The Jews of the North

By Karl Taro Greenfeld

EZEKIEL knew it was the common opinion that he had fled south, though others speculated he had gone into hiding, in the months before the destruction of the community. ¶ Of the many areas of contention between Ezekiel and Rabbi Chaifetz—the proper way to wear one's tallis and the correct composition of tefillin, the literal interpretation of traife as exclusively describing a young goat boiled in its mother's milk, and Ezekiel's disregarding of most of the 39 proscribed labors on the Sabbath—there had been none as potentially divisive as Ezekiel's deeply held view that everyone, including other Jews, was seeking to destroy him. Ezekiel had been urging the community to leave the Quarter for years before they finally fled. The rabbi, wealthy and invested in the Quarter, and beneficiary of special privileges as the representative of the Jews, had been understandably reluctant to sanction the costly migration that Ezekiel had noisily advocated.

The north had never been hospitable to Jews, yet this community had survived here for a century, building two synagogues, schools, a theater, and publishing two daily newspapers. They had buried their parents and grandparents in the small Jewish cemetery and in the very recent past had enjoyed relative prosperity and unantagonistic relations with the Gentile majority. What Ezekiel had determined from a young age, however, was that this period of

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relative tranquility was an aberration, and as soon as the wars along the southern frontier began again, and young Gentiles were conscripted to serve, the usual resentments toward the Jews—who had been deemed unfit for military service—would resurface. Why, the Gentiles would reason, were their young men sacrificed to keep the Jews safe and prosperous? At first, a tax was imposed, and then finally the hostage-taking and ransoms, ostensibly to raise more money for the war effort.

But it would be the burgeoning power of the Sultanate to the north that recommenced violence against the Jews. Before his vanishing, Ezekiel would appear daily outside the synagogue, urging every adult male who passed him to go south, to the capital, where, he reported, there was an even more established Jewish community that would welcome them. Most of the men, Ezekiel was surprised to notice, had not concluded from the various portents that the end was indeed near for their community. They didn't seem to notice Ezekiel; he was easy to dismiss as some sort of messianic apostate, when nothing could be further from the truth. He was, at his most religious, profoundly agnostic. His cause was nothing more than survival.

Before he departed, he called on Chaya, the beautiful daughter of the rabbi. Chaya had exhibited nothing but disdain for Ezekiel yet continued to receive him in the parlor of her family's six-room apartment. Of course they were loath to leave this luxury, Ezekiel reflected, yet he strongly urged Chaya to consider fleeing with him.

She asked him why she should take up with a disbarred advocate.

"Not disbarred," Ezekiel told her. "Forbidden to practice by the new anti-Semitic ordinances. In the capital I will take up my rightful trade."

She waved him away with her pallorous and tantalizingly long-fingered hand.

It was Chaya's impatience with Ezekiel that convinced him she must have feelings for him. With everyone else, she was relentlessly cheerful, smiling and casually interested in their affairs and petty gossip; with Ezekiel she was dismissive, verging on rude. Ezekiel deduced that her singling him out for harsh treatment meant she saw him as a being in a separate category from the rest of humanity. She noticed him.

CHAYA was not a contemplative woman. She was joyously industrious and beloved by the community for her easy-going manner. Yet she was also progressive in nature, shunning marriage, and even, over her father's objections, taking up the surprising, and some in the community believed sinful, hobby of photography. She purchased an elaborate Steinheil Aplanat camera, basins, mercury, silver halide, and tintype plates, which she used primarily to photograph and develop images of children and babies. The resulting portraits were erratic, scarred with foggy splotches and chemical smears, prone to fading and distortion. Yet nearly every family in the community had one of her images in a place of prominence in their homes.

Chaya had taken Ezekiel's photograph the last day she had seen him, urging him to relax during the several seconds of waiting for the exposure. She developed the tintype in the darkroom she had improvised in her basement. It was a tedious and noxious process, the careful slanting of the silver halite plate over the slightly heated cup of mercury, the gradual washing of the silver out of the halides, and finally the fixing of the image by dipping the plate into a solution of soda of hyposulfite. The resulting images were fragile, susceptible to fogging, shadowing, ghosts, and simply dissolving. She was often in a daze from chemical inhalation after working on several of these images.

Still, when she looked at Ezekiel's photograph after his disappearance, she was frightened by what she found. The image had degraded since she had developed it, the plate taking on shades and billows previously unseen. It appeared as if Ezekiel were surrounded by four apparitions, winged creatures composed of smoke, their round faces filled with stern worry. Ezekiel himself was vanishing, a ghost among ghosts. She immediately thought of the mystical hierarchy of angels, the Erelim. Why in this tintype? She didn't show the print to anyone.

Chaya began to wander through the Quarter, now looking to take pictures of whoever would allow it. Her desire was to perfect her technique so that her images would stay fixed and not fade. The tailor, the

butcher, the baker, the matchmaker, the Orliansky twins, they all posed. Even the police, who paused for her in the middle of an arrest of a fruit-seller who hadn't negotiated the proper permit. She photographed the nightsoil collector, the flower-seller, the children in the playground, the headstones in the Jewish cemetery. Each she would develop in the basement, searching always for those same apparitions. They never reappeared.

EZEKIEL'S gloating during the arduous journey south would have been as unwelcome as it was justified, had he accompanied them; he had warned them, repeatedly, frequently, about what was coming. Yet the catalyzing factor for the majority of the community would be the arrest of every twelfth Jewish male in the Quarter more than thirteen years of age. The rabbi had raised enough to ransom fourteen of them, but the remaining four were charged with apostasy and murdered by bullets to the back of the heads, their families invoiced to pay for the spent rounds. This had far exceeded previous hostilities in the usually uneasy relations between Jews and Gentiles in the north, and even the rabbi had to concede that perhaps the time had come to depart the Quarter. Yet even then, he had dallied, continuing negotiations with the City Master about how much would be paid for the Jewish furniture and livestock, which the City Master had forbidden them to take with them.

Chaya had looked through her tintypes for images of the murdered men. She found them, bending to look closer at their faces, and then leaping back when she saw that they too were degrading and becoming soft-featured, turning to smoke. She vowed to redouble her attentiveness to the temperature of the mercury, the composition of the hyposulfite, the duration of the soaking. These images must survive.

WHEN the train from the north carrying his former neighbors arrived at the Central Station, Ezekiel found himself there, cursing his own sense of duty and grim discovery that the Jewish community in the capital, never mind the Gentiles, was not nearly as welcoming as he had once promised. A few other Jews, those in the capital with family in the north, were also on the platform.

Ezekiel was unsure how he knew to go to the station—and wondered where his strength came from, as he hadn't eaten in days—but was pleased with his hat, which was festooned with a feather in the manner then fashionable in the capital. He wanted his fellows to see him as already urbane and familiar with the ways of the capital; he wanted to remind the rabbi how prescient he had been, how his foresight should have been heeded.

And so Ezekiel waited on the platform, in his suit jacket and modern hat as the passengers from the north disembarked and he sought in vain his neighbors. Yet when all the carriages had emptied, he still had not caught sight of any familiar faces. The passengers and porters were a blur before him, parcels and luggage being swung onto wagons while families reunited and husbands sought their wives in the crowd. Finally, as the crowd on the platform thinned out, he saw in the distance, at the rear of the train, a string of freight cars of the type he associated with cattle or sheep, and these were being unlocked and the doors slid open by railway officials, and he could just make out, jumping gingerly from the opened doorway, a ragtag and filthy assembly of humanity who, he knew without yet recognizing them, were his fellow Jews. He hurried down the platform, searching among the bedraggled and exhausted passengers.

He had anticipated they would be surprised to see him. Instead they were calling for water, as they were desperately thirsty. They'd not had the foresight to bring water with them, so concerned were they with secreting valuables and heirlooms among their possessions before embarking on what they assumed would be a journey in second-class cars. Yet during the two-night journey they had been given just a few buckets per car; they were parched and some said the deprivation contributed to the passing away of the 92-year-old elder Caleb, who died just a few hours before they arrived in the station.

The railway company had made the small gesture of providing on the platform a barrel and ladles, and for several minutes the hundreds gathered around, drinking in turn.

"What happened?" Ezekiel asked.

He gathered that on the morning of their departure, the police force, augmented by citizen volunteers, had marched the Jews out of the Quarter, jeering at them as they went, and then loaded them onto these freight cars instead of the second-class carriages for which they had bought passage. It had been a terrible journey, hot during the day, freezing at night, but thank God nearly all of them had made it.

Ezekiel was suddenly ashamed of his hat; the ridiculous jauntiness of the feather and band seemed inappropriate to the suffering of his community. He removed it when he saw Chaya assisting her mother in gathering up their parcels. She had weathered the journey well, her cheeks retaining their ruddiness despite the privations.

"Have you found us shelter?" the rabbi inquired.

Ezekiel nodded. One of the city Jews reported that the Jewish Council had provided temporary housing in a garment factory's warehouse. Ezekiel hesitated to tell the rabbi about the Council's impatience and agitation at this influx from the north. The capital, while not under direct threat from the Sultanate, was in a state of anxiety about myriad threats, from the Partisans to the south and the Mohammedans to the north. Local Jews were uneager to add to this sense of foreign intrusion by admitting into their community many hundreds more northern Jews with their alien traditions and costumes.

The Jewish section of the capital, an area roughly congruent with the old ghetto walls but with some additions down the major commercial thoroughfares, was only a kilometer from the station, and most of the northern Jews walked to the factory while the rest took carriages and arranged with the railway company for the delivery of the luggage and trunks.

The rabbi's family would ride in a buggy, and as Ezekiel slipped aboard he sought to meet Chaya's glance but she turned away. He had been waiting since their arrival for some acknowledgement that he had been right, but most of the new arrivals were so traumatized by their journey that they were in no mood to praise him for his foresight. Riding in the clattering buggy, the family gawked at the sight of their first camels, two large, shaggy, humped creatures harnessed to a carriage, and a pair of monkeys who cavorted on a street peddler's stage, banging together miniature cymbals and even strumming a small guitar.

The warehouse had been hastily demarcated into allotments for each family with old sheets hung from string. The Jewish Council had donated bedding, straw mattresses, and a few sticks of furniture, but, for most of the Jews, this was a terrible step down from the apartments and houses they had left behind. Only a few families were accommodated in spare apartments, among them the rabbi's clan, who were given a three-room apartment with water closet near the warehouse. The rabbi was disheartened to see how his flock was accommodated, and turning to Ezekiel asked when he could meet the Jewish Council.

"Food? Tea?" the rabbi asked.

Another of the Jews told him the Council would provide two meals a day: flatbread, olives, and smoked fish or lamb.

"And chicken for the Sabbath?" the rabbi demanded to know.

Ezekiel hadn't thought about the Sabbath. "You can bring that up with the Council tomorrow."

The rabbi nodded and looked around his small apartment. His daughters would be in one room, his wife and he in another. He shook his head, as if saddened by his circumstances. "This is the best they could do."

Ezekiel restrained himself from shouting. The rabbi would soon enough understand the severity of their circumstances, somehow this had eluded him so far. A few hundred Jews had actually stayed in the north, and now Ezekiel suspected the rabbi regretted not having stayed himself.

"You urged us to come south," the rabbi said.

"Yes, to stay alive." Ezekiel said.

"We had no choice," the rabbi's wife added.

"Those who stayed. They have at least their dignity, their apartments, their possessions," the rabbi said.

"You were spat upon, denied service in restaurants, shoved. Members of your flock were killed," his wife said. "And you would stay there?"

"Don't you ever wonder if the reason we are so

oppressed is our own sense of victimization? Perhaps if we went about in the world as if we belonged, then the world would welcome us."

"Those policemen and bullies who taunted you as you walked to the station, were they responding to something you did? Did they hate you because you wanted to be hated?" Ezekiel shook his head. "Please. They hate us. That is all. And it's no different here."

EZEKIEL had taken to sleeping wherever he fell tired, in alleyways, on benches, in corners, in the shadowy recesses between buttresses and walls. Despite the nippy season, the frigid wind, he rested, indifferent to the climate or his own comfort; it was less a sleep than a cessation of movement, a stillness from which he rose and took up again his restless thoughts exactly where he left off. He stood up from a stoop upon which he had kipped and grimly reconsidered whether he should turn his back on his fellow northern rabble. He could acquire more hats, better suits, and blend in with the local community and perhaps make a life here in the capital. There were even Jewish legal partnerships where he might practice. He could be free of the burden and responsibility of those who wouldn't heed him in the first place.

The next morning he went to the warehouse before he was to join with the rabbi and a few elders from the community to go meet with the Jewish Council. There were the murmur and roar of many hundreds in the cavernous room, the smell of sweat, food, effluvia, smoke, the anxious bustle of mothers trying to make habitable an essentially uninhabitable place as fathers smoked their pipes and shook their heads at this turn in their circumstances.

Ezekiel found Chaya helping with some of the children, boiling on the one stove a large pot filled with diapers. He stood close by her side.

"Do you see now?" He tried to smile. "I was right."

Chaya shrugged. She didn't care to apportion credit or blame for their dismal situation.

"Did you bring your camera?" Ezekiel asked. Almost all of Chaya's images of life in the north had been carefully wrapped and packed for the journey south.

Chaya said nothing.

"They have entire shops here devoted to photography." Ezekiel said. "They have cameras so small you can hold them in one hand. You should see what else they have. Dogs who can smoke cigars. A chicken who can read the newspaper and perform simple arithmetic. An airship as spacious as a synagogue."

Chaya nodded, turned to the woman next to her. "They've been on the boil long enough."

Ezekiel smiled. "Chaya, now that we are in the capital, away from our old habits and customs, from the strictures of our old community, would you consider having tea with me?"

Chaya made a small gesture, a half smile. But it was enough.

Ezekiel was in a fine mood as he walked with the rabbi and other elders to the Jewish Council at the Shashnut Community Center. This wasn't even among the grander thoroughfares of the capital; downtown were the wide avenues of ministries, trading-company offices, and diplomatic missions. Yet the three- and four-story white stone buildings were impressive enough; the vast array of shops and businesses seemed to proffer all the wares of the world. The crowd streaming by was too busy to be interested in bullying the Jews. Still, even here, in the Jewish section, Ezekiel was acutely self-conscious of how his fellow northerners appeared. With their long beards, bushy eyebrows, black hats, and thick brown coats, they were easy to identify as outlanders. The youngest of the group, Ezekiel should have been walking in the rear, yet as he knew the way, he was up front next to the rabbi.

"When they see that we are devout men, honorable men, then they will provide us with more appropriate accommodation," the rabbi was saying.

"I'm not sure that is the correct approach," Ezekiel answered. "They don't have to give us anything." Behind him, the elders had been discussing the impropriety of the theory of evolution. They agreed with the rabbi.

"Oh yes, Rabbi, they can't turn their backs on their fellow Jews."

The rabbi nodded, slid his arms over each other into his capacious sleeves. Ezekiel had never before been in the council room of the Shashnut Center. The vast, wide chamber had tall casement windows overlooking the Great Synagogue; on the wall behind

the table where the Jewish Council would be seated was an immense painting of heroic-looking men in modern suits, some of them portrayed in hunting gear. When the members of the Council filed in, it took a few seconds to figure out who correlated with which of the larger-than-life portraits on the canvas.

The rabbi explained the circumstances in which his community now found itself. (Ezekiel had already made this case to unlistening civil servants several times in various lesser offices in the same building.) He explained the hardship, the suffering, the arduous journey with the elderly and very young. There was also the trauma of arriving in a new and alien city, many hundreds of miles from where they had spent their lives, and of having to sleep, for most of them, in a damp, cold space.

The rabbi implored: Couldn't the Jewish Council arrange for more suitable lodging?

The president of the Council, a man called Potok, nodded and sat back. "Rabbi Chaifetz, we acknowledge your hardship, and you have our sympathies. God help us all, we live in uncertain times when even our neighbors and friends turn against us. Here in the capital we have our own community issues. We have provided you with what we can; you will not starve while you are here. But it is our wish that you rest, regain your energies, and then journey on to your destination."

The rabbi didn't understand. "Destination?"

"Your eventual home," Potok said. "Perhaps you can return to the north. Or perhaps you will find another place of habitation."

"You would send us home?" the rabbi asked. "We fled!"

"We would not send you anywhere. We would only say that there is no room in the capital for more Jews."

The rabbi shook his head. "I walked here myself this morning, through streets with tall buildings standing side by side as far as I could see. And you tell me there is no room here for a few hundred Jews?"

Ezekiel had already heard the explanation that came next. Every inhabitant of the capital was required to hold a residence permit. They were granted by the City Masters who each year permitted a certain allotment to the Jewish community, enough to accommodate, barely, those born into Jewish families. The City Masters would certainly not grant the hundreds of permits these northern Jews required, and the Jewish Council, anyway, was not about to ask. There was very little appetite for more Jews in the capital, and even less among the Jewish Council to ask for such a favor.

"How long do we have?" asked one of the elders.

"Perhaps two weeks," said Potok. "The City Masters are not cruel men."

The rabbi nodded thoughtfully. "Can we at least have some chickens for the Sabbath?"

He was assured they would be delivered that afternoon.

CHAYA slept in a narrow bed with her sisters, a goose-down blanket pulled over her. She knew her good fortune in having these comforts. Her world, everyone she knew, was in a predicament. There had been stories in the newspaper about riots in the Jewish Quarter to the north. According to these stories, the Jews themselves had started the riots, the police acting justifiably and forcefully to restore order. Several hundred Jews, according to the story, were missing.

There was nothing left of their lives, just Chaya's tintypes, which she removed and studied carefully. She found in the images new details, the strange pointed shoes of the man who sold butter; the vast birthmark, shaped like a foot, on the matchmaker's forehead; the curious habits of the Orliansky twins, who sometimes tied their sleeves together as they walked to school. (With a start, she realized she had not seen the twins since their flight. The Orlianksys must have stayed.) And, of course, Ezekiel and his Erelim.

She wasn't sure of the meaning of any of this, yet as she tried to sleep, she could see hundreds, thousands of Erelim, taking flight from the sides of a muddy cliff, the gauzy angels rising, the spent bodies falling into a pattern, head to toe, toe to head, the corpses extending along the deep channel as far as she could see. Who or what were these people, she couldn't know. They were the dead, she understood, but whose dead? What dead? The images would burn in her retina for an instant, emerging in her consciousness like the halides on a tintype, the bodies falling, the Erelim rising. She would lie awake at night and study these images as if she were at a museum, taking in an etching.

She vowed to stop taking photographs. She didn't have the chemicals or equipment anyway. And she couldn't bear what she was seeing.

CHAYA and Ezekiel walked through the Plaza of the Heroes, dedicated to those who fell defending the state. It was late afternoon, and the grassy area around the pillar and the sculpture of soldiers at a barricade was thronged with peddlers and those hurrying to the municipal offices before closing. Chaya wore a headscarf, a coarse black dress, her thick black shoes; at a glance, she was still the northerner. Through the hardship and depredations, she retained her lush looks, her plump, freckled skin, black hair, green eyes. She was, Ezekiel reflected, what kept him tethered to the community.

Ezekiel lacked money to dine in any of the cafés to the south of the Plaza, but Chaya had enough for tea, which came in a pot and instead of glasses was served with only one cup, which was fine as Ezekiel wasn't in the mood for tea.

"Where will we go?" she asked. This was the question that had been echoing all day and night through the garment warehouse. There were other questions: Have you seen the requirements just to apply for a visa? You need a certificate of good conduct from your local police covering the past five years. Were we supposed to ask the policemen who were driving us out for a note describing our good conduct?

Slowly, steadily, those among the northerners with any connections, however tenuous, with the local Jewish community had disappeared from the warehouse, having decided that even without the proper permits they might fare better here in the capital than in risking the unknown. There were rumors that they would be sent to the uncivilized far south, where the army was still battling the aborigines.

The worry and stress had softened Chaya; she had even allowed Ezekiel to take her arm as they walked.

"I will stay in the city," Ezekiel explained, emboldened by Chaya's new affection. "I will take my chances. Stay with me."

She wouldn't deign to reply to this inappropriate suggestion. Instead, she left a few coins on the table and walked ahead of him back to her family's apartment.

EZEKIEL did enjoy the pace of the city, the indifference of its population to suffering or joy, the spectacles on every street corner, the aborigines balancing plates on sticks, the brown-skinned men in turbans who made snakes dance, the puppet shows where the various battles against the Sultanate and the Partisans were reenacted. And Ezekiel was able to move through it all as if invisible. For the first time, he reflected, this is what it must be like to be a Gentile, to pass through the world as one among many, not to be singled out, not to be meted special treatment, to be as unnoticed as air. He had always been the outlier, the Jew among Gentiles, the secular Jew among the religious, until finally, here in the city he could walk as if a man among men. Here in the capital, he could wander unchallenged into offices and inner sanctums of executives and politicians, take a seat across from them, watch as they barked orders and studied foolscap. He had listened as the Jewish Council deliberated the fate of the northerners, had known before even the rabbi about the island that had offered to take them. The governor general of the little island had been swayed by the fee promised by the Jewish Council, a tax in gold per family to be paid from whatever the northern Jews had secreted away on their journey south.

Ezekiel made his way to the rabbi's apartment, where his knock was unanswered. He heard voices inside and took the liberty of opening the door slightly. Gathered in the larger of the two rooms were several community elders and the rabbi. The rabbi was seated on the large mattress; three of the elders had somehow wedged themselves into a wicker two-seater. They were discussing an island, the island Ezekiel had heard about before, where there was space enough for the Jews.

"An island without water," said one of the elders, "does not sound like a promised land to me."

"They have water," said another. "Just, not so much water."

This island, apparently, had suffered greatly during a blockade imposed by the Sultanate during a

previous nadir in relations. The blockade had brought great hardship to the island. Many had died.

Many Gypsies had perished.

So the Gypsy quarters, a series of tenements built in the lee of the walls of an old fort, were abandoned. The governor general of the island had invited the Jews. He welcomed the Jews!

Ezekiel shouted: "You see? Was I not right? Is the world indeed not against us?"

No one responded as Ezekiel stormed out and into the next room.

Chaya was there, buttoning the shirt of her younger sister Haviva.

"An island," she was whispering. "Can you imagine? The sea! We can eat fish."

"And swim!" said Haviva.

Chaya smiled. She patted her sister and told her to help Mama in the kitchen.

"Will you go?" Ezekiel asked.

Chaya did not answer. She turned to the cabinet and the space beneath it, withdrawing again her tintypes. She had taken to studying them at every opportunity now, for they were changing with each inspection. The Orliansky twins, she had noticed, had now appeared in other tintypes, their faces on the bodies of Erelim. What this meant she was too frightened to say. They had stayed behind, and they too must have perished. She continued to flip through her images, the butcher, the tinker, they were all floating above their neighbors, angels captured in midflight. She gasped. Or was it all just a trick of the light, a degradation of the image, the mercury further dissolving the silver halide, the image unfixing from too much hyposulfite? Or were these faces, the many faces? Was she going mad?

Ezekiel stood over Chaya as she held her hand over her mouth, choking back a sob. He pressed his mouth against her nape, his nose against her ear. She didn't resist, instead shaking with what Ezekiel interpreted as joy.

FINALLY, a letter arrived containing a list of the hundreds who had perished in the north. An awful list, the Orliansky twins, the butcher, the tinker, the man who sharpened knives and his wife, so many, all dead.

The rabbi had decided they would take up the offer to settle on the island.

"If they will have us, then what choice do we have?"

Not much was written about the island. There had been the blockade; there had been some hardship. It had in years past been a popular destination in the hot season, a place for holidays. The rabbi seized on this as proof that it couldn't be so bad.

"But the homes of Gypsies," asked Ezekiel. "And what exactly happened to the Gypsies?"

The question was ignored as the northern Jews began their preparations. What was needed? Shoes? What plants would bear fruit? Should they bring chickens? The Torah from the northern synagogue was safe in the rabbi's possession, but would there even be a prayer house on the island?

The garment warehouse had become funky from the lives of hundreds in a cramped space. They took their meals, made their toilet, washed at basins. The rabbi could barely stand the stink and limited his visits. Chaya dutifully turned up every day to do what she could to help those in need. She couldn't help feeling sad for the children, yet those playing in the narrow filthy alley between buildings or on the patch of sidewalk in front were the lucky ones. Those left behind, those whose names were now being prepared for the memorial prayer of El Moleh Rachamim, they were the unlucky ones. Her tintypes were now so foggy and hazy with the smoky images of the departed that she could hardly make out the subject matter. Streetscapes of ghosts, of wispy children, smoke ribbons of adults, the cloudy bodies of matrons, all of it a chemical swirl, smudges upon the black and white tintype, a world dissolving.

THE Jewish Council allowed the El Moleh services to be held in the Great Synagogue. In front of the Torah ark, bathed in the yellow and orange light cast by sun shafts filtering through the stained-glass mosaics, stood Rabbi Chaifetz and Rabbi Kaufman, the latter wearing the golden, silver, and black-patterned robes handed down by generations of his predecessors. Behind and above the columned bimah was a limestone gallery with great round windows, each comprising twelve smaller,

circular windows, one for each biblical tribe, around a *hamsa*-shaped central pane. Several dozen candelabras blazed against the sun, the *ner tamid* over the ark burning more brightly than the rest.

The men and women had separated into two seating areas. The rabbis began chanting together, and were soon joined by the congregation.

God full of compassion
Who dwells beyond,
Locate a true rest,
Under the wings of the Shekhinah
In the heights of the holy and the pure,
Who shimmer like sky at first light,
For the soul of Avram ben Adam and Sara
bas Israel and Mata,
Who are on the path to their next world
of being …

Ezekiel sat to the rear of the temple, reciting the prayer, the litany of names, stirred by the farewell despite his disbelief. He had tried to signal Chaya when she entered and took her seat near the front. He wanted to tell her that he too had decided to join, to go with them to this mysterious new island. Perhaps it was a new beginning for all of them. He was having trouble imagining such a place—to be surrounded by water on all sides, to be warm all the time, to catch fish from the sea. He was eager to share with Chaya his new optimism. Surely, the rabbi by now valued his wisdom; Chaya must have been moved by his prescience. The fiery light cast by the candelabra, the *ner tamid*, and the late sun dissipated, slowly glowing over the heads and along the marble floor to where Ezekiel bobbed in prayer.

Still more names of husbands and wives:

Tinod ben Maresh and Amy
bas Shlomo and Par

Aaron ben Zushi and Sophie
bas Nathan and Sanna

How many had they lost? One hundred and eighty souls gone, the worlds extinguished. The governor general of the north had proudly proclaimed the region free of Jews.

And the rabbi added:

And the first who perished in these
troubles, the young man Ezekiel Elijah bar Zev

Ezekiel was stunned to hear his name. What an embarrassing mistake. He rose quickly, on steady legs, and ran forward, shouting.

"I'm here. Alive, you idiots! I'm here."

The rabbi continued, the congregation rocked and murmured in prayer.

They did not hear his voice. They did not see him.

But Chaya felt a flushing, heard a soft rush of air, detected a heat flash, her skin rose for an instant at the feeling. For she had felt his presence without putting words to it. She turned and could make out, in the high vaults of the temple, against the blue and orange glass, the arches, the dome, a smoky apparition, the Erelim, Ezekiel, finally gone up, up, up to rest.