The Brothers of AUSCHWITZ

A harrowing untold story of hope and heartbreak

MALKA ADLER

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Table of Contents

About This Book

This ebook meets all accessibility requirements and standards.

Please be advised this book features the following content warnings and proceed at your own discretion: graphic depictions of violence, child abuse, anti-Semitism and genocide.

This book is dedicated to
Israel, Leora and Avi
Ravit, Yonit and Hadar

In the darkest part of the sky
The light breaks through.

Prologue

Israel, 2001

7:30 in the morning and it's frrrreezing.

I'm huddled in a heavy black coat on the Beit Yehoshua railway platform. I have a meeting with Dov and Yitzhak in Nahariya. There was a time when Yitzhak was known as Icho and Dov as Bernard. Yitzhak is seventy-five and can still lift a whole calf. Still strong. Dov at seventy-six is bigger than Yitzhak and loves cocoa cookies, television and peace and quiet. They have wives. Yitzhak has Hanna, a goodhearted woman. Dov has Shosh, who is also goodhearted.

The rain stops falling like a scratch. Like pain. At first it falls hard, abundantly, then trickles down. Branches drop to the ground indifferently. Shhhh. The tops of the eucalyptus trees travel from side to side in the wind and already I need to pee again. The loudspeaker announces the next train. The lamp flickers. In two hours' time I'll meet with Yitzhak and Dov. Yitzhak no longer pushes forward. And Dov never pushes, not even before. Dov will bring good coffee and cookies with cocoa and raisins.

Pew. Pew. Pew.

A man in a long coat fires at the approaching train. Pew. Pew. Pew. Wearing a beret pulled to one side, he holds a black umbrella and fires. His face is divided in dark lines, forehead, cheeks, chin, even his nose. His face is taut as if someone had slipped underwear elastic under his skin and pulled and pulled, almost tearing it, but no. He takes short hurried steps, flapping his arms hither and thither as if brushing away a swarm of flies or insects, or stinging thoughts, and firing. Raising his umbrella high in the air. Aiming at the eucalyptus trees or the train and shouting, pew-pew. Pew-pew. Pew.

I look the man straight in the eye as he shouts, pew. Pew. Pew. Pew. Pew.

I'm beside him now and he says stop. Stop. Aims and fires, pew-pew. Pew. Pew. Pew, all dead, he says and wipes his hand on old pants. I cough and he frowns, thrusting out his chin and biting his lips as if to say, I told you, didn't I tell you? You had it coming, sickos. And then he breathes three times on the end of the umbrella, phoo, phoo, phoo, brushes imaginary crumbs from his coat

of the umbrella, phoo, phoo, phoo, brushes imaginary crumbs from his coat, straightens the beret and returns to the middle of the platform. To and fro. Back and forth and back again, his hands in fighting mode all the time.

The soldiers have grown used to Friday shootings, the great rage that explodes on the platform from seven in the morning.

Everyone knows he comes from Even Yehuda on his bicycle. Winter, summer, he comes on a Friday. A constant presence. The trains pull out and he remains until noon. Firing without resting for a moment. In summer he uses a cane. People say, eat, drink, rest, why tire yourself, go home, too bad, but he's in his own world. Seven in the morning, Friday, he must be seventy, maybe less, shooting on the platform in dirty clothes with wild, white hair. Every Friday he leaves on his bicycle at twelve-thirty on the dot. The cashier tells everything about him. Eager cashier. Fat cashier with blond bangs and black hair. The man has no watch. There's a clock on the station wall. But he stands with his back to it. It isn't important to him to see the time. He knows. He prepares the Sabbath for his dead.

Ah. The Beit Yehoshua platform is the closest thing to the platforms at Auschwitz. This is what the cashier tells us and we fall silent. At Auschwitz he touched his family for the last time. That's what Yitzhak would say, and he'd raise his hat and shout, why should Jews stand on platforms at all? Are there no buses? Sometimes you have to stand on a bus, well, a taxi then. Taxis are expensive. So what, he refuses to stand on the platforms. Dov would cough if he heard Yitzhak getting mad about something. Then Dov would be silent. I'd pay no attention. I'd look first at Yitzhak, then at Dov and turn on the tape. Yitzhak would say loudly, why do you stand on the platforms, why don't you take a taxi, too. Yes.

Now the eucalyptus trees are still. And the cashier is telling someone about Yajec. She has to talk fast before the new person shouts at Yajec. Every Friday the cashier protects him. Every Friday there are people who don't know about him, haven't heard him despair. The cashier has heard him and tells the older people so they won't bother him. Leave him alone to kill with his umbrella, pew. Pew. Pew. Pew-pew. Once she told some new people, leave him alone, leave him be. Yajec was a little boy when he grabbed his mother's dress, crying, yes. He wept incessantly, screamed, don't leave me, but poor woman, she pushed him towards the group of men, and he ran to her, Mama, take me, but poor woman, she didn't. Looking at her child, her face white, she screamed in his ear, Yajec you aren't staying with me, go over there, you hear? And she slapped him and pushed him fiercely. You heard me. Yes. She went with the women and he stayed with strangers who didn't see him because he was seven or eight, yes.

The train entered the station and stopped. Quiet. Three minutes of quiet