

When the world turned over / Yoav Avni
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A Book synopsis

Translation sample



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Rotem is an exceptionally sensitive boy. When he and his parents have to leave Tel Aviv and spend the summer vacation in the village where his father grew up, Rotem is filled with fears - what will he do there all summer? How will he make friends? Will he be able to fit in at all? Rotem's fears come true when he meets the village children and their arrogant leader, Goni. It's clear to Rotem that they will never get along, especially when Tal-Yaar, the only girl in the group, is so nice to him and provokes Goni's jealousy.

The children are determined to renovate an abandoned city, and Rotem really wants to participate in the secret operation, but as far as Goni is concerned, it's out of the question. And it turns out that's not the only obstacle: Rotem's father suddenly declares that even if the world turns over, he won't allow him to go near the mysterious city.

Everything changes when the children realize that to bring a city back to life, brushes and paints are not enough. Rotem has an idea! He'll have to involve the managers of the strange start-up where his father works, who declare their intention to change the world, and Rotem has no idea how they will react, but it's a risk he's willing to take. At least that's how he feels. A captivating book about emotions, dreams of the future, change in the present, and secrets from the past.

Yoav Avni is an Israeli writer and translator. This is his first book for young adults.

More about him [here](#).

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By Yoav Avni

Translation sample (CH1-3) - Translated by Yoav Avni

Chapter 1: The truck was there

Every time he looked back - the truck was there. Rotem imagined that every lane change and every overtake were evasive maneuvers designed to confuse the white and dirty delivery truck, but no matter what Dad did - signaled, turned or accelerated - the truck always remained behind them.

It was there when they left Sokolov Street, and it was on the bridge when Mom convinced them to wave goodbye to Tel Aviv - even though neither he nor Dad felt like it - and when they drove on Ayalon-North. When they reached 'Spellman' Junction, Rotem looked back again and discovered that no spell had made it disappear: even the green traffic light refused to change to red when they crossed the intersection, and the truck stuck to them without difficulty. If this were a movie, and the music in the car was a bit more suspenseful than the jazz that Mom and Dad insist on loving for some reason, it would be clear that they were being chased. That's how Rotem felt.

He tried to prevent the truck from affecting him, and to feel nothing, but anyone who knew him knew that for him, this was tantamount to not thinking or not breathing. When Dad announced, "We'll be there in five minutes!" and when Mom replied, "You're funny, as if we've never been to your parents before," Rotem understood exactly what Dad was trying to say. They had never been to Grandpa and Grandma's like this. Continuously. For the whole summer, or even longer. Longer! A huge, steaming pile of time hiding and blocking the way home. Just this morning he had asked Dad again how long he thought it would take, but instead of answering like the previous times "Until the end of summer, probably," Dad added, "I hope. Renovation is always a story".

This was worrying. Very worrying. When adults say something is a story, they never mean one with a happy ending, so how could he not feel what he felt?

In the sky were scattered puffy clouds with reddish edges, like echoes of explosions that had destroyed his familiar world, and when they entered the Village (and the truck behind them), Rotem felt that the road was trying to comfort him unsuccessfully. The winding road encircling the village, which they had traveled so many times before, seemed foreign this time. On the right was the big house with

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horses in the yard, and immediately after it the house with the 'For Sale' sign that was always there, and the gentle ascent, and the speed bumps calming the car but not those sitting inside it, and the monument with the plane canopy and tank turret surrounded by black and white photos of soldiers, and the soccer and basketball and tennis courts, and then the grocery store, and the right turn - and Grandpa and Grandma's house, and that's it.

In the end you always arrive, as Mom says.

If only it was just a regular visit, like on a regular Saturday. Then the stop was accompanied by a warm feeling and anticipation for lunch, and Rotem used to open the door even before Dad turned off the engine. But this time he preferred to stay in the car forever. The change was too big and he missed every other day. Even yesterday.

Chapter 2: The color of blueprint

"Dad, can you show me how dark is blue-print?" It's hard to believe that was just yesterday. Dad smiled at Mom, and Mom put the tape on the box labeled in black 'Kitchen - Pots and Pans', and smiled back at Dad.

This wasn't the response he expected - not at all - and he tried to explain that he wanted to draw a line under his name on the boxes that contain his stuff, and he wanted to use a special color and not just a plain one. But the smiles remained. Maybe they even widened a bit.

He was probably wrong.

It was embarrassing. Very embarrassing. "I just thought that-" he tried to continue, but the words scattered everywhere. When the storm of emotions started, there was no room for anything else.

Joy, sadness, fear, anger, surprise and everything else - he always felt this way - felt very much. Always too quickly and always too much.

Mom had told him before that this was actually his superpower, and that in her opinion, the problem in the world was people who don't feel enough, not those who feel too much.

People with small, regular hearts, not those with enlarged hearts like his.

The doctor repeated the diagnosis at every semi-annual check-up - Rotem suffers from cardiomegaly, and insisted on explaining again that 'cardio' means heart, and 'mega' means

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big, as if someone had forgotten. Dad and Mom didn't agree. "You don't suffer from it," they corrected, "it's just something you have".

But every time it happened, every time he couldn't do anything but feel, when emotions behaved as if he belonged to them and not they to him - every such time Rotem thought it was actually a super weakness, and wished he could learn to feel little and slow.

The doctor never said that the enlarged heart was the source of Rotem's sensitivity. This was Dad and Mom's explanation since he was little, and Rotem adopted it - even if it wasn't accurate, it sounded right to him.

After one of the check-ups, the doctor asked to know exactly how it feels when you have cardiomegaly and Rotem struggled to explain. It wasn't possible to describe it exactly, so he answered that it was like in a car wash, which he went to once a week with Dad: the heart was the car, and around it noise and foam and lashes of bright colors, and everything moved on its own. And from the moment any feeling rushed in, all that remained was to wait for it to subside and retreat and clean up.

And so it happened also when he stood facing his parents' smiles - it seemed to him that the room was suddenly lit in a bright orange-pink peach hue, maybe he even heard parrot calls mocking his blushing face, and felt a wild wind blowing around him, maybe even through him, and that anyone looking from the nearby houses, and surely Dad and Mom, could see him like this, in his embarrassment.

Everything happened at once, and without prior warning. The feeling swelled, and his breath shortened - as if his heart was trying to reach the end of the car wash tunnel without success.

Dad and Mom knew him, of course, and even if they didn't notice the peach light like he did and didn't hear any parrot, they spread their arms towards him.

Only when he finally found himself between his parents, deep in a hug that quieted almost every storm, did his heart return to itself. And then Dad explained that blueprint isn't a real color, but just the plan for the renovation, with everything needed for each room.

"That's how the contractor knows what to do. Here," Dad approached the bursting document folder, which had fattened as the start date of the work approached. Maybe the folder was pregnant too. This time it was lying on the 'Bathroom - Towels' box.

"See?" Dad handed him a densely printed page, "For example, electrical sockets," he pointed with his finger at one of the columns, "This is for your room - one socket for the TV you'll have above the bed, and four for the desk and computer area, and this is the column for Mom and my bedroom, and for the new room," (that's what they called for now the fourth

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room that would be added to the house at the end of the renovation and towards the birth. Every time they talked about the new room, Dad and Mom placed their hands together on Mom's belly, and too often for Rotem's liking, they also hugged). "But it's nice that you thought it was a special blue color. You always surprise us," and again they smiled at him, and again peach embarrassment rolled through him, and his heart accelerated.

At seven-thirty Dad and Mom announced it was time for a break, and the three of them went to 'Pasta Bistro' - usually Rotem's favorite place, but towards the end of this day, everything looked like an end. The last day in Tel Aviv, the last supper, and then the last night in the house where he was born, and who knows when they'll return? And maybe they even preceded the moving? Maybe they made sure to get him out of the house already now, while the boxes are being loaded onto the truck, so he wouldn't be very sad, as only he knows how? Maybe the contractor is already there, at their place? Maybe the last night was actually yesterday? Is there even such a thing - the night after the last?

If only everything would be canceled – if only there would be no renovation, and the objects would jump back out of the boxes, and that the boxes would fold back to where they came from. Rotem rested his elbows on the table and leaned his head on his hands. The sky peeked between the treetops of the neighborhood, and even the stars now looked to him like bubbles in bubble wrap that wraps the world every night, so it doesn't break during the transport to the morning.

The feelings were already spinning in their usual way from inside out. First embarrassment and now distress, and everything was absorbed so strongly in the heart, and takes over all of him, and melts his thoughts, and paints everyone around him in pale gray, and fills everything up to eye level, which see Dad and Mom looking at him with a loving and reassuring gaze and saying to him: "Eat, it's getting cold." And actually meaning to say "Everything will be alright, we promise".

Although Rotem knew that they too weren't completely calm about this renovation. It was a fact - they left one small box open in the living room and wrote on it 'Concerns', and announced that this box too would be stored in the warehouse they rented in the south of the city, so that the summer would be worry-free. Each one wrote something on a note and before folding and inserting it into the box, read aloud its contents to the rest of the family. Rotem wrote that he doesn't know if he'll have friends - he knew the village from visits on Saturdays, and even slept at Grandpa and Grandma's once, when Dad and Mom flew for a weekend in Rome, but to live there for the whole summer vacation and maybe even longer?

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In her note, Mom was bummed about the traffic jams every morning to Tel Aviv, and Dad read that he really hopes everything will be finished before the winter starts, and kneaded with his fingers the old scars from the army, which stretched across his arms. Once Mom revealed to Rotem that Dad does this without noticing, every time he feels uncomfortable. When they returned home, they continued packing, and then Mom and Dad called Rotem to the living room and asked him to help them convince the microwave to enter the designated box. Mom scattered some popcorn seeds on the counter and Dad told Rotem that if it doesn't work, they'll have to scare the microwave with a fork or something else made of iron. It was funny. Happiness is also an emotion, and when it arrived - quickly, and all at once - it expanded the room and wrapped Rotem in yellow-golden flashes, and tickled the tips of his fingers at tremendous speed.

After the shower, Rotem underlined his name with a regular blue marker on the packed boxes in the corner of his room, and just before he fell asleep, the realization dawned on him that not only this day was everything but normal.

Tomorrow will be like that too, and actually, the whole summer.

Something will happen there, in Grandpa and Grandma's village. He knew it, actually more than that - he felt it. Something will happen there, and he wished he had a private blueprint for the coming weeks and months, to know exactly what will happen and when. To know whether he should look forward to the future or beware of it.

Chapter 3: First night without a home

"I'll go open the door for them," Dad said as they stopped in front of Grandpa and Grandma's house, carefully placing a black laptop bag on his knees. The movers huddled near the truck, smoking. For them, it was just another ordinary day.

"What's that? Is it new?" Rotem asked, leaning forward. He had never seen this bag before, or the colorful circle on its back that looked like an inevitable storm's eye.

Mom shifted slightly in her seat, and it was clear she wanted to tell him something. No, actually, to inform him. "It's not a bad thing," she hurried to say, "Dad's starting a new job. We have a lot of new beginnings"...

Or endings, Rotem thought. He tried to smile, but it seemed that in recent days, Mom and Dad were better at it than him.

"Where will you work?" Rotem asked.

"I asked too," Mom said, "but your dad is very mysterious about it".

"I'm sorry," Dad smiled, "Mom already knows - I signed a confidentiality agreement".

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"What does that mean?" Rotem asked.

"It means they can fine me or even fire me if I tell anyone about what I do".

"Even us?"

Dad shrugged in a gesture of no choice. "I promised Mom it's not a government job or anything like that, so she calmed down. Right?" And he kissed her.

Rotem contorted his face into the expression reserved for parental kisses, thinking it would actually be cool if Dad worked for the government. Dad was a programmer. His previous job was for a company that built a photo editing app. It was boring, there are countless apps like that. Dad thought so too, and Rotem knew he had started looking for a new job recently, but didn't know he had already found one. And maybe it's better that he can't tell too much - this way you can imagine whatever you want.

"I don't know most of the details either," Dad continued. "For now, I'm dealing with very focused things. I still have no idea how it's all supposed to connect. It's really a bit strange," he admitted.

"So why did you want to work there at all?" Rotem asked. "They don't sound nice if they don't tell you anything and are already threatening to fire you".

"They're not threatening, they're just asking," Dad explained patiently. "The two people I met are very interesting. And they pay excellently. It will really help us now, with the renovation. And you know what else?" Dad turned to the back seat and lowered his voice, "They intend to change the world! That's the first thing they told me in the interview. Cool, right"?

"That's how I knew he really wasn't working for the government," Mom whispered to Rotem, but loud enough for Dad to hear and laugh.

Change the world? Rotem didn't understand in what way.

"I'll have a lot of work," Dad said, "and they're in a crazy time crunch - that's the second thing they told me in the interview. But don't worry, there's something else that convinced me to join this company - I'll work from home".

Rotem sat up straight. Could it be that-?

"Not really from home," Dad quickly corrected. "You remember the small shed Grandpa and Grandma have here in the backyard? I'll probably turn it into an office so I won't have to drive to Tel Aviv every morning. Great, right"?

Rotem didn't answer. For Dad to be so excited about not driving to Tel Aviv? After all, that's his favorite city in the world! Mom sometimes says that the world is always changing, but so

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are we, so it balances out - but Rotem didn't have to agree with everything he was told, even if it was Mom. For him, everything had changed but nothing had balanced out.

One of the movers knocked on the car window.

"Can you take the rest of the stuff from the car to the shack?" Dad asked as he grabbed the laptop bag and opened the driver's door.

"Wait!" Mom called out and pulled Dad towards her, "Let's change the name to 'cabin', okay? It'll be much nicer for us that way. I don't want to be someone who lives in a shack. We'll live in the cabin this summer. Besides, look at you two. What's with those faces? Don't be such sourpusses!" She placed a hand on Dad's shoulder and on Rotem's, "Everything will be fine, you hear? There's no reason it won't be. Here come your parents, darling, maybe you should let me help you with the laptop? So you have free hands for the movers".

"But keep it with you all the time, okay? It has an important version on it that I need to upload," Dad handed Mom the bag, and the colorful circle on it caught Rotem's eye again. How was this circle supposed to change everything? More than it had already changed, that is.

While Dad went to talk to the movers and show them the entrance to the shack or cabin (Rotem wasn't happy with either word), Grandpa and Grandma hugged Mom and him, and invited them into their home. Yes, that's the word he preferred - home.

Nothing was normal. Not Grandpa's "He-lllo!" declaration, which was longer and more festive than ever, nor Grandma's apology for not having prepared breakfast. "I'm not used to you being here on a Sunday," she admitted with a smile. "Grandpa will go to the grocery soon". Dad came back just to take a key, and before attaching it to the car key ring, he insisted on untying the piece of string that was tied to it.

"What do you care if it's there?" Grandma asked, but Dad continued to work on the knot and only said in a low voice, "I care." Grandma shrugged. When he finished, Mom joined him to supervise the movers unloading the truck, and Rotem peeked out of Grandpa and Grandma's living room window towards the backyard, where the cabin was located.

The procession of people carrying furniture, boxes, and lamps reminded him of the picture on the postcard his parents had sent him from that vacation in Rome. The postcard arrived home two weeks after they returned, showing the Arch of Titus with a relief depicting the objects looted from the Temple.

It was sad. Very sad. Tears flooded Rotem's eyes without warning, and he wiped them away quickly when Grandma offered him a sliced apple. A deep, dark, and green shadow coiled and entwined around his heart. Grandpa and Grandma didn't really understand the whole

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feelings thing. In a way, Grandpa and Grandma agreed with him - they didn't think it was a superpower either.

His gaze returned to the window. True, they had been here a million times, but usually on Saturdays, and for two or three hours, and now it was so sudden and seemingly forever.

What would night after night after night look like here? How would he feel tomorrow? And the day after? And after that?

When they finished arranging the cabin and all the boxes were emptied, folded, and stored, evening was already approaching - darker and wider and much emptier than just a city evening, and Rotem wandered around the large yard until it was his turn to shower. In the renovated house, they would have two showers, but since when does mood depend on the number of showers?

Warm light flooded the cabin's front porch and danced between the olive trees in the string of small lights Grandpa had installed last year. At the edge of the lawn stretched clotheslines, and beside them the small, abandoned shed that Dad was supposed to turn into an office.

Dry leaves crackled under Rotem's feet. Long grass tickled his knees. Something winged buzzed near his ear and disappeared. He heard his parents talking inside the cabin in soft voices. Everyone, it seemed, had their own place - the dogs barking in the distance, the beetles scurrying on the ground, the grass planted in the soil. Everyone. After all, Dad has Mom, and Grandma has Grandpa, and the contractor has workers, and the insects have the glass lights they so want to be around, and the clotheslines have clothespins hanging on them. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't quiet the loneliness that pushed him towards the wooden cabin.

Mom and Dad had already predicted that in adolescence, all his feelings, already strong, would intensify even more (Mom even called it the age of intensification). Maybe adolescence is actually a renovation that the body and mind and heart go through? But who's the contractor? Another one you can't talk to and can't ask to wait a bit?

At night, he lay in his bed and had trouble falling asleep. The sheets were familiar - lightning bolts and skulls, but everything else wasn't. In the adjacent room, Mom laughed at Dad for insisting on putting his computer under the bed - "Maybe you should put it under your pillow?" she suggested, but Dad didn't laugh. "Where's yours?" he asked.

"In the living room".

"Do you know how many break-ins there are here?" he whispered, and Mom retorted:

"Shhh... you're crazy! Don't let Rotem hear!"

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He did hear. The door in his small, temporary room was in the wrong place - on the side of the bed, not in front of it like at home, and the light cast alien shadows on the ceiling. The village was a new planet, with different and strange gravity, atmosphere, and day length. The wooden floor in the cabin creaked every time someone went to the bathroom, and the refrigerator made unclear gurgles.

Rotem closed his eyes and tried to cheer up. Dad once told him about the Baron Munchausen who sank in a swamp and rescued himself alone by pulling himself up by his own hair. It sounded painful. Or something that could only happen abroad. Rotem touched his straight hair, which was still wet after the shower, but didn't pull. Maybe tomorrow he'll go with Mom to Tel Aviv, or maybe he'll help Dad arrange the shed, and the days will start to pass. The pile of time will diminish.

His eyes remained closed - for someone who closes their eyes, the darkness in the village will look similar to the one in Tel Aviv, but his ears were exposed to a chorus of foreign sounds: cat howls, the rustle of predatory birds' wings, wind between olive branches, and this restlessness - it too is a feeling, a feeling by negation.