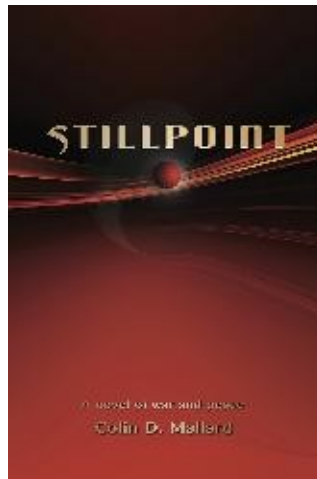


Stillpoint: A Novel of War and Peace

By : colinmallard

Stillpoint is a daring, controversial examination of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that shows the struggles of ordinary men and women on both sides. Spanning the period from 1947 to the modern day and showing how lives are affected from Boston to Beirut, from Haifa to Rockport. Do we learn from history? It would appear that we don't. What we learn we can easily forget, but understanding is of a different order, it cannot be forgotten. The poet T.S. Elliot describes this place of understanding as "The stillpoint of the turning world."



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By Colin Mallard

Excerpt: Chapter 8

By way of introduction to this chapter: Mera is the grand daughter of Ali, a Palestinian refugee, whose village was attacked and destroyed in April 1948.

Spring had come suddenly. One week it had been cold with heavy snow, and two weeks later the snow was gone and the dormant plants of winter pushed through the earth in search of the sun. Coaxed into the world of the living, they thrust upward, frantic for life which they somehow sensed was all too brief. Mera and Ali strolled along the docks in Camden, warmed by a sun in a cloudless sky, while a cold wind came sweeping off the Atlantic.

The river flowed beneath the bakery on Main Street, spilling over the weir, and rushed, white foam flying, toward the harbor, where it slowed into a muddy stain pushing against the green incoming tide. It was almost a year since the death of her son, Ted.

They sat on a bench, with the river behind them and the harbor in front. "Tell me," Mera said to Ali, "what happened in Haifa?" The death of Ted had brought home the delicate balance between life and death, and perhaps because of it, she had probed with more urgency into the deeper layers of her grandfather's story.

"Haifa?"

"Yes, Haifa, Grandpa."

"All right, little one."

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She smiled at Ali's use of the phrase. It was what he'd always called her as a small girl, and even now as a woman approaching fifty, he still thought of her as the little one. She watched the subtle change come over him when he opened the door into the past. Somehow he seemed to soften and the quality of his voice became devoid of emotion as though describing events from a great distance.

â We arrived at Haifa just before dawn. More than a hundred of us had traveled all night to escape the carnage and destruction of the attack on our village. We looked over the city shrouded in darkness except for the lights around the market and the harbor, which gave it a warm and friendly appearance. We were exhausted and in shock. Loudspeakers blared somewhere below but we couldn't hear what was being said. We made our way toward the town. It was early in the morning as we approached the harbor. Roads were choked with refugees. Arab leaders directed us, loudspeakers in hand, to the old marketplace near the harbor.

â Moving streams of people became more densely packed. Children were crying, some carried by their parents, some by older siblings; still others clung to their parents' clothing. Many of the children and some adults stared blankly unseeing, in a state of shock. People had slept on the ground, wherever they could find room. Most of them had been there all night, some longer. As the crowd grew, the crush of people forced them to stand and make room.

â The first rays of sunlight burst over the hills to the east and flooded the market and harbor with light. Suddenly the noisy mass of humanity went quiet. Loud amplified shouts came from high up the slopes in the direction from which we'd come. Waves of humanity poured down the side of the mountain. Like a river that had broken its banks it flowed around the houses, filling the roads and trails, an unstoppable mass of people driven toward the harbor.

â Someone was shouting over the loudspeaker, â The Jews are on their way, get out! Get out while you can.â Explosions and smoke rose above houses in the Palestinian quarter.

â The crush of people became so intense it was getting hard to breathe. Nadia and I lost sight of our friends from the village. They'd vanished in the tide of humanity forced into a space no longer able to hold everyone. Some had climbed into the trees that lined the roads and the square. A lone policeman stood nervously behind the gate to the harbor, the crowd now straining against the fence.

â Then came the sound of mortars. They were being fired from a ridge in the hills and fell just at the back edge of the crowd, driving them toward us. Women, children and the elderly died underfoot in the ensuing panic. Somehow Nadia and I were able to withstand the pressure and stay together. We were being pushed toward the harbor gate when it gave way and thousands surged through, trying to escape the mortar rounds that came ever closer.

â Propelled by the great thrust of the crowd, we broke free and ran for the boats. Somehow we managed to board an old sailing hull with a battered sail of little use. The big single-cylinder motor had been started and we found ourselves with a chugging sound nosing toward the outer harbor and open water. Not another person could have got aboard. There were so many boats we could have walked from one side of the harbor to the other. People hung over the rope railings and with their feet tried to fend off the boats that crowded us. Mortar shells were now landing in the market. Terrified people trampled each other. Some were pushed and others leapt into the water, which was filled with boats and people trying to swim. Some landed in the overloaded boats, others on top of the swimmers, and some on the bodies that were now floating everywhere. We escaped only through the will of Allah. It was not our time to die. Once out of the harbor, we were part of a huge flotilla heading for the fortress city of Acre across the bay to the northeast.

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â It was late afternoon by the time we approached the beach just south of Acre. We were so badly overloaded it had taken us eight hours. During the crossing we lost a number of people, whoâ d died from their wounds. We had no medical supplies, no food and no water.

â We went ashore just south of the city. Palestinians from Acre thronged the beach to help bring people to safety. Coordinating as best they could were the young men, members of the Arab League.â

As Ali described the horror of Haifa, Mera found herself looking at the harbor in front of her, crowded with boats and the docks that stretched like fingers into the bay. She tried to imagine the same events taking place here. This peaceful idyllic place she loved, choked with boats and panicked people and the explosions coming ever closer, signaling the approach of death.

The water spilled over the weir behind her, tumbling to the sea, while the halyards of the sailboats slapped in the sharp wind. She reached over and took Aliâ s hand.

Colin Mallard has been deeply interested in Eastern philosophy; particularly Taoism, Zen and Advaita Vedanta. He was trained as a psychologist and worked for a number of years with families of abused children. He has always been interested in the subject of peace and how it can be attained. His books have won numerous awards.

Learn more at www.colinmallard.com

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