

THE DOWNFALL

Even when he had returned home during the days of the commission meetings, Begin could not be comforted. Aliza had developed severe pneumonia, and her condition deteriorated rapidly. She was hospitalized again and again, and Begin spent long hours at her bedside.¹ At home she often had to use a respirator and a wheelchair. Begin found it hard to see the champion of his youth so weak, and her condition affected his ability to conduct meetings. He needed no medical knowledge to understand that the woman he loved, who had given him the strength he had needed to cope with the difficulties he encountered, was fading away. In a conversation with the U.S. ambassador to Israel before a meeting with Reagan in November 1982, Begin said that he preferred to resign and “devote my time to her in the time she has left,” but Aliza encouraged him to continue in office.²

Reagan wanted to meet in Washington to discuss the peace plan, about which he and Begin were in disagreement. Before the meeting Begin was scheduled to deliver speeches across the United States and to raise funds. Amid preparations for the visit Begin split his time between the Prime Minister’s Office and Aliza’s bedside. At the beginning of November her condition took another turn for the worse, and a breathing tube was inserted into her throat. Because she could not speak, she communicated by writing notes. Begin wanted to postpone his scheduled visit and stay by her side until she recovered. At that time Begin’s relationship with Burg got closer, and Burg too believed he had to postpone the trip. But Aliza wanted to bolster him, as usual, and after hearing allegations that he was unable to perform his duties, she