Anja Reumschüssel: Over the Roofs Of Jerusalem

Über den Dächern von Jerusalem

Age: 14+ | 336 pages | 978-3-551-58514-1 | pub date: February 2023

ENGLISH SAMPLE TRANSLATION

Rough translation. For sample use only.

Please always check the original manuscript

Present – Karim

"Yalla, ya Karim, get in, we're attacking!" shouted Ahmed. He hung out of the passenger window of the old Volvo up to his waist and waved his arms. In one hand he held the most important weapon for their attack, a string longer than Karim himself, with a piece of leather in the middle. A slingshot.

Karim grinned. Ahmed was well prepared. Karim was one of the best shooters in the refugee camp; with his slingshot he hit a sparrow from twelve metres away. He had been training for years, ever since his eldest brother had given him his first slingshot. "Every Palestinian boy must know how to use it," Mohammed had said. "We have no tanks, no fighter bombers, no machine guns. We only have our slingshots and the photos journalists take of us throwing stones at Israeli tanks. Those are our strongest weapons, the photos and the slingshot. So you have to learn how to use them." Karim had nodded devoutly and from then on had collected stones and practised at every opportunity, had trained hitting old car tyres and metal rods sticking out of walls like gnarled fingers on fallow plots of land. Later, as he got better and better, he also aimed at birds. Not to torture them, but to to take them to his mother, who taught him how to gut and roast the small animals. As she had once learned from her father, who in turn had learned from his mother, back in the war, when the Jews had come and they had to flee and suffer from hunger. They are still refugees, the Jews are still there, they even have their own state. But they, the Palestinians, still have no state, still shoot with slingshots, but mostly at soldiers, tanks and walls, not at birds. Again today. And it was only Thursday. Nevertheless, Ahmed called for a fight, the others were surely already on their way. The engine of the rickety Volvo rattled frantically, as if he too could hardly wait to go into battle.

Karim once again glanced over the land that had become spread out before him. He was sitting on a little wall at the side of Manger Street, between Reem Al-Bawadi's coffee shop and the Bandak grocery shop, from where one could see all the way to Jordan. Somewhere in its rear, far behind the hunched hills to the

west, the sun was just sinking into the Mediterranean, sending its last rays across the promised and martyred land. The white-yellow houses on the hills around Bethlehem shone in its light and cast their shadows on cypresses and olive trees. Behind them, the landscape rose once more to higher hills, crowned by small villages and minarets, and then suddenly disappeared. One might think that the world had ended right there, behind the last minaret, if sometimes at sunset there would not emerge pale pink mountains from the haze like a mirage. The Jordanian mountains.

Every now and then, when the mountains melted into a pale blue wall in the haze, Karim imagined it was a huge tsunami that roared in, swept everything down, swallowed up this land between the Jordan and the Mediterranean until nothing remained of everyone, the refugees and soldiers, the watchtowers and walls, but a peaceful, deep blue sea glistening in the sunshine.

Behind him, the Volvo roared relentlessly like cannon fire. "Karim, stop dreaming, we need every man!" Ahmed urged him on. He was only thirteen and looked ten. That he, of all people, was calling for every man and could mean himself and Karim made Karim laugh. Actually, he didn't feel like coming along. He had taken an extra diversions from the market in the old town. The direct way home would have led between crowds of people and cars to the Bab El-Zakak crossing and from there along Khalil Road to the refugee camp. Instead, Karim had dragged the heavy plastic bags with cucumbers, tomatoes and aubergines through the alleys on the other side of the old town, finally dropping the bags next to the little wall on Manger Street and losing himself in the distance for a while.

But he could not leave Ahmed hanging now, who had obviously been looking for and desperately wanted to have with him. Karim jumped off the wall, dragged the shopping bags onto the back seat of the Volvo and slammed the door behind him. Ahmed's brother sat at the wheel and accelerated.

And immediately braked again.

As if they didn't know that there were fighters on an important mission, the cars crowded the road and stopped them. Everyone wanted to go home. It was Thursday evening, Friday was the start of the weekend. Ahmed's brother honked at pedestrians on the road and yelled at the driver in the car in front of them. He yelled back a bit, but it still didn't go any faster. Karim looked out of the window once more at the Jordanian mountains. When the Volvo finally jolted on, they disappeared behind Reem's Coffeeshop.

Karim leaned forward. "Has something happened?" he asked. "Why are we attacking the Israelis?"

"Because they occupy our land, kill our fathers and dishonour our sisters!" Ahmed shouted over the noise of the engines. He had already become engrossed in his mission to drive the Israelis out of Palestine on this March evening of all days.

"I mean, why today of all days?" repeated Karim. "Did someone die?"

"Don't you notice anything?" Ahmed's brother growled. "Last night they went to Jamal's family. They wanted to arrest him for throwing stones or something. But he wasn't there. Little Layla was screaming in fear. We can't put up with this any more!"

"Has something happened to Layla?" Karim asked worriedly. He knew Jamal from school. He was a year older than Karim and lived with his parents and three sisters in a small apartment a few streets behind Karim's house in the refugee camp.

Karim hadn't seen him for a while. Neither at camp, nor at school, nor at his uncle's car repair shop, where he earned a few shekels washing cars.

"Aren't you listening?" replied Ahmed's brother. "The soldiers scared Layla! They were in her room in the middle of the night with guns because they were looking for Jamal! What if they shot the little girl to shut her up?"

"We must avenge them," Ahmed agreed with him.

Karim had never heard of Israeli soldiers shooting screaming little girls to keep them quiet. But he had heard enough other stories about Israeli soldiers searching Palestinian houses in the middle of the night and arresting people. Mostly teenagers and young men who had allegedly thrown stones or were suspected of being terrorists. Although, for the Israelis, every Palestinian was a terrorist, thought Karim, clutching his slingshot in his fist.

Finally they had reached the watchtower. It stood right at the intersection where Manger Street joined Hebron Road. Hebron Road had once wound unhindered up the mountains into the centre of Al-Quds, which the Jews called Yerushalayim and everyone else Jerusalem. But since the Palestinians' second uprising against the Israelis a few years before Karim was born, a nine-metre-high concrete wall blocked the road. The wall wrapped around the northern border of Bethlehem on both sides, around the Aida refugee camp on one side and the eastern foothills of the city on the other. Behind the Wall Hebron Road led past the tomb of Rachel, the second wife of the biblical arch-father Jacob, who was revered by devout Jews. From there, it wound its way up to the old city of Al-Quds. Karim had never been there before. Palestinians like him were not allowed on the Israeli side. They were prevented from doing so by the border crossings with their soldiers, the wall and the watchtowers that jutted out of the wall every few hundred metres.

They were now standing in front of one of these towers. Colourful graffiti, blobs of paint bombs and holes from stones and bullets were emblazoned on the concrete. It had already taken a beating from Palestinian rage.

"Get out, I have to go on," Ahmed's brother Karim snapped out of his thoughts.

"Aren't you joining us?" asked Ahmed disappointedly.

"No, I have something else to do."

"You just want to get back to Fatma," Ahmed grumbled, got out and slammed the door so hard that the old Volvo wacked.

Karim had also got out. He heaved the shopping bags in front of the City Mart, where he was never allowed to shop, even though they had popsicles and chocolate bars. Too expensive, his mother said. He placed the bags on the small wall in front of the shop so that they couldn't fall over. Here, about forty metres from the tower, the precious vegetables should be safe from stones and tear gas. "Karim, bring some ammunition!" Ahmed yelled. Karim startled. Ammunition? That's when he noticed the pile of rubble in front of the house, which had been a construction site for as long as he had could think. He piled a few chunks on his arm and ran to Ahmed, who was crouching behind a small wall with some other boys, piling up stones. Karim unloaded his ammunition, quickly shook hands with Mohammed, the oldest, and nodded to the other boys. Some were younger than him. They were the most eager to carry stones, as if to make up for the fact that they did not yet have enough strength to throw far or use the slingshot. "Who is standing at the corner in front?", Ahmed turned to Mohammed, who was sixteen and thus the commander-in-chief of the skirmishers at the watchtower. "Shahid and his troops. They block the road afterwards so that cars don't suddenly come around the bend and get our stones," Mohammed replied. Shahid was actually also called Mohammed, like so many sons in Muslim families. But so as not to get confused, the boys called him "Shahid", in memory of Mohamed's younger brother Khalil, who was a Shahid, a martyr. He had fallen from the roof three years ago when he went to check the water tanks up there. The water came from the Israeli waterworks and had failed again. If the Israelis had supplied more water, Khalil would not have climbed onto the roof and fallen. But as it was, he was another victim of the Israeli occupation. They had covered his coffin then with a huge Palestinian flag, the women had cried, the men had shot into the air and the boys had hurled stones at the watchtower after the funeral. And ever since Mohammed proudly said that he was the brother of a martyr. So they called him "Shahid".

For further information, please contact
daniela.steiner@carlsen.de or
sylvia.schuster@carlsen.de

When the pile of stones reached the smaller boys' waists, they looked at each other. Who would throw first? "Arif may start," Mohammed decided and pointed to the youngest in the group. For a moment, the little boy looked startled, then he straightened up, nodded gravely and grabbed a stone. As if to make sure that he was really meant, he looked Mohammed in the eye once more. Mohammed nodded. Then Arif, just eight years old, ran up the street. Karim, Ahmed and another Mohammed loaded their slingshots, the rest grabbed a few stones and waited. Time seemed to stretch as Arif ran with his short legs towards the tower, slowing down as if he was running out of breath, then running a little faster again until he was finally close enough to the tower to hurl the stone against it.
On the other side of the road, two young women were standing wearing sunglasses and backpacks. Ajahanib - foreigners, either female tourists who would immediately flee in horror and hide in their hotel, or female employees of some human rights organisation who would immediately pull their cameras out of their backpacks and document the freedom struggle of the Shabaab, the Palestinian youth. Between the boys with their stones and the two women who were now actually holding their smartphones, one last car drove around the bend. Then the shabaab on Manger Street had apparently stopped the traffic. The drivers would had to find another route, a little further south via Moradeh Street. There was nothing up here except the wall, the tower and a petrol station.
Further ahead, Arif's stone bounced off the concrete of the tower. Even as the stone flew, Arif turned and sprinted back as fast as he could. For the other shabaab it was the signal to attack. They also dashed forward from Manger Street, stones whistling from the slingshots of the bigger boys up to the windows of the tower. Karim heard the cars brake behind him as he dashed out of cover with Ahmed and Mohammed. He ran up the street until he was close enough, stood wide-legged for a firm stance, put the stone in the pod, took both barrels, thickly braided cords, in his hand and let the slingshot whirr in a circle beside his

body. Then, at just the right moment, he released the barrel and let the stone whiz towards the tower.

CRACK!

It crashed against the concrete and shattered. There was not even a notch on the tower itself. Karim glanced up briefly at the low windows, which were arranged in a circle not ten metres above the ground and made the tower look like a grim robot, looking down disapprovingly at the small warriors and their ridiculous weapons. Up there, behind the frosted glass, the Israeli soldiers in their khaki uniforms squatted with binoculars in front of their eyes, watching the Palestinian side, peering into Palestinian neighbourhoods and houses while remaining invisible to the Palestinians. When they were not just suddenly standing in their bedrooms at night. Karim felt himself getting hot with anger. As always when he thought of these injustices. And how dangerous these soldiers could be.

Sometimes they ignored the shabaab, who were having fun at their tower. But sometimes they would open the windows, take photos of the boys down there, and at some point, at some checkpoint, they might pick out one of the boys they had photographed throwing a stone, interrogate him or lock him up for a few days. Those who wanted to prevent this would wrap a scarf around their face. Karim didn't have one with him. So he stayed in the background, far enough away not to give the cameras a clear picture. Close enough to hurl stones at the tower. Again he loaded his slingshot, grabbed the barrels, let them whirr and noticed with satisfaction that the two foreigners across the street now had their smartphones pointed at him.

Suddenly there was a crackling from loudspeakers high above them.

Then the "Allaaaaaahu akbar - God is greater" boomed first from the Salah ad-Din mosque in the small Al-Azzeh camp south of their battlefield, then also from the Abu Bakr As-Siddiq mosque in the Aida refugee camp. It was time for the adhan, the call to evening prayer. Only now did Karim notice how dark it had already become. And his mother was waiting to go shopping!

Karim no longer paid attention to the other shabaab. He ran across the street. To where the cucumber was sticking out of the shopping bags. Further back, from the Bab El-Zakak crossing, he saw a Palestinian police car rolling up. With blue lights, no siren. In a moment it would stop at the side of the road, the policemen would get out and shoo the shabaab away. All routine.
Behind Karim, another stone banged against the tower.
"Take that, you fucking Israelis!" he heard Ahmed shout as he had already grabbed the bags and rushed home.

Present - Anat

"Fucking Arabs," Gil growled.
"Fucking Arabs," Anat muttered without thinking about it.
"Why today?" said Gil, more to himself than to her.
"It's not Friday."
"Maybe because the old man had to do exercises at the camp last night with the pimps," Anat remarked. "Maybe someone there didn't think it was so great."
"Then let them leave us alone and not raise their brood to be little terrorists." Gil snorted contemptuously.
Anat remained silent. She looked after the boy who had broken away from the commotion and was running down the street. A lanky guy in jeans and a mouse-grey T-shirt, his skull shaved almost bald on the sides, his hair combed smooth. They all looked the same somehow. The boy bent down in front of a supermarket and pulled two large plastic bags out from behind a small wall. Anat stretched her head. Intuitively, her arm moved towards the machine gun leaning against the wall next to her. What did the boy have in his bags? Just paint bombs? A gun? A granade, perhaps? Something elongated was sticking out of a bag, she could see that even at a distance. She raised her binoculars in front of the eyes. A cucumber. How banal, she thought, what was a cucumber doing in battle?

She found it almost insulting that she had to stay here in the tower and be attacked by these children. They would soon go home and be cooked for by their mother. And her stomach growled.
However: at least cucumbers did not explode.
She watched as the boy wrapped the handles of the bags around his wrist and heaved the bags up. Anat thought of her grandmother's goulash, shakshuka and liver pate. He'll probably run home to his mum and eat what the Arabs and the foreigners eat.
"Turkish salad", made from finely chopped cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers and onions with coriander and olive oil. But this is Israeli salad, Anat thought. And here I am wasting my time on this corrosive tower.
Her stomach gurgled once more as she watched the boy hurrying down the street, as if the shabaab screaming had nothing to do with him, as if he hadn't just been hurling stones himself. Was he afraid of the Palestinian policemen who drove up from the south? They only scolded him a little, Anat thought. She had never seen the policemen arrest one of the shabaab.
She saw the boy disappear around the corner of a wall. She knew that the path behind the wall led to the Aida refugee camp. She also knew that it had not been a real refugee camp for a long time. Most of the residents had been born there. At most, their grandparents had fled from somewhere, but that was a long time ago. Nevertheless, even the babies behind the grey concrete walls were described as refugees. But it had to stop sometime, Anat thought. At least that's what her mother always said.
Where was the lanky Palestinian down there actually going in such a hurry? Was he planning something? Was he going for older brothers, a gun, a bomb? What did he have in his bags that he ran away with so hastily? Was it really just vegetables? Or explosives?
BOOM!

Something had thundered against the glass of the watchtower. Many voices cheered from below. They cheered the direct hit, which had left a red stain on the glass and was now slowly running down. Anat's heart was still racing with shock. Then anger spread through her. Great, we'll have to clean up the mess later. That meant she had to do it, the way she knew her commander. He only ever got the women to do the cleaning.

Anat looked back past the splash of colour to the street. Below her, there was an occasional banging against the walls of the tower. Apparently it was now the turn of the smaller boys who could not yet throw so high.

Meanwhile, Gil yelled into the radio. "They're attacking us, request permission to use tear gas!"

Anat rolled her eyes in annoyance but forced herself to keep her mouth shut. She didn't feel like arguing. Soon it was party night.

Others would have continued to play on their mobile phones and waited until the shabaab had run riot. But Gil had a short fuse. Which was probably why he was on duty up here in the tower and not at one of the checkpoints.

"Fucking terrorists, all terrorists, these fucking Arabers!" he snarled again, more to himself than to Anat.

"Did you know that they bring cakes and grilled sandwiches to our comrades in Avraham Avinu?"

"The Arabs?"

"Nonsense, our people, Israelis, who live there in the Old City in the midst of thousands of Arabs!"

"I know," Anat murmured. "I'd rather be here anyway. Those in Hebron are all fanatics."

"The Arabs?"

"No, our people. All religious people who desperately want to be close to the graves of Abraham and Sarah. And we are supposed to protect them. First they bring you cake, and then they spit on you when you stop them from throwing

stones at Palestinians. But when the Arabs throw stones at Israelis, you have to arrest them. I don't want to go to Hebron again. Don't want all that stress."
"What's wrong with you? Are you too lazy or are you too left? Or both?" snapped Gil. And then more quietly: "Women are just too soft for the army."
Anat thought about whether she should say something else. And remained silent. What was she going to do about Gil.
She looked down at the road again. Behind the commotion at the foot of the tower, a tomato lay on the roadway. Had the boy lost it? It was probably just vegetables in the bags after all, Anat thought boredly. An answer crackled from the radio. Gil was allowed to shoot. He grinned with satisfaction, grabbed a tear gas grenade, opened the window facing the street, pulled the safety pin and hurled the grenade at the shabaab as best he could through the narrow window opening. He quickly closed the window again. Anat watched as the smaller boys fled from the gas that the wind blew across the street. One youth ran towards the gas grenade, picked it up and threw it back, as the older shabaab often did, as a test of courage or to prove themselves as heroes.
Gil opened the window once more to throw a grenade into the street. Acrid air poured in, Anat's eyes watered. "Watch it, what are you doing?" she cried and coughed. Gil laughed and pulled the window shut again.
Anat gritted her teeth. Stupid guy. Five minutes to shift change. Her eyes watering, she looked back down at the street where the tear gas had driven the shabaab away.
A car rolled up below. Anat wiped the tears from her eyes and saw the car run over the tomato on the road that the lanky Palestinian had lost. She thought she heard the humble *plop of* the vegetable.

Summer 1946 - Tessa

Gooey juice ran down her fingers. Tessa didn't care. The flesh crawled over her tongue, the taste of the tomato exploded in her mouth. Tomato. She hadn't known how much she had longed for it. For six years she had not eaten a tomato. Even during the liberation more than a year ago, when the British soldiers came and after them the nurses, doctors and journalists - even then no one brought a tomato. On the very first day, a soldier in a mud-brown uniform put a bar of chocolate in her hand. As if he wanted to reward her for being the only skeleton among all the motionless bodies still alive in front of her barracks. Tessa had stuffed the chocolate into her mouth. And a few minutes later vomited at the feet of the soldier who had returned with two men and a stretcher. It took several days and many lives for the British to distribute lighter fare, rusks and preserved fruit instead of black bread and powdered milk. Everything that a body that had been kept alive for months or even years on watery soup with potato peelings could better tolerate. But they had not distributed tomatoes.

"Do you know where there are more of them?" asked the woman, who looked as if there had never been a war, never a camp and never hunger, pestilence and death. "In Palestine. Do you know Palestine?"

"My father is in Palestine," Tessa said.

The woman opened her eyes in delight. For a moment, Tessa had to think of an astonished eagle owl: big, round eyes, green-brown, almost a little yellowish.

"Well, that's wonderful, then you'll have to go to Palestine!" the woman shouted, and then again: "Yes, girl, then you'll have to go to Palestine when your father is there. That's where the future is! That's where the future of our people is!

Tessa remained silent, looking furtively at the woman's bag, wondering if there were more tomatoes in there and if she was going to get another one.

"What's your father's name?" the woman asked, ignoring Tessas' gaze.

"Schmuel Froimann."

The woman reached for her bag after all, Tessa was hoping for another tomato, but the woman only pulled out a notepad and a pencil.
She noted Tessa's father's name and then turned her eagle owl gaze back to Tessa, "And what's your name?"
"Tessa."
The woman frowned. "Tessa? Did your parents really call you Tessa? What does your passport say?"
"Therese Emilie Froimann. Number 202500."
Now the woman looked confused. "What a nu..."
She fell silent and then looked at Tessa's arm where the number was tattooed dirty under the sleeve. Tessa remembered the pain of the pinpricks. But she remembered her mother's tears even better. She had cried a lot during that time, as if the tears could flow together to form a river that would tore away everything that had frightened Tessa, the guards, the guns, the dogs and the barbed wire. But tears couldn't do that. Tears couldn't do anything.
The woman who had done the tattoo probably thought so too.
"Stop crying," she had said, "you'll get a number. Those who don't get a number have to cry." Those who didn't get a number went straight to the shower rooms, from whose showers no water came. But Tessa only found out about that later.
She and her mother were allowed to shower after their heads had been shaved. They were given a place to sleep in a barrack, and they were given work.
It was the first camp. More followed. All this time Tessa stayed with her mother, who seemed to shrink further with each passing day, while Tessa grew taller and taller. Thinner, but also taller, and now she was a skinny girl of fifteen who looked like she was twelve, and her mother was dead and no longer crying.
But her father was alive.
When neighbours and strangers set fire to the synagogue in their little town, looted old Yitzak's toy shop and beat the rabbi's sons down the embankment until they were swept away by the river, their father had boarded the train to

Vienna to reach one of the southern ports and travel across the Mediterranean to Tel Aviv, to Haifa or Yerushalayim and buy a house there and then bring his family from Germany to join him. But before that, the Nazis took his family. Tessa was convinced that her father had been waiting for her in Palestine ever since. But between her and her father lay many countries and the sea. And British warships.

"I thought no one was allowed into Palestine anymore," Tessa said, somewhat proud to be so well informed. "Here in the camp they say the British don't let anyone in."

"We just don't ask the British," the woman said, grinning.

"There are ways to Palestine that are not without danger. But strong young people like you will go this way with their heads held high and with fresh courage, won't they?" She looked at Tessa expectantly.

Tessa just nodded.

"We have been smuggling Jews from Europe to Palestine for years," the woman continued. "Even before the victory over the Nazis. And now even more so. We need every man and woman in Palestine. There we will build a home for the Jewish people. Only in a Jewish state can we survive. Only there will you and your children and your children's children be safe forever."

Tessa nodded once more. She found it rather silly that the woman spoke of Tessa's children and children's children, as if Tessa were interested in children. Or for a Jewish state. But Palestine still interested her.

"How do I get to Palestine?" she asked.

"You wait here," the woman replied, and that was not exactly what Tessa wanted to hear. "I belong to the Haganah. That's a Zionist organisation. Zion, like the mountain where our temple stood and will stand again one day, you know? We are fighting for a Jewish state. We need young people like you. The Haganah has chartered ships to smuggle Jews into Palestine. We will also issue new passports

for you. You wait here until I find more brave pioneers, then I'll pick you up and we'll travel together to your new homeland."
"How long do I have to stay here?" asked Tessa, who was a little annoyed by the owl woman's turgid speeches, which did not reveal the most important things, the when and the how.
"I can't say for sure yet. The British are intercepting more and more of our ships. So we have to be smart and deliberate. But let that be our worry, the Haganah will take care of it. You stay here and wait for word from me."
Then suddenly another question seemed to occur to her: "There is no one waiting for you here in Germany, is there?"
"I don't think so," Tessa replied, "I don't have any relatives here anymore. That's why I'm still in the camp."
"Good. Wait here. And don't get adopted."
"Who would adopt me? I'm already 15."
"That's the right attitude. You are almost a woman. And we need young women like you. I have to go, but surely you know what we always say on Seder night before Passover?" the woman asked as a farewell. For a moment, Tessa feared the woman was testing her. She hadn't celebrated Passover for years. What else did they say? If she didn't know the answer, would the woman consider her unsuitable? Would she not be allowed to travel to Palestine? But then the woman answered her question herself: "Next year in Jerusalem. Then she grinned again, stood up and strolled to a group of young people sitting together in the shade of a house wall. Swinging on her arm was the bag that held her notepad. And surely more tomatoes.
Had she screamed?
Tessa remembered that she had called for her mother.
Was that in a dream? Had anyone heard it? Many screamed here in their sleep, usually all ignoring the cries of others. Only heavy breathing reached her from the darkness of the room and the rustling outside the window where the low

trees bent in the wind of the approaching thunderstorm. Soon the rain would patter against the windows and cool the summer air. Tessa was looking forward to it. She was no longer afraid of thunderstorms. In the past, Tessa had been afraid of thunder. But then heavy boots had thundered up the stairs in front of her flat, kicked the door, orders had whipped through the rooms: "Get up! Pack your things! Out!" Tessa's mother had grabbed the suitcase that already held clothes, money, passports, family photos, and the small silver menorah, a seven-branched candelabra she had received for her wedding to Tessa's father. Tessa was carrying a bag with blankets, a loaf of bread and some tinned food. Amid laughter and insults from the Hitler boys, they hurried to the village square, stood in the hot August sun, sweating and thirsty, until lorries came to pick them up, until they had to climb into cattle trucks. Little children cried for water, mothers cried for their children. And then salvation, at least for the time being, when lightning flashed, thunder rolled and the sky dumped water over the wagons, which those standing at the tiny window caught with cups from those who had packed some, drank from it themselves and then passed it on until the children stopped crying for a while.

That was how long ago that redemptive thunderstorm had been. Four years, almost a quarter of her life.

Now, as the clouds poured over the Displaced Persons Camp of Bergen-Belsen, Tessa had fallen asleep again.

For breakfast we had hot coffee and cold bread. The coffee tasted bitter. She had never been allowed to drink coffee before. It was not for children, the adults had said. But they probably preferred to drink it themselves. Coffee was precious and in the end there was none left. Tessa had heard the grown-ups complaining about it when they sat together in the kitchen, mum, the neighbour and someone else. When they raved about how good life had been before the war and complained about all the things that no longer existed. Until one day there was nothing left, no neighbour, no kitchen, no home and no coffee anyway.

And coffee didn't taste good at all. But everyone drank it, so Tessa did too. She gulped down the bread. She was not hungry. The loneliness and the wild dreams of the previous night stuck in her stomach like thick porridge. She shoved the bread into her mouth anyway. Food is important. If you were fat, you didn't fit through the chimney so easily.

Although the chimney of the crematorium had not smoked for more than a year. Since they had been liberated and yet were still stuck in Bergen-Belsen, in the DP camp in the old Wehrmacht barracks not far from the former concentration camp. The forgotten ones who had remained after the "Final Solution to the Jewish Question" and with whom no one knew what to do.

Tessa looked around. They sat at long tables here. "They were called "displaced persons". But no one had expelled them. They had been taken from their village near Berlin and taken to various camps in the East, and finally to this camp near Celle. Men in black uniforms with heavy boots that tramped through their dreams every night. But no one had driven them away, they were still in Germany, still in their homeland.

Nine children were sitting here. Actually no more children, only a few more winters and they would all be adults.

There were Rahel and her sisters, the twins Ida and Inge, who miraculously had not fallen into the hands of a Nazi doctor. They must have been the youngest in the room, maybe twelve years old. Rahel was a little older and almost like a mother to her sisters. The night before, in the dormitory, she had carefully draped the scratchy woollen blankets over the younger girls before wrapping herself in a blanket and lying down beside them. Now she admonished her sisters to drink their coffee carefully, as it was still hot. One of them - was it Ida? - hissed back that Rahel should not treat them like little children.

Tessa had always wanted siblings. Now she was glad to be here alone and have no one to worry about or whose crying she had to endure, when she herself

wanted to do nothing but cry. Better alone, she thought and swallowed again. This time she swallowed tears.

A little apart from the sisters, the long Georg tore hard bark from his bread like a dog tears meat from a bone. He almost looked like a man, if he hadn't been so lanky. But the first fuzz was showing on his upper lip and his voice was raspy and deep. Tessa estimated him to be fifteen or sixteen, the same age as Herbert, who had helped her mother in the fields before they drafted him, to the front, shooting down Soviets. I wonder if he had returned.

I wonder if he had also shot Jews.

"I love hard work," Georg said at that moment, and Tessa listened. That sounded almost like Herbert, who had also liked to brag about how hard he could work.

"I'm going to a kibbuz!" he continued, sounding as proud as Herbert had when he was allowed to go to war. "On the kibbuz, everyone is equal, everyone works together. Maybe I'll be their leader!"

Apparently the woman who looked like an eagle owl had also been with him.

"They only dig in the dirt on the kibbutz," Hans shouted between them, "they only grow potatoes!" Then he lowered his voice and said very importantly: "I'm going to the Palmach. They train young people to be fighters. And then I'll fight against all the enemies of the Jews!

"They were just waiting for you, you little squirt," mocked Jacob, who was almost seventeen and the oldest in the room, Tessa estimated. "You're going to shit your trousers when it comes to the Arabs!"

"Against whom?", Rahel now interfered.

"The Arabs," Jacob explained meaningfully, "the people who live there. They hate Jews too. Everyone hates us."

"I don't think anyone lives there," replied Rahel. "They always say: A country without a people for a people without a country?"

"The Palmach only drive out the British, and there's no one else there!" crowed Hans, who knew everything better.

"Yes, that's what my father said," Jacob replied, obviously incensed that the smaller man was questioning his authority.
"Oh, your father! He also let himself be gassed!"
As the boys went at each other, Tessa stuffed the last piece of bread into her mouth, stood up and walked out of the dining room.
sesaal. Behind her, fists met boys' bodies, each muffled blow followed by groans from rage-distorted mouths. "That's enough, shame on you!", Rachel's voice cut through the noise of the fight.
While Tessa was still chewing on her bread, she walked down the hall to the girls' dormitory. She was still tired after that night of thunderstorm dreams. She lay down in her bed again and thought about the people who would live in Palestine. "Arabs," Jacob had said. There couldn't be many, after all, all the Jews from all over the world were moving to Palestine because there was supposed to be room for them there. They were to be allowed to live there and no Hitler or anyone else would ever be able to destroy them again. Palestine was to be their land.
And somewhere there already lived her father. Surely he was a fighter. Maybe he was even a king like King David. He would then be King Shmuel. And she would be the king's daughter. Tessa smiled quietly. That was nonsense, of course, but she liked the idea. With crown and cloak, her father would stand on the quay when the ship docked and hold out his arms to her. And she would stand at the railing, wave at him and shout, "Abba!" That was Hebrew for Papa. She didn't know much Hebrew, but she did. "Abba!" she would shout. And then again in German, so that he really knew it was her.
"Daddy!"

For further information, please contact
daniela.steiner@carlsen.de or
sylvia.schuster@carlsen.de

22 July 1946 - Mo

"Yaba!", Mo shouted.

It was to be the last time he called for his father. Mo ran down the street. His father had already reached the end of the alley, but he heard him and turned around. Mo's bare feet slapped the sand-coloured cobblestones, polished smooth by countless feet that had walked along here every day for thousands of years. As soon as it rained or someone sprinkled water on the stones to tame the dust, they became slippery like the blocks of ice you buy for the freezer. Mo was proud that he could run over the slippery stones without slipping. He could only do that barefoot. He loved the feel of the smooth road under his soles. Even in winter, when there was sometimes a thin layer of snow over Al-Quds, he still ran short distances without shoes. No matter how much his mother scolded him and threatened him with bitter sage tea for the cough he would undoubtedly catch. Panting, Mo reached his father and pressed the bag of sesame bread and hard-boiled eggs into his hand. "Shukran, ya ibni," his father said, "thank you, my son." He squeezed his firstborn's shoulder, turned and disappeared behind the next corner of the house. His shift at the King David Hotel started in half an hour. Mo knew because at that moment somewhere above him, the first church bells began to ring at the noon hour. Shortly afterwards, the muezzins on the muesli intoned their calls to prayer. Mo recognised his uncle's voice from the direction of the Sidna Omar mosque. He called out plaintively, almost wailing, as if pleading for all the faithful to finally prostrate themselves. Among the ringing of the bells and the calls of his uncle, there were other calls to prayer, some lively and loud, as if they were calling for a dance, some reverent and sublime, as if they were shouting not to the people but to Allah Himself. The shouting, booming, gonging and singing covered the houses, alleys and squares of the old city of Al-Quds like a blanket. Pious Muslims were now kneeling on their prayer rugs. Mo's father would also pray in the hotel before going on duty. Mo didn't. He was already fifteen, but all this religious hocus-pocus didn't interest him. And his

father still left him alone with it. There were still more important things in his life.

Ten minutes later, Mo was sitting on his bed in the small room he was allowed to occupy all by himself. His two younger brothers had to share a room. The midday heat was pushing in through the narrow window, but leaning against the cool wall, the sultriness was still bearable. Mo had notebooks and books spread out around him, adding up numbers and calculating unknowns. The teacher had announced an algebra test. Mo's favourite subject, right after history.

"Umm Mohammed!"

Down in the alley, someone called for Mo's mother. Then chaos broke out. Mo heard excited voices, scraps of words, lots of Arabic and a few English words peeling out of the guttural sounds of his mother tongue, making him suddenly freeze in in the midday heat: "bomb" and "explosion". And then a high-pitched scream, the desperate rising of a woman who was fighting with all her might against news that could not be true. It took Mo a moment to realise that it was his mother screaming. And it took another moment for him to force his limbs, frozen with shock, to move, to unknot his long legs from their cross-legged position and lift his body up. It was as if an ice-cold leaden lump in his stomach was pulling him down. Every movement took strength. As if what had happened would not come true if he just stayed seated and continued to do his homework like a normal boy with a normal life that was not shattering into pieces around him.

When Mo stepped into the shimmering heat in front of his house, his mother's scream had already died away. He saw her immediately. She looked smaller than usual. Only at second glance did he notice what he had never seen outside the house: she was not wearing a headscarf. With wide eyes, she was huddled against the wall next to the house door, her hair falling over her face and shoulders. Mo's little sister Amal, who had just learned to walk, clung to her arm, crying. A neighbour knelt beside his mother, trying to comfort her, to hold her in

her arms, and at the same time to cover her bare hair and bare arms with a cloth. Suddenly his uncle was standing next to him, "Take her inside, Mohammed, keep her honour, so not everyone shall see her," he hissed at him, "yalla, go!" Mo obeyed, grateful that someone was telling him what to do. Together with the neighbour, he helped his mother up and pulled her the few steps to the door, the crying Amal plodding behind, into the dark vestibule, into the coolness of the thick stone walls. His mother sank down on a sofa, huddled together, and only by her shrugging shoulders could Mo tell that she was crying. Somehow that was worse than her cry. Amal tried desperately to climb onto her lap. Other neighbours pushed into the house behind them, sat down with his mother, knelt on the floor in front of her, held her hand and cried with her.

Mo still didn't know what had happened. Was it about his brothers, who played somewhere in the alleys and usually only came back in the evening? Was it about his father?

Mo slipped outside and left the women to their pain. There in the alley stood the men, Uncle Qader, his father's brother, and neighbours from the surrounding houses, joined by more and more. And before he could even ask his uncle, he had spotted him, pulled him close, whispered something in his ear and let him go, as white as a sheet.

Mo ran. Through the narrow streets across the Old City, shot out onto the street along the city wall, past the Citadel of David, through the huge Jaffator, which was more a tower than a gate. Through streets and across squares down the hill on which the Old City of Al-Quds was perched, until he reached King David Street from the south, panting. Dust hung in the air, making it even harder to breathe in the summer heat. Police jeeps and a truck with a big red cross on a white background stood at the side of the road in front of the hotel. British policemen in their silly short trousers blocked off the road. Behind them he saw it: rubble. Rubble. The sandstone façade of the south wing looked as if a gigantic beast had sunk its claws into the venerable building.

and tore it open from top to bottom. Slowly, as if wading through water, Mo approached the hotel, barely noticing the policemen until one stepped into his path. "Stay back, boy," he said in English, "it's too dangerous here."
"My father," Mo stammered, also in English, "my father is in there."
"Go home, I'm sure your father will be here soon."
"No," Mo replied, and the certainty gripped him that what his uncle had whispered in his ear was true, even if he did not want to believe it. His father had served in the southern wing. Wooden beams protruded from the walls like ribs, ceilings and floors hung down like garlands, rubble and stones piled up two storeys high, Mo could see into all seven floors like into a doll's house. The hotel where the King of Spain, the Emperor of Abyssinia and the King of Greece had stayed, as well as film stars, singers, spies, his father had often told him proudly. The hotel whose south wing housed the offices of the British government and the British army in Palestine.
Which his father had entered at noon today and which he would never leave again.
Immediately, rumours were rife that the British had stored information about arrested Zionists in their offices and that the Jewish underground organisation Irgun had wanted to destroy the documents.
However, witnesses reported that it was Arab workers who had heaved heavy milk cans into the basement of the south wing. Shortly afterwards, security guards had noticed the workers, shots had been fired and two attackers had been injured. One died. The rumours about Arab assassins quickly died down, because the two injured were Jews.
Only later would Mo learn that death actually came from the milk cans. Three hundred and fifty pounds of explosives had been placed in front of the hotel's delivery entrance by someone on that 22 July 1946, distributed among seven milk cans. At 12.37 p.m., the bomb killed 91 people.

The British responded with the gallows. In the middle of Al-Quds, not far from the New Gate to the Old City, the Jewish terrorists waited in a low building for their execution. However, they were hanged in Acre, far to the north of Palestine, where mainly Arabs lived. The British feared the anger of the Jews if Jewish fighters were hanged in their holy city.
In the days and weeks that followed, they heard again and again about arrests in the Old City. In Tel Aviv, the British carried out one raid after another, surrounded the city, combed houses, arrested Jews. In Al-Quds, too, they searched for the assassins, but less enthusiastically, after all, it was the Holy City. Even at his neighbour's house one morning at dawn, British policemen were banging on the door while Mo lay in his room, thinking of his brothers in the next room, of his mother and Amal sleeping downstairs next to the kitchen, and the certainty flowed through him like molten lead: he was now responsible for them all. He was the eldest of the family.

November 1947 - Tessa

The blood seemed to freeze in Tessa's veins, the wind smashed invisible teeth into her skin, gnawed at her cheeks, tore at her hair and smashed ice-cold spray into her face.
But worse than the cold was the uncertainty: Would this go well? Would she finally no longer have to be responsible for herself alone? Could she be a child again, her father's daughter?
Because if this didn't go well, if the British picked up the ship or if she didn't find her father in the distant land, then all would be lost. Then loneliness would swallow her up.
It smelled of salt water and the rubber dinghy they had squeezed into. Only the soft groaning of the rubber could be heard and the heavy breathing of the men pulling the boat over the waves on a thick cable. One end of the cable was attached to the shore, the other to the railing of a ship whose outlines Tessa

could only make out indistinctly in the darkness. It was the second part of her journey to Palestine, to her father. Tessa, some other young people and the eagle owl woman had travelled by train to Bandol on the south coast of France, where the air tasted of fish and freedom. There they had hidden in a rented flat and waited until the Eagle Owl Woman found them one day. picked them up at night and drove them to the vicinity of the harbour. Tessa had assumed that they would be taken to a quay and walk across a landing stage onto the ship that would take them across the Mediterranean. Instead, she had trudged with the others over sand and stones to where the waves lapped ashore and inflatable boats rocked. The Uhu woman had explained it to them: they were now Ma'apalim, Jews trying to enter Palestine illegally. British warships patrolled along the Palestinian coast and intercepted boats with Jewish immigrants. Those they were able to pick up had so far been taken to internment camps on Cyprus. But the camps were overcrowded, too many Jews had tried to reach Palestine and had been caught. So the British had changed their strategy. Two months earlier, in September 1947, the *Exodus* had left southern France with more than 4,500 immigrants on board. But from the beginning, the ship had been pursued by British warships. In the port of Haifa, with their destination in sight, the immigrants were driven off the ship by British soldiers and taken directly back to Europe on other ships. To Hamburg. Jews who had just survived the Holocaust were again locked up in camps on German soil two years after the end of the war, behind barbed wire and guard towers to prevent them from travelling to Palestine. For there, the Arab inhabitants were becoming increasingly restless in the face of the flow of Jewish refugees. They feared losing too much of their land, on which they too finally wanted to found their own state. And the British Mandate, which still ruled Palestine, feared unrest in the country and therefore wanted to prevent the immigration of even more Jews.