

# The New Yorker

"You know," she said almost shyly, "that I have the ability, if you wish, to look into your eyes and tell you when you will die?"

"No, I didn't realize you could do that." He hesitated for a moment. "And I don't want to know."

That was how Ravitch's first encounter with Gerda had ended, four years earlier. It was Mira, his friend Yoram's wife, who had taken him to her. She'd told him that there was an amazing sorceress in Jaffa, a "good witch," with unusual psychic powers, who had been born in a D.P. camp in Germany after the war and brought to Israel as a child. "You must meet her before you return to New York," Mira had said, and since he was very fond of Mira, and because she was always capable of surprising him, Ravitch had gone along.

The apartment occupied the top floor of a decaying Arab house in Jaffa. They climbed three flights of stairs and Mira knocked four times, then simply pushed the door open. They entered the living room, where there were multicolored lights in brass lanterns, blue glass bottles from Hebron, Bedouin weavings on the walls, cushions on the floor—the kind of baroque pseudo-Orientalism that Ravitch disdained. But the location was superb. Through one of the two windows placed irregularly in the far wall, he caught sight of an exquisitely bloated red sun sinking into the darkening sea.

Gerda now entered the room and they were introduced. He guessed that she was at least in her late forties, but it was difficult to judge her exact age. Gaunt, pale, straight dull-brown hair, a cheap cotton print dress with a low neckline, her collarbones straining against freckled skin. Yet there was something girlish about her. After some initial pleasantries, she offered them sweet black coffee in Turkish cups, and when they had finished drinking she read the grounds for them. Then she laid out the Tarot. Ravitch noticed that the deck was a fine one, obviously old, beautifully illustrated, hand-colored. But all she offered in her readings was banalities. Mira would become pregnant sometime soon. Mira must avoid walking on the left side of the street. As for Ravitch, when he got home he would finish his book (Mira must have told her about the book) and it would be a success. No witch she, Ravitch mused, only a skinny Jewess playing Gypsy. He smiled to himself. Just at that moment, she said to him in a curiously insistent tone, "Please, come with me to the other room."

He followed her into a tiny bedroom. Unlike the living room, it was totally austere, its white plastered walls bare except for a small Klee lithograph. They sat down facing each other, on straight-backed chairs, near an iron cot. Well, what game will we play now? Ravitch wondered. Closer to her than before, he studied her face and realized that she might once have been beautiful. When she spoke, the timbre of her voice had changed, taking on a richer, more full-throated texture that momentarily startled him. An unfamiliar tremor flickered through his body. It was then that she made her offer and he refused.

"Well, what did you think of her?" Mira asked as they drove away.

"You certainly know some weird people," he replied with a shrug.

Four years ago, all that. He had gone back to New York and, yes, he had finished his book,

though, of course, this had had nothing to do with the witch's prediction, since he'd already had a rough draft when he met her. The book, a study of the Jewish tales of Sacher-Masoch, received enough friendly reviews from the critics and deliberately misleading publicity from his publisher ("Jews . . . Masochism!") to bring him some much needed money. But Ravitch was not gratified. The moment the book was published, it was already alien to him, as though someone else had written it. He wished someone else *had* written it.

Now he was on vacation. He had gone first to Greece, but after two days in Athens, on an impulse, he flew to Israel. He was staying in Tel Aviv, a city he was not fond of. Why had he chosen Tel Aviv? Why had he even come to Israel? No answer. His habitual lucidity seemed to have deserted him. The past four years had not been good ones. His divorce. Inevitable, he thought in retrospect. And, in the course of separating, both he and Evelyn had behaved reasonably, even charitably. Yet he couldn't reconcile himself to sleeping alone, still lay awake entire nights. It wasn't that Ravitch had difficulty finding women. There had been several since the divorce, attractive, intelligent, eager to please, to console. But even now he awoke in the middle of the night, groping in confusion for the familiar, soft yet stubborn body. Then, there had been his father's death, at eighty-four, which had been surprising only in the intensity of the depression that followed. He'd felt nothing comparable when his mother had died, years before. The shock of it. He, Ravitch, who had always thought his mind inviolable, had naïvely conceived of depression as merely a state of being very sad. The trembling of his hands and the motor roaring loudly in the back of his skull had enlightened him. *Clinical* depression, a succession of doctors had explained gravely, patiently, defining his suffering. Not uncommon under the circumstances. Not severe enough for hospitalization. A cocktail of various pills, taken over three months, had rid him of the worst symptoms. Time and new habits would undoubtedly assuage his nocturnal agitation. What was left was simply the feeling of being scooped out, hollow. No other words for it. But what did it portend?

For the first few days in Tel Aviv, Ravitch contacted no one. None of his friends knew he was there. He had taken a room in one of the luxury hotels lining the beach, on a high floor with a huge picture window facing the sea. He remained in his room, took all his meals there, going down to the lobby for a drink only to enable the maids to tidy up and make his bed. Though he had brought some books, he did not read. He lay on the bed, inert, unable to focus on a thought, occasionally dozing lightly. Or else he sat for hours at the window, looking out toward the sea.

On the fourth day, in the late afternoon, he finally emerged and began to walk along the beach, the hotels to his left, the sea on his right. He walked slowly on the moist margin between sand and water, oblivious of the cries of children and gulls. Staring straight ahead, his eyes scanned the coast as it began to curve outward some two miles away. Toward the end of the rim was the other town. Even through the slight haze, you could see that it was no longer Tel Aviv. The architecture was visibly softer, older. Dun-colored houses, the silhouette of a small mosque. Dome and minaret. Jaffa.

Ravitch returned to the hotel. He called Mira, deflected her torrent of questions, apologized for not having sent a gift when the baby was born, congratulated her and Yoram. Yes, he was fine, no need to worry about him. By the way, was she still in touch with that woman—what was her name—yes, Gerda? Could he have her phone number? More questions. Even marvellous Mira could be exasperating. No, no particular reason. Just the number, please. Finally, she gave it to him.

He called immediately. "This is Ravitch. Do you remember me? We met four years ago. I was with Mira." Gerda remembered. "I want to see you again," he continued rapidly. "Actually, I must see you. This time alone."

A pause. "You can come tomorrow night at ten o'clock," she said slowly, "not before. How will you be coming?"

She gave him the address and instructions for the cabdriver. The following night, he went down to Jaffa.

Gerda opened the door and stood on the threshold without moving, scrutinizing him. She was wearing a long sleeveless black dress, simply cut, rather becoming. Her hair had been brushed back over one ear, revealing a single amber earring. "You are depleted," she said. "You need lots of sun, lots of love."

"I need more than that," he replied, wondering if it had been a mistake to come. "I need to talk to you, and not about my death. About my life."

"Of course," she murmured. "Please come in."

The living room was exactly as he remembered it. Not a single object had been shifted, nothing removed, nothing added. They sat in silence for a few minutes. Then he told her all that had happened since he last saw her and almost all that he felt now, for that was harder to articulate. Curiously, it did not take him long. While he spoke, he noticed that she was not looking at him. She had closed her eyes, as though to listen all the more intently. As soon as he finished, she looked at him again. He met her gaze without flinching. Once more, they were both silent. He felt his heart beating, but she seemed utterly tranquil, exuding a stillness that enveloped the entire room. At moments, he was aware only of the sea sounds drifting in through the windows and then fading away. When she finally spoke, it was almost in a whisper.

"What I am about to tell you," she began tentatively, "what I shall tell you, you are, of course, free to believe or disbelieve. It will make no difference to me."

"But I came deliberately to hear what you have to say," Ravitch protested. "After all, it was I who sought you out, who chose to come."

"Perhaps," she said with a passing smile.

"But that last remark of yours was unnecessary, even a bit unkind. I had hoped that your allowing me to come here meant that you might also care a bit about what is happening to me."

"I didn't say that I don't care about you. I said that whether or not you believe what I tell you will not affect me, which is something different. I said it because it is true and also because it might free you to listen properly—that is, without worrying whether by not believing me you might hurt my feelings in some way."

"I understand," Ravitch said, somewhat subdued.

"And now I ask you only to listen closely. Try not to judge until you have heard me out, although, knowing something about you, I realize that will be difficult, perhaps impossible. In any case, whatever your judgments may be, keep them to yourself. Agreed?"

"Agreed." Ravitch settled himself more comfortably on his floor pillow and leaned his back against the wall.

"I am aware," Gerda said, "that people call me a witch. It is not meant meanly and it doesn't bother

me. Who knows—perhaps I am a witch. It is a venerable vocation, and its history is not without honor. Be that as it may, if I am a witch who still reads coffee grounds and the Tarot—I could feel your disapproval four years ago—I am also a very modern one. It may surprise you that I am known to a number of psychiatrists around the world, a small number, to be sure. But there have been occasions when they have tried all their own brands of sorcery on a patient, without success. Then, when they have given up, they have sent him to me.”

Ravitch said nothing.

“Before I tell you my tale,” she continued, “I shall ask you only one question. Do you know what *gilgul* is?”

“Given that I have been speaking fluent Hebrew to you since we first met, I find it odd that you should ask. Of course I know. *Gilgul* is the transmigration of souls. Reincarnation. Metempsychosis. Related etymologically to *galgal*—‘wheel’—and *galgel*—‘to roll’—neither of them inappropriate, as a matter of fact. If you mean do I know anything about it, well, yes. The soul, after death, can be reborn in the body of another human, an animal, or some other creature—once, repeatedly, or infinitely, according to the quality of the life one has lived. It’s a give-me-another-chance doctrine, so to speak, ancient, ubiquitous, simultaneously comforting and frustrating. Pythagoreans, Hindus, Buddhists, and Kabbalists all believed in it and spun their own complex variations on the basic theme. I have read some of the Kabbalistic material. Do you want more details?”

For the first time, Gerda actually laughed. “Stop, Ravitch, before you overwhelm me with your legendary erudition! No more, I beg you. You have answered my question, at least on a certain level. I shall proceed to my tale and promise you no more questions.”

She stretched, arching her back like a cat, folded her hands in her lap, and leaned slightly forward.

“I said that certain psychiatrists refer their failures to me. One of them is British, a psychoanalyst, actually, who practices in Manchester. It happened about eight years ago. He had a patient, a middle-aged Jew born in Bucharest, with a singularly interesting problem.

“The man was—how shall I put it—restless. Not like your restlessness, Ravitch, or that of other people. He was not an insomniac, like you, or unable to sit still in a room. He was pathologically *rest-less*, without respite. Nothing ordinary here. Let us call it an uncanny geographical restlessness.”

Ravitch had not mentioned his insomnia. How does she know? he thought. Does it show? But he held his tongue.

“Yes, a geographical restlessness, rare, perhaps unique. This was a man who could not bear to live in one place for more than a short time. Sometimes after only a few months, some strange compulsion would drive him to leave for another place. You must understand that we are not speaking of wanderlust; he had no desire to travel and see the world. On the contrary, he hated this constant moving about, wanted nothing more than to fix his abode somewhere, anywhere, to have a permanent home, perhaps a family, to find repose. Instead, he had crisscrossed the whole of Europe, had been several times to America, and even once to Bolivia and Peru. He was an engineer of some sort, an eminently portable profession, but he never committed himself to large projects, knowing in advance that he would not stay long. How he suffered! In great cities and small, he would rent a flat, begin to rearrange the furniture and to make it his own. Sometimes he even met a woman he liked sufficiently to begin an affair. But as soon as a particular job was done,

sometimes even before it was completed, before he had hung a picture on a wall, before the affair had had a chance to blossom, he was off again, without knowing why, knowing only that he had to leave, that he had to uproot himself once more. Desperate, he finally sought help for his affliction. The Manchester analyst was the last of many to whom he had poured out his troubles. And then he came to me. I listened to his account, which was far more detailed than what I am telling you now, and even as he spoke I knew the real root of his troubles."

She "knew," Ravitch thought, vaguely irritated. With what assurance she said that, the arrogance of it. Yet what she had told him so far was obviously only a prelude. Despite his misgivings, he was eager to hear more.

As she resumed her tale, he noticed that Gerda's voice now swiftly modulated into that vibrant resonance which had so unnerved him at their first meeting. This time, he allowed himself merely to savor it, waiting.

"Here is what I told that driven man, almost in these words:



"Go right in, detectives, and remember—all of his answers will be in the form of a question."

" 'Your body,' I said, 'was born in Bucharest, but your soul was born elsewhere. You carry within you the soul of a Jew born long ago, in Spain. He was a physician. His name was Isaac Benveniste. His family had lived for centuries in Ávila. Along with the rest of Spanish Jewry, he

was swept up in the great expulsion of 1492. I have reason to think that, when the edict of Ferdinand and Isabella was made public, he decided to make his way to the Holy Land. As you must realize, this was no easy task. The Jews had only three months, a period of turmoil and panic, in which to liquidate their assets and leave. There was no way for him to travel directly to the Land of Israel. Benveniste managed to get from Ávila to Valencia, where he was lucky enough to find passage on a ship sailing to Genoa. The voyage was unusually long, the seas turbulent. When he arrived, the authorities would not allow him to remain. Since Genoa was not his goal, he accepted this rebuff with equanimity. He did not realize that his wanderings in exile had only begun, that in a sense they would never end, that he would never reach his real destination.’ “

Ravitch found himself under the spell of the tale. As Gerda spoke, his breathing began to rise and fall softly to the cadence of her sentences. There was something magnificent about her now, as though she had come into her true kingdom. She had the radiance of a born storyteller, luring him, lulling him. No longer Gerda at all. Scheherazade.

“From Genoa, Isaac Benveniste made his way to Venice, and from there across the Adriatic to Ragusa. I did not give my patient all the stations along the way, only the major ones, but, Ravitch, try to trace the map in your imagination. Years of travel from one place to another, practicing medicine in small towns just to stay alive and save enough to journey farther. Wars, plagues often forced him to take circuitous routes. But always he pressed onward. Down the Dalmatian Coast, across the frontiers of the Ottoman Empire, eastward overland all the way to Adrianople, then westward again to Salonika and once more by ship through the Aegean to Smyrna. From Smyrna, he sailed finally to the island of Rhodes. Why didn’t he undertake one more voyage? A few hundred miles by sea and he would have reached the Land of Israel. Who knows? He had been wandering for almost twenty years; he was old, exhausted. Whatever the reason, the will to continue had seeped out of him. He remained in Rhodes. Less than two years later, he died and was buried there.”

Silence. Gerda’s face now looked strained, as though she were wearied by the effort of retelling the tale.

“But that is not all you told your man from Bucharest,” Ravitch said quietly. “Please, go on.”

“I said to him, ‘This story is, in a real sense, your own. When Dr. Benveniste died, his soul found no rest. Since that time, it has wandered, as you are wandering, born and reborn in every generation. Now it is you who carry it within you. Its restlessness is the source of your own. You will never find peace until you help it find peace.’

“ ‘How can I do this?’ the man from Bucharest demanded.

“ ‘You should first go to the university in Jerusalem. The rational part of you must be convinced that this person at least existed. In the library, read whatever you can on the history of the Jews of Rhodes. On Jews in medicine as well—I hear they have a large and splendid collection on the subject. Since you barely read Hebrew, speak to the librarians and archivists; some may be willing to assist you. See if you can find anything about a Spanish Jewish physician named Isaac Benveniste who died in Rhodes in 1515 or thereabouts. If you succeed, and if what you find has any relation to what I have told you, then you must take the next step and follow my instructions carefully.’

“Our man was fortunate, Ravitch. He called me a few weeks later from Jerusalem and told me that, with the help of the library staff, he had found not only some scattered information about Benveniste in various books but even a manuscript, a Spanish medical work that Benveniste had

translated into Hebrew, with a colophon signed and dated in his own hand. The man from Bucharest knew that I had never looked at these materials, because the library kept a record of those who had. There was now no longer any question as to what he should do next.

“ ‘You must,’ I said, ‘go to Rhodes yourself and find the old Jewish cemetery. There are only a handful of Jews left on the island since the war, but one of them will surely guide you. With him you must walk carefully among the tombstones, reading the inscriptions, until you discover Benveniste’s grave. Once you find it, you will ask to be left alone. Then you must immediately recite Kaddish, as though you were a mourner. After that, you must prostrate yourself on the ground and pray. You needn’t even mention God. But you must pray, in your own words, that Benveniste’s soul should cease its wanderings, that this should be its final *gilgul*, and that you, too, should at last find peace.’ ”

“And did he go to Rhodes?” Ravitch asked.

“Yes. And he found the grave. And he did all that he had been told.”

“And did he find peace?”

“He remained in Rhodes for a month. Then he came to Israel. He has been here ever since, living in the same town. He no longer travels at all.”

“And where, precisely, does he live?”

“This I shall not—cannot—tell you. It would do neither of you any good to meet.”

Another silence. Ravitch waited for Gerda to say something, anything, about him, but she was completely still. Suddenly, with a single abrupt motion, she rose from her pillow and stood before him. “My God!” she exclaimed. “I didn’t realize the time! Already past midnight! I promised a friend that I would pick up her dog. It is ill. I must run!”

It all happened so quickly. Gerda was already gathering her shawl and a large handbag. “Wait!” Ravitch cried, leaping up. “Please wait! You can’t leave yet! There is so much more I need to hear from you. This entire story you told, was it a parable for me? Do I also carry someone else’s soul—is that what you mean?”

Gerda turned to him. “No,” she said. “The story was meant for you, but it is not about you. And now I must really go.”

“Can I call a cab and drop you off?”

“No, the place I’m going to is right here in Jaffa. I will walk. Don’t accompany me. You can remain here for a while if you like. But don’t wait for me. I will not be back tonight. Leave whenever you wish. It is no problem. I never lock the door.”

“Does that mean I can come again?”

“I don’t think so. It will serve no purpose.” And with that she walked out.

Ravitch remained standing in the middle of the room, stunned, hurt, angry. It had indeed been a mistake to come here. A sick dog! The woman was crazy—he’d already known it four years ago. In his fragile state, this was the last thing he should have done. Scheherazade, indeed. Circe! He could not forgive himself for having been such a fool, he, Ravitch. Coffee grounds, Tarot, *gilgul*—

they were all of a piece, a cheap occultism, sham powers of darkness.

Dire Biblical verses welled up from the past and pounded through his head. *Turn ye not unto the ghosts, nor unto familiar spirits; seek them not out, to be defiled by them.* They knew, even then, long ago, the ancestors knew! *There shall not be found among you any one that . . . useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch. . . . For all that do these things, are an abomination unto the Lord.* True, so true. For what had happened this evening, for this abomination, he was as responsible as Gerda. Guilty, the two of them, perhaps he above all. *They shall stone them with stones: their blood shall be upon them!*

By the time Ravitch got back to his hotel, he was calmer. He had some vodka and hors d'oeuvres sent to his room. Hungry, he quickly devoured whatever it was they had put on the tray. Then, drink in hand, he settled into a big armchair.

He now began to review the events of the evening from beginning to end, gradually, as though projecting a reel of film in slow motion, freezing frames here and there so that he could examine them more carefully. He remembered every word of Gerda's, every gesture; nothing had escaped him. Yet he could make no sense out of what he so vividly recalled.

Who was Gerda? Different voices in Ravitch's head whispered different answers. She was a charlatan. She had read about Benveniste in some book; how else could she have known such details? Or perhaps she had invented him altogether. Perhaps the whole story of her restless client was an invention, concocted to impress him. On the other hand, there was something compellingly sincere about her. Ravitch had felt it. If a charlatan, she was certainly not a deliberate one. She obviously believed in what she did. But that did not mean that what she did or said was true. Far from it. Gerda lived in a world of fantasy. Still, her fantasies could be useful, even therapeutic, for those who accepted such things. The tale of Dr. Benveniste might have been an illusion, a hallucination, but its impact on the Jew from Bucharest was real enough. A placebo effect. Just so.

Yet even as these thoughts came to him Ravitch was not satisfied. This was just the kind of crude and sterile reduction that he detested in others, the glib psychological demolition he encountered so often at New York gatherings, everything neatly explained, nothing understood.

If this was what he thought of Gerda, why such fury when she walked out on him? Why his deep and aching sense of loss? What had he sought from her to begin with that he should feel so deprived?

The fact was, as he now allowed himself to recognize, that even at their first meeting he had sensed something remarkable about her, as though she really had access to some uncommon order of knowledge and power. Of course, he had tried his best to deny his own intuition, but it had lingered within him. When he had suddenly decided to come back to Israel, it had been because of her. That much was now clear. If he had asked to see her, it had been because he needed her help, hers alone.

So why had the evening ended in disaster? He unwound the reel again, looking, listening. The effort was strenuous and sterile.

Ravitch took a sip of his drink and felt the warmth permeate his body. His thoughts turned to his father. Vodka always reminded Ravitch—who was never a heavy drinker—of him. His father's favorite snack, fastidiously prepared by Ravitch's mother, never varied: Slices of herring and a boiled potato neatly arranged on a plate. A small decanter of vodka on the side. Afterward, some scalding hot tea, always in a glass, sucked through a lump of hard sugar. All gone now, mother,



father, the samovar that his grandmother had brought from Russia to New York, long lost.

His grandmother, another storyteller. And what stories! Along with the samovar, she had brought a trunkful of superstitions, dark and marvellous, which he, as a child, had accepted without question. When once she caught his mother in the midst of altering his jacket with needle and thread while he was wearing it, she rushed to pop a piece of bread into his mouth and told him to chew vigorously in order to show the Angel of Death that he was alive, for only a shroud is sewn directly on the body. When she cut his nails, she was careful to keep the parings together and burn them. If she failed to do this, she warned, at the time of the Resurrection of the Dead his body would have to roll underground to all the places where he had scattered his parings and gather them together again. Ravitch had adored and trusted her. She'd died when he was eight. For several years after that, he had still burned his parings, but then he gave it up, and by the time he went off to university he had given up much else as well. He had left behind his childhood; his grandmother's quaint fancies; the Resurrection of the Dead, along with the parings; the Messiah, along with the Resurrection; God, along with the Messiah. For want of a nail, he now punned to himself, the kingdom was lost.

Only the classical Hebrew texts remained important in his life, his father's legacy, transmitted so lovingly that they still spoke to him. But they could no longer guide, let alone command, him.

He recalled that once—how old could he have been?—his father had told him, "It is written that if all the Jews were to observe one Sabbath completely the Messiah would arrive." For weeks, this idea obsessed him. Why, he kept thinking, could all the Jews in the world not pick one Sabbath and make a pact to do just that? The nonbelievers had nothing to lose if it turned out to be false, while if it was true there was everything to be gained. A Jewish version of Pascal's wager, though he had not yet heard of Pascal.

Ravitch realized that his mind was wandering and that his eyes were moist. He was overcome with a sudden nostalgia for the child who had believed so passionately in the Redemption. But he checked himself, drained his glass, got up, and paced the room. After a while, he went back to his chair and resumed his vigil.

Why had Gerda left him stranded? Had she felt his innate skepticism rising, even though he had not expressed it? But, no, she had told her tale from beginning to end, had engulfed him in it. Why? It seemed to him now that in all she had said there was one crucial remark. *The story was meant for you, but it is not about you.* Here was the key, but it unlocked nothing. The man from Bucharest was not Ravitch. He was, if he existed at all, unique. Ravitch's problems were not his. Yet the story was meant for him. Ravitch turned and twisted the sentence in his mind, repeated it aloud, pondered and dissected it over and over until his head ached. Finally, he gave up. No question of sleep. He merely continued to sit, immobile, glazed.

At 5 A.M., he stirred, aware, through the window, that the darkness outside was yielding to a very pale light, the first hint of dawn. He pulled on a sweater and his canvas shoes. Then he took the elevator down, passed through the back door of the hotel to the terrace, and descended the curving ramp to the empty beach. He walked a short distance and sat down facing the sea. Nearby he saw the ruins of an elaborate sandcastle that must have been built the day before. He noticed a few pieces of charred wood and a small pile of tiny scalloped shells that someone had collected and then abandoned. The light was slowly expanding over the sky. The sea was quiet, small waves breaking gently at the shore, leaving patches of white foam as they retreated. Ravitch sat very still, staring raptly at sky and water, the rush and ebb of waves pulsing softly in his ears.

He must have sat this way for some time. The sky was luminous now, the ripples in the sea glistening. Ravitch saw a young woman strolling with a little girl, the first visitors of the day. After they had passed him, they paused. The girl took a pink plastic pail she was carrying and ran to the edge of the water. She filled the pail, ran back to the woman, and poured the water on her feet. "*Yam!*"—"Sea!"—she shouted triumphantly. The woman smiled. Then they went on their way.

Ravitch continued to watch them as they receded in the distance. Then he stared down at the sand. He observed a few tiny flealike insects hopping around. How do they live? he mused. What do they eat? It was warming up a little. He stood, took off his sweater and slung it over his shoulder, brushed the sand from his trousers. Then slowly, deliberately, he walked toward the water. The waves were cresting higher now, churning and crashing as they rolled in. Isaac Benveniste had never reached this, his destined shore. He, Ravitch, had arrived here. Soon he would leave. A waste.

Ravitch looked one last time to the left, around the coast, toward Jaffa. Then he turned back to the sea, scanning it to the horizon. What will become of me? he asked quietly. What must I do?

The sea heard him but did not reply. It continued to shimmer, to heave and swell, to roll its waves, ancient, majestic, inscrutable, indifferent.