's work. It always took priority. It's too late for that now. But I could write. I've always wanted to.

Noga: What is she waiting for? She's got the time, she's got the experience. I'm sure it would just come to her. She's even got a brand new computer just waiting!

The roles are reversed. Noga and Yael start planning for their mother. They decide she must go regularly to the gym and she must begin writing.

The door is open. Rebecca stands there, watching. Her hands are wet, her eyes searching, knowing that two pairs of eyes are waiting. A smile appears on her face.

Rebecca: Why not?

MUSIC

Zohar can speak. Zohar can sing. She and her mother listen to music together. Zohar would have liked to be able to play an instrument. She accepts that she will never be able to. Her fingers touch the keys of the piano. She stands there, looking, trying to understand. She looks back at her mother standing by the door.

Rebecca: Zohar has a beautiful smile.

“Try, Zohar, would you like to have piano lessons?”

“No, I’ve tried at Moorhouse, don’t you remember? And it didn’t work. Daniel, he can. He has never had a teacher, and he knows it all by heart. He was even invited to play with an orchestra.”

Zohar turns away from her mother. Walks towards the window, looking at the snow falling.

“Mummy, I know that I am different and so are my friends. We all have a learning difficulty. The one I really feel sorry for is Stuart. The others re working hard and I feel less sorry.”

Rebecca’s lips tremble.

Rebecca: Has the moment arrived to speak, to go further into the problem? To get closer?

“Come, Zohar, sit here, next to me on the sofa.”

Rebecca: I must measure each word. I must keep her talking. I must be patient.

“Zohar, why sorry for them? In what way?”

The young girl’s face goes slightly pale. She sits on the end of the sofa, looking straight into her mother’s eyes. She starts to speak in a soft, firm voice.

“We talk in college, Mummy. We know about each other’s problems, medication and everything. Look at Marek. He and his brother now share a flat but neither can really see or hear properly. They were born with an eye and ear problem. His father comes nearly every day to visit him. Marek feels like a child. His father should treat him as a big boy. He’s 19. He can’t learn to drive. I’m learning to drive. And Nigel. He doesn’t have a home. His parents don’t want to see him. Each one of us knows that we have a learning difficulty. I don’t want to have in my passport

any more that council's card that says I have a learning difficulty. I know how to manage alone. I feel sorry for all of them."

Zohar stops talking. She takes a cup of tea from the tray and looks away towards the window. The snow keeps falling.

"Are you sorry about yourself?"

Rebecca: The words came out of my mouth before stopping to think of Zohar's reaction.

"No, I work hard. I always have. I am going to be part of the Israeli Project. I travel alone. I'm learning Hebrew. I can't play the piano, maybe I'll try something else."

Rebecca smiles. Zohar smiles back.

Rebecca: We're two survivors. Teaching each other to carry on with the fight.

The room is dark. The light of the snow reflects on their faces. Nothing else is said. Zohar's words are still dancing in the air.

FAMILY PHOTOGRAPHS

A grey Sunday in Paris. The family go to the Bois de Boulogne to take photographs. Black and white photographs. They photograph each other, together, separately, against different trees, some with the dog, some without. The leaves crackle beneath their feet. The mother and her children running from one to the other. The husband, the father, looks at the family. He stands to one side. Removed from the others.

Trevor: I like watching them but why do I have to join them? They don't need me. I feel ridiculous holding hands and dancing.

Zohar: Do you remember, Mummy? It was here that we used to come.

Rebecca: Yes, Zohar, this was also our way to Carolyn's house and over there is the little brown house and on the side is the lake with the ducks.

Trevor: Memories. Where was I? Travelling, working. They have each other.

The father hesitates. Looks on. Rebecca can feel his hesitation, turns her head and extends her hand, reaching his.

Trevor: She's beautiful, she's so feminine. She's mine. She's flirting with me. Rebecca, are you mine?

Rebecca: Don't you understand? We are your women, silly man. Hold my hand tight, don't let go.

Yael: Mummy is playing with Daddy as if he were another child. It's so strange to see them like this.

"Mummy, can I borrow your shawl? I want a photo of me wearing it!"

Noga's slim figure is wrapped in black from head to toe, giving her a very dramatic look. While they turn, the sound of witches' laughter rolls through the trees. After a moment of surprise the group bursts out laughing. Zohar's face is red, Yael's eyes are shining, Rebecca's face has tears of joy. Trevor embraces them all without touching any of them. The dog's barking brings them back to the reality of time.

ORANGE

The autumn leaves fall, touching the ground noiselessly, knitting a golden, velvet rug which Rebecca loves to walk on. The outline of the stone church against the sky appears like a marionette waiting for the puppeteer to work the strings and set it in motion. On the Surrey hills, horses, cows and sheep seem to have been placed there for Turner's inspiration. Rebecca sits next to her husband. They listen to the news on Radio 4. She holds her coat tight around her. The car window is slightly open. Cold air touches her forehead making her eyes cry. They are driving from Gatwick airport where Rebecca flew in from Paris. A year has gone by since the family returned to Jerusalem. Rebecca looks at her husband's profile, his hands holding the wheel. The knuckles of his fingers are white. His grip is tight.

"We're almost there. We'll make it in time for tea", he says.

Rebecca doesn't answer. Her eyes wander over the pastoral scene of this world almost untouched by time.

Rebecca: How serene, settled, ordered; how peaceful it looks. I want this journey to go on and on. I feel like closing my eyes and not thinking about when I'll wake up. I feel warm and protected here in the car.

The old school building, solid-looking, with lights at the windows. Rebecca rouses herself from her dream-like state.

Rebecca: Why do I always feel this lump in my throat before I see Zohar again? We'll be meeting the headmaster today and her different tutors. They will give us Zohar's report, this year's evaluation of her progress. Trevor's insistence on parking the car so carefully irritates me. But I mustn't say anything. I'll look for Zohar's face at one of the windows. Perhaps she's seen us already, watching us.

The headmaster's study smells of pipe tobacco and books. There are comfortable chairs, a fire is burning in the grate. Rebecca takes off her hat, coat and gloves. They sit opposite the fire.

Rebecca: The English know how to make their rooms cosy, warm. His strong handshake always surprises me. Somehow I never expect this pale, thin, rather short man to have such a strong handshake. Those eyes. His tweed jacket, corduroy trousers and checked shirt give him a gentle look, but his eyes so blue and clear! They're cold and piercing. They make me lower my own eyes.

"Did you have a good journey? Awful weather, isn't it. Damp and quite chilly. Cup of tea?"

That night at the hotel, Rebecca prepares Zohar's bath with pink bubbles. She kneels beside the bathtub and washes her daughter. Not words but gestures are exchanged between mother and daughter.

Rebecca: I've been longing to do this since I saw you last. Wash you, touch you.

Rebecca wraps Zohar up in a big towel.

"Are you happy with my report, Mummy?"

"Happy? I'm proud of you, Zohar, so proud!"

RETURN

The house is quiet, everything in its place. Light coming through the window speaks of winter as does the slight movement of the curtains. Robin is sleeping on the sofa. She jumps off as soon as the woman comes into the room. It is a family room, a family of one couple and a child. Twelve chairs are around the large table in the dining room. Formal yet welcoming, silver and tapestry on the wall. Old candlesticks stand on the sideboard. The portrait of an old looking rabbi hangs above the fireplace revealing the Judaism and tradition of the owners. Footsteps from the kitchen down the corridor. A woman wearing a uniform crosses the room towards the entrance. She switches on the lights by the bookshelves and the other lamps in the lounge. She looks around to see if everything is in place and returns to the kitchen where she is preparing tea. The sound of the front door opening makes her switch on the electric kettle.

“Rosa, are you there?” calls Rebecca.

“Yes, ma’am and tea is ready.”

“My husband will be home soon so put out two cups, please.”

Rebecca goes to her bedroom, closing the door behind her. She puts down her hat and bag, takes off her shoes and rings and goes into the bathroom.

Rebecca: I look awful. I have to be over and done with this secret of mine. I’ll start slowly, listen to his day first, then I’ll attack.

She cleans her face slowly, observing her complexion. She brushes her teeth and goes back to the bedroom. She puts eyeliner, pencil, loads of cream on her face.

Rebecca: Not bad, I can’t complain. Just a bit of colour on my eyes and I immediately lose that sickly look.

She puts on flat shoes, an easy T-shirt and a long skirt. Looks at herself in the mirror and smiles.

Rebecca: Not bad, but I could try to do something about my tummy.

She switches on the light, looks around to leave everything in order, sprays some perfume and leaves the bedroom. The front door is being opened.

Rebecca: How do I always get right on time? Am I a witch?

“Ah, you’re already home? Good. Let’s have tea. It’s just ready.”

The husband looks tired and Rebecca’s face feels cold when she gives him a light peck on the cheek, very light indeed. He speaks, recalling every detail of his afternoon. She half listens.

Rebecca: Winter is nearing. I love it. Grey skies, wind falling leaves. I wish I could just close my eyes and listen to the wind. Cover myself and disappear somewhere.

“Trevor, I think we have to discuss my return, I mean our return, home. Zohar’s last year in Manchester is nearing. We have to make plans.”

The woman refills her cup, standing against the light coming through the window. Her silhouette is fine, the long skirt gives the impression of an unending figure. Her face is pale and thin, her eyes yellow like the sand and the sun of the desert. She sits down next to Trevor.

“I’m not leaving you. It will be best for all of us. Yael and Noga need methere. Or I need them. Zohar has to be near them...”

Trevor’s eyes are lost somewhere else. His fingers fiddle. He finishes his tea, leaves the cup on the small table Rebecca placed next to him and sits next to her. Holding her tight, closing his eyes, he hides his face in her hair, smelling her freshness.

Trevor: Is this an ultimatum?

DEPARTURE

Trevor opens the front door. He finds himself facing piles of boxes.

Trevor: She's started. The moment is getting closer.

"Rebecca?"

"I'm here, on the phone."

Trevor: She's talking to that architect who's fixing the house in Jerusalem. She looks so well. She seems so eager to leave here and be back in Jerusalem. Isn't she at all worried about losing me and breaking our relationship?

"Trevor, it's great, Josef thinks that the work can be done in time which means..."

The husband is looking through the mail, nodding his head, approving.

Rebecca: He's not interested. Isn't he afraid of losing me, or breaking our relationship?

MARCH OF THE LIVING

Zohar decides to follow in the footsteps of her sisters and take part in the March of the Living, joining hundreds of other young people from around the world in visiting the concentration camps in Poland. On her return, Zohar gives two poems to her parents.

Auschwitz

On Friday we went to Auschwitz.
It was sad and tough.
But Orna (the Survivor) had courage to tell us what happened
to her, when she was there.
It was sad and tough.

I felt like crying when I watched the film
(which was showing)
but I couldn't.
Seeing the prisoners starving, exhausted and thin.
It made me sad.
It was sad and tough.
To see the rail-track made me feel the pain.
Thank you for this opportunity. There might not be
another chance.
It was sad and tough.
It was sad and tough.

What I thought

I thought that it was sad. Loads of shoes, glasses, hair. Why?
I felt also angry, because of this boy who stole and didn't
even turn around when he heard the shout of who he
stole from,
but in some way he was right, because he needed
revenge.
The dark skies, loud music, screams, cries no one
could help or even hear.
Why, why?

KEY IN THE DOOR

Rain had been falling all afternoon. The heat was heavy and humid. July in Paris could be unpredictable. The room was half empty, piles of boxes stacked against the walls. A sofa facing the entrance sits quietly waiting for someone to occupy it. Steps coming from the passage can be heard. Rebecca appears carrying a tray of tea. She sets the tray on the floor and looks at her watch. Turning towards the mirror she smiles.

Rebecca: Not too long to go.

Her hair is shorter than usual, younger, ready, waiting. A key in the door.

Trevor smiles, dropping his case, keys and umbrella. He opens his arms for Rebecca to come to him. He smells of sweat, dust. Rebecca enjoys it. She kisses him. Passionately she says: Tea can wait.

Later, the tea was cold and the couple decided to go out for dinner, walking down the street that had witnessed so much of their lives.

WHITE

The young woman's dark hair is tied in a ponytail. She wears old jeans, a white T-shirt, sandals. She walks down the road on a hot, white summer day of August in Jerusalem. Her skin, deeply tanned, makes her eyes almost black. The rucksack on her back, although full, swings with her light step. Drops of sweat slide down her small nose. With one hand she checks in her jeans pocket for the keys. Zohar stops in front of a stone house, half hidden behind tall trees. The shutters are half-closed. Music can be heard coming from the street. She pushes the iron gate with a firm hand. Silver rings shine on her fingers. Her steps slow down as if deliberately delaying her arrival and the moment of putting the key in the door. She climbs the five steps, stopping to look at the plants blooming at the entrance. Zohar puts the key in the door and a familiar smell welcomes her.