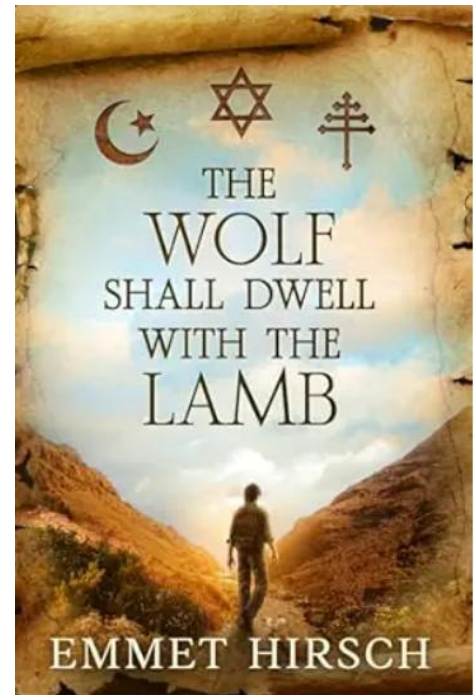


Excerpt:

The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb

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The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie in repose with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a small child shall lead them.

(Isaiah 11:6)

Chapter 1

The sun broke over the rolling hills of Bhamdoun, Lebanon, on April 1, 1931, and a fifteen-year-old Jewish girl cried out in terror and pain. Her lamentations mingled with the wails of a muezzin calling the Muslim faithful to prayer from his perch atop the town minaret, and with the soft chanting of lauds from the nearby convent.

The convergence of the three sounds was a common enough occurrence in that region at that time. Yet the weird harmony might have been considered a momentous sign as far as portents go. Most places, and the people who come from them, are the products

of such uneasy admixtures. In that respect, the town of Bhamdoun was like most places. That is to say, it was a place from which the dissonance of everyday events might sound chords of blessing or misfortune echoing over a lifetime.

The girl was named Ziva. A house servant had heard her shrieks from his small chamber in the basement and ran upstairs to her bedroom. After knocking uncertainly on the door, he entered to find her screaming, blood pooling in her sheets. He threw a blanket onto the back seat of the Packard convertible, the only one of its kind in the Middle East and his master's prized possession, and loaded Ziva into it. From there, he sped to the infirmary, awakening the nuns with blares of the Packard's horn from outside the gate. The sisters hastened to open the lock.

They rushed Ziva, gasping, panting, a dark stain blooming over the lower part of her nightgown, into a small treatment room. Before allowing himself to be ushered out, the servant assured Ziva that he would wake the telegraph operator and send word to the master that his young bride had been taken to the hospital.

The attendant, a nun of indeterminate age, a white coif covering her hair and a wooden cross dangling from a black cord around her neck, wiped the girl's brow. "Shh, child," she murmured in Arabic as she tucked a wad moistened with some bitter substance between Ziva's cheek and gum. "It is God's decree that you endure this with dignity. Offer your pain up as a sacrifice to Him."

"What are you talking about? What is happening to me?"

"Why, child, do you not know you are having a baby?"

A baby! Ziva wailed and fainted.

As she came to, the room's white walls and metal furnishings blurred, as though layered with honey. Ziva breathed in and sighed, a deep exhalation that dislodged her consciousness and cast it backward in time and space. Gathering speed, she soared eastward over Mount Lebanon and the Beqaa Valley. In her delirium, she spied a prior version of herself far below in the passenger seat of the Packard, wending west on the Beirut-Damascus road, a middle-aged man at the wheel. Ziva flew over the

neighborhoods of Damascus and through the open window of her family's estate in the Jewish quarter, alighting in the library of the house of her father, scion of the Hedaya clan. She looked up at the family tree spanning the southern wall of the room, its many branches proliferating from the source of the clan's glorious birthright: the lineage of King David himself.

Ziva had spent many hours sitting cross-legged on the floor contemplating this family tree, its boughs labeled with the names of traders, rabbis, physicians, royal advisers, and scholars of renown. Ziva's name, like those of other female relatives, was not listed. She had imagined it hidden behind those of her brothers, trapped like a dove in the foliage, neither seeing nor seen. The world outside her family and community, she had been told, was a heaving, vulgar, dangerous place, a place where corruption overwhelmed merit. It was the necessary province of her father and brothers but something from which she required protection.

In her dream, Ziva rose and approached her father, who sat scowling in his chair behind the desk, scholarly texts towering over them in shelves stacked to the ceiling. Her mother stood at his side, her face buried in her hands, her stooped frame shaking with sobs. Ziva's father's face was flushed, his beard flecked with gray hairs and spittle. "Thus do you bring shame upon us?" he thundered. "By consorting with a Christian boy?"

"Father!" Ziva cried. "It was nothing! I was only speaking to him!"

"Hush!" he shouted. "I have had business dealings with his father, an honorable man! Had he not come to me at the last moment, your shame would have stained both our families! A Jewish girl, my own daughter, escaping the house at night to meet with a boy? A *Christian* boy? Why not a Muslim? Why not a Kurd or Druze?"

"Father! There was nothing between us! We were only talking!"

"Enough, Ziva! Secret conversations in the middle of the night lead to other activities! His parents have already sent him to an uncle in Cairo."

"No!" cried Ziva. "Father, no!" She wanted to rush toward him, but the massive desk stood between them.

Her father lowered his eyes. “You make it very clear how much of a ‘nothing’ this boy is to you,” he muttered. He rose and turned to face the window. “And as for you . . . as for you, my Ziva, my light, you will be married to a man named Friedmann within the month.”

“Father!” Ziva wailed. “Father, hear me!”

“A very fortunate match, given the circumstances,” he murmured, his face toward the window, the narrow alleyways of the city crowding in beyond. “Praise God, Friedmann approached the matchmaker not two weeks ago. Were it not for the reputation and fortune of our family, you would have been forsaken.”

Ziva learned that her betrothed was a forty-five-year-old Belgian, a childless widower with a mansion in Beirut and a summer home in the village of Bhamdoun. He was an Ashkenazi Jew, she was told in apologetic tones, but no one else was available on such short notice. And Friedmann was very wealthy; he had business interests all over the Far East, Europe, and the Americas. The wedding would take place in three weeks.

Her mother tried to teach her something about “marital relations” before the wedding, and Ziva had nodded without understanding. Then, before she knew what was happening to her, Ziva had immersed in a *mikvah* and stood at the *chuppah*, a ring on her finger, the glass broken at her feet, strangers shouting, “Mazal tov!” Shortly after that, the unimagined horror of being laid on her back, her husband, sweating and groaning, on top of her. And then he was somehow inside her, together with a new, ripping pain and blood between her legs.

The following day, they had driven together in silence in the Packard to Beirut, where he introduced her to the household staff at his mansion. He left the following day on a business trip abroad. Friedmann had spent the majority of the time since then overseas, leaving her in care of the staff and returning from time to time to lay her again on her back and enter her as before. In the morning, they would share awkward conversations on the veranda over coffee and *shakshuka* before the arrival of business associates, to whom she was instructed to serve tea and sweet cakes, and not to speak.

Her mother came once to visit while Ziva was at the summer home in Bhamdoun. She praised the Lord that her daughter lived in more luxury than she had dared hoped for. She did not notice the swelling of Ziva’s belly, concealed beneath a loose-fitting dress. And what was Ziva to make of this strange growth, which was but one more in a series of bewilderments, each related somehow to the preceding in ways she did not

understand? Everything had happened so quickly, without preparation, without explanation. Having no one to consult, Ziva hid her shame and confusion from herself as well as others. Perhaps a resolution would come with time, or perhaps she might wake to find it all a dream. For all she knew, this change in her body might happen to anyone after being separated from her family, after marriage, after moving from Damascus to Beirut . . .

* * *

The drug began to wear off, and the images in Ziva's mind faded. She began to feel again the hard surface of the delivery table and the excruciating pain in her belly. The rest passed quickly, and Ziva could not be certain of the line between reality and imagination, only that she crossed it repeatedly in either direction. An elderly woman, dressed from head to foot in black, a cross at her neck and another at her hip, spoke kindly to her, introducing herself as "the abbess." A phantom materialized in a corner of the room, and when Ziva called out, "Father!" he turned away, disgust marring his face before he faded into nothingness.

Then, a man stood between her legs, and something about him frightened Ziva. "Stop shrieking, child!" the nurse commanded. "This is your doctor!"

The doctor was nothing like the kindly physician who had made house calls to her childhood home. He had three days of stubble on his chin and reeked of alcohol. He touched her roughly, and a short time later, her agony reached its peak and then abruptly subsided.

Panting and sobbing with her eyes screwed shut, Ziva heard a baby screech and a female voice call out, "*Mabrouk!* God has granted you a son!" Ziva opened her mouth to speak, but the world was again obliterated by a new kind of pain: being stitched together without anesthesia.

And then the nurse placed into her arms a baby swaddled in a blanket, and Ziva wept with this final rupture of everything she had known.

I was the child in that blanket.