

CHAPTER 1

HE HAD THOUGHT that watching a movie would agreeably distract him, but the images unspooling on the tiny screen and the tinny sound coming through the headphones were an irritant, like an inexpert touch between a tickle and a scratch. Matt sat back in his seat and took off his headphones, crammed a pillow behind his head and shoulders, closed his eyes. The events of the past day came streaking toward him, and he opened his eyes again quickly. He stole a glance at his partner, Daniel. But there too he had to look away, the sight was so shocking. Daniel's head hung, his chin touching his chest; Matt had called the doctor and gotten some Ativan, and Daniel was far gone on it. His lips were slack, his eyes cratered and bruised. In a single day his dark hair and beard stubble had become streaked with gray, something Matt had always thought was a horror story cliché. Daniel was all of thirty-eight and looked ancient and decrepit, Matt thought, and was immediately ashamed of himself.

Matthew Greene was six years younger than his partner, tall and thin, with a head of thick brown hair that lightened in the summer sun. He had a handsome angular face, and a grin that placed a perfect demonic dimple in his cheek, so that his smile looked more wicked than he intended. Now his eyes were grainy with exhaustion. They were a

few hours into their flight to Tel Aviv, and meal carts were starting to be rolled down the aisle, bringing with them the smell of cooked meat. The Ativan was in Daniel's bag in the overhead, and he contemplated getting up and fishing it out. He hadn't till now, because somebody had needed to be on the ball, but now he felt wasted, his mind humming and strung out.

Was it only yesterday that the call had come from Daniel's father? Time seemed bundled and knotted, and when he tried to calculate the hours backward, they evaporated before his eyes. When the call came, he had been sitting at the computer in his study, watching a chickadee make restless, shivery passes at the bird feeder in the bare backyard. After he ended the call, he put the phone back into its charger very carefully. He stood and looked around, then sat down on the floor. The room was thunderously quiet, and he was bewildered to be alone with this information. He wondered, When did an event like this actually *take*? If he sat there very quietly, could he prevent it from coursing out into the wider world, where it would happen to other people instead of just to him and Daniel's father? The dog ambled up and he clutched its big head, trembling, thinking that every moment that passed without his breaking the news to Daniel would remain a happy moment from Daniel's old life.

Twenty minutes passed. He was conscious of his bare feet getting cold, of the dog's sigh, and of the study darkening as clouds passed over the weak March sun. Finally, the image of Daniel working tranquilly in his office, innocent of the knowledge that his world was about to be destroyed, became even more unbearable than the idea of telling him, and he stood. He went into the bedroom and put on a sweatshirt, found his coat and keys, and went out to the car. As he drove, he let his mind deliberate but forbade his heart to register, practicing fiercely how to say it, how to build up to it gradually without torturing Daniel with suspense. He had made Daniel's father promise not to call him at work, to let Matt break the news himself; he was glad he could be the one to tell Daniel but agonized over it too, wondering if Daniel would ever for-

give him for being the one to tell him his twin brother, Joel, had died.

He pushed back to recline his plane seat. He remembered getting to Public Affairs and going into the office of the director, Daniel's boss, April, so Daniel could make a quick exit without having to excuse himself. Matt stood before her and made his first attempt at saying the words out loud: *Daniel's brother and sister-in-law were killed in a café bombing in Jerusalem.* April cried out and clutched her heart; he had never uttered words before that had so much sheer physical power. They gave him an embarrassing sense of self-importance, as though he were bragging, or exaggerating, and his body was spastic with apology, even though he knew, as she was telling him, that there was no need.

It was weird, he mused. As a kid, he'd dreamed of being famous, as an artist or an actor. Those dreams had subsided as he'd gotten older. But here all that dream-energy had come rushing back, like a floodlight dazzling him. His mind buzzed unpleasantly around those feelings, knowing that he wasn't really culpable for whatever weird feelings came to him in crisis, but also wondering if they said something definitive about his personality. He stood, took down Daniel's bag from the overhead compartment, found the pill bottle he'd been looking for, and shoved the bag back in. He sat down with a thud and a sigh, and put one of the tiny pills on his tongue.

By the time he'd opened the door to Daniel's office, he'd hardly been able to breathe. Daniel had been sitting at his desk with a manuscript in front of him, scratching his head with a big pensive scowl, and at the sight of Matt his face had broken into a smile whose sweetness Matt was certain he would never recover from. He'd breathed "Dan," and "Honey," and burst into tears. Daniel had rushed around the desk, banging his leg and swearing, and Matt choked out the words as they clutched each other, his head over Daniel's shoulder and his eyes squeezed shut because he couldn't bear to see. He felt Daniel slip through his arms to the floor. Kneeling beside him, his fingers twined through Daniel's dark hair, his throat seizing, Matt had raged against the hard fate of this man who so didn't deserve it, and wondered whether

Daniel's face would ever light up again at the sight of him. Certainly it hadn't since.

He remembered the minutes passing, and he remembered growing drowsy, and his mind beginning to drift. He'd listened to the sounds of office life outside the door, made out a phone conversation between one of the secretaries and what seemed to be her daughter complaining about her husband. They spent so much of that day down on the floor—not only because it was hard to stand, it seemed to him, but also because they were trying to cringe low to the ground to make themselves as inconspicuous as possible, like terrified animals. Finally, Daniel lifted his head and whispered, "Take me home." He let Matt help him to his feet. "Easy, baby," Matt murmured as Daniel stood unsteadily, looking at him with wide, shocked eyes.

After he'd gotten Daniel home, he'd been on the phone nonstop. First with Daniel's father, who was channeling all of his horror into obsessing over whether they should fly El Al or Continental. And then with Continental, trying to get a bereavement rate for a next-day flight. Trying to figure out, without bothering Daniel about it, how they'd get a death certificate in Israel. Finding the passports and ascertaining with relief that they hadn't expired. Logging onto Weather.com to see what the weather would be like in Jerusalem this time of year, and seeing that it fluctuated wildly, overpacking. Calling their friend Cam to take the dog. Interrupting that conversation when a call came in on call-waiting from the president of the college, offering his condolences and his services. Matt thanked him repeatedly, burdened by his windy solicitude; Cam was crying on the other line and he wanted to get back to her.

All the while, Daniel had been lying on the bed, shaking, his knees drawn up and his arms thrown over his head; his jacket and tie and shoes were strewn on the bedroom floor, and he ran periodically to the bathroom to vomit. Matt kept approaching the edge of the bed, and then, overwhelmed by a sense of his own irrelevance, turning away. He picked up Daniel's jacket from the floor, brushed it off, and hung it

in the closet. Finally, he lay down carefully beside Daniel, enveloping him with his arms and drawing the stockinged soles of his feet up his calves, trying to still his shaking with his own bigness, his warm body. Daniel's shirt was cold and damp from sweat, and his teeth were chattering. "Honey, you're chilled," Matt had murmured, "let me get you into the shower." But Daniel had let out a moan and blindly thrown an elbow that struck Matt in the cheek, and Matt had stumbled off the bed and ran out of the room. In his study, he stared out the window at the yard, which was blurred and somber in the fading light, and fought back tears of fury. He touched his smarting cheek, which hurt all the way to his teeth, and told himself not to be such a big pussy. There was a pack of Camel Lights stuffed in a drawer; he took one out and lit it, blowing smoke forcefully out the open window. He knew he was being stupid and childish. And yet, fury coursed through him, and on its heels, a terrifying intimation of the suffering to come.

MATT REACHED FOR THE in-flight magazine, flipped through it looking for the crossword and saw that someone had already done it. He studied the map of Continental's flights, and then the floor plans of various European airports, and then he read an article on how to respect and handle the customs of foreign businessmen. He hoped Daniel's father, up in business class, saw it, because he knew he'd like it. He was a corporate executive, and from the time they were teenagers, Daniel and Joel had bought him, as birthday and Father's Day and Chanukah presents, books on how to be effective, how to motivate others, how to think outside the box. Sam's total immersion in the corporate mind-set was something Matt found both alienating and adorable, and he related to Sam like a fascinated anthropologist, getting him to talk about company retreats where they did relay races based on army training exercises, or used their teamwork to build a jet engine out of matches and cardboard and nail polish. It was Rosen family lore that Sam once read a book about how to utilize humor to defuse difficult interpersonal rela-

tions. When his wife, Lydia, saw it, she'd smacked her forehead with her palm. She called him the only Jew in America without a sense of humor.

Matt stuffed the magazine back into the seat pocket and opened his tray table. Around him were the shuffle of newspapers, the drone of the engines, the metallic sound coming through people's earphones, the murmur of *beef or chicken?* Across the aisle from them, in the three middle seats, sat a religious family with a fat baby and a toddler in a frilly dress who was peeling stickers off a sheet and laying them carefully on her armrest. Exploded all over their seats and the floor were wet crumbs in smashed Baggies, crayons, plastic pieces from games, empty yogurt containers, Goldfish crackers. The mother was kerchiefed and red-cheeked, joggling the baby with an expression of hassled professionalism, and the father pale, with blond ringlets down the sides of his face, reading a small prayer book. There was something a little hot about the guy's detachment, his look of being above it all.

Matt needed to pee, but he'd waited too long; the food cart was blocking the aisle behind him. He wondered what Daniel's parents were eating up in business class—probably not something called “beef” or “chicken.” They were probably drinking heavily, too. The four of them had found one another in the security line in Newark, where Daniel's parents, looking like ghosts in expensive travel coats, had pulled Daniel toward them with a cry and clung to him while Matt dragged their bags and gently herded the huddled group forward, ignoring the curious glances of other passengers. He was sweating and winded by the time they settled in at the gate. It pained him to see how shock had blunted the normally ingenuous features of Daniel's father; Matt could see the tiny webs of capillaries around his nose, and when Sam put his and Lydia's passports and boarding passes into the inside pocket of his jacket, his hands shook. Lydia had sat huddled in the crook of Daniel's arm, from time to time grasping his sleeve and whimpering, “Those poor babies,” and “Why didn't God take me instead?” Her dramatic dark eyes were bloodshot, her face dusted over with recently reapplied face pow-

der. Matt felt terrible for her, but her behavior made him think that she had seen one too many Anna Magnani movies. Since when did she even believe in God? He had gladly gone off to perform helpful tasks, buying a neck pillow and some Tylenol for her, and two new luggage tags for his and Daniel's bags, and *Time* and *Entertainment Weekly* for himself.

Now, as a tray was set in front of him, he had the sudden thought: Maybe Lydia's response was a Jewish form of expression? Maybe the Jews were one of those howling or keening peoples, their mourning a residue of the customs of their often-bereaved peasant ancestors? Matt's fingers grew still over the silverware packet he was trying to open. He was destined to be ashamed of himself, he was learning; since yesterday's call, there was virtually no thought that came without recoil. So, believing it was always better to face his demons, he made a mental list of all the thoughts he was ashamed of:

1. Was grief going to make Daniel look old and shriveled?
2. And if so, would they ever have halfway decent sex again?
3. He clearly wasn't going to make the Rufus Wainwright concert on the twenty-sixth: Could he just let that go?
4. Would his, Matt's, needs and aspirations ever be considered important again?
5. Would he ever get to just be a normal, young, shallow queen again, or would tragedy dog him for the rest of his born days?

But Matt knew these questions were bullshit, that he was evading the real issue: If Joel and Ilana had really done what they said they were going to do, he and Daniel would be returning home with their kids, and the life he knew would open up into dark seas he couldn't even begin to chart.

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THREE MORNINGS AGO, MATT had awakened singing Gershwin:

*They laughed at me wanting you—
Said it would be Hello! Goodbye!
But oh, you came through—
Now they're eating humble pie.*

He lay smiling next to Daniel in bed, with his hands folded behind his head, singing to the ceiling in a husky morning voice. It was their fourth anniversary; four years before, Matt had come up to Northampton to visit the shy Jewish cutie he'd met at a party in New York. He knew Daniel had never imagined being with him for so long; he'd thought of Matt as an amazing sexual windfall, and continued insisting that it was just an affair even after Matt moved permanently to Northampton, even after Daniel's friends began to tease him that his "affair" had begun wearing Birkenstocks with socks, a virtual guarantee that he'd never be allowed back in the city. Daniel just couldn't believe—and sometimes Matt couldn't believe it himself—that a young gay man would choose to leave New York to live in Northampton, which the *Enquirer* had once called, in an effort to shock, Lesbianville, USA.

That morning he turned to Daniel, stuffing a pillow under his neck. "Remember how you thought I was just some shallow hottie, but then you couldn't help falling in love with me?" he asked.

The memory of that morning made Matt clench his teeth, and as he picked at meat in gravy with peas and carrots, his partner still unconscious beside him, his mind cautiously turned over the question of what the terrain was like in Daniel's head. Like a tornado, he imagined, whipping trees up from their roots and slamming them into cars. He remembered an educational segment he'd recently seen on the Weather Channel, where the quiz question was: *During a tornado, where is the safest place in a mobile home?* After a commercial break they returned with the answer: *NOWHERE; leave immediately.* It had shocked him, the cruelty of the trick question; wasn't it bad enough that these people had

to live in mobile homes? They were advised to go outside and find a regular house—*some wealthier person's decent home*, he had acidly glossed to Daniel—and failing that, to find a ditch to lie in. He had been indignant. “Yeah, you pathetic trailer trash, go lie in a ditch!”—that’s basically what they’re saying, isn’t it?”

He set aside his roll and piece of chocolate cake for Daniel, hoping he’d be able to choke down food that was mild and sweet. He looked at Daniel’s sagging head. *NOWHERE*, he thought, *that’s where it’s safe to be*. Leave immediately, go lie in a ditch.

AFTER DINNER AND A long wait in the bathroom line, Matt read the movie and TV reviews in *Entertainment Weekly* and drifted off with the magazine in his hands. He was awakened by murmuring voices and the jingle of a bracelet. Lydia was standing over them, bringing in the sweet musky smell of her perfume, which Matt always smelled on his ears and collars for a few days after they spent time with her. He looked at Daniel and saw that he’d awakened too, and had a cup of ginger ale on his tray table. He pressed his hand, which lay on the seat between them, against Daniel’s knee, in a discreet hello.

“Darling,” Lydia was saying to Daniel, with a hollow trace of her old intensity, “for the shiva, I think we should pick up some *bourekas* at that little bakery on Joel’s street.”

Daniel laid his head back. “Okay, Mom,” he said. His voice was hoarse, and he brought his fist to his mouth and cleared his throat. His shirt was open at the neck, the curls in the back of his head flattened.

“It’s just that Ilana’s parents are utterly useless in this regard.”

“Okay,” Daniel said. His gray face shifted into something like its usual life as an idea came over it. “Actually, I think the visitors bring the food—the mourners aren’t supposed to have to cook. And are we even sure the shiva’s going to be at Joel and Ilana’s? Maybe the Grossmans will want to have it.”

Lydia blinked. “That’s out of the question.”

"Why?" Daniel asked. "Wouldn't it be better for the kids to have a place to come home to where there aren't a million people sitting around?" Gal and Noam were with their *sabba* and *savta*, Ilana's parents, now, but the plan was to bring them to their own house when their uncles and other grandparents arrived.

Matt could see the struggle break out on Lydia's face, and the stubbornness. "Don't you think the people who loved Joel and Ilana will want to gather one more time at their home?"

Daniel shrugged, and Lydia's eyes welled up. "And don't you think I'm thinking about those children?" she hissed. "I think of nothing else!"

"What are *bourekas*?" Matt asked.

Lydia looked down at him incredulously, and Matt was sorry for the silly question. In front of Lydia, he was a chronic blurter, and he knew that she didn't like him very much. Apparently she'd loved Daniel's first boyfriend, Jonathan. Matt—much younger than Daniel, eye candy, a goy, a lover of television rather than art or opera—was clearly the inferior and less appropriate partner.

"They're small triangular pastries in filo dough," she said.

"Oh."

"They're savory, not sweet. They're filled with cheese or spinach. They're a very popular finger food in Israel."

"I see," Matt said.

"Mom," Daniel said, "why don't we wait till we get there, and maybe this shiva thing will just work itself out." He closed his eyes.

Lydia nodded, drew herself up, and said to Matt with a strange pride, "The place down the street from Joel's house has some of the best *bourekas* in the city."

When she headed back to the front of the airplane, Matt said, "Well, *that* was a surreal little exchange."

Daniel's eyes were still closed. "She's trying not to have to imagine how much of her son's body has been blown to bits."

Matt bit his lip, scalded.

Daniel opened his eyes and looked at him with a weak appeal, laid a hand on top of his. "Forgive me if I'm an asshole, okay?"

"Okay," Matt whispered, squeezing Daniel's cold fingers, unspeakably grateful for the gaze that seemed to recognize him for the first time since the news had come.

"Do we have a piece of paper and a pen?"

"Sure, baby."

Matt fished them out of his travel bag, and Daniel sighed, then bent over the paper and began writing in Hebrew. Matt looked at the round strong veins on Daniel's working hand, which passed rapidly from right to left. "What are you writing?" he asked.

"A eulogy for my brother."

Daniel covered the page and then stopped and gave Matt a stricken look. He set the pen down, took off his glasses, and started to cry. Matt gripped his hand. He had never seen Daniel cry until last night, and he was a little scared he'd cry like that now, in public. He'd seen him well up once or twice, and that was shattering enough to witness. But not really crying, and certainly not crying like that, writhing, screaming his brother's name, his teeth bared and his face sealed off and unseeing so that he seemed like one of those creatures, like otters or monkeys, whose faces lie on the disconcerting boundary between human and animal. Now Daniel was quiet, tears streaming down his face. *Oh*, Matt's heart clamored, *what should I do?* How could he be a comfort to this man who had been such a comfort to him? And those kids! Noam was only a baby! He wasn't up to it, he knew it. He would blow it again, the way he had with Jay, with all of the bad-mouthing and posturing, and his boycotting the memorial service, and the crushing fear that he had failed to be there for his best friend in the right way.

Oh poor poor Joel, Matt thought, and Ilana's face too flashed into his mind, big and raucous, and her sloppy ponytail, and tears rushed, hot and brutal, into his eyes.

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SEVEN HOURS LATER THEY stood at the airport curb, huddled around a small, curly-haired woman—Yemenite, Daniel would later tell him—holding a walkie-talkie and wearing a neon-green vest marked with bold Hebrew lettering. Her name was Shoshi, and she was the social worker sent by the city of Jerusalem. The Middle Eastern morning sun was bright and penetrating, and they had taken off coats and jackets and put on sunglasses. Around them, cars jostled and honked, and trunks slammed shut. Taxi drivers in open-necked shirts and Ray-Bans jingled keys in their hands as they approached exiting travelers. While Shoshi and Daniel spoke in Hebrew, nodding rapidly, Matt bent over and pulled down his right sock, his heart still thrumming with excitement and indignation at the lunatics in baggage claim. People had bumped into him and shouldered in front of him, and an elderly man on a fanatical push to the conveyor belt had jammed his luggage cart into Matt's heel, knocking his shoe clear off. Matt had wrestled it back on, surprised by the rage surging up his throat, and the rude old prick hadn't even apologized. Now Matt gripped the handle of his own cart with renewed, glowering concentration. He heard a lot of English spoken in American accents with strange glottal emphases. Their language sounded self-important and bullying to him, as though they were talking to children or foreign servants, and thinking that many of them were probably settlers, he felt a strong antipathy for them. Daniel loathed them. Each time they saw one of them interviewed on television, he would shout, "What's the matter, the U.S. isn't fundamentalist enough for you?!"

Matt's heel was chafed, but not bleeding, and he pulled up his sock and straightened. The sun was warming him to the bone, and there was the smell of something sharp in the air, like citrus or guava, mixed with exhaust fumes. This country seemed to him to be a different earthly element than his own, and he found that both exciting and a little frightening. He wasn't well traveled; his only trip outside the U.S. had been to Amsterdam with Jay years ago, right out of college. Here, under a cloudless sky, people were smoking and gesticulating; everyone had a

cell phone attached to his or her ear, even the children. Although Matt was shocked by the open display of assault rifles, and officially disapproved of the soldiers in uniform, he found them beautiful. They were short and brown-skinned and very young.

He began to notice that passersby were casting curious and compassionate glances at Daniel's family. He stepped closer to Daniel, laying his hand on the small of his back, and bowed his head into the conversation. The social worker had switched to English, and was telling Daniel's parents that a van would arrive shortly to take them to the morgue. She touched their elbows as she spoke. She projected an aura of gentle authority, and looked into their faces in a way that was somehow both searching and undemanding. Matt had a powerful impulse to sidle up and confide in her. *I'm the gay boyfriend! I'm the goyfriend! I'm in a foreign country where I don't speak the language!*

At that moment Sam frowned and pointed into the distance, where a small group of photographers were snapping pictures of them with zoom lenses. "What are they doing?" Shoshi's face darkened and she took off toward them with her arms outstretched; when she got near them, she wagged her finger in their faces, barking commands. They gave her a short argument, and then walked away, one of them turning to utter a final deprecation.

The family had instinctively turned their faces away, and when Shoshi returned, panting and apologizing, they moved their bodies to gather her within the pack. A white van pulled up to the curb, and a driver wearing a yarmulke got out and put their luggage in the back as they climbed inside, Daniel helping Lydia into the front seat. Daniel sat with the social worker in the middle seat, leaving Matt and Sam in the back. They settled into the air-conditioning, wound up by the unexpected fracas with them at its center.

"What was that all about?" Sam asked.

"Joel was a minor celebrity," Daniel reminded them; he'd been the host of an English-language television interview show.

There was a pause. "How did they know we were . . . ?" Sam trailed

off as Shoshi pointed to Daniel's face. "And my emergency gear," she added.

As the van pulled through the guard stations at the airport exit, Shoshi twisted to sit sideways and told them that the ride to Abu Kabir would take about twenty minutes. Her English was proficient but heavily accented, and from time to time she hesitated and said a word in Hebrew to Daniel, who translated it for his family. She told them that Ilana, Joel's wife, had been identified by her parents, but the other body had been held so that, if it was Joel, he could be identified by his immediate family. She pronounced Joel "Yo-el," its Hebrew version.

"If it is Joel?" Lydia asked sharply.

"If it is," Shoshi said, giving her a steady look.

"Why do you say *if*?" Lydia's voice was rising.

"Mom," Daniel murmured.

"We cannot say for sure until he is identified."

"Are mistakes ever made?" Lydia insisted. She had twisted around in her seat, and was trying to pin Shoshi to the wall with a single flashing look.

Shoshi was quiet.

"My wife is asking you a question," Sam said sharply from the back. Matt started. He had never heard Sam talk like that; his authority was normally genial. Watching Shoshi's sad and patient look, Matt surmised that they did in fact know it was Joel, but that she wasn't allowed to say so until his body was officially identified.

Finally, Shoshi said, "It is very rare."

Lydia's mouth quivered, and she turned stonily toward the front. Matt looked out the window at long fields, a flat and hazy stretch to the horizon, where he imagined the ocean to be. Irrigation pipes sent up a fine glinting spray. Until that moment, as they'd moved busily through passport control and baggage claim and customs, there had been a faint sense of reprieve. There was the unreality of being in a foreign country, the disorientation of a different time zone. And then the weird and unexpected excitement of being the targets of paparazzi. But now, a

crushing silence fell over them. Sam exhaled next to Matt, giving off a smell of alcohol, morning breath, dry cleaning.

No one spoke until the van pulled off the highway onto a smaller road and Shoshi turned again. They were there; a sludge of anxiety seeped through Matt and turned him cold. "I want to tell you a little bit about what will happen inside," Shoshi said. "You will be brought into a room where police will ask you questions about Joel's body. I will come with you." She paused, trying, Matt imagined, to give them time to comprehend these barbaric sentences. "They will ask you questions about his body from his toes to the tips of his hair. Then you will be brought into another room to wait. And finally, you will be taken to what is called the separation room, to identify the body there."

The van stopped, and an electric gate was opened. Matt read the English part of the sign, *Institute of Forensic Medicine*, saw photographers bunched outside the gate, getting shots of the van with zoom lenses. They pulled in and parked in a small lot beside another van, and the driver turned off the engine, leaving them sitting there in silence. "I can't move," Lydia whispered. Matt knew the feeling; his legs were numb, and it felt as though the force of energy required to lurch into movement would require a strength way beyond him. It was Daniel who pressed down the latch on the door; it slid open with a roar. "Let's get this over with," he said.

THERE WAS A BRICK path leading to an unobtrusive entrance. There was a hall with white chairs. Around them, people babbled and wailed. The smell was awful—a combination of what? Formaldehyde, for sure, and burnt hair, but other smells too, hideous ones for which Matt had no olfactory memory or vocabulary. They were urged to wash their faces, and to drink some water. Before Matt knew it, Daniel was stuffed in a chair between his parents, his hands thrust helplessly between his knees. Matt slunk around like the loser in musical chairs. Finally, Lydia snapped, "Sit already, would you?" A horrible wave of righteous indig-

nation rose in his throat. But he sat in a chair beside Sam and stuffed it down, his throat cramping with the effort.

He ran his hands over his face. The sound of crying roared in his ears, and his mind worked at the sound until it smoothed out, became an abstract pattern.

They didn't have to wait long to be ushered into the office with the police; Matt learned later that, except for Joel and an Arab dishwasher, the other fourteen victims had been identified already, and that the remaining mourners in the hall were identifying the bodies of victims of a massive pileup that had occurred the previous night, outside of Tel Aviv. He touched the social worker's sleeve. "Should I go with them?" he asked.

Her look was kind, but doubtful. "The room is quite small," she said.

"Oh, okay then," he said in a quick, anxious display of cooperation that he immediately regretted when the door closed behind them.

He thought he could safely leave the building for a little while and be back by the time they emerged, so he wandered outside. He stepped out of the sun into the shadow of pine trees, gravel crunching beneath his shoes, grateful for air that didn't stink of mayhem. His dress pants were damp at the seat and thighs. An old man was sweeping pine needles off the paths that ran between the stuccoed buildings, a lit cigarette in his mouth, and Matt wondered if he dared ask him for one. He felt shy; he didn't know if this dark-skinned fellow was Jewish or Palestinian, and didn't in any case know either language. He slowly walked toward him, and when he met the man's eye, he mimed smoking a cigarette, his eyebrows raised inquiringly. The old man rested the broom handle against his armpit and fished out a rumpled pack from his breast pocket, extended it toward Matt, and Matt drew one out. With a leathery hand, the man gave him his own stub of a lit cigarette to light it with. Matt inhaled deeply and blew two thin streams from his nostrils.

"Thank you," he said, nodding, in this act of bumming a smoke, without social class or nationality, a man among men.

He strolled back to the building, holding the cigarette in graceful fingers. He leaned against the stucco wall, closed his eyes, and rested. Instantly, his peace was shattered by the vision of Joel's body being torn apart, and he opened them again, found himself laboring to breathe. Inside, they were talking about every inch of Joel's body. Matt felt an overwhelming tenderness toward it. Joel looked a lot like Daniel, but with the slight beefiness of the straight man. Matt and Daniel had been together for a year before Matt met him, and he'd refused to believe that Joel was straight. When Daniel said, "He's *married*," Matt asked, "To a woman?" He quizzed him suspiciously. Had Joel gone to Israel to try to be straight? Did he think a macho culture would straighten him up? Was Daniel sure they were *identical* twins? Then one summer, Joel came to visit them in Northampton and brought his wife, Ilana, and Matt took one look at the butch with the booming voice and bruising handshake and shot Daniel a look: *Why didn't you tell me?*

Joel was all *ta-dal*—he had a strong sense of entitlement, but mostly in a nice way. He was a child who had madly flourished under the praise he received when he brought home his accomplishments. He acted as though he believed he was handsome, and that *made* him handsome, although in fact, Daniel was much more so. He was the best dancer Matt had ever seen in a straight man. He flirted with Matt, as though Daniel's gayness gave him a delicious permission; he was even a little inappropriate sometimes, maybe coming on too strong as the cool and gay-affirmative straight twin. He pretended that he was dominated by his giant wife.

Matt crushed the cigarette under his shoe, suddenly sickened by it, and went back inside.

Two big, loutish sons were muttering in Russian, bent over their keening mother, who wore a shapeless housedress and a scarf on her head. The sounds she made seemed to come from some hideous marshy place inside her, and the men winced and muttered, patting her shoulder with stiff paws. Matt took a seat and closed his eyes. An hour passed. He opened his eyes to see Daniel's ghastly face; the Rosens had

returned. He patted the seat next to him, and when Daniel sat, he took his arm, but Daniel moved it away. Matt looked around at the hall: For Christ's sake, who was capable of crawling out of their own misery to notice they were queers? He told himself: *Daniel can do anything he wants right now, don't get mad.*

They waited. They were taken outside to a different white house, and led into another office, where they waited some more. "Why must we wait so long?" Lydia moaned, and then her eyes fluttered and she fainted. "Hello!" they called, and there was noise, and shuffling, and curt instructions. Daniel and Matt knelt, cradling her head; Shoshi ran out and came back with a wet paper towel, with which she patted Lydia's forehead. They brought her staggering to her feet, her dark hair limp around her face, and pressed a water bottle to her lips. Sam paced around her, swatting at the fabric of her suit where it had become dusty from the fall. The door opened, and Shoshi said, "Now we will go into the separation room, to see the body. I'm sorry to say that the body must not be touched, since it has been prepared for Jewish burial."

They stared at her dumbly. Matt felt goose bumps shiver along his forearms. They heaved themselves to their feet and followed the social worker down a hallway. Matt stopped at the door. When it opened, he could see into the bare room where a man in a lab coat stood beside a covered body on a pallet. He had a sudden passionate urge to say good-bye to Joel. Could he go in? But Daniel and his parents glided toward the pallet without looking back, the door swung closed in front of him and Shoshi, and he felt that without an explicit invitation, he couldn't.

His eyes were dry and itchy, red-rimmed; he rubbed them furiously with his fists. He'd been kept from Jay, too. That officious little prick Kendrick had neglected to inform him that Jay was on a respirator, and the following afternoon Matt had heard from a different friend altogether that Jay had died that morning.

He pressed his forehead against the glass of the small window in the door.

Lydia and Sam stepped back, and Matt got a glimpse of Joel. His eyes galloped over the covered body to see if it looked intact, and it did, he thought, except for maybe in the middle; he squinted and blinked hard, until his mind reassured him that the whole body was there. Joel's face was white, his dark hair swept stiffly back off his forehead as if by a sweaty day's work. Daniel looked somberly at him, then bent and murmured something into Joel's ear. The doctor was speaking to Daniel's parents with a serious and patient look, as though he wanted his words to be remembered. He stopped from time to time, waiting for them to nod. Beside him, Shoshi spoke. "He's saying that Joel was killed on the spot, and didn't feel anything."

Part of Matt's mind caught that, and he wondered if the doctor said that to everybody. But mostly he was watching Daniel, and something was coming over him that took his breath away. He squared his shoulders. At that moment he knew the answer to the question with which he'd often secretly tormented himself: whether he would be loving enough, selfless enough, to fling himself into the path of an oncoming car to save Daniel. He would, he suddenly knew he would. He felt stern and important, for all that he was the one left unnoticed outside the door. History had entered their lives with a sonorous call, and it was up to him to shepherd Daniel, and the children too, through this dark flood and onto higher ground. There was no room to ask whether he could do it or not. He had to.

"Good-bye, Joel," he whispered. "I love you."

Shoshi placed a gentle hand on his arm. He was trembling.

BEFORE THEY COULD GO, they had to sign. Shoshi brought them a form in Hebrew and Daniel perused it. "It says that you identified Joel, and that the body is his," she told Lydia and Sam, handing Daniel a pen.

"They wouldn't let me touch my own son," Lydia murmured.

Daniel put the form down on a table and leaned over it with straight arms. He stared at it for a long time. Matt stepped up to him and laid

his hand on his back, and felt it heave. Finally, Daniel turned toward his father, his face crumpling like a child's. "Dad," he whispered.

Sam stepped forward and took the pen from him and ran his finger down the page, which was mercifully indecipherable to him, found the blank line, and signed.

And with that, Joel was dead.