

Chapter One

The call that changed Nobel laureate Omri Zohn's life came at the hour when the most distasteful acts are perpetrated in Washington, D.C.—when Congressmen can board flights home before the news hits the airwaves.

Omri forced one eye open and squinted to see the phone's caller ID. 202 area code. His friend, U.S. Senator Joseph Frank. His heart fluttered, or maybe even skipped a beat and he tried to calm a shaking hand as he reached for the phone.

“Omri! It's Joseph.” The voice boiled with tension, urgency. Zohn sat up in his bed and struggled to open the other eye. He looked at his clock: 2:58 a.m.

“They've done it, Omri!” Frank's hoarse utterance quaked between a rasp and a gasp. “The Senate just approved enforcing the United Nations Resolution.”

A crushing weight settled on his chest. “Oh, my Lord,” rushed in a hushed tone through his lips—more a moan than a statement.

“We Jews are now essentially prisoners in our own countries,” Frank said. “Not allowed to go to Israel or any country that defies the UN Resolution outlawing emigration to the Holy Land. Get your escape plan in motion, now, as I will mine.”

“You said ‘we,’ Joseph. Even *you* can’t leave?”

The three-term senator from Florida grunted. “Even I. Beware of men in dark suits at your door. They’ll hold you here.”

Omri shook his head in the dark, then said, “My brother, Ariel, just called me yesterday. He’s got stage-four cancer.”

Joseph groaned.

“Are there no exceptions, Joseph? Any chance at all I can get permission to visit him?”

“fraid not.”

Anguish! Omri gritted his teeth. “Joseph! You know my son and his wife and child moved to Israel a year ago. You’re saying I can’t see them again, either?”

“Not a chance,” Joseph said, “unless Benjamin and his family come back to America. But if they did, then, of course, they couldn’t be

allowed back out of the country. Not unless they've obtained their Israeli citizenship already,"

"Not yet."

Omri flicked on the light of his nightstand and swung his legs off the bed. If the sky was falling, he had to move, get his plans in motion.

"Homeland Security had representatives in the chambers, sitting on the edge of their seats, waiting to give the 'go' signal to headquarters," Frank said. "Making it more repulsive is today is August second, the last day before the six-week summer recess. So my colleagues—the brave sort they are—are about to vanish into the countryside and avoid any nasty questions."

Omri chuckled ruefully. "No surprise there."

A pause, then Frank added, "You realize this begins the curse on America."

Omri knew the scripture: "I will bless those who bless My people, but those who curse them I shall curse."

"God speed, my friend!" Joseph said. "Hopefully we'll meet again in Israel. Shalom."

The line clicked off.

Omri settled the landline phone in its cradle, like it was a grenade. He peered at his bedside clock. 3:01. Appropriate, he thought, recalling the words of Psalm 3 verse 1: “O, Lord, how many are my foes! How many rise up against me!”

He spoke softly the seventh and eighth verses: “Arise, O Lord! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked. From the Lord comes deliverance. May Your blessing be on Your people.”

He took a moment to reassure himself the plan he had in place was truly what he wanted. His wife and daughter were buried in Israel, killed by a terrorist bomb at a bar mitzvah celebration for their nephew a dozen years ago. His boyhood home was there. Besides Benjamin and his new family, Ariel and his family, many cousins and friends lived there. And this ban would prevent him from ever seeing them again, ever paying respects to Adina and Devorah, ever setting his feet in the Old City, ever praying at the Western Wall. Besides all this, Israel was the only country in which the Jews could defend themselves.

Omri stiffened his back, swung his feet out of the bed and onto the small sheepskin on the wooden floor. The time has come, he thought.

This will be the last aliyah, the final return of Your people to their homeland, Lord. If we can get there.

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Vice President Daniel Fireside walked to his office, a Secret Service man at each shoulder, the hall filled with the hum of phone calls, the tapping of fingers typing tweets as senators hurried to get out of Washington even though daybreak was still three hours away.

The chills of triumph gave him a buzz but Fireside fought to contain his elation. He'd proven he could indeed push measures through a stubborn Congress—and this particular legislation was the most contentious in his twenty-two years in this combative Congress in this quarrelsome town, the hub of what was more and more a belligerent country. While he'd needed to merely cajole many colleagues into he and the President's way of thinking, he had to bludgeon others with substantial threats before they succumbed. The eighty Congressmen

who'd flipped their votes on Obamatrade overnight years ago paled to this victory.

Most people would be astonished how much you could accomplish by threatening the loss of a coveted committee chairmanship, or removal of a major Naval contract from a person's district. Perhaps even more revealing was the senators who would succumb to your will if you merely dangled the idea of slapping their name on a bridge or airport or federal building. *Pride, thou art my velvet glove.*

People were all so—well—self-absorbed, self-centered and parochial. Politics possessed powerful tools, even when you were voting to outlaw an entire race within your country from traveling to their people's homeland. Well, it served the blasted Jews right; they'd been too powerful for too long and felt far too pleased with themselves and their accomplishments. Fill their champagne glasses with tar pitch for a change.

The atmosphere outside the Senate chambers crackled with electricity all about Fireside. It was obvious he wasn't the only one grinding his teeth. Senator Halsey was leaning on one leg, then another, like she had

to go pee. Senator Franceour was maybe one decibel down from shouting at an aid.

Standing in a wide hallway with gleaming floors and walls soaked with two centuries of rich history, Fireside thought of the consequences. The Party had surely alienated the Jewish vote, but the Muslims' high birth rate had already overtaken the Jews in numbers—just like they would in Israel with this ban—so it was a net win at the polls.

Chuck Claiborne, Fireside's chief of staff, was doing his job, refereeing a scramble of senators pushing each other aside to get the Vice President's ear. One step removed from a Macey's Bargain Basement free-for-all.

“Fireside, you'll pay dearly for this. Your career's over!” yelled Senator Bill Bloom.

Fireside winked, smiled and—the trifecta—shot him a thumbs-up. *Billy-boy, dream on. I just jumped aboard a rocket ship, pal.*

Fireside tapped one of his Secret Service protectors on the shoulder. “Wait here by the door. Nobody comes in.”

The agent nodded and the two men took up their posts as Fireside escaped to his office. He closed the door—and the hubbub—behind him. He had to place a most important phone call.

Taking a seat behind the historic double-pedestal, mahogany Wilson desk, he wondered how many of his predecessors could have pulled off this coup. John Breckinridge? “Cactus Jack” Garner? No and no. Not even the brilliant John C. Calhoun.

None, except perhaps LBJ, who, like Fireside, had used this office as an elegant and convenient setting for informal party caucuses, press briefings, ceremonial functions and—ahem, this was the bend-your-arm-’til-it-breaks part—private meetings. LBJ might have been considered the master, but Fireside had just one-upped the big Texan’s Gulf of Tonkin Resolution with this Jewish emigration ban. *Check and mate.*

Placing his hands on the desktop, he took a deep breath, picked up the red telephone and punched in a number he knew well.

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When the phone rang beside him, President Herald Smith switched on a low-wattage bedside lamp. He hadn’t been able to sleep, but had fidgeted

under the sheets for hours, awaiting this call. He'd spent his last drop of political capital on this UN Resolution, declaring failure was not an option. Though no one else knew it besides his wife, his future beyond the Presidency hung on its success.

His neck hairs prickled in anticipation. Was it good, news, bad news, or some dire gray-area result? Smith despised gray areas.

Picking up the phone, he murmured, "Yes?"

"It's done, Mister President. We're a 'go!'" He could see Fireside glowing on the other end like a schoolboy after his first frolic.

Smith's eyes shot wide open and he released a breath. "Fallout?"

"Some outrage, plenty of grumble. Good thing Lieberman and Shumer retired. A few almost stalked out of the chambers. Well, Frank and Weiss did—as we predicted. Frank leaving was okay because I thought I'd shoot him, he was so distraught, so righteous, so—Jewish. Broke an arm here, a leg there, but we avoided insurrection and got the law passed without a real bullet being fired, although I'm glad Armstrong and Bloom weren't armed.

“Great work, Dan! Glad you’re at my side. Nice to have a majority in both the House and Senate, eh?”

Hanging up, the President turned to his wife.

“The vault door’s slammed shut on the Jews,” he said with cold certainty.

In the faint shadows of the room, Theresa Smith smiled back and whispered hoarsely, “Well done, my love. “You can say you’re actually protecting the Jews. Besides, what Jew in their right mind would want to go to Israel, what with the Arabs firing rockets at them day and night?”

Smith nodded, then asked, “Like a drink in celebration?”

“In the middle of the night?” Theresa reached for her nightgown hanging on a nearby chair. “Good idea.”

Smith swung his feet over the side of the bed and said, “You know when I first saw this could happen?”

“When?” The First Lady was now on her feet and slipping them into slippers.

“Back in August 2014 when the UN Human Rights Commission came down on Israel for *not* sharing its Iron Dome technology with

Hamas. The fallout about said everything. Imagine sharing life-saving technology with the terrorists trying to kill you!

“Then, in 2015, when we made the deal with Iran which, everyone knew, paved the way for them to go nuclear.”

“M-hm. Shows how much hatred the UN hates the Jews.”

“They’re not alone,” Smith said. “Gin and tonic?”

His wife nodded. “You know me so well, Mr. President.”

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Fidgety! Agitated! Whatever’s bothering my Spirit, I hate it, Bunyan “Jacko” Jackson thought, forcing himself from his bed, through the sliding doors to the patio. He stood—all six-foot-four inches and two hundred and thirty-four pounds of him—and pressed his hands against the waist-high railing, peering out onto the dark Atlantic Ocean beyond his expansive lawn.

He tightened the sash of his flimsy cotton robe over his pajamas. It was a warm summer night on the outskirts of Portland, Maine. The nightglow of the city to the north turned the sky a pale fluorescent green. A faint scent of salt drifted in the air. *Tide’s out.*

The first couple bars of Louis Armstrong's *What a Wonderful World* on his cell phone wafted through an open window in his bedroom. He hustled back to his room. Who was in the hospital, or who died? What would cause a call at this hour?

He answered, "Jackson."

"My friend, it's me." The distinctive Israeli accent of Omri Zohn made Jackson stand straight in anticipation. "*Aliyah* is on. Plan B."

Click.

Jackson's mouth went wide. He scowled at the phone as if the item were a Yankee pitcher, or an implement able to answer the stark questions: How could we? How could the United States do this to its own people? Have we not learned from what we did to the Japanese Americans during the Second World War? Have we not learned from slavery? Have we finally succumbed to an Islamic-driven United Nations gone rogue?

In dismay, he murmured, "Well, Satchmo, today's it's not such a 'wonderful world.'"

He laid the phone down on the bedside table and sat on the king-size bed. He inhaled deeply and peered at a shelf below the tabletop. Reaching down, he pulled out a leather-bound copy of *The Pilgrim's Progress* handed down by his Great-great-great-great-grandfather Tice, who had escaped slavery in 1860. The book was an allegory of a man's journey from the City of Destruction, the world, through all sorts of obstacles and diversions to the Celestial City, heaven. It was the book from which Tice had learned to read and taken to heart deep things of God.

Jackson thought of the book's story, then recalled the passage in the 9th chapter of the Book of Amos: "I will bring back My exiled people Israel..."

This was it: the last *aliyah*. And here he was—retired Major League baseball player, Hall of Famer and descendant of a slave—positioned to pay forward what so many good-minded people had done for Tice. Jackson brought the little book to his lips for a light kiss. "We'll get them to Jerusalem, Grampa Tice. I promise."

He set the book down, picked up a thick, well-worn manuscript in a homemade binder—Tice’s hand-written account of his own escape from the South. With a deep love of an ancestor he’d never met, Bunyan frowned at the thought the world had come to this. He stood and walked to a two-shelf glassed-in bookcase and pulled out a world atlas. Opening it up revealed a PGP mobile phone hidden in a hollow. He grabbed the phone and texted an encrypted message. When deciphered the note read: “*Aliyah* is on. Plan B.”