

NIGHT. AUGUST 1989

Something terrible is about to happen.

It's exactly 1:30 a.m.

I don't need a watch to know.

I wake every night at this time to make sure they don't kill us all.

First I check that the chain is still around my neck.

Hanging from the chain is a small plastic bottle I once found.

Inside the bottle there's a note.

The note tells you how to find this notebook.

That way you'll know what happened when you find my body.

I open the small bottle and check that the note is still inside.

The note says:

*The closet in the children's room:
open the far right shoe drawer all
the way and lift up its front edge. The
notebook is on the floor under the
drawer. It explains everything.*

I put the note back into the small bottle and close it.

I get out of bed and walk quietly from my room to the entrance-way. I walk in my socks so no one hears my steps. Dad's keys are hanging from the lock. Still, they may have forgotten to lock the door.

I push down very slowly on the handle so as not to make a sound and then I gently pull on the door.

It doesn't open.

It's locked.

I push down very slowly again on the handle and again pull on the door.

And again.

A little quicker now but still quietly, 7 times:

Click

Click

Click

Click

Click

Click

Click

The door doesn't open.

I walk back to my room and pass by Dad and Mom's room. They're asleep. Their breathing is peaceful and deep. They don't breathe quickly like I do.

Back in my room.

I remove a ruler from my pencil case.

I take quiet steps back to the kitchen.

No one hears me.

Stuck on the fridge door is a magnetic calendar with pictures of wildflowers. Every month, you tear off a page and the picture changes. This month there's a picture of a red-black flower with the words Coastal Iris written underneath. Above, in bigger letters it says August, and higher up it says 1989, and that means I'm already 10.5-years old because I was born in 1978, which is a number that divides by 2 without a remainder but not by 3 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 7 or 8 or 9. Only by 2.

I open the fridge door. The light from inside floods the kitchen. I wait for a minute to make sure I haven't woken Dad or Mom. If

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they wake up, I'll say I was thirsty and got up to get cold water from the fridge.

I take the ruler and measure the level of water in all the bottles in the fridge. In one there's 20 centimeters and 7 millimeters and in the other there's exactly 15 centimeters. I don't use a pencil to mark the level of the water on the bottles because Mom tells Dad that's not appropriate behavior for a child my age or any child at all actually, and it worries her.

I'll check the level of water in the morning again. That way I'll know that no one added poison or some other material to the bottles.

I check the level of the water again.

One last time and I slowly close the door.

I peer through the crack in the door to make sure the light in the fridge goes out just before the door closes completely. It's important.

I go into Mom and Dad's room and stand in front of their bed.

They're asleep.

I watch them for a few more minutes.

They don't know how dangerous it is.

If I tell them they'll die.

I need to protect us all.

I go to my room and put the ruler back in the pencil case and the pencil case back in my schoolbag. In just a minute I'll put the notebook back in its place under the drawer.

Mom says I should keep a journal.

That's what the school counselor told her.

"It'll help him," she said.

December 3rd 2016

It was 11 in the evening, and an old Land Rover headed down a dirt road under the light of the moon, leaving a whitish cloud of dust in its wake. The nearby town was fast asleep, and apart from the chirping of a variety of insects, the only sound that could be heard was the crunching of gravel under the Land Rover's wheels and the quiet hum of its engine.

The Jeep passed through an open steel gate and continued on for a few dozen meters before coming to a stop outside a small house, then the engine went silent. The dust cloud momentarily enveloped the vehicle, and then drifted back down to the ground. The car's lights went out and the driver's door opened. An elderly man, his hair white and short, stepped out of the Jeep and turned toward the house, striding briskly.

The door to the house opened, and in the dim light the silhouette of a second elderly man was visible. He welcomed his guest with a warm embrace.

“Amiram. It's been a while since we last met.”

“A long while, Avner. And I know I'm not supposed to be here. Thanks for agreeing to see me on such short notice.”

Avner poured two cups of Turkish coffee and the two men sat at a round kitchen table. The light from a naked fluorescent bulb on the ceiling cast their shadows on the kitchen wall. Avner sipped his coffee. He waited for his visitor to begin the conversation.

Amiram paused for a moment, then placed a thick manila envelope on the table. From it, he removed a large lined notebook, swollen with extra pages that had been stuck inside.

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“I don’t know what to do with it.”

“Where did you get it from?”

“It arrived by messenger from the Aharoni-Shamir law firm. I checked them out. He went to see them ten years ago, in 2006, gave them the notebook in a manila envelope bearing my name and address, and paid them \$15,000 in cash to hold it for ten years and send it to me today. They haven’t seen him since.”

“And they’re positive it’s him?”

“I showed them a picture, and two employees identified him.”

“And what if you’d moved in the meantime? Then no one would have found you. It’s not like we’re listed in the telephone directory.”

Amiram sighed. “He left them with detailed instructions in case they weren’t able to find me. They had the names and addresses of Shaul Adler, Ronen Agami, Michael Azran, and Motti Keidar, with instructions to approach them one after the other; and if none of the four authorized the handover, the instructions were to deliver it to the Israeli ambassador in London in person; and if he refused to meet—then to the foreign minister’s bureau in Jerusalem; and if the minister wouldn’t take personal delivery of the package, then to hand deliver three copies to the *Yedioth Ahronoth*, *Haaretz*, and *The Jerusalem Post* newspapers.”

“Suits him.”

“He’s a psychopath,” Amiram said in a deep voice. “Read the first few pages about how as a child he was convinced someone wanted to murder his family. And that’s just the beginning. It gets a lot worse.”

The two men sat in silence for a moment. Amiram lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply. “It’s a bombshell,” he said. “It ties us to the mass murder in Canada in 2006. It explains disappearances that the operators division has been investigating until now. He outlines work methods he invented. It’s a fucking record of everything he did since he was ten—plain and simple. Everything’s documented. I’m retiring in two years and he comes back now to haunt me from the grave.”

Avner blew on his coffee, sending a small cloud of steam skyward, took another sip, and remained quiet. Amiram took one last puff from his cigarette and stubbed it out in the ashtray on the table. The only sound was from the insects outside.

After a long moment of silence, Avner glanced over at the kitchen window and then fixed his gaze on the notebook on the table. “Go home, Amiram,” he said. “This notebook doesn’t exist. This meeting never took place. Move to a different house. Your grandson could be the one to open the next package, and it’ll blow up in his face.”

Amiram nodded. He stood up from the table and left the house without looking back.

Thick and heavy black clouds filled the night sky and the moon peeked down from between them. Tomorrow would bring rain.

Avner looked again at the notebook on the table. The sound of the Land Rover’s engine faded in the distance and then the house went quiet. Avner stood and picked up the ashtray. He emptied its contents into the trashcan, washed it under the tap in the kitchen and placed it on the windowsill. He dried his hands on a small kitchen towel, returned to the

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table, sat down in front of the notebook again, and sipped his coffee. He was tempted momentarily to burn the notebook and wash the ashes down the drain in the kitchen sink.

Instead, he picked up the notebook and started reading.

NIGHT. SEPTEMBER 1990

I run fast along the sidewalk. I'm on the way to school. My steps are a i r y. The trees flash by quickly. The running doesn't tire me.

I pick up speed and dive to the ground. My body's horizontal, my arms spread out on either side.

My body doesn't hit the sidewalk.

Instead, I hover in the air, approaching the ground faster and faster.

The street is empty and no one sees me.

I move upward, away from the sidewalk.

Higher and higher.

Skyward.

I wake up at 1:30 and go check the door and the bottles in the fridge. I used to have to set my alarm to do so. I'd place it under my pillow. But not anymore.

The calendar on the fridge door says it's the Blue Lupine month of September 1990, and I'll be in middle school next year. 6th grade is boring. I don't get why we need a whole lesson to learn 3 pages from a math workbook. I read the entire book in the first class and solve all the exercises.

At the end of the lesson I approach the teacher and give her the workbook. She looks at me with eyes that move quickly and asks if I did it with Mom or Dad.

"Mom and Dad are very busy," I say to her. "They don't have time to help me with my homework."

The teacher smiles at me and says she'll check the workbook

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at home and that if I got everything right, I can sit in the class and read through a middle school math book.

“Everything’s been solved correctly,” I say to her.

Time turns differently for me. I don’t smile and I don’t laugh. Not even in my dreams. I don’t understand what makes others smile or laugh. I don’t even try to understand. Most of the time I protect my family, read a book, or write in my notebook. I create programs on the computer that take mathematic models and display them graphically, like for example the dispersion of a shockwave or a constructive interference. I try to listen to music but it doesn’t interest me in particular, other than helping me to identify repetitive sound patterns.

NIGHT. OCTOBER 1991

The sun is shining. The train left Tel Aviv just a few minutes ago on its way up north, and I place the book I'm reading on my knees for a moment and look around. I look at the passenger sitting opposite me. It's like looking into a mirror. The same face, the same hair, even the same small scar on his chin.

He looks astounded.

"You look like my twin brother," he says.

Another boy looks at us from across the aisle. He looks exactly the same, too.

A commotion erupts in the passenger car as more and more sets of identical twins and triplets and quadruplets and quintuplets discover one another.

"Where are your parents?" asks the boy who looks just like me.

I look around. They're not there.

"Leave me alone." I say to him.

I get up and go to the door that connects the cars. I'm in the last car and only one door connects it to the one in front of it via a sleeve.

The door is locked. I push down hard on the handle again and again. Nothing happens.

The commotion in the car continues as everyone tries to figure out the strange resemblances of their lost brothers and sisters. No one is looking outside, except for me. What I see outside is no less strange than what is happening inside.

Everything that flashes by is replicated several times. There are no solitary trees, for example, they're always in groups of 3

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or 4—absolutely identical. The same with the electricity poles and the houses.

I feel nauseous.

I open the window to breathe in some air but only feel worse. When I stick my head out the window, everything seems normal. The replicated trees are solitary once more, and the foursomes of electricity poles become single poles again. I draw my head back inside, and everything outside appears multiplied again.

A boy shouts next to me, “We’re five, you’re the fifth in our quintet. We’ve overtaken everyone, the rest here are threesomes and foursomes.”

I ignore him and try again to open the door and move to the next car. The door doesn’t open and the car in front of us moves off quietly into the distance. Someone has disconnected the last car and we’re gradually losing speed.

“What’s going on?” one woman yells.

“Why have we stopped?” someone else shouts.

“Try to open the doors.”

“What’s this darkness?”

“Mommy!”

I wake up at 1:30, take out my notebook and go to check the front door and the bottles in the fridge. On the way back to my room I stop briefly in the bathroom and check my chin. There’s no scar.

I don’t have friends and I get bored being with other children. They’re all stupid.

I refuse to go to after-school activities or to Scouts.

Dad tells Mom that it worries him.

“Why don’t you go outside for a while to play with Eyal?” he says to me. “He’s in your class at school, right?”

On Saturday he sends me out to play with some children who live in the same building. We go to a demonstration that’s taking place a few blocks from the building where I live. People are shouting and blocking the road, and the police are trying to disperse them.

The police bring a big truck. There’s a structure like the turret of a tank with a steel pipe sticking out of it on its roof.

The truck starts to spray the protesters with blue dye. I stand to the side and watch everyone run away. A little girl in a floral dress with a long black braid in her hair runs and trips over someone’s leg. She looks about 6. She loses her balance and falls.

Freeze frame.

In front of the girl there’s a fence that separates the road from the sidewalk.

In just a moment the girl is going to crash into the pole of the iron fence in front of her.

Her hands start to move forward to break the fall, but she won’t be able to stop herself. The fence is too close.

She realizes she’s not going to be able to prevent the fall. A look of fear in her eyes. I absorb it.

Release frame.

The girl’s face slams into the iron pole and she sits down quietly next to the fence. She doesn’t cry.

You can’t see her face.

It’s covered in blood.

The blood runs down her face and over her chin, coloring the flowers on her dress red.

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Someone picks her up and runs toward the police officers.
“Call an ambulance,” he yells.

I wait for the commotion to die down and approach the fence.

Under the fence there’s a bloodstain and a few small bits of gravel.

I pick up a small stone and examine it.

It’s not a stone.

It’s a tooth.

My fingers are covered in blood.

I taste it.

It’s less salty than mine.

I open the small bottle on the chain around my neck and put the tooth inside together with the note.

December 3rd 2016

Silence and darkness all around.

Amiram wasn't in a hurry. He rolled down the window of the Land Rover and allowed the cool early-December wind to rush in and fill the interior of the car with the smells of winter.

It was good to be rid of the notebook. He felt relieved. As if he'd had a lump in his throat and was now free of it.

There are no streetlights along the access road to the town. Two rows of tall cypress trees block out the light of the moon, casting the road in further darkness. The two beams from the jeep's headlights slice through the black.

Avner will know what to do with the notebook. He always knows what to do, Amiram thought.

He reached out and turned up the volume on the sound system. He was listening to an argument on Army Radio between the program's host and a listener who'd called in and was on the air. One was saying that celebrating New Year's is a Christian practice and has no place in the Jewish state, and what's with all the parties that take place, and that it isn't right; and the other was arguing that there's nothing wrong with it, and why is a fuss made about every bit of nonsense in this country, and that we have no self-confidence if we're scared to celebrate a holiday that the whole world celebrates, and that we're a country of paranoid people.

He must start dealing with moving, Amiram mused. Avner's right, he can't afford to take any risks at all. He'll

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Speak to his wife tonight. She probably won't like the idea, but it has to be done.

The host of the program ended the argument by abruptly hanging up. "And now let's listen to 'If You Go' by Idan Raichel, followed by a news update."

Amiram pressed on the lighter button in the car and, while waiting for it to heat up, reached for the box of Marlboro Lights in his shirt pocket, took out a cigarette, and slipped the box back into his pocket. He withdrew the lighter from its socket and directed its glowing red end toward the tip of the cigarette in his mouth. His lips could feel the heat of the metal coil. Even if he hadn't taken his eyes off the road in that second, he still wouldn't have been able to see the thick steel cable, painted black, that had been tied to two thick-trunked cypress trees and stretched across the road.

The front end of the jeep struck the cable and the back end was catapulted into the air, causing the vehicle to somersault and land on its roof in a ditch by the side of the road. The cigarette flew out of Amiram's mouth and the lighter was thrown from his hand. The seat belt saved his life; but because the old Land Rover was not fitted with an airbag, his head slammed hard into the steering wheel and Amiram lost consciousness. He remained strapped in the seat of the overturned vehicle, its engine running and its wheels pointing skyward, still spinning.

* * *

A figure dressed in black emerged from the ditch by the side of the road and quietly walked over to the steel cable. The

person released one end of the cable and crossed the road to untie the other, cheerfully humming. After rolling up the cable and inserting it into a backpack, the dark-clothed figure then walked casually over to the overturned Jeep, looking up and down the road to make sure no other vehicles were approaching.

At closer range, the figure looked like a young man. He peered into the jeep and waited for a moment, stroking his beard. He then reached out and removed the Jeep's key from the ignition. The engine went silent. The Jeep's wheels stopped spinning. The man switched off the vehicle's lights, removed the pistol from the unconscious driver's belt, and emptied his pockets. Wallet. Cell phone. He removed his ID card from the wallet and looked at it.

"It's really very good," he said to himself.

The bearded man then sat on the ground in front of the open door of the overturned Jeep, crossed his legs, and stared with interest at the unconscious passenger.

* * *

Amiram didn't know how long he'd been lying there like that, upside down in the Jeep. But what he did know when he came to was that something was wrong. His head was throbbing, both from the blow it took on the steering wheel and also due to the fact that he was strapped upside down in his seat. How had the Jeep flipped like that without him crashing into anything? He had indeed been fiddling with the lighter, but there was no car coming in the opposite direction at the time and there had been nothing on the road. He was sure of that. His reflexes kicked in.

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Hand to the right hip.

The gun wasn't there. It must have been thrown aside by the force of the crash, he thought.

His cell phone wasn't in his pocket either.

Amiram groped around in the dark for the release mechanism of the seat belt. He pressed down on the button, taking another blow to his head as he fell from the driver's seat onto the roof of the overturned vehicle.

He noticed after freeing himself that the Jeep's door was open. He crawled out of the vehicle, freezing in place at the sight of the bearded man sitting in front of him, legs crossed and a gun in his hand.

"What's going on here?"

"Hi. I've come to get you. Take these handcuffs. Use one pair to shackle your legs and then tie your wrists with the other pair. Drink this when you're done."