

CHAPTER 1

The hot desert wind rose in the east with the sun. Known as the *Khamseen*, the breeze moaned over the besieged Old City, piling misery onto misery. There was no refuge from it, no shelter or shade from its incessant presence. The air above the pavement buckled and quavered in its heat. Breathing was labored. Living creatures became weak and motionless; even walls and stones shimmered and trembled as the *Khamseen* passed. Dust swirled into the atmosphere chalking every surface with gray film. By noon the sky congealed into a pale canopy of blue-white haze.

Today the *Khamseen* carried the reminder that Jerusalem perched on the rim of stark and brooding wasteland. Immense nothingness, bleak and sterile, stretched out beyond the border. And from these sterile wastelands men of Jordan, Syria, Iraq, and Egypt came with the *Khamseen* to encircle Jerusalem, to blow the hope of Israel to dry dust. Gnawing hunger and thirst were their allies against the Jewish population of the Holy City. Water rations were reduced to four cups a day per person. Food allotments dropped to seven hundred calories a day—two hundred less than had been possible in the Warsaw Ghetto.

Lori Kalner, her dust-caked face streaked with tears, knelt with Alfie Halder and Rachel Sachar beside the roses of Gal'ed. Here the dead of the Jewish Old City had been planted.

Three-year-old Abe Kurtzman leaned against Lori and whispered the names of his brother and sisters.

The child asked Alfie, "But when will they wake up?"

Alfie responded, slow and childlike in his reply, "When the true King comes back to walk in the garden. He will wake them up."

"And Mama?"

"Mama, too," Alfie said gently. The body of Abe's mother was still beneath the rubble of their home. Perhaps it would never be reburied in the patch of earth on Gal'ed Road.

"I would like to be here when they wake up." Abe looked toward the plume of smoke that rose into the sky like a banner beyond the walls of the Old City. Then he put his small hand on Lori's cheek. "Why are you crying, Lori?"

"Because I am glad . . . glad you are awake. We were waiting for you to wake up." Thoughts tumbled through her mind. Long days had passed since the child had eaten, willingly sipped water, or spoken. Now at the moment of a Jewish victory against the Arab advance into the New City, the little boy had returned from the brink of death.

It seemed like a miracle to Lori. Was it also some portent of salvation for the desperate Old City populace?

Perhaps now the Haganah and the Palmach would once again break through to relieve the Jewish Quarter!

"We should go back to the Hurva." Rachel touched Lori's arm in warning and scanned the sky as if expecting a renewed shelling from the Arab Legion. "Moshe and Dov are on their way back through the tunnel." Rachel's voice was hopeful. Moshe and Dov, like the Hebrew spies in hostile Canaan, were still behind enemy lines and trying to get home.

"Go ahead," Lori encouraged, understanding Rachel's urgency to know if her husband would truly make it back to safety. "You should be there. We'll be along."

Rachel gave Abe a brief squeeze and hurried away toward the towering stronghold of the Great Hurva Synagogue.

"I don't want to go." Abe followed Rachel with his gaze, then shook his head adamantly. "The soldiers will make us go away."

"Aren't you hungry, Abe?" Lori urged. Then she gave Alfie a pleading look. Could Alfie convince him?

The big man cleared his throat. "Hey, Abe. It don't matter if they make us leave the Old City, see. The true King will still come sometime soon. And the bad soldiers will have to leave, but we will come back."

What was Alfie rambling about? Surely resupply was within reach!

Go? After Moshe and Dov had blown up the Arab cannon on the wall? After the Arab Legion's advance into the New City was stopped? Was Alfie imagining things? Was it the heat? The wind? The ache in his empty stomach?

"But who will water the roses?" Abe asked as the Khamseen and the sun beat against their backs. "If we go away. Who?"

"We'll be safer in the synagogue," Lori consoled the child.

"They will make us go forever," Abe protested loudly. "I don't want to!"