

Having been sent to the right-hand queue, Yossi looked round to make sure that his parents and sisters were still behind him.

His father was. His mother too. They were ordered into the right-hand queue behind Yossi. But Mina and Anna were ordered to the left, both of them standing with their arms dangling at their sides, pale-faced, staring at their mother. The noise of their crying was drowned out by the sound of other people crying, shouting, calling out. Next, he saw his mother and father's hands touching, then separating as his mother moved left to be with his sisters.

"No," Yossi heard himself shout.

Yossi feared that he knew what the queue on the right meant. There was a phrase he had heard one of the soldiers say: *fit for work*. Yossi knew he was in the fit for work queue. But he didn't know what happened to people in the other queue on the left. The women. The girls. The old people. What could you do if you weren't fit for work? Where did you go?

And he also didn't know why his mother had gone to join his sisters. She was still a youngish woman. *She* could work. He went to go and tell her, grabbing her, pulling her away from Mina and Anna across the divide.

"Leave me," his mother said calmly to him. Then she whispered something to him in his ear that chilled him to the bone but made him move away, looking at each of them solemnly in the eyes: Mina, Anna, his mother.

"Your mother will look after your sisters," his father said.

"I understand."



“She must,” Yossi’s father croaked. “They need a parent. You have me and they have your mother.”

“I know Dad,” Yossi said.

Yossi’s father put his hands on his shoulders as if he was comforting him. But Yossi knew better. He could feel the full weight of his father’s frame leaning on him now. Without Yossi there, his father would have collapsed in front of everyone, could maybe have been taken to the left-hand side too, deemed not fit for work.

Yossi stood still, looking again at his mother. The words she had whispered to him echoed in his head like she had shouted them across a valley.

“You must leave me,” she had said. “And you must live, Yossi. You must survive. Only you can keep the family going now.”

She had given him a hint that he might survive. But in doing so she had foretold what would happen to Mina, to Anna and to herself.

