Modi’in, 2009

I beam at my mother, holding up a trophy: a crushed Diet Coke can. Tossing it into our rusty red wagon, I pull at the handle, hearing the wheels squeak; eyes glued to the apricot Israeli terrain. *Khamsin* claws at our lungs, regardless we push on, wondering why no one else was seen.

She always made it into a game. Grabbing a cooler, suntan lotion for my sister, snacks, and a handful of black thirty-gallon garbage bags. From there, the clock was ticking. We looked underneath shrubs and searched along busy highways, for the glint of metal. Sifting through piles of trash, shaking dirt from plastic bottles.

Never questioning why, my sisters and I trailed behind my mother, ducks in a row—Sasha’s hand snug in hers. I failed to look beyond my mother’s smile, for if I met her eyes, I would’ve known. I learned a few months before my bar mitzvah. Pinching pennies was not enough—never would the bottles and cans have been enough.